



The Exquisite Corpse of History. Radu Jude and the Intermedial Collage

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Abstract. The article argues for the relevance of intermediality in the interpretation of Radu Jude's films made after 2016: *The Dead Nation* (*Țara moartă*, 2017), *I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians* (*Îmi este indiferent dacă în istorie vom intra ca barbari*, 2018), *The Marshal's Two Executions* (*Cele două execuții ale Mareșalului*, 2018), *To Punish, to Discipline* (*A pedepsi, a supraveghea*, 2019), *The Exit of the Trains* (*Ieșirea trenurilor din gară*, 2020), *Uppercase Print* (*Tipografic majuscul*, 2020), *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* (*Babardeală cu bucluc sau porno balamuc*, 2021). Instead of framing Jude's aesthetic in terms of the Eisensteinian montage, as many reviewers have done, the article addresses the way in which these films insist on the tensions between media, on creating an ontological collage, not only a cinematic montage. The collage effect of the films materializes in sensuously and intellectually layered permutations that connect different media and shares some traits with the Surrealist play of the *cadavre exquis*. The mixture of heterogeneous materials becomes a strategy (informed by the ideas of Walter Benjamin) to reflect on history in the conditions of postmemory as well as a way to explore the relationship between media and reality through various positions of spectatorial engagement and the affective metalepsis between reflexivity and immersion.¹

Keywords: Radu Jude, affective intermediality, postmemory, collage in film, photography and cinema.

"History decays into images, not into stories."
(Walter Benjamin [1982] 1999, 476.)

Collage Effect and Intermediality

Although never in the frontline of discussions about contemporary Eastern European cinemas, the poetics of intermediality (i.e. an aesthetic highlighting

¹ This work was supported by a grant of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization in Romania, CNCS - UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-PCE-2021-1297, within PNCDI III.

the moving images' relationship with the other arts and the media complexity of moving images) has actually emerged in a variety of forms, and has proved highly effective in registering how the cultures of the region perceive themselves after the fall of the Iron Curtain caught in-between East and West, past and present, emotional turmoil and more detached self-awareness. Radu Jude's 2016 film, *Scarred Hearts (Inimi cicatrizate)* epitomizes one of the most relevant strategies of such a poetics of in-betweenness: a pictorial stylization displaying a fascination with the arrested, *tableau vivant*-like pose perceptible on the border of stasis and movement, in-between photography, painting and moving image.² This kind of stylization that we find in the works of a wide range of Eastern European authors, is usually enhanced by scenes in which, signalling an adherence to a cultural tradition, some of the great paintings of Western European art history are recreated or alluded to,³ often in images that can be considered "cadaverous *tableaux vivants*," as they display a live body as if it were a corpse. These tableaux confront the mortality of the body with the immortality of art, and intertwine the sensation of corporeality with the distancing effect of a conspicuous artificiality and aestheticization. They are capable of conveying a wide spectrum of tensions between the experience of transitoriness and a feeling of paralysis, and open up the image towards multiple philosophical interpretations.⁴ Belonging to the so-called second wave of New Romanian cinema (the first wave making themselves widely known with a series of award winning films marked by a kind of austere realist style in the early 2000s), Radu Jude's latest experimental works propose a radically different approach to reality and a media-conscious reflection on history. They also explore intermediality as an "art of in-betweenness" even further, moving from what I have distinguished earlier as a "sensual" mode of intermediality (that brings forth impressions of other arts through such painterly images as mentioned before) to experiment with strategies based predominantly on a "structural" mode that unravels the world on the screen into pieces and layers of media forms and representations (Pethő [2011] 2020, 93–163). Thus, metaphorically speaking, Jude moves from the pictorialism of the "cadaverous *tableau vivant*" to a construction that resembles more the mashup of the *cadavre exquis*.

2 See more about this in the introductory essay to the volume, *Caught In-Between. Intermediality in Eastern European and Russian Cinema* (Pethő 2020, 6–11).

3 Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* reproduced in Jude's *Scarred Hearts* was therefore chosen as an emblematic image on the cover of the book, *Caught In-Between. Intermediality in Eastern European and Russian Cinema* (2020).

4 See more about this in: Sándor 2014, Király 2016a, Pethő 2016 and 2020, 6–10.

The *cadavre exquis* or *exquisite corpse* was originally a parlour game practiced by the Surrealists and used as a form of artistic creation (similar to the Dadaist cut-ups) in which each participant added a segment to the finished artwork, taking turns in writing or drawing, sometimes cutting and pasting pieces of photographs onto a sheet of paper.⁵ The resulting text or picture (or a mixture of the two) was a collage composed of incongruous elements, each taken from different contexts, connected to different authors, styles and sometimes media. Although there have been cinematic experiments that aimed specifically to adapt the concept of the *exquisite corpse*, like Apichatpong Weerasethakul's film, *Mysterious Object at Noon* (2000), blending documentary, collaborative storytelling and fiction, in Jude's case, I am using the term more loosely to highlight the mixture of fragments offering glimpses into different worlds, the elements of contingency, the multiplicity of authorial voices, discourses and media, as well as the *exquisite corpse*'s paradoxical invocation of both life and death. All of these apply to Jude's films made after the sensuously intermedial period dramas, *Aferim!* and *Scarred Hearts* (2016), which already prefigured this change in poetic strategy through the abundance of literary and pictorial quotations.⁶ *The Dead Nation* (*Țara moartă*, 2017), *I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians* (*Îmi este indiferent dacă în istorie vom intra ca barbari*, 2018), *The Marshal's Two Executions* (*Cele două execuții ale Mareșalului*, 2018), *Punish and Discipline* (*A pedepsi, a supraveghea*, 2019), *The Exit of the Trains* (*Ieșirea trenurilor din gară*, 2020), *Uppercase Print* (*Tipografic majuscul*, 2020), *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* (*Babardeală cu bucluc sau porno balamuc*, 2021), all draw on various archival sources and/or different types of representations in creating a fragmented and medially layered cinematic texture. In what follows, I would like to unravel this composite style, and bring into focus the inherent tensions woven into its fabric.

In interviews, Jude speaks of Eisenstein's montage technique and the kind of modernist political cinema represented by Jean-Marie Straub's and Danièle Huillet's films in which montage is a means for delivering powerful messages.⁷ Along with this undeniable legacy, however, the heterogeneity of the materials and the manner of their combination can also be framed from another perspective:

5 Apparently, the name originates from a phrase composed when they first played the game, "le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau"/ "the exquisite corpse will drink the new wine" (Breton and Éluard 1938, 6).

6 See Pieldner's analysis of *Aferim!* (2016).

7 See, for example: <https://www.ziarulmetropolis.ro/radu-jude-simt-nevoia-de-cat-mai-multe-reactii-negative-violente-fata-de-filme/>, and: <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/tipografic-majuscul-este-un-film-de-montaj-in-sensul-stabilit-de-eisenstein/>. Last accessed 12. 01. 2022.

as an intermedial collage, i.e. a collage exploiting the rich connotations and sensations ensuing from the juxtaposition of different media. Although they are partially overlapping notions, some differentiating traits between montage and collage are worth noting. Montage is most generally defined as the technique of editing, i.e. piecing together discrete sections of films to form a continuous whole. Sergei Eisenstein's theory emphasizes the dialectical collision of images and sequences, their rhythmic, affective and intellectual impact unfolding in time. Accordingly, montage is described as something essential in creating meaningful sequences of moving images. The notion of collage is more frequently used to denote a technique in the visual arts, in which different materials are assembled on a pictorial surface, heightening a sense of tactility, texture and simultaneity. The key issue is how the parts relate to each other. Montage is a process of adding up elements in conveying meaning, assimilating the parts into a continuum, into an autonomous artwork, even when contrasts are involved, or when image and sound are edited together in what Eisenstein describes as a vertical montage. As he writes, "there is no difference in principle between purely visual montage and montage that embraces different areas of sensory perception" ([1940] 2010, 329). Even in a most heterogeneous form that Eisenstein calls the "montage of attractions," in which there are "arbitrarily chosen independent [...] effects (attractions)" and unexpected junctions between the arts (e.g. theatre and cinema), the aim is for building a construction allowing for the convergence of intellectual, sensual and emotional impact, mathematically calculated through "the sum of stimulants," "to produce specific emotional shocks in the spectator in their proper order within the whole," leading to a particular ideological conclusion ([1923] 1988, 34–35).

Collage, on the other hand, is based on fragmentation in which the pieces that are "torn" from their original "place" retain their relative independence within the new context, and pose a powerful challenge to the "aesthetic 'autonomy' of the painted surface, and to the principle of organic composition, the integral relationship between part and whole" (Arthur 1998). Departing from the ideas of Eisenstein, Jacques Aumont writes that the "montage of attractions" is "like a fireworks display, a dazzling spectacle in which each 'sequence' (in fact there is nothing very sequential about them) stands on its own, like an 'aggressive moment.' [...] Within this overall effect, however, each apparition loses its singularity" (2020, 49). In contrast, the diverse elements in a collage "are subjected to an overall artistic logic, but by virtue of their separate strengths preserve their heterogeneity" (2020, 49). Unlike montage which is ubiquitous and essentially cinematic, Aumont

considers collage an “inherently odd model” in cinema. Comparing film to “a work of art which combines elements of diverse origins: drawings, photographs, prints, sections of newspapers and even fragments of objects, all arranged in an inconsistent manner,” is paradoxical, he affirms, “because a collage appears in one space while montage occurs over time, thereby bringing memory (both short and medium term) into play. In addition, apart from a few exceptional cases [...], the filmic material is always materially homogeneous. It can only be heterogeneous in its origin, in cases where the film is made up of pieces of film taken from ‘elsewhere’ – found footage” (2020, 49). Although Aumont makes a germane observation, it is conceivable to go even further and reflect on a whole range of other possibilities in which the “separate strengths” of “elements of diverse origins” come to the fore in cinema. Other media (or images resembling or representing other arts) may disrupt the unity of the cinematic discourse and introduce connotations and sensations that are never fully absorbed by the Gesamtkunstwerk-like principle of montage⁸ or a “self-effacing”⁹ narrative flow of moving images. They may demand the viewer’s distinct attention and ability to perceive interactions, frictions or breaks between them, i.e. they may act self-reflexively as instances of intermediality. This can happen not only at the level of the image (undoing the amalgam of its palimpsestic layering), but also on the profilmic level of the *mise-en-scène* (emphasizing embedded representations), at the level of the vertical montage of sound and image, or the sequence of scenes. There is therefore a correlation between the concepts of collage and intermediality, in as much as the perception of heterogeneity that is essential in a collage is also a prerequisite of intermediality, just as a focus on intermedial relationships always highlights the relative autonomy, semantic complexity and dynamics of the parts involved in a collage. With the rare exceptions of certain experimental practices in which there are literally other materials glued on the film stock (e.g. in Stan Brakhage’s *Mothlight*, 1963, that Aumont mentions, or *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 1981), the term is, of course, used as a metaphor. When we are speaking of collage in film, we are actually speaking of a collage effect, much in the same way as Jaimie Baron (2014) conceives the “archive effect” in terms of a specific audiovisual experience produced in the context of experimental, documentary or fiction films.

8 One of the most important sources of inspiration for Eisenstein’s ideal of the “synchronization of senses” (1957, 69–113) and the organic synthesis of arts was Richard Wagner’s concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk. See a detailed elaboration of this connection in Finger (2006, 136–140) and Somaini (2016).

9 This is a term introduced by David Bordwell to describe the perception of the so-called classical narrative style, which “typically encourages the spectator to construct a coherent, consistent time and space for the fabula action” (1985, 163).

However, while “the archive effect” is based on the perceived temporal disparity of fragments, collage in film is a form of intermediality that hinges on perceiving medial otherness and the “separate strengths” of the media involved.

With the aim of looking more closely at the intricate forms and effects of collage, a media phenomenological approach to intermediality and, as I will argue further on, considering specifically the affective impact of media is more useful than an abstract, semiotic frame of reference, because it enables a more nuanced observation in the spirit that W. J. T. Mitchell has recently demanded, “allowing theory to emerge as sensuous, articulate experience” (2017, 12). In view of this, it is not just “the three great orders of media” that Mitchell mentions, “images, sounds, and words” (2017, 12) that we can take into account, but, speaking of cinema, also all kinds of moving images, as they engage our senses and interact, “producing the double signification of ‘sense’ as feeling and meaning” (2017, 13). Thus, we can speak of a “sense” of intermediality (i.e. a noticeable and meaningful media difference and interplay) coupled with a collage effect occurring through the perception of the admixture of any media form that is deemed uncinematic in cinema, as well as through diverse technical formats (analogue or digital film, varying resolutions, etc.), or even styles (i.e. certain well-established patterns attached to historically distinct types of films), which, placed side by side, throw into relief their own unique affordances in mediation, in carrying specific meanings, sensations of quasi-materiality and affects within the otherwise elusive substance of moving images.

