Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn as Radu Jude's *ars poetica*

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Abstract: The article explores Radu Jude's 2021 film Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn, considering it as a summation of the aesthetic and thematic concerns pursued by the Romanian director in his earlier films. The article also includes a discussion of Jude's short film Semiotic Plastic, which was shot at the same time as Bad Luck Banging.
Keywords: Radu Jude, Romanian cinema, Bucharest, fascism, vaudeville.

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Radu Jude's most recently completed feature[1] bears the deliberately disreputable Romanian title *Babardeală cu bucluc sau Porno balamuc.* The English translation, *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn,* cannot quite render its Romanian associations of lowbrow showbiz, lowest-common-denominator commercialism, and 'low-life' slang; it cannot convey its echoes of sleazy 'liberated' sex farces from the early post-communist era (films like Mircea Mureșan's *Sexy Harem Ada-Kaleh,* from 2001[2]) and undistinguished Hollywood comedies aired on Romanian television under uninspired titles invariably making use of the funny-sounding word *bucluc* (which translates as "trouble," "messy situation," "hullabaloo," "quagmire") to advertise their comedic qualities. To these echoes Jude's title adds an element of too-muchness which by now has become characteristic of his local image as a 'bad-boy' filmmaker: a suggestion of having gone 'too far' into vulgarity – too far even by those standards. In an article he wrote for *Cahiers du Cinéma*,[3] where the film is described before having been completed, Jude explains that the title was meant to annoy a certain type of Romanian intellectual – tremedously influential in the 1990s and 2000s, and still prominent today – who sees himself (it is usually a "he") as a guardian of high ("aristocratic") culture, while being, in Jude's view, totally undiscerning as far as cinema is concerned.

Bad Luck Banging is as confrontational and as boldly experimental as anything Jude has done before. The story is about a woman in her thirties, Emilia (Katia Pascariu, an actress well known in Romania for her involvement in left-leaning theater productions), who teaches history in a prestigious Bucharest secondary school and finds herself in the middle of a potentially employment-terminating scandal when a video of her having sex with her husband leaks on the Internet. (As Jude mentions in his *Cahiers du Cinéma* article, there have been several such cases in the last few years, covered in great detail by the prurient and moralistic Romanian media.) Emilia's story functions as a nail on which Jude hangs an experimental tryptich-like filmic structure.

In the first part (which lasts about 30 minutes), the camera follows Emilia as she walks through Bucharest. Her destination is the house of her school's headmistress (Claudia Ieremia), who is to arrange a meeting with the outraged parents for later. This visit to the headmistress's house is essentially a pretext for a documentary immersion (heightened by bits of stylized mise-en-scène) in an urban environment – Bucharest – caught at a very specific moment: September 2020, with local elections coming (posters everywhere) and the second wave of the Coronavirus crisis gathering momentum (some of the passers-by wear masks, some do not).

The second section – throughout which Emilia's story is left on hold – is non-narrative. Lasting about 25 minutes, this section presents itself as an alphabetical

list of terms, each with its own definition, which can take the form of an aphorism, a quote, a gag- or haiku-like juxtaposition of image and text, a YouTube video or a very short revue-like sketch. The list begins with *August 23* (1944, to be precise, when Romania, till then an Axis power, belatedly switched sides),[4] followed by the words *aborigeni* (aboriginals), *adevăr* (truth) and *armata* (the army). It includes the words *cunt* and *cock*. It also includes names of persons, institutions and buildings which function as Romanian brands at home or abroad: Ceaușescu, Eminescu, the Romanian Orthodox Church, the House of the People (aka Palace of the Parliament). The definitions are sometimes playful, other times drily sarcastic, sometimes brutal, and other times earnestly didactic. They are colored by Jude's eye for grotesquerie. Many of them are political: they point at racism, violence against women and children, homophobia in Romanian society, and the brutality of capitalism. They lash at patriotic bombast, massively cherished institutions like the army and the church, and the obscenity of the media. Human absurdity in general is also highlighted. There are pithy definitions of the cinema (a version of Perseus's shield: it allows us to confront and even vanquish monstrosity without staring at it directly), children (regarded as political prisoners of their parents), history (its contemplation inspires a somber, melancholy outlook). A critical guide to Romanian society, this section of *Bad Luck Banging* is also a catalogue of Jude's current themes, obsessions and beliefs: an *ars poetica.* He talks openly about the importance of balancing a sense of tragedy and a sense of the comic. In words taken from Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project,* he criticizes the kind of artist who "seeks eternal truth and knows nothing of the eternity in his midst. He admires the column of the Babylonian temple and scorns the smokestack on the factory. Yet what is the difference in their lines?" The next sentences could have served as Jude's epigraph to the first section of his film – that guerrilla-filmmaking raid carried on the city of Bucharest in the early autumn of the year 2020:

> "To walk out your front door as if you've just arrived from a foreign country; to discover the world in which you already live; to begin the day as if you've just gotten off the boat from Singapore and have never seen your own doormat or the people on the landing..."[5]

The film catches up with Emilia for its third section (which lasts about 45 minutes). As different formally from the first part as it is from the second, this section is a nightmarish and didactic sitcom. Gathered in the schoolyard, wearing anti-Covid masks and observing social distancing, parents and school representatives put Emilia on trial, grotesquely analyzing her 'porn movie' and arguing whether or not it makes her unsuitable to continue teaching to their children. Jude provides three alternate endings, the last of which is a sort of revenge fantasy, triumphantly over-the-top, in which the martyred Emilia turns into a superheroine wielding a dildo and a fishing net; throwing the net over her tormentors, she proceeds to rape them orally through it.

"As if You've Just Arrived From a Foreign Country"

The first section, to which those lines from *The Arcades Project* – about walking "out your front door as if you've just arrived from a foreign country" – would have made an ideal epigraph, is actually very consciously placed under the sign of Walter Benjamin: it is called "One-Way Street" and it is built around the heroine's *flânerie*; it also suggests a dystopian, late-capitalist updating of Benjamin's famous inquiry into the city's shaping impact on its inhabitants' modes of perception: the human sensorium adapting to the urban experience of constant overstimulation (and the cinema serving as an instrument of that adaptation).[6]

In this section, Jude's directorial choices are faithful to the initial impulse and the basic principle which gave rise – through Cristi Puiu's 2001 *Stuff and Dough* and his 2005 *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* – to the New Romanian Cinema of the early twenty-first century: the impulse of documenting the contemporary and engaging with the present, or the Bazinian-Renoirian principle whereby a filmmaker, while following a fictional character played by an actor in a made-up story, should seize the opportunity to also document a particular environment at a given moment in time. Writing about a scene in Jean Renoir's *Boudu Saved from Drowning* (1932) – the suicide attempt from the Pont des Arts in Paris – Bazin notes approvingly that the

> "crowd of unpaid extras gathered on the bridge and the river banks was not there to witness a tragedy. They came to watch a movie being made, and they were in good humor. Far from asking them to feign the emotion which verisimilitude would demand, Renoir seems to have encouraged them in their light-hearted curiosity. The film does not for a moment convince us that the crowd is interested in Boudu. Some of the spectators turn around to get a better look at the cameraman, much as in the earliest newsreels when the people had not yet grown accustomed to the camera. And, as if he felt the falseness of the acting were not sufficiently apparent, Renoir had some rapid shots taken from behind the crowd, which leave no doubt of its lack of emotion. [...] For Renoir, what is important is not the dramatic value of a scene. Drama, action – in the theatrical or novelistic sense of the terms – are for him only pretexts for the essential, and the essential is everywhere in what is visible, everywhere in the very substance of the cinema. Of course, drama is necessary – that is what we go to the movies to see – but the story can get along easily by itself. It is sufficient to sketch just enough of it so that the audience

has the satisfaction of understanding. That done, the real film remains to be made: characters, objects, light, all must be arranged in the story like colors in a drawing, without being directly subordinated to it. At times, the very interest of the finished product may be in the fact that the colors do not fit neatly within the contours of the drawing."[7]

The Cristi Puiu of *Stuff and Dough* also believed that the fictional and the documentary should mix: his debut feature told a story (with genre elements such as drugs and chases), but at the same time it documented a road trip from Constanța to Bucharest and back; it self-consciously built a time capsule of things glimpsed from inside the car – highways, bridges, other vehicles – and how those things looked like in Romania at the end of the first post-communist decade and at the very end of the twentieth century. This was a radical belief at the time in Romanian film culture, which tended to marginalize documentaries.[8] It led to a general rethinking of filmmaking in Romania.[9] Twenty years later, Puiu himself – the Puiu of *Malmkrog* (2020) – has temporarily retreated from the documentation of Bucharest's contemporary sights. It is Jude who carries on here in the spirit of Puiu's early filmmaking – which is also the spirit of Renoir's work in *Boudu* and Bazin's writing on it –, revising his initial plans for the film in order to document aspects of Bucharest during the COVID-19 pandemic and the the reactions of those passers-by who look into his camera, dance to it, or throw obscenities at it.