A paradigmatic example of this is Alain Resnais’s famous documentary about the Nazi concentration camps, *Night and Fog* (*Nuit et bruyard*, 1956), which pieces together black and white archival footage and photographs with new sequences filmed in colour, exploring the sites of the camps in the present. There has been much debate around the ethics of showing the gruesome pictures of corpses and emaciated bodies in the film, but leaving this debate aside, I would only like to point out its blending of the principle of montage with collage and an impression of intermediality, as it provides a relevant counterpoint to what we see in Jude’s cinema. The film relies on the disjunction and incommensurability between the archival images and Resnais’s recurring tracking shots scanning the landscape around the former camps and the deserted buildings. Past and present are associated with two kinds of images in the film, i.e. the photo-filmic archive, with each individual picture and sequence recognized as both imprints and remainders of a palpable reality that was there before, contrasting with Resnais’s shots that are seen as images made in the present, as images of a movie, recording

the sites of historical events, signifying an absence. Document and documentary are connected not only to different time frames, but they appear on ontologically different planes. Nevertheless, Resnais constructs a quasi-homogenous discourse, stitching into its narrative fabric the essentially non-discursive archival material. He does this by bridging the gap both between media (i.e. photography and film, by combining them in smooth transitions, in a manner that seems to infuse movement into stasis) and between these planes, through the accompanying musical score and voice-over commentary which also provide emotional and intellectual cohesion to the poetics of the film, wrapping up the interstitial collage into a montage. Gilles Deleuze's claim that Resnais "creates a cinema which has only one single character. Thought" (1989, 122) captures a similar impression. Furthermore, the film's vantage point is clearly anchored in the present, as the viewer's gaze is carried around the sites. It is the gaze of the living looking at the dead, invited to confront the past.

In comparison, Jude's films dealing with past and present atrocities offer a multiplication of viewpoints without a single definite anchor, through a collage strategy that is reconfigured in a different way in each of his subsequent films. I will examine Jude's films produced between 2016 and 2021 through a few discernible conceptual clusters. First, I will look at the films that reveal the epistemological values and limitations of collage as a means of reflection on history, then I will try to chart the affordances of the intermedial relations of words and images in his photofilms, and lastly, I will address issues of affectivity, performativity and metalepsis in the films that deal with a historical perspective projected over both the recent past and the present.

Postmemory and the Angel of History

In *The Marshal's Two Executions* Jude uses a minimalist collage form, a mirror structure, placing side-by-side fiction film and archival footage. The short film shows the execution of Ion Antonescu, Romania's leader and Hitler's ally during the Second World War, recorded in 1946 by cameraman Ovidiu Gologan, and compares it to the scene as it is rendered in the biographical film directed by Sergiu Nicolaescu, *The Mirror (Oglinda)*, 1994). The correspondences are striking, as Nicolaescu remakes almost shot-by-shot the original film. Despite these parallels, however, the comparison works towards the perception of a similar disjunction and incommensurability as we see in Resnais's film, but without the organizing principle of a montage. Jude is not interested in constructing a narrative but in

deconstructing the images through their association.¹⁰ Nicolaescu's sequences are immediately decoded as fiction, even before we can observe the subtle, manipulative changes in the reconstruction. The imitation of the colour palette of old movies and the vigorous voice-over introduction, the steady camera, the dramatic dialogue enhanced by the surging music and the close-ups create an image shaped by clichés of cinematic imagination in stark contrast with the silent, black-and-white footage of the execution, which is opaque, unsteady and uncanny. Nicolaescu aims to rehabilitate the marshal, the scene's resemblance to the original footage serves a rhetorical purpose, the differences in framing, and the alignment of the camera with the executioners and their guns point to the victims presented as heroes. The original footage concentrates on the people who are executed by the firing squad; it is filmed for the most part by a handheld camera and makes us feel the tension of the eyewitness of a horrible act, the abjection of the dead bodies, thus allowing a glimpse into something that is very hard to see. Nicolaescu constructs a fictionalized account, an unflinchingly sutured vision of the historical event with the familiar devices of narrative cinema, fabricating a rhetoric of objectivity through its connection to the source material and documentary style voice-over in order to deliver his own unequivocal interpretation of the events.

In this manner, the sequence from Nicolaescu's film clearly supports Jacques Rancière's contention that the essential feature of fiction is "not a lack of reality but a surfeit of rationality," an ordering of events according to "consequences of a chain of causes and effects" (2020, 1). Whereas the original footage – with the flickering images partly fading into mist and the lingering on the gaping eyes and mouths of the corpses, with the wavering and jumpy camera movement – allows a sense of subjectivity to seep both into the recording of the event by a mechanical device and into our present day perception of the fragile archival material, opening up the image into an abyss. It appears as something outside the rational order of fiction, what is more, in Julia Kristeva's words, "it jettisons the object into an abominable real" (1982, 9). [Figs. 1–4.] Alternating between these two kinds of moving images (and implicitly, between two different points of view), Jude cuts up the original succession of the shots in both films, resulting in a series of fragments spliced together as distorted mirror reflections. The jarring discordance of this heterogeneity along with the experience of repeated ruptures

10 See this idea emphasized in this interview: [https://romania.europalibera.org/a/cele-dou%C4%83-execu%C8%9Bii-ale-mare%C8%99alului-compara%C8%9Bie-radu-jude-\(interviu\)/29826508.html](https://romania.europalibera.org/a/cele-dou%C4%83-execu%C8%9Bii-ale-mare%C8%99alului-compara%C8%9Bie-radu-jude-(interviu)/29826508.html). Last accessed 12. 01. 2022.

in the mashup goes beyond the rhetoric of the proposed intellectual exercise (“a comparison,” as announced by the film’s subtitle). It amplifies the affective-performative qualities inherent in any collage, i.e. the unresolved tension both between the different sources of the images and between the sensuous features of each sequence ripped apart.

The short film is actually a kind of by-product of the feature film, *I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians*, which invites the viewer to plunge headlong into the abysmal depths and spirals of history. The title is a quotation from Deputy Prime Minister Mihai Antonescu, who was speaking in the summer of 1941, before the start of the ethnic cleansing on the Eastern Front (and who was later executed together with Marshal Ion Antonescu in 1946). The film is about a young woman’s political art project staged in the centre of Bucharest, consisting of a re-enactment of the massacre of Jewish people in Odessa in the autumn of 1941, and making a film about it in order to raise awareness of the atrocities committed by the Romanians. The synopsis of the film, published in the official press leaflet, is a mere list of keywords thrown together in a manner suggesting a cut-up, fragmented text, indicating a clear engagement with the principle of collage.¹¹ The director’s statement from the same official leaflet includes a quotation from Walter Benjamin’s essay on the philosophy of history. The fragment is a philosophical ekphrasis of a painting that Benjamin owned, *Angelus Novus* (1920) by Paul Klee [Fig. 8]. In Benjamin’s compelling poetic interpretation, the painting “shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward” (2007, 257–258).

11 “Military reenactment – Hannah Arendt – show – 1941, “the year that keeps returning,” as seen from 2018 – quotations – firearms – archive footage – the Odessa massacre – 16 mm and video – the Military Museum – negationism – videomapping – burlesque – dialogues – fanfare – Isaac Babel – fragmented narrative – Wenn die Soldaten durch die Stadt marschieren – trivialization by comparison – script by Marshal Antonescu – fire –directed by Radu Jude – featuring Ioana Iacob, Alexandru Dabija, Alex Bogdan – barracks jokes – ordinary people – nunca más! – the present past, the past present.” (https://www.betacinema.com/index.php/fuseaction/download/lrn_file/175689.pdf. Last accessed 12. 01. 2022.)

The film is in fact a vision of such a “pile of wreckage” or “debris” of history assembled for the most part according to the principle of *mise-en-abyme*, i.e. a vortex structure of superimpositions of narrative layers, images, texts, objects and theatrical *mise-en-scène* in which all the embedded layers reflect one another. We may see an allusion to this in the segment in which the protagonist is holding up an old photograph against the building in front of which it was taken, and captures the building again in its present state in a joint picture with the historical photograph, replicating its point of view on her mobile phone, while the scene itself (showing the act of taking a photo of a photo) is constructed as another version of the same shot [Fig. 5]. This multiple mirroring also reveals how such a *mise-en-abyme* construction overlays not only a series of representations, but connects past and present, mediation and immediacy, inviting the viewer to reflect on all these juxtapositions.

Jude frames the movie self-reflexively, starting with a film within a film, showing in a kind of prologue a fragment of archival footage on a digital monitor. As the screen goes blank, the title appears on the same monitor hinting both at the historical origin of the quotation that takes the place of the archival images, and at the film in the process of being edited. The film then shows a film crew at work in a museum among glass cases filled with guns. The film’s clapperboard appears in close-up, identifying this to be the shooting of a Radu Jude film, *Is This What You Were Born For?* (*Pentru asta te-ai născut?*), which, as we learn from several sources,¹² was the original, provisional title of the film. Thus, the two titles are connected to objects belonging to different phases of a film production (editing and shooting), and have divergent connotations: the final version closely linked to the evoked historical time and the embedded provisional title linked to yet another time frame and to a mere idea of a film preserved, encapsulated within a work that has already surpassed this incipient stage. Jumping from the archival images to the museum as a shooting location, the film conflates a reflection on history with a reflection on the means of reflections on history, as well as a preoccupation with its own history, with the recording of its own progress both as an act of physical creation and as a thought process. This latter is also made explicit by the gesture of the protagonist turning to the camera and introducing herself as the actress, Ioana Iacob, playing the role of Mariana Marin in the film and saying a few words about what differentiates the fictional character from

12 E.g. <https://www.filmneweurope.com/news/romania-news/item/114423-production-radu-jude-preps-is-this-what-you-were-born-for>. Last accessed 12. 01. 2022.

the real person who embodies her.¹³ This reflexive frame is then doubled by the actual narration in which we see the preparations and staging of the public performance. Additionally, this narrative includes a further reflexive frame in which a town hall official supervising the project, Mr. Movilă (played by one of the director's recurring actors, Alexandru Dabija) and Mariana continuously discuss ideas connected to the spectacle. The performance itself is then shown to be recorded in (live) television style, with multiple cameras placed around the square. And when we notice the familiar figure of the director, Radu Jude, in the crowd as an extra, vociferously reacting to the performers in the square, in the company of people casting glances at the camera and thus breaking the so-called fourth wall of the screen [Fig. 6], we see the film gesturing again, as in the beginning, towards its audience, playfully acknowledging its constructedness.

Self-reference of this kind, which invites the viewers to watch a film being made in front of their eyes, creates the illusion of reality around the embedded fiction that is meant to expose the concrete, tangible world in which a work in progress unfolds through various means of mediation. As such, it has the ambivalent potential to present art both as an artificial construction and as a straightforward depiction of reality. It is through this intertwining that film's main questions emerge for the viewer. These questions do not only concern the understanding of history despite all the explicit debates addressing it in the film, but also the relationship of media and reality, which is in fact a central issue in all of Jude's collage films. Can media actually mediate? Can there be a leap from representation to presentation, and thus, can the use of media in a film (archival footage, photography, music, theatre, etc.) become an effective strategy to create artificial "passages" to the real?¹⁴ Can the past be excavated and revived from pictures, objects and texts, so that it has a perceptible, emotional impact in the present?

The show directed by Mariana is not a realistic docudrama, but a spectacularly stylized multimedia performance with scenes recreating archival photos, involving

13 The explicit acknowledgement of the double identity of the woman (actress and fictional character) may remind us of Jean-Luc Godard's heroine in *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (*Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, 1967), and there are also other similarities with Godard's political cinema (including stylistic features like the use of vibrant, primary colours in clothes and objects), as noticed, among others, by Lazăr and Gorzo (2019, 10). For Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* pointing out the double identity of the heroine becomes the start of a more complex and universal philosophical inquiry into the nature of images. Jude's brief scene is perhaps no more than a nod to Godard, but it does anticipate that this will be a film that explores role-playing, media reflexivity, the duality of fiction and reality, attempting to add more layers to each of its scenes.

14 Lúcia Nagib (2020) has proposed the idea of such "passages" as a strategy to forge a cinema deeply committed to reality through intermediality.

amateur actors, theatrical sets and props, military marching bands, accompanied by today's fashionable and state-of-the-art video mapping technology, the projection of images over the surrounding buildings in one of Bucharest's most iconic squares. [Fig. 7.] The performance staged in this square is also uncannily resonant with the grandiose public pageants of the Ceaușescu era, and the place of the re-enactment is saturated with several layers of historical memories. The square as we see it today is a historical palimpsest. It is the Revolutionary Square (formerly named the Royal Palace Square), where a pro-monarchist and anti-Communist protest was violently crushed in 1945, and which later became symbolic for marking both the apogee of Ceaușescu's dictatorship (as a place where he openly condemned the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968) and the fall of the regime after the disastrous mass meeting held in the same location in 1989. The re-enactment show, as a multimedia event embedded in this specific site, augmented by digital visual effects, spotlights the multiple superimpositions that appear both on the level of the self-reflexive cinematic narrative and on the level of pro-filmic reality, where an obscure and deliberately obscured past looms below the visible surface of the present.

The film's multi-layered *mise-en-abyme* construction becomes a double-edged device, one that both uncovers and reproduces the mechanisms leading to this obscurity. In one of their conversations with Mariana, Movilă dismisses the uniqueness of historical events and the reliability of historiography, arguing that history tends to repeat itself, and that historiography is nothing but texts quoting other texts, one writing incorporating the ideas from another, thus suggesting their ultimate disconnection from reality. The part in which we see an excerpt from Sergiu Nicolaescu's film *The Mirror* is perhaps an ironic reflection on this. Nicolaescu's movie is rewriting the past, and (as the film's companion piece, *The Marshal's Two Executions* demonstrates), in one key section, it is rewriting another film (i.e. the original footage). Displayed on a small, old-fashioned TV in Mariana's room, and inserted within a contemporary domestic setting, a piece of history is then wrapped into a boxed-in fragment of fictionalized history within a fiction film about history.

The immediate context of this sequence is symptomatic for the way in which Jude attempts to counter the infinite regress effect distancing the film's multiple *mise-en-abymes* of representations from physical reality by repeatedly inserting intellectual debates into shots with locations engaging the senses (featuring loud music, people in hectic movement, bright colours, overcrowded frames, etc.), staging a clash between mind and body, abstract thought and raw emotion. The movie quotation is embedded in a postcoital scene that flaunts the naked

bodies of Mariana and her lover, with the images of flesh, skin and hair.¹⁵ The carnal relationship shown in this scene is a clandestine affair kept secret from a husband who is away, and with whom Mariana is only seen talking via the computer screen. There is an unplanned pregnancy and the protagonist reflects on the possibility of its termination from a feminist point of view, retorting to the lover's cautious inquiries by reminding him of a woman's right over decisions concerning her own body. In this way, while Mariana is now grappling with the issue of collective responsibility over lives brutally taken in the past, at some point she will also have to ponder the fate of her unborn baby. The tangibility of the present, the sense of corporeality foregrounded in the scene with her lover, enhanced by the prospect of life-altering personal decisions, is in contrast with the distant, intangible past and the historical events, but it also points to the precariousness of human existence that ultimately connects them.

There are also other resonances between past and present. Mariana denounces the naivety and misinformation of people that lead to the massacre, and is infuriated by the argument of relativism voiced by Movilă that such events are not unique in history. Yet the pattern of repetition germinates in Mariana's zealous project itself. Some of the people participating in the re-enactment prove that xenophobia is just as entrenched in the present as it was in the past, and physical violence springs easily from situations of confrontation. In her passionate desire to condemn the barbarity of the executions, facing the ignorance and indifference of her peers, Mariana herself becomes aggressive and attacks a man who angers her, starting to beat him in a frenzy. The past is both dead and buried, and paradoxically present and alive, ingrained not in memory but in our human vulnerability and weaknesses. The message may not be much of a revelation, and the execution may even be fairly didactic, just as the show within the film does not even try to be subtle in its means (as the fictitious director admits to her supervisor). Nevertheless, the complex *mise-en-abyme* structure creates scenes of truly mordant irony that subvert its simplistic reading. Mariana's final political art performance – also bringing to mind the golden years of communist mass spectacle extravaganza – communicates the same impression described by Walter Benjamin, that of history conceived not as a linear succession of events but as “one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage” in front of us.

15 The scene has shocked some of the viewers who saw the display of the non-erotic naked bodies as gratuitous nudity. Andrei Gorzo, on the other hand, considers it as an instance of Jude making fun for fun's sake, by filming the actor, Șerban Pavlu “from a very unflattering angle,” reminiscent of his previous films in which he repeatedly placed him “in undignified, ridiculous postures, as if he were the butt of an extended directorial joke” (2019, 17).

In Boris Groys's interpretation, "Benjamin uses the image of *Angelus Novus* in the context of his materialist concept of history, in which divine violence becomes material violence [...] Benjamin does not believe in the possibility of total destruction. Indeed, if God is dead, the material world becomes indestructible. In the secular, purely material world, destruction can be only material destruction, produced by material forces, and any material destruction remains only partially successful. It always leaves ruins, traces, vestiges behind – precisely as described by Benjamin in his parable" (2016, 35). Jude's vision of history as a "single catastrophe," although informed by a similar materialist view (signalled at the very beginning of the film by Mariana's remark of being an atheist), is clearly adapted to our times. It is a vision shaped not by the memory of the horrible events of the Holocaust but constructed in the condition of so-called postmemory (see e.g. Hirsch 2012, Frosh 2019), when the traumatic past is recalled not by people who experienced it, not even by the generation whose parents experienced it, but by the third generation of survivors. This generation only has material vestiges, objects, museum exhibits, texts, archival photographs and films, historical sites augmented by media representations through which memory can be performed and consumed. As Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger describe in their book, "the third generation must navigate with an inexact, approximate map, a broken narrative. Theirs is a 're-created past,' a matter of 'filling in gaps, of putting scraps together'" (2017, 4). For Resnais, the memory of the Holocaust was still a past perceivable in the present (and therefore an intensely painful subject), for Jude this memory can only be a product of "putting the scraps together," what is more, in a context marked by the challenges imposed by an age obsessed with the present¹⁶ and with immersive, hypermediated forms of entertainment.

As a postmemory exercise, the film is therefore packed on the level of text and image with "scraps" both as concrete objects (books, fragments of films on laptops and editing monitors, photographs, artworks, costumes, guns, various items used for the re-enactment, etc.), and in the form of intellectual references and allusions (quotations from philosophy, literature). Mariana's efforts provide a daring mixture of pathos, absurdist comedy and the macabre, and culminate in a collage-show that is hence as much an attempt at a political act of commemoration as a reflection on today's popular culture. Benjamin's "angel of history" is not

16 According to Boris Groys: "our contemporary age seems to be different from all the other historically known ages in at least one respect: never before has humanity been so interested in its own contemporaneity. The Middle Ages were interested in eternity, the Renaissance was interested in the past, modernity was interested in the future. Our epoch is interested primarily in itself (2016, 137).

just evoked, but thrown into the jumble as a large poster reproduction of Klee's *Angelus Novus* painting (which is relatively tiny in original, 31.8 by 24.2 cm) hanging on the wall of Mariana's living room. [Figs. 8–9.] Without ever being brought into full view or close-up, hovering in the dark background, hidden in plain sight, it is an ominous, silent reminder of Benjamin's tragic vision underlying Jude's cinematic collage. Its use remains purely intellectual, spotted only by more attentive and knowledgeable spectators, the blown-up picture does not have the unsettling radiance of the original painting that could somehow permeate the cinematic image. However, in the morbid *tableau vivant* of the dummies staged in the final show, and based on an archival photograph of corpses dangling from the gallows [Figs. 10–11], Jude creates a powerful, contemporary response to Benjamin's angel of history. With their heads turned down towards the people standing below (who are re-enacting the massacre, commenting or just cheering the performers), these life-size puppets seem to embody the same feeling of horror by “fixedly contemplating” both past and present “wreckage” at their feet, unable to “make whole what has been smashed.” The source of this horror, however, this time is not just humanity shattered by the Holocaust, but also the impossibility of connecting to the past. If we accept Eva Hoffmann's claim that the second generation “has inherited not experience, but its shadows” and thus “has grown up with the uncanny” (2005, 66), then the third generation's difficulty is that it can only recreate this shadow, the uncanny. Accordingly, the grisly and somewhat vulgar props of the dummies “reviving” an image of the dead are also, paradoxically, mere uncannily materialized shadows of Benjamin's and Klee's *Angelus Novus*.

Words, Images, and the Blind Spots of History

The evocation of a world through its uncanny shadows is also the key to Jude's *The Dead Nation* (as indicated already by the film's title, which in the Romanian original is actually slightly different, meaning *The Dead Country*). Unlike Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), film history's perhaps most famous incursion into a world of the dead by means of a series of still photographs arranged in a cinematic succession, and accompanied by a voice-over narration, there is nothing cinematic in the construction of Jude's photofilm. In *The Dead Nation* we do not have an arrested, fragmentary flow of images in which photography evokes or morphs into cinema, as we see in *La Jetée*, instead we have a kind of slideshow of individual pictures preserving the autonomy of photography. Each photo appears not just as

a still image, a photogram constructing a film, but also as a unique photographic object displayed within the cinematic frame offered to be looked at individually. There are no cinematic close-ups of details either; we always behold the pictures in their entirety. What binds them together is that the images originate from a single collection of photographs preserving the work of a photographer whose handiwork and idiosyncrasies we learn to recognize by the end. Not being placed in cinematic succession, these pictures do not convey a single narrative, but encapsulate their own, multiple and enigmatic narratives which are not elucidated by the voice-over speaking of events happening elsewhere. The film consists of two parallel layers of image and sound. What we see is a series of photographs taken in the 1930s and 40s by Costică Acsinte, a professional photographer from a small, South-Eastern Romanian town, Slobozia, and what we hear are excerpts from the diaries of a Jewish doctor, writer and poet, Emil Dorian, living in Bucharest, commenting on current historical events and speaking of his own experiences in these dark times, read by Jude as a voice-over, and interspersed with fragments from contemporary propaganda songs and radio broadcasts.

This polyphonic texture of media and multiple points of view is meant to represent the “fragments of parallel lives” implied by the film’s subtitle. On the one hand, we have the rural or small-town Romania portrayed in endearing group photos marked by a kind of naïve aestheticization showing people of varying social strata from middle class downwards. Butchers, bakers, tailors, cooks, shoemakers, seamstresses, soldiers, musicians pose with the tools of their trade, farmers and townspeople are photographed with their family and domestic animals, sometimes captured at leisure in the company of friends gathered for social occasions. [Figs. 12–17.] Presented in chronological sequence, the series of photographs record not only the bucolic country life of the petty bourgeoisie but also the widespread and deep poverty of the lower classes. Cars, motorcycles, or tractors appear after a while as prized possessions, and there is an uncanny fascination with weapons and manliness, we see children performing the Nazi salute [Figs. 18–21], all naturally incorporated in the compositions. On the other hand, in stark contrast, we listen to original recordings of political speeches and military marches. The voice-over narration reads Emil Dorian’s succinct notes on all the major political changes of the day, on the surging wave of antisemitism leading to the escalating humiliations and destitutions of the Jews, the atrocious procedures of torture and mass executions. In the excerpts from the diary, Jude brings into focus an authentic personal reflection on the emergence of the Romanian Holocaust, which has been a blind spot of history for such a long

time, but avoids showing any pictures about it, offering instead a photo album documenting life in a small town. The ambivalent approach may even ironically reiterate the suppression of Romania's contribution to the genocide by official historiography insisting on detailing other events.