However, it is not precisely the same spirit. Renoir's apprehension of 'the real' is sensuous. Bazin's is spiritually infused. The Bucharest-set films that Puiu made after *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* insist on a certain opacity of 'the real' – the densely described urban environment in *Aurora* (2010) is especially resistant to readings. Conversely, Jude's documenting the Bucharest of the year 2020 in *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* seems to be synonymous with documenting horror. It is also telling that Bucharest as shown in the films of the NRC has most often been a driver's Bucharest – a city mostly seen from a car. What Jude gives us in *Bad Luck Banging* is definitely the pedestrians' – to be more accurate, the women pedestrians' – Bucharest. This makes a world of difference.

Documenting Bucharest

As seen by Jude in the early autumn of 2020, Bucharest is a city of gambling and betting parlors, political and advertising banners, sirens shrieking incessantly to the accompaniment of drilling machines, noisy construction sites which seem to proliferate (it is never easy to tell what exactly is being constructed) even as whole sections of the city seem to be crumbling, symbols of nationalism and cars parked on sidewalks – always on sidewalks. They are cars of all sorts, from limousines to tank-like vehicles on huge wheels – the shot of a driver stepping down with some difficulty from such an affluence-signalling contraption has a charge of horrified comic poetry. There are shouting matches between drivers and pedestrians unable to use the sidewalks. There is even a young man on foot who crazily chooses to go head-to-head with a car which should not be there. Such bits of slapstick are staged, but the depiction of Bucharest's parking culture – which makes it just about impossible to get out of the house in a wheelchair or with a baby carriage – is hardly exaggerated. It is surprising that it has taken so long for a Romanian film to use this culture as a motif in a 'city symphony' – or cacophony. Pedestrians are called names such as *paupers* (an insult which seems to be thrown around not only in traffic but also in places like supermarkets) and they instantly fire back with their own swear words – everyone on the streets of Bucharest seems to be quick to retort with an obscenity, even Emilia. If the film's Romanian title includes the words *porno balamuc* – literally "porno madhouse" – it must be partly because that is what Bucharest itself is to Jude: an obscene environment. This is not the overstimulating modernist metropolis that Walter Benjamin wrote about; this is numbing. Although it is not exactly colorless under the warm September sun, with its countless flashy commodities, plasticky urban furniture, banners and billboards, the city seems to be rotting even as it keeps developing in its pell-mell, thrown-together fashion. (Writing on the film, American critic J. Hoberman aptly describes the city on screen as "half-built and half-derelict – a semiotic jungle and a ruin waiting to happen."[10]) Jude's camera keeps panning, slowly bringing out the lugubriousness of a vista: a bookseller's window in which kiddie stuff sits next to Jesus stuff and conspiracy theory stuff; a playground built on a hideous expanse of concrete in front of a shopping mall (Hoberman: "[t]he mall is stocked with ersatz Disney creatures, gaudy princess dolls, and pink-orange Paw Patrol toys"), with recordings of children's songs playing perpetually as in a horror film. Jude does not film the city's beggars, the very poor and the disabled: he is careful to avoid 'poverty porn'; his vision of Bucharest as an obscene environment with a vibe of imminent apocalypse needs not such dubious 'spicing'. True to the Benjaminian injunction of looking at your own doormat as if you have never seen it before, this section of the film is an exercise in estrangement – the camera interrogates the city's billboards (some of them quite tattered in these pandemic times) as if they were alien hieroglyphs, scrawls or tattoos.