As a whole, however, the film becomes primarily a meditation on the wider context of historical events, on how they relate to the ordinary lives of people. On the one hand, Dorian's diary unspools as a series of terse observations which occasionally turn into bitter commentary and lively anecdotes of particularly affecting cases (like the excursus about the orphaned little girl, Clara, sent from Transnistria to Bucharest before being shipped to Palestine, whose tiny body bears "the stigmata of malnutrition," and who speaks of death, of walking over dead bodies "with petrifying nonchalance"). On the other hand, the country photographer's shots encapsulate everyday reality in the changing seasons of the year, and in different stages of life, while the radio speeches and songs provide the general background of the political atmosphere. Jude's cinematic canvas populated by scenes and figures evoked through text, sound and image, encompassing a multitude of characters and situations depicted in minute details, recalls the technique of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, who – in paintings like *The Procession to Calvary* (1564), *The Conversion of St. Paul* (1567), or *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (1558) – paints the heroes of Biblical or mythological stories as miniature figures, lost somewhere in the centre of crowded compositions, surrounded by a flurry of people preoccupied with their daily activities. Bruegel weaves the grand stories defining our culture into the texture of everydayness, of the unexceptional stories of people going about with their lives, their own private suffering regardless of the cataclysmic events taking place amongst them.

In spite of their separate approaches, both Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog*, alternating archival materials and new footage, and Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), using exclusively testimonies filmed in the present, build on a similar contrast between the ordinary enveloping the extraordinary. In both cases, however, there is a distinct temporal gap between the two. As Laura Rascaroli remarks, Resnais's "method throughout focuses on showing how the apparent normality filmed by the camera in the now of the narration conceals a horrifying past" (2017, 49), or, as Georges Didi-Huberman states, the whole challenge of *Night and Fog* "rested on a shake-up of *memory* caused by a contradiction between unavoidable documents of *history* and repeated marks of the *present*" (2008, 130, italics in the original). In Jude's film, this is not contemporary normality reclaiming the space of past horrors, suggested by the images of grassy

lands shown at the sites of genocide in the films of Resnais and Lanzmann, it is the routine of ordinary life of the country occurring simultaneously with the dreadful events described in the voice-over. So we have to wonder: are these people who pose in these pictures of the “Foto Splendid” studio from Slobozia, oblivious, insensible, or complicit to what is going on? The fact that they do not live at the centre of historically significant events, does not mean they are not part of the reality of their day.¹⁷ The juxtaposition of the time frames of the sounds and images makes Jude’s wide-angle perspective clear: these lives may not be directly connected, but they are part of the same world that gestated the Holocaust. This colourful mosaic of human life also includes unimaginable anguish, darkness and even inhumanity. These people are all potential victims, but also potential perpetrators. They will all suffer or die in the war. It is possible that some of them will also go and massacre their fellow humans and commit incomprehensible acts of cruelty. The flow of images enfolds this “terrible *human possibility*” that Didi-Huberman (2008, 28, italics in the original) quotes from Georges Bataille, who wrote about those responsible for the Holocaust not in terms of what makes them exceptional, but in terms of what makes them “similar, fellow human,” and insisted that “Auschwitz is inseparable from us” (2008, 27–28).

Whereas *I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians* is all about remembrance as a political act and the challenges of political art in our postmemory condition, *The Dead Nation* does not attempt a “shake-up of memory” in the same vein that Didi-Huberman mentions with regard to Resnais. There is no present vantage point over the past, only the past made present through both the diary and the photos. There is no gap in time, only the gaps between words, sounds and images. The sounds are imageless and the pictures are silent. They are both highly revealing, yet merely lacunary representations of a reality we do not know and cannot remember ourselves, opening up the frames for the viewer’s imagination. The descriptive qualities of the pictures make them invaluable resources for historical anthropology, but their referents are identified only by the date the photos were taken. Excluding the abundance of pictorial details of their physical existence and environment, we actually

17 One could argue that *The Dead Nation* is comparable in this respect with Corneliu Porumboiu’s *12:08 East of Bucharest* (*A fost sau n-a fost?*, 2006), which debated whether people living in a small town in the Eastern part of the country actually had anything to do with the revolution of 1989, or they merely reacted to the news of what happened in the country’s capital when Ceaușescu’s regime collapsed. Nevertheless, while Porumboiu’s satire clearly sets the periphery in contrast with the centre, Jude’s film speaks of “parallel lives” implying no hierarchy between the two, and the duality in his film has more to do with the dialectic of the singular and the universal.

have no information about these people as individuals. Who are they, what did they think or feel, what happened to them? As Siegfried Kracauer writes, “in a photograph a person’s history is buried as if under a layer of snow” (1993, 426), the picture contains only “the residuum that history has discharged,” “if one can no longer encounter the grandmother in the photograph, the image taken from the family album necessarily disintegrates into its particulars” (1993, 429). Similarly, Dorian’s meticulous notes on what is happening in the world around him betray very little directly about himself. There is an excess of particulars that masks many blind spots in this superimposition of text and photography, and brings forth an interplay of the visible and the invisible.

Words and images are in a tense, competing relationship to capture the attention of the viewer, who is constantly forced to move in between and fails to absorb both at the same level of intensity. The powerful impact of the photographs overturns the conventional dynamic between text and image in documentary films, in which verbal narration usually takes the lead as the main source of information, guiding the viewer in the interpretation of the images. The dominance of an “intelligent text” in voice-over is also the way in which many of the essay films “think” (Rascaroli 2017). André Bazin observed, for example, that Chris Marker’s *Letter from Siberia* (*Lettre de Sibérie*, 1958) is actually an “essay documented by film:” the image appears as a mere support of the “verbal intelligence,” connected directly to what is said, and thus “the intelligence flows from the audio element to the visual. The montage has been forged from ear to eye” (2003, 44). In contrast to such films, in *The Dead Nation* the dominance of the text is continuously thwarted. The deadpan delivery of Jude’s voice-over comes across literally as an act of reading a text and not as a direct, verbal recollection that would address the viewer. Despite the shocking content of the narration, which counterpoints the picturesque quality of the photos, and despite the fact that the slow pace of the slideshow does allow the audience time to grasp the weight of the information conveyed by the words, the text does not have the same affective charge as the images, or at least, it does not work in the same way. The director’s personal intervention places Emil Dorian’s prose within Brechtian quotation marks. It preserves the parallel autonomy of the soundtrack and even enhances the distantiation effect of Dorian’s intellectual reflection (which is thus filtered through the mediation of another authorial voice), while Costică Acsinte’s photos fill the screen with mesmerizing effect, immersing the viewer into a fascinating world. This is no longer a montage “forged from ear to eye” or even from the eye to ear, but a collage in which text and image lead indeed to “fragments of parallel

lives” conjured up from long ago. The two, quasi-autonomous and incongruent mediums, which are connected to different viewpoints, are constantly eroding and overwriting each other. As Melinda Blos-Jáni’s refined analysis has pointed out, this is “a film about shifting, fluid meanings” (2020, 142), in which the indexicality of the photographs is weakened in the context of the diary, “images cease to point at the unique reality of Slobozia from the 1930s and 1940s, instead they become signs of possible realities from that era” (2020, 142). Grotesque contrasts and semantic resonances emerge, a series of allegoric associations are created by the coincidences of text and image (e.g. all the slaughtered animals, several photos of people posing with calves and brandishing their knives, the image of people butchering a pig in a partially damaged plate in which their heads have been erased, all appear as ironic parallels to the slaughterhouse effect of the war, etc.). [Figs. 22–23.]

This mutually corrosive and transformative overlay of literature and photography also fills an enormous void in the film, the lack of images of the actual Holocaust, considered by many as “the invisible and unthinkable object par excellence” (Didi-Huberman quoting Gerard Wajcman 2008, 27). Jude seems to allude to this invisibility in the sequence in which the screen goes completely dark while the voice-over is speaking about gas used as a special weapon for the extermination of the Jews. In the photograph shown just before this, we see a group of people surrounded by a sinister halo of blackness seeping into the picture from the margins. The blank screen as a temporal break (and as such, a minimalist and performative cinematic intervention) in the succession of still images lasts for about 35 seconds followed by an extra 15 seconds in which the sound also stops and there is complete silence. This erasure of image and sound is counterbalanced by the following photo of the small-town jazz band posing in the photographer’s studio playing their instruments in a crowded, uncanny, and silent tableau. [Figs. 24–25.] While acknowledging in this way the unfathomable barbarity of what happened in Auschwitz, overall the film contests the radical unrepresentability of the Holocaust by insistently stimulating and testing the imagination through the interaction of word and image, photography and film. Thus, the film supports both Giorgio Agamben’s assertion that one can only speak about the Holocaust by admitting “an impossibility of speaking” (1999, 164), and Didi-Huberman’s claim that “we are bound to imagine, as a way of *knowing it in spite of all*” (2008, 162, italics in the original). Jude’s collage technique foregrounds both the limits of mediation and the productive, liminal spaces of perception, cognition and imagination.

At the same time, the film's photographic tapestry of Bruegelian life, the visible, quasi-palpable layer of the film unfurls on its own a photogenic "mortification" of history, where – as Didi-Huberman comments on Kracauer's criticism of photography – in the opaqueness of the images, history is "rendered impotent, and reduced to 'indifference toward what things want to say'" (2008, 173). The photographic texture of Jude's film weaves life and death together and positions the subjects in an impossible space of in-betweenness. Beside the disjointedness of image and sound leading the viewer into fragmentary, parallel lives of an all-encompassing humanity envisaged by Bataille, the photos also open up multiple paths leading the viewer, more than anything, to parallel associations with death.

In Jude's cinema, death has always been an important topic, even before his collage films. In *A Film for Friends* (*Film pentru prieteni*, 2011) a man records a video-message ahead of shooting himself in the head. The *Shadow of a Cloud* (*O umbră de nor*, 2013) presents a priest called to assist a woman on her deathbed and contemplates the perspective of death hanging over all of us. In the short film *It Can Pass through the Wall* (*Trece și prin perete*, 2014) we see a young girl being unsettled by the news of a neighbour committing suicide. *Scarred Hearts* documents the last months of a terminally ill poet committed to a sanatorium prior to the outbreak of World War II. In *The Dead Nation*, however, death is more than a topic addressed in the film, or a recurring narrative motif; it penetrates the very fabric of the film, becoming the most compelling connotation of the photofilmic images.

The photographs effectively dissect cinema's "body" into pieces, making Jude's film exude "death 24 times a second," in Laura Mulvey's words, as "the still, inanimate, image is drained of movement, the commonly accepted sign of life" (2006, 24). The photographs themselves are all stained by physical deterioration: the coating peeling off the glass plates, corrosion seeping into and erasing parts of the frames, creating new, abstract images of their own disintegration, and gravitating towards the Bataillean *informe* (1985, 31), towards a "formless abstraction striated with fractures."¹⁸ [Figs. 26–27.] Yet even this sensuous texture of decomposition is ultimately erased by the digital conversion of the analogue photographs. The ultra-high resolution scanning glosses over the imperfections, lifts the images from the base materiality of putrefaction on the glass surfaces and (re)casts their formlessness into crisp, poster-perfect *tableaux*, eerily magnified on the cinematic screen. In connection with Resnais's use of archival footage,

18 Excerpt from George Bataille's poem, *I Throw Myself among the Dead* (Botting and Wilson 1997, 105).

Emma Wilson (2011) writes about the heartrending frustration of the desire to touch which enhances the spectral quality of the cinematic image and exposes the ungraspable disappearance of loved ones through images bearing the fleeting photographic traces of the dead. In Jude's cinematic appropriation of Costică Acsinte's remediated images, we are confronted with the double spectrality of digitized photography, which places not only its subjects forever out of reach, but tears away the pictures themselves from our hands and from their fragile materiality as objects, and makes them immaterial and indestructible within the realm of the convergent scopic mediums of film and digital photography, in which "touch" can only be mediated by technology. In these digitized images, the formlessness of decay appears neither as a disruptive process acting against form, suggested by Bataille's concept, nor as a self-reflexive mark of their status as a "visual event" like the mass of blackness in the *Sonderkommando* photos interpreted by Didi-Huberman (2008, 36), but as a pattern redrawing the visual representations into icons of death.

All the images refer to a world that is gone, in each image we see people who are long dead, while Jude lends his own voice to read out a literary text of a writer speaking from beyond the grave. Looking at the men in uniforms, we cannot shake the impression that in the context of the war, these young men are all potentially marked for death. There are also many pictures of dead children, photographs taken at funerals with open coffins, with their lifeless bodies embalmed by Acsinte's camera [Figs. 28–29].