What Jude does add to his found urban sights are a number of staged surreal vignettes: he balances found with planted details. One of the things he does is stud this section with cameos of show-business personalities whose names and faces are rich with associations for younger and older Romanian audiences. Some of the

cameos are mere walk-ons. Others are vaudeville bits. Some of them are bound to remain inexplicable for viewers unversed in the history of Romanian popular culture. (They work anyway – they add to the mad urban texture.) For example, what are non-Romanian audiences (or even younger Romanian audiences, for that matter) to make of the short moment when an old man starts following Emilia on the street, insistently introducing himself as "Pierre Vaillant"? The man is Ion Dichiseanu, a well-known actor; Pierre Vaillant was the character he played in a very popular TV series from the Ceaușescu era. What is he doing in Emilia's story? Her gestures do not seem to imply she recognizes him; she reacts to his sight as if he were just a weirdo who would not let her be. The proliferation of off-kilter, seemingly in-joke cameo appearances such as Dichiseanu's (for example, there is one by comedian Silviu Gherman as a bookseller who – in what looks like a blooper that Jude decided to keep in his film – bursts out laughing while delivering a line about "the horrors of the twentieth century") suggests an eccentric, jocular answer to the ceaseless popular complaint that New Romanian Cinema films are not audience-friendly enough. (*Bad Luck Banging* is subtitled "a sketch for a popular film".) It also serves to prefigure the subverted sitcom antics of the film's final section.[11]

Hijinks and Obscenity

Ever since his first feature, *The Happiest Girl in the World* (2009), Jude has repeatedly tapped into a particular vein of Romanian popular culture: its vaudeville tradition. From I.L. Caragiale's classic plays to contemporary TV skit shows and reality shows, loud quarrelling degenerating into awkward pushing around, with lots of hollering, hair-pulling, etc., has been a staple of Romanian popular entertainment, more solidly established than any specifically cinematic genre. This tradition's focus is on 'respectable' citizens erupting into the kind of behavior that used to be (and still is) often described in racist and classist terms in everyday Romanian language: *țigănealã* (i.e., behavior associated with the Roma) or *mahalagism* (i. e., behavior associated with the slums). Long before Jude, directors such as Lucian Pintilie and Mircea Daneliuc had delighted in pushing the comedy of such behavior to uncomfortable extremes, suggesting that there may be something quintessentially Romanian about losing one's dignity like that. With his taste for the loudly comic and the disreputable, his radicalism which includes a rejection of art-cinema solemnity, Jude is in this respect a continuator of Pintilie's and Daneliuc's, minus the implicit class contempt from some of their films.[12] If in an early film like *Everybody in Our Family* (2012), he was pushing this comic tradition in a psychodramatic Cassavetesian direction,[13] in *Bad Lucking Banging,* the direction is loosely Brechtian.

And so to the final section of the film, in which Emilia's moral fitness to be a teacher to 13-year olds is debated in her presence by a nightmarish jury of outraged parents gathered in the schoolyard. These include a priest, a pilot and a military man. The pilot talks in aviation metaphors, while the soldier's metaphors are military. Their names are chosen for their cartoonishness (the pilot is called Otopeanu, for the name of Bucharest's principal airport, Otopeni), or borrowed from a well-known satirical text by Caragiale which deals with Romania's educational system.[14] The school itself – a fictional one – is named "Nichifor Crainic", in homage to an influential writer, philosopher and theologian who was also an antisemite ideologue and a Minister of Propaganda in Antonescu's pro-Hitler regime; while conducting the hearings on Emilia's morality, the headmistress pronounces Crainic's name with pride. Emilia finds a defender for herself among them, but, apart from that one relatively enlightened voice (Hoberman describes him as a "mansplaining intellectual"), everything that is said about her 'sex film' is dementedly judgemental. The offending home video is screened to the assembly, an indignant mother solemnly holding a laptop as the others drool over it; the mouths of the vociferous spectators, correctly covered for sanitary reasons, contrast with Emilia's often close-upped mouth on the laptop screen, mobile and mostly open. True to Jude's unabashed taste for shrill didactic caricature, the puritanism here is of the kind that does not even have to be scratched to reveal the prurience underneath. And this hypocritical moralism surrounding sex is not the only pathology manifested by this obscene chorus of public opinion: every time it opens its foul collective masked mouth, out comes rabid antisemitism or racism or homophobia or classism or Holocaust-denial or nostalgia for the use of corporal punishment in education or worship of the memory of Field Marshal Antonescu[15] or Coronavirus-denial. With the seating arrangement changing from one shot to the next one and everybody wearing face masks with absurd or incongruous prints or messages, this is a stylized representation not so much of a cross-section of Romanian society, as of the chorus of Internet opinion which activates itself in profanity-spouting far-right anger every time Radu Jude makes a new film.[16] These fascists are the inhabitants of the dystopian Bucharest that we saw earlier in the film: the instant we meet them, it is clear that what we had earlier witnessed was in fact their metabolic environment. They are also an echo of the over-involvement craze of – middle class and often know-it-all – parents into the organization of classrooms and curricula, and the increasing pressure to convert public schools into mere – but very responsive – service providers accountable to their entitled clients.

Jude's obscenity-laced brand of cinema-as-didactic-political-theatre, which makes use of George Grosz-like exaggeration while also channeling the Romanian

vaudeville tradition of so-called *mahalagism*, is always in danger of going flat while remaining hectoringly shrill.[17] His 2016 stage adaptation of *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* departed from Fassbinder's film in its unwillingness to depict the racism of ordinary citizens as 'small-time' racism. In Jude's depictions, racism is rarely 'small-time'. It tends to be turned at a constantly hysterical, unmodulated pitch which can make it look like a governing passion, like a grotesque obsession – those who live within its toxic grip seem to know of little else. Those neighbors and colleagues and drinking buddies who jeer at the central biracial couple in Jude's *Ali* tend to act like *militant* racists. This is nothing like Fassbinder's own analysis of prejudice, which emphasizes the insidiousness of popular racism – its adjustability to pragmatic considerations, its flexibility, instability, its tendency to arrange and rearrange itself in various and sometimes hideously creative constellations of beliefs or attitudes. Jude's take on the racism of *Ali's* ordinary citizens is somewhat similar to what he does in *Bad Luck Banging* with the voices of public opinion.[18]

Radu Jude was the first mainstream artist in Romania to confront his country's history of anti-Roma racism. He was also the first filmmaker to systematically tackle Romania's fascist past. In *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* he touches on an urgently relevant theme: the contemporary resurgence of fascism. And the film offers remarkable evidence of his finger-on-the-pulse sense of the contemporary. At the same time, it offers some evidence of a tendency towards ahistoricism that was also visible in his stage production of *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul.* It is a tendency to make all of Romania's shameful past appear to be simultaneously present, almost as if it were all a matter of the same recurrent phenomenon – the same 'principle of obscenity' at work throughout Romanian history. Obscenity is, of course, the great theme of *Bad Luck Banging,* where the thing unjustly denounced as obscene (Emilia's 'sex film') is contrasted with the real stuff: the hypocrisy of the denouncers, their lecherous moralism, their racism, their classism, their obscurantism, their nationalism repressing historical crimes against the Roma and the Jews, making them complicit with the fascist or authoritarian regimes of the past, making future crimes possible. In Jude's *Ali,* which he set in contemporary Bucharest, he had some of the jeering racists bear names such as Moța and Marin – the names of two notorious Iron Guard thugs of the 1930s. He also had them insistently reference Field Marshal Antonescu – as if he were recent history to them. The point was unmissable: fascism can always be reborn – it can materialize right here with us before we know it. But Jude's way of making that very welcome point tended to make distinct eras coalesce into the same obscene, nightmarish matter which became *Ali's* conception of fascism – an ahistorical and paradoxically apolitical one. This did not happen in *Aferim!,* where, in reconstructing the early nineteenth-century atmosphere, he delineated the sources of today's racism with great suggestiveness, while making other aspects of the past feel very alien, very different from the present. Since *Aferim!,* Jude has shone an angry light on other histories of prejudice, oppression, and mass murder excavated from his country's past – a past which for him is emphatically not passed. Hence his tendency to make everything appear to be somehow simultaneous. (It is also his way of applying Godard's dictum – from the era of *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her* – that "everything should be put into a film"[19]: everything that obsesses you when you are making the film.) Hence the pull of a metaphysical view of history as a reiteration of the obscene. In *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn,* this is held in check by Jude's interest in the contemporary and his willingness to immerse his filmmaking in its still unstabilized matter. The film achieves a volatile and exciting equilibrium. Nevertheless, one can spot a sort of fatigue in this preoccupation with capital-H history, maybe a turn from history as concrete politics and individual events to history as a grand somber panorama of human nature. After documenting so many instances of unfading inhumanity, nothing new can pop up and old-style philosophical melancholy begins to (re)assert itself.