None of the pictures were made in haste, as in the case of the *Sonderkommando* photos from Auschwitz that Didi-Huberman (2008) analyses, but composed with attention to detail and in most of the cases, in good humour. The photographer's evident gestures of pictureiness are superimposed onto the gestures of life within the frames, congealing them as visual forms and compositions, generic portrayals of families, craftspeople, soldiers, etc. often arranged in front of the same blanket used as a background in the ramshackle studio. Every now and then, this superimposition accidentally fails. In one of the photos, a calf that cannot stay still and makes a sudden move to leave the carefully arranged scene, and the surprised look and blurred movement of the head of one of the boys disrupt the fixity of the image [Fig. 30]. In another group photo showing the newspaper boys in front of the bookshop, a young lad stands all translucent behind the others, while one of the bystanders also has a ghostlike double in the frame [Fig. 31]. These instances show the uncontrollable movement of life inscribed onto the stiff compositional designs intended to preserve the world in an inanimate form. Setting aside such

incidents, this is not candid photography; all the people strike a pose, some even in an artificial manner as *tableaux vivants* enacting a picture for posterity [Figs. 32–33]. As such, they are all already abstractions of themselves even before the photo is taken. By standing in front of the camera, people consciously halt the flow of life and solemnly acknowledge the process of their objectification as an image, and thus become, by dint of the “mortiferous layer of the Pose,” according to Barthes, “Death in person” (1981, 14–15). Moreover, in the predominantly frontal compositions, most subjects look straight into the lens, with a fierce, fixed stare [Figs. 34–35]. In these uncanny, penetrating gazes, we may feel that it is not us looking at them, but it is the dead (like the ghastly dummies in Jude’s previously analysed film) who are insistently watching us without actually being able to see.

The film has two companion pieces in Jude’s oeuvre: *Punish and Discipline* (*A pedepsi, a supraveghea*, 2019) and *The Exit of the Trains* (*Ieșirea trenurilor din gară*, 2020). The short film, *Punish and Discipline*¹⁹ uses a selection of images from the same archive of Costică Acsinte’s photographs edited together this time with a fragment from the memoir of Colonel Grigore Lăcusteanu, an officer in the Romanian army who actively participated in the violent crushing of the 1848 revolution. The diary was discovered and first published in a heavily truncated form in 1935; however, in 2015 it produced a small-scale literary sensation when the whole text was finally made available in a new, annotated edition. A conservative Russophile, who also joined the service of the Turkish invaders of the country, and a person with a choleric temperament, Lăcusteanu, represented a previously absent voice in historiography (that of the oppressor who stood against the revolutionaries extolled by communist propaganda).

The film is constructed almost in the manner of a true *cadavre exquis* with a simple joining of two, unrelated historical documents, literary text and photography. Part One, entitled *Major Lăcusteanu Arrests Some Revolutionaries* displays a couple of pages of the book, and we hear an excerpt from the memoir in the suggestive interpretation of the actor, Șerban Pavlu. This shorter segment speaks of a violent attack and the Major boasts about his reputation among Armenian children who are scared even by the simple mentioning of his name. The text that fills the screen is not entirely in synch with its audio dramatization, and it materializes as a distinctly different type of visibility compared with the vivid, verbal account that captures our imagination (although the image of the

19 Unfortunately, until now this film has only been screened at a documentary film festival. I would like to express therefore my gratitude to Radu Jude, who generously made his film available to me at the time of writing this essay.

page replicates in a way the protagonist's aggressive stance with someone having marked it up in ballpoint pen) [Fig. 36].

Part Two is longer (about nine minutes of the total of little over twelve), and it is entitled *Pictures of a Country Policeman, approx. 1950–1980*. This consists of a similar slideshow of photographs as we saw in *The Dead Nation*, only without sound, music or voice-over. This time there is nothing to distract us from looking at the pictures. We see photos of the same man posing with his wife, family, and dog, having fun while drinking with friends, or showing off his gun [Figs. 37–38]. All the photos are printed on paper, which makes them very different from the delicate glass plates digitized for *The Dead Nation*. The images are not as sharp and full of depth, some are partly faded out or sepia toned, the compositions are less aestheticizing, many of them are actual snapshots, showing, for example, the policeman feeding his hens in his backyard, mounted on a motorcycle [Fig. 39], bicycle, or trotting down the country road on a horse. These are no longer *tableaux vivants* fashioned according to the slightly kitschy taste of a small-town photographer aspiring to appeal not just to a lower class but also to a petit-bourgeois clientele. They reflect the change in history and taste. The efforts of beautification are resumed to a few modest attempts at group arrangements, colourizing one of the photos, and the use of the popular deckle-edge photographic papers of the day (the cheap residual traces of the erstwhile connection of pictorialist photography to the visual arts). Both parts of the film end with a few seconds of a military march, written for the Romanian army by Eduard Hübsch, who was a contemporary of Lăcusteanu, and whose music was also indispensable from the military parades demonstrating the power of the Ceaușescu regime.

The title alludes to Michel Foucault's work, *Discipline and Punish* (1995), which traces the evolution of society's ways of punishment from the extreme brutality of public executions and torture to the elaboration of the prison system and the emergence of more refined ways of surveillance. Through the century gap in time between the two parts, Jude confronts in a similar manner two distinct stages in Romania's history of enforced discipline. The adventures of the belligerent 19th-century officer are in contrast with the seemingly uneventful, ordinary life of the country policeman in the second half of the 20th century. However, this opposition between violence and peace is deceptive. The banal photos were taken in an era when the communist state employed the most insidious methods of surveillance to control people. The policeman was a privileged and much feared member of society whose presence among people never failed to remind them of the threat of constant observation and potential persecution (either by the "ordinary" police or by the state

security agents working with a network of collaborators). The idyllic photos hide the larger picture and the true mechanism of discipline and punishment in communist Romania. Thus, the film becomes yet another meditation on the relationship between the visible and the invisible, and on the epistemic limitations of media. The first part shines a flash of light into a distant past through a tiny window opened up by a literary text, while the second part presents us with rather opaque images of life stamped onto photographic paper. The film exhibits what Didi-Huberman (2008) considers the “dual system of the image,” its simultaneous capacity for truth and obscurity, and compares this with the multimedia phenomenology of the literary text. The colourful archaic language heard over the text-as-image in the book and the captivating particulars of the photos inevitably intervene as screens that never allow for a full view of material reality.

The Exit of the Trains addresses the blind spots of history more directly. Based on an extensive archival research and created in close collaboration with the historian Adrian Cioflâncă, the almost three-hour-long film documents in yet another slideshow of photographs the pogroms that took place in Iași in June 1941. During this pogrom more than 13,000 Jews were killed. First they were taken to the Iași police station by the Romanian army, assisted by German troops and mobs of civilians, they were beaten, tortured and some of them murdered on the spot. The surviving men were then packed in the infamous death trains of sealed freight cars where the majority died in the infernal conditions of heat, lack of water, air and food. Those who made it alive to the destinations of Podu Iloaiei and Călărași were deported to concentration camps. The Iași pogrom was similar to the Odessa massacre that inspired the metareferentially framed multimedia project of *I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians*, and it was one of the shocking events that remained out of sight in the picturesque tableaux of *The Dead Nation*. During the first two and a half hours, entitled *Statements and Testimonies*, Jude catalogues in alphabetical order the photos of the men who died, while their story is told in a voice-over by the surviving family members (mostly the wives), neighbours and friends [Figs. 40–45]. The texts gathered from private diaries, official testimonies at the post-war trials and interviews are read by Jude, Cioflâncă, their friends and regular collaborators in a humble political act of memorialization. The final, approximately fifteen-minute-long segment, entitled *Images*, concludes with a series of photographs that document the pogrom as it happened and the subsequent events: the round-ups, the dead bodies lying in the street, the loading of the “death trains,” the heaps of bodies falling out as the doors of the wagons are opened and piled up alongside the railway [Figs. 46–51.]

Although some reviewers have argued that due to its austere minimalism and evidentiary value, the film belongs to an exhibition in a museum and not in cinema,²⁰ *The Exit of the Trains*, is actually more cinematic than *The Dead Nation*. With its title alluding to *The Arrival of a Train* (*L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat*, directed by Auguste and Louis Lumière, 1896), one of the first moving images to be shown in a movie theatre, Jude's film ostensibly promises to leave the realm of cinematic spectacle for a more direct look at the photographic archives and historical documents. Perhaps the viewer cannot miss the coincidence either that in one of the most memorable photos retrieved from the archives [Fig. 48], the image of the train is framed from a similar (albeit lower) angle and reverses everything else that we saw in the Lumières' shot: instead of the wonder elicited by the strong sense of liveliness of the moving image we have an impression of petrifying stillness and immobility in the photograph, instead of living people meeting the train along the platform, or descending from the carriages, we have the empty carriages with their doors flung open and the corpses stacked up in front of them. Thus the gesture of leaving behind the kind of cinema that began emblematically with the Lumière brothers' film may perhaps echo the much-debated idea of the capitulation of art facing the barbarity of the Holocaust. A movie attempting to express the inexpressible has to renounce all that is typically decoded as "a movie," which in fact Jude has already done in *The Dead Nation* by conceiving it through the divergence of text and image, and the lacunae of representation. Unlike its preceding photofilm, however, *The Exit of the Trains* assembles a coherent archive and a seamless narrative by weaving together text and image. In some cases there is no narration to accompany the pictures (probably because nobody survived to relate their fate), while some stories are told over a blank, black screen (in the absence of photographic sources), but for the most part Jude restores the authority of the text over the image, as is the genre convention in documentaries. Text and image are complementary. This is no longer an intermedial collage, but a highly effective cinematic montage. The testimonies add up as a powerful choir of individual voices. The spoken words are closely sutured to the images, which then serve as illustrations and anchors for the harrowing stories we are told. This semantic unity also compensates for the lack of movement in the succession of photographs. The final silent compilation punctuated with cinematic close-ups corroborates and completes

20 See, for example, Marko Stojiljković's review published at the time of the film's premiere at the Berlin Film Festival: <https://ubiquarian.net/2020/02/film-review-exit-trains-2020-adrian-cioflanca-radu-jude/>. Last accessed 12. 01. 2022.

the verbal testimonies. The intermedial tensions of the film are thus considerably alleviated by the montage effect of text and image, yet the two series of photos also manage to impose their own media characteristics over the film, bringing forth specific meanings that destabilize the narrative concentrating exclusively on the annihilation of a large group of people.

While death emanates from each frame of *The Dead Nation* on multiple levels of connotation, here death no longer haunts the images, it is a certainty: it is recounted, shown, and explicitly confronted with the photographic evidence of the living (the portraits of the victims in the first part are taken from their identity cards and other official papers, or from family albums, certifying their existence). This is a film about identification as opposed to the dehumanizing facelessness of genocide, the killing of individuals set against the Holocaust as a crime against humanity. The series of portraits subverts the horrendous tableaux of anonymous corpses that can no longer obliterate what we have seen before, and makes the ending all the more difficult to watch. These are no longer anonymous victims, each picture points to a life cut short with all the affordances that the indexicality of photography can provide. Kaja Silverman reminds us in her book, *The Miracle of Analogy*, that “discussions of photographic indexicality [...] always focus on the past; an analogue photograph is presumed to stand in for an absent referent – one that is no longer there” (2015, 2). Barthes has further nuanced this view by associating the image with a future perceived in the past. Looking at a picture of a person who was photographed while awaiting his execution, he writes, “the punctum is: he is going to die. [...] I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose [...], the photograph tells me death in the future [...] I shudder [...] over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe” (Barthes 1981, 96). In an essay written in 1931, *Little History of Photography*, Walter Benjamin, remarks, on the other hand, the allure of presentness in photography, and the emergence of “sparks of contingency” with which reality “has seared the subject” (Benjamin [1931] 1999, 510) even with the assumed poses. He finds that unlike the subjects portrayed in painting with whom we lose direct connection in time and see them subordinated to the mastery of the whole artwork, those of photography never cease to speak to the viewer who feels a strange co-presence with them. “The pictures, if they last, do so only as testimony to the art of the painter” ([1931] 1999, 510), he writes, whereas, speaking of a photo of a Newhaven fishwife, Benjamin is filled “with an unruly desire to know what her name was, the woman who was alive there,

who even now is still real, and will never consent to be wholly absorbed in ‘art’” ([1931] 1999, 510).