Life Itself

During the filming of *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn,* Jude found time to also shoot a 22-minute short called *Semiotic Plastic.* Drawing freely (as acknowledged in the opening title) from three classic literary texts – Baudelaire's 1853 essay "A Philosophy of Toys", Chekhov's 1882 short story "Life as a Series of Questions and Exclamations", and Flaubert's 1913 "Dictionary of Received Ideas" – it is a film made entirely with toys. Jude does not use animation techniques; he just arranges dozens of toys (dolls and soldiers, cars and dinosaurs, etc.) in brightly-lit, static tableaux (with mechanical or battery-powered toys providing the occasional movement in the frame), which he films from up close. Sounds are parsimoniously selected: occasional snatches of music, flies buzzing, water running, birds chirping, plus the original whirring-spinning-clicking-and-so-forth noises made by some of the toys.

Semiotic Plastic is structured as a series of chapters named after the stages of life ("Childhood and adolescence", "Youth", "Maturity", "Old age") and a Flaubertian collection of quotations, definitions and bromides sampling popular wisdom. It is strongly reminiscent of *Bad Luck Banging*'s central section, with its glossary structure and its montage-collisions of texts and images (including at one point a tableau of toys). As in other Jude films, conventional wisdom is savagely satirized as a repository of attitudes which are at best

platutidinous and, at worst, downright odious – racist, sexist, nationalist and generally retrograde (children and animals should be beaten, etc.); here, their association with childhood and toys brings out how deeply embedded in culture they are (in this case, the primary reference is not Romanian culture). *Semiotic Plastic* invites us to ponder toys as the first representations of gender and race that children are subjected to. It makes the obvious point that, while the culture holds the innocence of children as an article of faith, it nevertheless exposes them to miniature arsenals of sniper rifles, flamethrowers, rocket launchers and a hundred other lovingly detailed items of warfare. Working with his usual cinematographer, the resourceful Marius Panduru (whose macro lenses and miniature lighting sources allow for a lot of play with the scale of the close-upped toys), Jude gleefully stages richly textured tableaux of racial carnage and army gang rape against bright yellow or green backdrops which conjure up deserts or jungles and evoke old colonial atrocities as well as wars waged more recently by the US.

The toy-based evocation of the consecutive stages in one's life includes more than a few tableaux of energetic sexual activity, all of them imaginatively composed. A particularly enthusiastic-looking group of orgiasts features a couple of Disney dwarfs and Pinocchio (who uses his nose to engage in intercourse with a soldier). Jude's (and his helpers') desecratory glee is apparent. It is also, of course, not untrue to the uses that some children have always made of their toys; among those of Jude's films that are concerned with childhood, *Semiotic Plastic* may be the first to suggest that children are not simply the innocent victims – or the "prisoners", as *Bad Luck Banging* puts it – of their parents. Other tableaux are sad, with the choice of a doll, the arrangement of props, the lighting and the camera angle working together to convey intimations of loneliness, sordidness, suicidal dejection, etc. The melancholy is consistently spiked with elements of the eerie, the absurd and the grotesquely surreal. From shot to shot, the atmosphere varies greatly, its control always precise. There are nods to Kafka, David Lynch, *Psycho* and *Apocalypse Now.* Further testimony to Jude's appetite for experimentation with new materials, this short film, with its mock air of a grand summative statement on life-seen-whole, is a fitting companion to *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*.

Notes:

1. It premiered in March 2021 at the Berlinale, where it won the Golden Bear for Best Film. The jury statement read: "The Golden Bear goes to a film which has that rare and essential quality of a lasting art work. It captures on screen the very content and essence, the mind and body, the values and the raw flesh of our present moment in time. Of this very moment of human existence. It does so by provoking the spirit of our time (i.e., zeitgeist), by slapping it, by challenging it to a duel. And while doing that, it also acknowledges this present moment in cinema, shaking, with the same camera movement, our social and cinematic conventions. It is an elaborated film as well as a wild one, clever and childish, geometrical and vibrant, imprecise in the best way. It attacks the spectator, evokes disagreement, but leaves no one with a safety distance." "Berlinale 2021: The Award Winners of the *Competition*," March 5, 2021, https://www.berlinale.de/en/2021/news-press-releases/70152.html, last accessed on December 9, 2022.
2. The Romanian cinema of the Ceaușescu era had been puritanical about sex. In reaction to its prudishness, the post-revolutionary cinema of the 1990s had been awash in gratuitous female nudity, often shot and scored in the manner of cheap softcore porn. The New Romanian Cinema, in its classic mid-2000s version, countered this with its own clinical, somewhat puritanical austerity.
3. Radu Jude, "Quelques mots sur un film en cours," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 770, November (2020): 92-96.
4. Before 1989 this date used to be known to all Romanians: for more than 40 years of communist rule it had been celebrated as the National Day of Romania. During the Ceaușescu era it commemorated the anniversary of the Revolution of Social, National, Anti-Fascist and Anti-Imperialist Liberation, a major event during World War II. What the celebrations repressed was the fact that at the Paris Peace Treaties of 1947 Romania had been considered one of the defeated Axis powers.
5. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge MA & London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 437. Benjamin himself is quoting from Pierre Hemp, "La Littérature, image de la société," in *Encyclopédie Française.*
6. Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (London: Penguin, 2008).
7. André Bazin, *Jean Renoir* (London & New York: W. H. Allen, 1974), 31-32.
8. For more on the marginal status of documentary cinema in the Romanian film culture of the state socialist era, see Andrei Gorzo and Veronica Lazăr, "A Slight Unease About Capitalism: Radu Jude's *The Happiest Girl in the World* and the New Romanian Cinema," *Transilvania,* no. 4 (2022): 5-6.
9. For Cristi Puiu's influence on the rethinking of filmmaking in the Romania of the 2000s, see Andrei Gorzo, "In the Name of 'The Ambiguity of the Real': Romanian Cinematic Realism after the 2000s," *Film Criticism* 41, issue 2, October 2017, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/f/fc/13761232.0041.206/--in-the-name-of-the-ambiguity-of-the-real-romanian-

cinematic?rgn=main;view=fulltext, last accessed on December 9, 2022.