The long procession of photographs in the first part of *The Exit of the Trains* imbues cinema with all these conflicting temporalities: we see them as definitely belonging to the past, as stand-ins for people who are no longer alive, and also pointing to a future-in-the-past, recognizing the certainty of death as the invariable punctum of each image, but most importantly, we feel the ambivalent co-presence of past and present which reverses the uncanny signs of death-in-life inscribed in the photographs, making us literally face the dead as still living, looking all dignified and enigmatic. Likewise, people portrayed in the quasi-autonomous photographic objects may enter the tragic narrative aided by the voice-over text, but they are not fully “in” it or substituted by it, just as their life stories are not being exhausted by the chronicle of their deaths. These frames preserve, beside the catastrophe of their imminent demise, also, indelibly, the “sparks of contingency” of life itself resisting absorption into images. Kracauer, thinking along the same line as Benjamin, noted that, even in a staged portrait, a photograph tends to suggest infinity, its “content refers to other contents outside that frame, and its structure denotes something that cannot be encompassed – physical existence” (2012, 210). Visually and affectively the film draws on the unresolvable incongruence perceived in the photographs of the two parts: on the affirmation of this visible uncontainability of life in the photos of the first part defying its dreadful counterpart in the formlessness of the entangled corpses shown in the pictures at the end.

The second part is more than an appendix to the narrative of the first, it is a montage that strips the photographs from words and allows them to “speak” for themselves. We see Jews marching with their hands raised and looking straight at the camera [Fig. 46], while civilians watch them from open windows. There are random passers-by staring at the corpses in the street [Fig. 47]. In one of the photos, passengers of a regular train lean out of the windows to have a peek at the mound of corpses near the railway [Fig. 49]. Soldiers collect the dead bodies and load them up on a truck. In a horrifying pit stop, men wallow in the mud and cast glances at the anonymous photographer. The close-ups reframing parts of the photos mimic the gaze of the viewer browsing the archives and lingering on details. They emphasize not only the documentary value of the photos (exposing what actually happened), and draw attention not only to elements that make us pause (by capturing moments of a reality that should never have happened and that we should never see), but also to their overall, abstractifying pictorial qualities

emerging on the flat surface of photographic paper, transforming the accidental into universal. The isolated fragment revealing a “group composition” of people [Figs. 50–51], for example, who survived part of the journey and jostle in the open door of a cattle car, appears just as forceful as any detail of Michelangelo’s staggering vision of people clinging to each other while falling towards Hell in his fresco of *The Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel.

The life stories in the first part are thus followed by images of “bare life” that make us behold the sites where people ceased to have individual lives, and where they became disposable *homines sacri* in the sense Agamben described (1998), i.e. viewed only in terms of “population,” cast beyond divine and human law, allowed to be killed by anybody with impunity. Highlighting the sense of vision in these essentially unwatchable sights through the act of photography perceived in the snapshots left without words, as well as through a multiplication of gazes (directed both inside and outside the frames), these final images also draw the viewer relentlessly into a realm beyond language, into an abject world where “meaning collapses” (Kristeva 1982, 4). Jude’s film becomes in this way also a cinematic journey of photography departing from a fragmented but narrative space of words and images into a space for which we have no words.

Affective Incongruities and Metaleptic Leaps

The identification of individuals caught up in the destructive, dehumanizing gears of history continues in Jude’s *Uppercase Print*, which leads us to another era, a more recent past, the communist Romania in its final decade. The poster of the film showing a white chalk mark of a capital M on a black surface reminds us of Fritz Lang’s famous film made in 1931, *M* (*A City Searches for a Murderer*) [Figs. 52–53], which was about a serial killer of children hunted down both by the police and the criminal underworld. The allusion is morbidly ironic, as Jude’s film is also about a manhunt, only this time, we have a young boy, not a criminal, hunted down by the secret police and informed on by almost all the people he knew. The film presents a true story, that of a Romanian teenager, Mugur Călinescu, who, emboldened by the rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland, wrote graffiti messages in chalk over a wooden fence (all in capital letters, hence the title of the film) protesting against the lack of freedom and the misery of people standing in interminable queues for food, at the beginning of the 1980s. He was quickly apprehended and repeatedly interrogated by the agents of the Department of State Security, the notorious “Securitate.” Not long afterwards, in

1985, he died of leukemia, and was rumoured to have been poisoned. Thus, the capital M in the poster could be interpreted as pointing, in fact, to the murderous Ceaușescu regime.

Even though this narrative is at the core of the film, its presentation is somewhat similar to the Bruegelesque concept of *The Dead Nation*, which foregrounds a mosaic of bucolic country life camouflaging the tragic historical events happening at the same time. Jude breaks up the scenes revealing this typical personal tragedy, unknown to the public in its day, and mixes them together with a series of unrelated samples from diverse television shows that filled the small screens in everyone's homes in those years, each clip telling a different story and most of them oozing a propaganda of happiness. The whole film relies on the expressivity of fragmentation. The subtitle announces that we are going to see "histories," in plural, already clearly signalling an allegiance with the collage principle of *The Dead Nation* and *The Exit of the Trains*. The piecemeal structure alternates between the selection of archival TV footage and the dramatization of documents referring to Mugur Călinescu's case: surveillance reports and depositions recovered from the archives of the Secret police. These have already been the sources of a docudrama written by Geanina Cărbunariu,²¹ who discovered them and created a successful multimedia performance that she directed at the Odeon Theatre in Bucharest in 2013.²² Jude's film uses the same texts as Cărbunariu (adding a few more excerpts from the archival documents), but devises a completely new dispositif for their presentation. Even though this is a not so distant past and witnesses are probably still living and available, there are no direct interviews to offer further testimonies or comments, which would have been customary for a documentary film. The story of Mugur Călinescu is told in a Brechtian frame of conspicuous theatricality where actors appear in an artificial space put together on a soundstage resembling a TV studio, its circular form perhaps even alluding to the panopticon Foucault described in *Discipline and Punish* [Fig. 54]. The camera usually reveals only one slice of the circle at a time, where actors recite the official statements and reports standing in front of plywood panels, with just a few symbolic objects attached to them as props (e.g. a giant cardboard TV or tape recorder). The compositions are frontal and symmetrical, most of the time the actors look straight at the camera [Fig. 55–58]. Everything is contrived, and as such, effectively echoes the duplicities of the

21 Cărbunariu had a cameo appearance in *I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians* in the audience gathered for the open air performance, and was possibly a real life inspiration for creating the main character in that film.

22 See excerpts from this show here: <https://youtu.be/3bzjlcOiANQ>. Last accessed 12. 01. 2022.

communist era, and even the cheap designs of the TV variety shows of the time (which, in turn, were crude transpositions of theatrical effects onto the small screen). A kind of oratorical style prevails throughout these sequences, enforcing text over the image, abstraction over reality (in an uncanny resemblance to the propagandistic recitations staged repeatedly in televised shows of the day), while also breaking off the present stylized performance from life in the past.

However, paradoxically, the past does come alive both in the theatrical recitation of the documents and in the patchwork of television clips, in a unique affective-performative manner, in a way that provokes the spectators' "dynamic and fluid engagement" with cinema that Vivian Sobchack (1999, 242) has pointed out. In a ground-breaking essay in which she rethinks the concept of documentary, Sobchack describes the experience of nonfiction films based on the shifting perceptions between the three basic modes identified originally by Jean-Pierre Meunier. These modes are distinguished by the degree they "tend to bracket, rather than posit, the 'real' existence of what we see" (1999, 243). In the fiction film we behold an autonomous, imaginary or dreamlike world "differentiated from the spectator's life-world and existing only in its mediated presence or perception" (1999, 244), the documentary makes us comprehend elements of reality existing outside the frame of which we already have partial knowledge but are "unknown in their existential specificity" (1999, 243), and the primary role of the so-called *film-souvenir* (i.e. the home movie) is not to inform us (as we already know more about this world than the images show us), but to recall memories. Depending on the permeability of the screen towards our experience in a lived world, however, "one viewer's fiction may be another's *film-souvenir*, one viewer's documentary, another's fiction" (Sobchack 1999, 253). When considering film as experience, one should take into account many different spectators and different viewing positions. In more general terms, although "films are designed to cue similar affects in spectators" (Plantinga 2010, 99), each film may be received differently by an audience divided by age, gender, race or culture, and films that connect more closely with specific contexts (e.g. a concrete material reality of a certain time and place, or a certain frame of references) polarize their viewers more, creating divergent positions for an affective spectatorship. The collage of the two kinds of sequences feels heterogeneous not only because the theatrical staging and the clips assembled from rummaging the television archives involve different mediums (both other than cinema) and carry a polyphony of narrative voices, but because it radically challenges a "holistic affective experience" (Plantinga 2010, 86), it mixes up the modalities described by Sobchack and elicits incongruent and even contradictory affects.

We learn about Călinescu's case not in a documentary mode, but framed reflexively as a piece of political art performance. Although the presentation of what happened is based on authentic documents, the panopticon-like circular set on the soundstage literally brackets off what we see. The devices of Brechtian theatre, the texts quoted from archival documents, the excessive artificiality of the scenes create a world "existing only in its mediated presence." The reconstitution of the events appears surprisingly lifeless, in a typical Brechtian fashion, this type of presentation does not allow for empathy with the protagonist of the tragic story, renouncing emotional closeness for intellectual distance. Throughout the sombre "re-enactments" we remain outside observers of a world made extremely strange, and experienced more and more like a bad dream in which all the people seem to look at us. The viewing position of detached reflection is also continually eroded by the humdrum repetition and monotonous delivery of the scenes. Even if we know nothing of the Ceaușescu era, we watch the claustrophobic space of the grossly simplified theatrical set-up and the wooden acting style with the same growing discomfort (and/or tedium) that people experienced with the unnaturalness of what was broadcast in the public media of the time. We may not be able to identify with the protagonist who remains a cardboard figure matching the props, evoked only indirectly by way of the texts, but we do share in the experience of a poorly furnished and strictly controlled world.

While the narrative segments mix documentary with fiction and emotional disconnection with affective immersion, paradoxically, the excerpts from the TV shows – assembled seemingly randomly, but in fact carefully curated to cover a wide range of programmes – provide the real-life context for the narration.²³ [Figs. 59–64.] The images preserve the detailed imprints of a past physical reality: while we listen to the praises of the rapid urbanization of Bucharest and the inventive ways in which people beat their carpets in the new socialist housing estates, for example, we can learn a lot about the physical environment where people lived. In the mosaic of musical numbers we see what kind of shows they watched for entertainment on Saturday nights in the comfort of their homes, or for the lack of other entertainment. The outlandishly exuberant festivals celebrating the superiority of communism and the genius leadership of

23 Some connections between the texts of the police interrogations and what we see in the clips also emerge in this apparent randomness creating counterpoints and ironic resonances in meaning. This montage effect, however, does not challenge the overall impression of heterogeneity, merely provides an added incentive for a search for meanings, reinforcing the satisfactions offered by an intellectual, reflexive interpretation of the film balancing the feeling of immersion into this past reality.

Nicolae Ceaușescu, or the dictator's visits in the country were part of everyday life not just as images appearing on TV but as common experiences in those days, for many people were either (bored and exhausted) applauding spectators or (stressed out) participants in these events. The propagandistic overtone of the materials filmed for the TV may have offered a skewed perspective, but it was an authentic part of the reality in those years, providing a ubiquitous "white noise" that no one paid much attention to.

Catherine Russell specified that "the complex relation to the real that unfolds in found-footage filmmaking lies somewhere between documentary and fictional modes of representation" (1999, 238), what is more, "the appropriated image points back to the profilmic past as if it were a parallel universe of science fiction" (1999, 241). This all seems to be true with a peculiar twist in this case in which we have filmed materials from an era when fictionalization was a key strategy of the party ideology enforced by a strict censorship, and when contemporary viewers already saw the "reality" screened on their TVs as mostly fiction. Jude's previous films used archival photographs, films and texts that unequivocally belong to a more distant past that is no longer retrievable as a personal memory. This is not the case with the TV clips of the 1980s in *Uppercase Print*, which may seem like an absurd, alternate reality to people who did not know this world, an eclectic collection of cinematic *bric-à-brac* displayed on the screen as in a curiosity cabinet. Yet this collection may also conjure up genuine memories for those who grew up watching them and who therefore experience it literally as a *film-souvenir*. In this sense, Jude entangles the viewers in a complicated temporal and affective scheme, inviting a more refined understanding of the processes through which the temporal disparity in films using archival footage produces not only an epistemological, "archival effect," but also an emotional one that Jaimie Baron calls the "archival affect" (2014, 109).

For the knowledgeable spectators past and present can be bridged by remembrance, and the experience can be informed by all kinds of emotions. D. N. Rodowick (elaborating on Stanley Cavell's ideas) speaks of the way in which photographic representation makes us "ontologically restless," because we are subjected to "a paradox of temporal perception" (2014, 18) by seeing in the present a world that is past and which, although present in space, is screened from us by its absence. In Rodowick's view, the image is a "complexly temporal" "space past," in which we feel our own absence from the frame, and which encourages "us to reflect on our own ontological situatedness in space-time" (2014, 19). Archival footage, in addition, "implies a profound sense of the already-seen, the already-

happened” (Russell 1999, 241), as such it is a kind of ready-made that is not only a piece of the past, it may also be something already-seen in the past (by a spectator-in-the-past who is also absent from the frame, but remembered in the present). When viewers who lived in Romania in the last decades of communism look at the clips selected from the archives of the state TV, they do not only recognize the places, the actors, the political festivities (if not the exact same materials, then the type and style of shows), and watch them all as the uncanny images of a “world past” that Rodowick refers to, but they also recall themselves watching or ignoring them, together with their erstwhile emotions (e.g. the amusement at the clumsy special effects of musical shows, the disgust with the shameless flattery of sycophants and with the lavish displays of Ceaușescu’s cult of personality, or the satisfaction of occasionally seeing poetry and art screened on TV, etc). Television was a medium valued for its domesticity in communist times, which provided with its kaleidoscopic range of image consumption an illusory counterbalance to the all-pervasive panopticism. Despite its ideologically tainted and limited content, it was consumed in one’s private space and amid the daily routine of family life, offering the possibility for viewers to comment on the programmes while being relatively safely hidden from public scrutiny. Although these are not home movies, they trigger a home movie kind of spectatorship, as each frame recalls a whole world outside that frame (including one’s own personal lives) that people knew so well, and enable a cinephile-type nostalgia even if they harbour no feelings of actual nostalgia for the age. Personal memories and cultural memories blend together, and make them reflect on how memories of a “lived experience” are always “interlaced with mediated experience,” i.e. with “the active choices of individuals to incorporate parts of culture into their lives” (van Dijck 2008, 74), including, in this case, the complex feelings ensuing from the frustration over the restriction of choices and access to culture. Yet, this ambivalent spectatorial position (of affectively immersing certain viewers in memories whilst making them aware of their own “ontological situatedness” connecting past and present) is precarious and it will inevitably disappear in time along with the passing of a generation. This precariousness is a constitutive element of *Uppercase Print*, which employs in the evocation of the past not the memorializing and evidentiary potential of photography, like Jude’s photofilms, but the “amnesia of TV culture” (Russell 1999, 271), materials which are defined by multiplicity, redundancy and ephemerality, the kind of media content that implies familiarity while it is inevitably predestined for oblivion. In stark contrast with the compilation films using archival materials that push the documentary mode towards fiction

(by focalizing our attention on an autonomous world other than our own), the fragmentation of Jude's clips – even when decoded not in a *souvenir* mode but with a predominantly documentary consciousness – will always retain the analogy with the jumbled bits and pieces usually preserved in our memory.

Additionally, the footage will always strike us with the paradox of showing too much and too little, of both transporting us back in time and withholding essential details from that time, of offering a multi-perspective, generic view of the communist era and eliding the full context for the many particular instances. In fact, the whole alternation of the two kinds of segments plays once again with the visible and the invisible, with what we know, what we imagine and what we feel. We are being told a lot of information, but we never see what really happened to the protagonist. Nonetheless, we have the sensation of being thrown into the world in which he lived. In working through the mixture of recycled and remediated texts and images, the film engages us in complex strategies of identification oscillating between critical distance and emotional proximity. We feel that the film pushes us away and pulls us in. We continually step out of the world on the screen (reflecting on the theatrical stylization and the noticeable artifice of the television footage) and step into this “alien” reality (through the direct address and the haunting effect of the panopticon-scenes, as well as being placed in or reminded of the position of the TV spectator of the day) in a kind of affective metalepsis.

Intermediality in film is often used metaleptically to signal an ontological leap either from diegetic reality into the world of imagination/pure fiction, or from reality (the illusion of immediacy) to the visible presence of mediation (hypermediacy).²⁴ Jude's film makes the opposite move possible, in which the conspicuous intermedial interventions in cinema manage to establish an affective dissolution of the distance from the real, profilmic world through the shifts from the spectatorial positions of reflexivity to immersion. The emphasis on this strategy is made clear by specific instances of metaleptic transgressions of boundaries which in fact frame the entire film. The prologue of the film, for example, is an outtake fragment of a political propaganda show in the Romanian TV of the 1980s, preserving a mistake that occurred during the recording. We see three actors, a woman and two men, arranged in a symmetrical composition in front of a fake wall covered by a picture of pink flowers, looking at the camera and praising, in free verse no less, the wonderful life provided by the dictator. After a few enthusiastically delivered lines, the teleprompter breaks down and the actors

24 See more about the possibilities of intermediality as metalepsis in Pethő ([2011] 2020, 373–397).

become hesitant and self-conscious, the camera shakes, the image glitches. [Figs. 65–66.] The actors disconnect from the rosy picture of the surreally blissful fiction and connect to the reality of the TV studio with unease. Their anxiety is justified, as they are keenly aware that the state security police is watching them (just like the mechanical gaze of the camera pointed at them), and that any mistake can be misconstrued as defiance. This introduction appears as the reversal of the famous opening scene of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (*Zerkalo*, 1975) in which we see the starting up of an old-fashioned TV, the noise and stripes on an empty screen, then a young man appears struggling with a severe speech impediment and is helped by a therapist to overcome his disfluency. With the image emerging from a blur and articulate speech prevailing over stutter, Tarkovsky alludes to his own quest for an uninhibited flow of a deeply personal and authentic cinematic poetry that he will follow in the rest of the film. In contrast to Tarkovsky, Jude begins with this found footage of a deceitful image of perfection being disturbed by a technical error, and rapturous, poetic declamation collapsing into silence as an appropriated and reframed gesture that may also point to the impossibility of free speech and to the truthfulness of the faltering, fragmented voice in the context of a seamless, artificial universe of lies. Besides being incisively symbolic and self-reflexive, however, this is also an emphatic, affective implosion of the fourth wall, in which we suddenly plunge into the real, unscripted world beyond the artificial façade, and, empathizing with the actors, we are directly confronted with an awkward situation that we feel instantly to be more serious than a mere technical glitch, even if we do not know much about those times.

To bookend the film, Jude wraps up the film with a series of scenes in which the screen opens up again towards the profilmic world. The camera leaves the venue of the Brechtian docudrama to roam the present-day Bucharest and to reveal (not without a touch of irony) its changed physical reality, i.e. the streets littered with foreign advertising labels applying another type of fake gloss on the panorama of a postcommunist patchwork city. [Figs. 67–68.] Intercut with this city symphony, and as a reversal of the actors' gesture in the prologue inadvertently "falling out" of their role, we see three actors from the re-enactment scenes in the studio, seemingly accidentally "falling into" another role. They become parts of a makeshift *tableau vivant* of Leonardo's *Last Supper* constructed from the elements of the soundstage with the buffet table of the crew, in a manner reminiscent of Giuseppe Arcimboldo's paintings in which vegetables or inanimate objects compose allegorical portraits [Fig. 69]. By using in this clumsily contrived composite picture the actors who played the policemen earlier (this time quoting

lines from interviews made after 1989), Jude makes a tongue-in-cheek comment on the supposed death yet all too real resurrection of the secret police. The tableau does not only emerge as an Arcimboldian visual joke but also as a self-reflexive allegory pointing to the mobility of the spectator's position between proximity and distance, and to the processes of making sense both of the autonomous parts and the "bigger picture" in the collage construction of the film.²⁵ Furthermore, it anchors the image in reality (both as a metaphor of the current political situation and by showing the people shooting the film in the actual studio space).

If this scene brings some buffoonish levity as a counterpoint to the apprehension of the introductory footage, Jude makes sure the film does not end on this playful tone and brings us back to a grim reality. In another intermedial and metaleptic leap, we step out of this double meta-narrative frame of actors playing a role (and re-enacting a picture reflecting on that role) and we look at the black and white photos of the original chalk graffiti texts and at a portrait of the real Mugur Călinescu placed on a flat wooden surface painted in red [Figs.70–71]. After the excess of theatricality and the mishmash of clips from the eerily sugar-coated 1980s television shows, these appear paradoxically as unmediated remnants of the past that we can observe in the form of concrete objects collected as evidence in a police file. In a gesture that reminds us of the minimalism of *The Exit of the Trains*, the final images pinning these archival pictures to the screen also engage the evocative power of photography in the sense indicated by Barthes, "there is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past" (1981, 76), "what I see has been here [...], it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred" (1981, 77), as a final memento of the things people did not actually see of this reality.

In all of his films made between 2017 and 2021, Jude handles the epistemological challenge of reconstructing the past through the multiple perspectives offered by the heterogeneity of different types of documents. The films delve into the dialogues between media, i.e. they bring out the semantic interactions and specific sensory and cognitive affordances of words and images, or photography and film. *Uppercase Print* widens this media spectrum to include interferences between theatre and television, while – dealing with a period that many people still remember – it also confronts the diverging positions of the viewer's intellectual and affective engagement. Jude's next film, *Bad Luck*

25 Roland Barthes identifies in Arcimboldo's pictures a similar dynamic of the viewer's positions that is at play in Jude's technique. He writes: "Arcimboldo's painting is mobile: it dictates to the 'reader,' by its very project, the obligation to come closer or to step back. [...] it implies a relativization of the space of meaning: including the reader's gaze within the very structure of the canvas" (1985, 142).

Banging or Loony Porn (subtitled *A Sketch for a Popular Film*), is set in current reality, and offers a fervent social-political satire combining an even more radical collage construction with a topic that elicits visceral emotions both on and off the screen. The film presents the story of a history teacher, Emi Cilibiu, who becomes embroiled in a scandal and risks losing her job after a sex video filmed with her husband and uploaded onto a private internet blog is downloaded and reposted on a public porn site for everyone to see. The outrage of the fictional parents in the film has been matched by the outrage of many real-life critics at home who denigrated its perceived vulgarity both in content and style. This kind of reception proved to be something Jude deliberately aimed for. In an interview published shortly before the film won the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 2021, the director spoke about the performative value of films, the necessity of violent, negative reactions to his work in order not just to depict but to effectively bring to light narrow-minded preconceptions. What is however more relevant for the purposes of this essay, is that he also defined this as “a historical film about the present,”²⁶ interpreting it within the same frame as his previous works. The quotation from the Mahabharata placed on the title card of the film, referring to “a world sinking in the deep ocean of time” is a subtle hint at this wide-angle view of history over our immediate, transitory world. Shot in the summer of 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic in Bucharest, the film connects along these lines the perspective of a recognizable here and now with the distantiation effect of irony and abstraction, and in an attempt to “reconstruct” the present, once more it straddles the line between Sobchack’s phenomenological categories of documentary, home movie and fiction film, as well as the affective metaleptic divide between immersion and reflexivity.

The film begins with an unusual experience of immediacy in which we may feel we are reliving the situation of X-rated spam videos popping up on our computer screens. We find ourselves in the position of unwitting voyeurs watching images of hard-core amateur pornography, we see the protagonist and her husband filming themselves while having sex, with Emi donning a carnival mask and a pink wig in a titillating role-play. Screening such a film within the film appears as an act of multiple transgressions: it strikes us not only as a recording that shows something that should remain invisible for the outside gaze but mainly as something that is out of place, a porn sequence inserted into what

26 Ionuț Mareș: Radu Jude: „Simt nevoia de cât mai multe reacții negative, violente, față de filme,” [“I feel the need for as many negative, violent reactions to movies as possible”] *Ziarul Metropolis*, 5 March 2021. <https://www.ziarulmetropolis.ro/radu-jude-simt-nevoia-de-cat-mai-multe-reactii-negative-violente-fata-de-filme/>. Last accessed 12. 01. 2022.

is expected to be a highbrow fiction film. The shooting of the scene itself exceeds sheer pornography (i.e. staging the impersonal, physical encounter of bodies) and veers towards the more intimate, mischievous improvisation of a home video. It also calls attention to what remains off screen, i.e. the camera, on account of which this goes beyond a sexual encounter and becomes an interaction with the eroticized technology itself that emerges as the real object of fascination here (“Look, how hard I get just from turning on the camera,” says the man while we see the woman looking straight into the lens and fondling her breast, making us understand why the couple will later upload the footage onto their computer and the internet) [Fig. 72]. The scene thus captures the way in which technological mediation penetrates the most private areas of our lives, and in which we do no longer aspire to behold images but to become images. Another off-screen presence, the voice of the mother-in-law banging at the door of the small bedroom and interrupting the act, provides yet another transgression by shattering the frame of the amateur porn/home video enacting a sexual fantasy and by re-framing it in the spirit of the realism and dry humour familiar from the fiction films of the Eastern European New Wave.