10. Hoberman's description continues: "The pervasive hostility of the people is echoed by the assaultive environment. Bucharest is not only ramshackle in its visual cacophony but also aurally abrasive: the endless clamor of the traffic, the blaring horns and constant sirens. The street is so noisy that when Emi's husband calls with the bad news that their amateur video has resurfaced on Pornhub, she seeks quiet in a gaming arcade." J. Hoberman, "Romanian Masquerades", *New York Review of Books*, March 24, 2022, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2022/03/24/romanian-cinema-bad-luck-banging/, last accessed on December 9, 2022.
11. Describing the first section of *Bad Luck Banging,* Ágnes Pethő also notes cameo appearances by veteran pop singer Marina Voica and Ceaușescu-era child star Costel Băloiu of *Pistruiatul* [*Freckles*]. Pethő, *The Exquisite Corpse* of *History: Radu Jude and the Intermedial Collage*," *Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* 21 (2022): 76. They all pop in Emilia's way like figments from an autochtonous pop imaginary which has run wild, sometimes mixing with their globalized counterparts – Hoberman notes that in a supermarket scene "one customer is unaccountably dressed as Superman." The pop phantasms continue to run riot in the film's final section: some of the parents who put Emilia on trial are also played by local pop singers (Adrian Enache) and TV sitcom stars (Florin Petrescu), while Emilia herself counterattacks by turning into a dildo-wielding version of Wonder Woman. Jonathan Rosenbaum appositely quotes some thoughts by film scholar James Naremore from an exchange of emails on Jude's film: "One of the things the tour of streets establishes is how much global capitalism has infiltrated everything – the Coca-Cola/Pepsi fast-food shops, the Xanax in the pharmacy, the plastic shopping bags, the plastic children's toys, the graffiti, and even the shops in more expensive parts of the town. Local or national culture is seen only in ruins or government architecture. The 'trial' scene provokes arguments that could be heard in any American school board meeting and even mentions Fox News. (Notice also the joke about the schoolteacher transforming herself and getting revenge by becoming a character in a Hollywood superhero movie)." Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Dangerous Sex and Scattered Focus, 50 Years Apart: *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* and *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*," posted on the author's blog on June 11, 2022, https://jonathanrosenbaum.net/2022/06/dangerous-sex-and-scattered-focusfifty-years-apart-wr-mysteries-of-the-organism-and-bad-luck-banging-or-loony-porn/, last accessed on December 9, 2022.
12. For more on Radu Jude's artistic and intellectual debt to Lucian Pintilie (1933-2018), see Gorzo and Lazăr, "A Slight Unease About Capitalism," 7-9; also Andrei Gorzo and Veronica Lazăr, "*... and Gypsies get many a beating...:* On the Significance of Radu Jude's *Aferim!*," *Transilvania*, no. 6-7 (2022): 2; Andrei Gorzo and Veronica Lazăr, "Radu Jude's Montage Experiments with Documents of Oppression and Mass Murder," *Transilvania*, no. 9 (2022): 3.
13. For an extended discussion of *Everybody in Our Family,* see Andrei Gorzo and Veronica Lazăr, "Radu Jude's Satirical Studies of Male Rage and Self-Pity," *Transilvania*, no. 4 (2022): 1-5.
14. *Un pedagog de școală nouă* [*A New-School Teacher*], originally published in 1893.
15. Marshal Ion Antonescu was head of the Romanian government during World War II, after King Carol II gave him dictatorial powers. He is held responsible for massive deportations of Jews (over 150,000 according to the most conservative estimates), Roma (tens of thousands), communists, anti-fascist fighters, and members of religious sects, many of whom died of hunger, cold or epidemic diseases. He was also found guilty of ethnic massacres – among them the Iași pogrom and the Odessa massacre – and not lastly for the Romanian army assisting the German ally in invading the Soviet Union as far as Stalingrad upon his orders. Still publicly underacknowledged, Romania's horrific record of antisemitic violence is a subject that Radu Jude has tackled again and again, in both fiction and nonfiction, in features and shorts: *Scarred Hearts* (2016), *The Dead Nation* (2017), *"I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians"* (2018), *The Exit of the Trains* (2020), *Memories from the Eastern Front* (2022).
16. After parsing some of the angry reactions to Jude's *The Dead Nation* from that film's Facebook page, and also from Mario-Cezar Popescu's Facebook page dedicated to Costică Acsinte's collection of photographs featured by Jude in his film, Diana I. Popescu has written: "Strong anti-Semitic slanders included Jude being accused of having betrayed the Romanian nation, of being sponsored by George Soros, and of being involved in Judaic masonic conspiracies [...] Some comments illustrated wishes to avoid discussing the topic altogether for the sake of preserving a positive national image: 'one should not remember crimes before the centenary anniversary of Romania's national existence [2018 marked the centenary of the unification of the Romanian Kingdom with Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina]. Someone else condemned Jude of 'making money by slandering the Romanian people'." Diana I. Popescu, "Staging Encounters with Estranged Pasts: Radu Jude's *The Dead Nation* and the Cinematic Face of Public Memory of the Holocaust in Present-Day Romania," *Humanities* 7, no. 2, (2018): https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0787/7/2/40/htm#B34-humanities-07-00040, last accessed on December 9, 2022. Jude's 2015 *Aferim!* (a western about the enslavement of the Roma minority), *Scarred Hearts* and *"I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians"* have attracted a lot of similar comments, most of them by anonymous internet users, although a well-established festival programmer, Cristi Mărculescu, has also been been known to publicly lash against those "lackeys to the Jewish cause" who praise Jude's films. (Mărculescu's comments are quoted by Jude himself in an interview with Iulia Blaga, "Interviu cu Radu Jude. Ce are pornografia cu educația în filmul cu care merge la Festivalul de la Berlin," *Libertatea,* February 19, 2021, https://www.libertatea.ro/entertainment/interviu-cu-radu-jude-ce-are-pornografia-cu-educatia-in-filmul-cu-care-merge-la-

festivalul-de-la-berlin-3419131, last accessed on May 27, 2021.

17. Phrases such as "monotonous shrillness" are often used to describe the Romanian cinema of the 1990s. Trying to make a clean break with that cinema, the leading filmmakers of the NRC generally espoused an appreciation of ambiguity, nuance, distance, neutrality, 'dedramatization'. For Romanian critic Victor Morozov, *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* carries a distinctly 90s vibe. See Victor Morozov, "Profesoara porno," *Scena 9*, March 2, 2021, https://www.scena9.ro/article/profesoara-porno-babardeala-radu-jude-berlinala, last accessed on May 27, 2021.
18. For more detailed discussion of Radu Jude's stage adaptation of Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul,* see Gorzo and Lazăr, "*... and Gypsies get many a beating...*: On the Significance of Radu Jude's *Aferim!*," 7.
19. Tom Milne, ed. *Godard on Godard* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), 238–239.

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