This prologue introduces not only the main story inspired by authentic events picked up by newspapers, but is highly indicative of Jude’s continued interest in the intersection of media and reality. The film is conceived as yet another exploration of our manifold involvement with images, and an interrogation of the potential of various media to portray and reflect on our world, this time through expanding on the idea of obscenity which is the catalyst of events in the film. The etymology of the English word “obscene” is similar to the word “obscure” being derived, according to many sources, from the Greek *ob skene* meaning off-stage, something that is not fit to be seen on-stage, that which should be hidden, kept out of public view (see Mey 2007, 6). Correspondingly, the film addresses even more explicitly the duality of the visible and the invisible (the leitmotif of his earlier films), also touching on what should or should not be made visible.²⁷ Beyond the indictment of contemporary society’s own obscenities, i.e. its hypocrisy, intolerance, ignorance, aggressiveness, and bad taste, which culminates in the final theatrical scene of the assembly of the parents who debate in a mock trial the scandalous behaviour of the “porn teacher” (and in the three endings provided for the film), this gesture of taking something that

27 This theme is somewhat ironically underscored by the variety of masks in the film: from the one worn by Emi in her sex video to the mandatory face coverings worn by everyone during the pandemic, and to the superhero mask in the conclusion to the film.

is usually off-screen and displaying it on-screen is evident in the two separate middle parts of the film, too.

In between the narrative sequences, Jude inserts two symmetrical segments (of around half an hour), each suspending the advancement of the story in order to offer glimpses “outside,” into the wider context of the film. Yet, these should not be seen as deviations, as, according to the director, this was never intended as “an attempt to make a film ‘about’ something, but merely ‘around’ something.”²⁸ Thus, even though we see the protagonist, the first part effectively turns the camera towards the profilmic world, focusing on the concrete, physical reality which inspired the film. The second part is a sort of dictionary of ideas gleaned from this reality and the various “obscurities” of history, a collage within the collage structure of the film, consisting of a string of short scenes and still images accompanied by a series of definitions and eclectic quotations, among others, from Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, Virginia Woolf, and André Malraux [Figs. 74–75]. In the first part, we see Emi on a lengthy walk across the streets of Bucharest before the meeting at the school. On her way she crosses a marketplace, visits the headmistress of her school, stops for coffee, enters a bookstore, talks on her phone, bumps into cars parked on the sidewalk, gets into petty arguments and tries to buy some pills to overcome her anxiety. As an homage to Walter Benjamin, this section unfolds under the subtitle *One-Way Street*, and together with the subsequent cinematic album of words and images, entitled *Short Dictionary of Anecdotes, Signs and Wonders*, betrays a deep affinity both with Benjamin’s vision of the quotidian, evanescent scenery of urban life, and with the paratactical²⁹ style of his prose (also from his *Arcades Project*), with his preference for writing in aphorisms, quotations and constellations of fragments, in which “mutilated” sections of larger wholes live on “like lower animals” (Benjamin 2016, 81). The sequence of the seemingly unmediated and uneventful long walk across the city privileges again, similarly to the prologue, the presence of the camera which performs here its own *flânerie*.³⁰ [Figs. 76–81.] It does not track

28 See: <https://www.filmneweurope.com/news/romania-news/item/122014-fne-at-tiff-romanian-days-2021-bad-luck-banging-or-loony-porn>. Last accessed 12. 01. 2022.

29 Parataxis is derived from a Greek word that means “to place side by side.” It can be defined as a rhetorical term in which phrases and clauses are placed one after another independently, without coordinating or subordinating them through the use of conjunctions. It is also called “additive style.” (See: <https://literarydevices.net/parataxis/>. Last accessed 12. 02. 2022.)

30 The camera performs what Benjamin indicated (quoting the words of Pierre Hamp) in *The Arcades Project* to be the mission of the contemporary artist, namely to set out and discover “the world in which you already live” as if “you have just arrived from far away” and “have never seen your own doormat” ([1982] 1999, 437). Jude cites this passage at length in the *Dictionary* part of the film.

Emi's movements, but merely follows her in a sensuous documentation of a city with its hustle and bustle and vulgarity (with people shouting obscenities both at each other and directly at the camera), with its hotchpotch of advertisements, walls full of graffiti, and its architectural heterogeneity juxtaposing processes of constant refashioning and picturesque decay. Yet, this natural collage of the street in which the camera surveys the photogenic details and browses the city for us, to paraphrase Benjamin's words from *One-Way Street* (2016, 78), as if it were a book in our hands, also mixes the present with the past. Beyond the recognizable snapshots of familiar sites for Romanians and of an already past summer marked by the pandemic, or beyond the presence of old, ruinous buildings, it opens up the realistic perception of the city towards the imaginary, the ephemerality of memory, and once more, much like Jude's previous film, divides its spectators.

Fiction seamlessly merges with the documentary when Emi is suddenly approached in the street and gallantly offered a rose by a character stepping out of a popular TV series from the 1970s, *Full Sail* (*Toate pânzele sus*, 1977, directed by Mircea Mureșan), i.e. by the actor Ion Dichiseanu, dressed for the part in a white naval officer's uniform [Fig. 81]. The metaleptic reference to this beloved Sunday morning adventure show, an exotic, escapist family entertainment in communist times, will probably bring back similar memories as the collage of TV clips from *Uppercase Print* (and prompt a comparable home-movie like spectatorship), while it will be missed both by younger and foreign viewers, who have not seen the old TV film. Marina Voica, a pop singer of Russian origin, who was a frequent protagonist of the kind of variety shows that were included in *Uppercase Print*, appears as a customer in a pharmacy with the same effect, being recognized only by a certain generation of moviegoers. Likewise, not many will realize that the white-haired gentleman in the headmistress's apartment is in fact Costel Băloiu, who as a teenager played the titular role in *Freckles* (*Pistruiatul*, 1973, directed by Francisc Munteanu), the first Romanian coloured TV series, a popular but also cringe-worthy communist propaganda film of fake history. He is called upon to impart a piece of behind-the-scenes information symptomatic for the absurdities of those times, telling Emi that his canine co-star was not only given the status of a secret service officer but actually outranked its trainer [Fig. 82]. The whole scene at the flat of the headmistress is a palimpsest of past and present, and an assemblage of objects with cultural references. The cluttered flat with the clamorous family (including a cameo of Jude's recurring actor, Șerban Pavlu), recalls recent Romanian films like Cristi Puiu's *Sieranevada* (2016) or Jude's own *Everybody in Our Family* (*Toată lumea din familia noastră*, 2012).

The cheap, photographic reproduction of Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson* hanging on the wall (next to that of El Greco's *St. Veronica Holding the Veil*, a mirror, and a large-screen TV playing a reality show) is not just a characteristic mixture of questionable taste and genuine longing for European high art displayed in Eastern European middlebrow intellectuals' homes, but can perhaps be seen as an allusion to Jude's *Scarred Hearts*, which recreated it in a memorable *tableau vivant* [Fig. 83]. The image of Constantin Brâncuși's *Infinity Column* sculpture, imprinted on a dress hanging in the background of the couple's amateur porn shoot in the prologue of the film [Fig. 73], points to the same cultural context and discreetly frames the film, returning ironically in the last part in an even more kitschified version, as a small-scale replica painted in the colours of the Romanian flag, and placed in the hallway of the school [Fig. 84].

This oscillation between the incidental and the emblematic, as well as the metaleptic crossovers between immediacy and multiple levels of mediatedness, reality and art, are carried over to the final scene in which, approximating the acerbic wit of the plays of Ion Luca Caragiale (which clearly informed this part), Jude parades a menagerie of stereotypes embodied by actors from his previous films (Gabriel Spahiu, Andi Vasluianu), current pop singers (Adrian Enache), comedians (Florin Petrescu stepping over from the awkward, boorish TV sitcom *Vacanța Mare/Big Vacation*), and cultural personalities (the queer activist and performance artist Paul Dunca/Paula Dunker in full drag). [Fig. 85.] To top it all, in the concluding fantasy scenario the protagonist steps out of this "reality" into another cinematic universe altogether, parodying today's popular superhero movies. In this way, the director seems to be sifting through the media "archive" of the present in the same way as he did with the historical documents of his previous films. He combines the collage of a multisensory reality (the rooms and streets jam-packed with people amidst an eclectic mix of objects and buildings), a selection of images and citations of philosophical texts with the collage of memory (switching between reality and fiction). Jude's Benjaminian technique of speaking historically about the present not only revitalizes the intermedial practices entwined with the realism of contemporary Romanian cinema (see Király 2016b), it also balances the heterogeneous compilations viewed from the perspective of irony and reflexivity with an immersion into a cinematic experience of physical reality and an affective engagement of viewers beyond the provocative topic – for specific segments of its home audience – through familiar sites, faces, and cultural references.

History, Collage, and Jude's Strategies of Affective Intermediality

At the conclusion of this series of analyses, there are certain aspects that need to be emphasized regarding Jude's vision of history and the collage techniques employed in the films. Most importantly, we have seen that in Jude's films collage is not merely a stylistic choice of joining words and images of different provenance (photographs, archival footage, quotations from texts, etc.), but an epistemological concept – informed by the writings of Walter Benjamin – connected to how we make sense of the world, both past and present. In *The Arcades Project* Benjamin famously remarks, “to write history thus means *to cite* history. It belongs to the concept of citation, however, that the historical object in each case is torn from its context,” and specifies that “history decays into images, not into stories” ([1982] 1999, 476, italics in the original), prophetically anticipating in this way our current postmemory condition. Today history takes the form of a kind of “ready-made,” belonging not to the realm of memory but to the archives, and subjected to the practice of “(re)collection, one that curates materials in fragmented form from different media. The past is literally a matter of found footage [...] delinked from the authoritative or authorising claim of a prior reality” – writes the cultural critic, Rey Chow (2016, 199–200). She adds, “what renders the past ‘ready-made’ is precisely this phenomenological condition or quality of being recognisable, of having-been-looked-at: the past is given to view as what has been cut into countless times already, by processes and apparatuses of (audial, visual and narrative) recording” (2016, 200). The same idea is stressed by Anton Kaes, who claims: “the past is in danger of becoming a rapidly expanding collection of images, easily retrievable but isolated from time and space, available in an eternal present by pushing a button on the remote control. History thus returns forever-as-film” (Kaes 1984, 198). Catherine Russell warns however that “it is tempting to think of archival practices as a kind of archaeology, and yet what is immediately evident in these films is that found footage is a discourse of surfaces” (1999, 241). Consequently, notwithstanding all their documentary value, Jude's films remixing various archival materials are primarily not about history, or about a past reality, but about the challenges posed to the viewer confronted with such decontextualized fragments and “surfaces.”

These challenges correspond not only to our postmemory age, but also to Benjamin's conception of history. For Benjamin saw history not as a chain of events but as a pile of catastrophes, laid out in front of us in shattered pieces, with our

own reaction transposed onto the gaze of the angel of Klee's *Angelus Novus*. The point of view uncannily embodied by the fixed, horrified glare of a painted angel is, however, located not in a concrete here and now, but beyond our own ontological realm. Beside adopting Benjamin's ideas (and explicitly referencing the painting in *I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians*), Jude also appropriates almost literally this ambivalent Benjaminian vantage point materialized in a (lifeless) picture, thus deflecting and even reversing Alain Resnais's paradigmatic stance from *Night and Fog*, which summoned the gaze of the living to face the dead. These films excel in the use of pictorial representations, literature, theatre, television, etc., for contemplating the horrors of history and for creating heterogeneous cinematic textures redolent of death. They insist on looking at vast panoramas of ordinary life from the perspective of the dead and the abject (see in this respect: the cadavers in *The Marshal's Two Executions* confronted with their fictionalized versions, the bodies represented by dummies on the gallows in the mass re-enactment spectacle of *I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians*, the images of death and decomposition in the Bruegelian photofilmic world of *The Dead Nation*, the concluding heaps of corpses reinterpreting the previous long string of statements and photographic evidences of the living in *The Exit of the Trains*, the retrospective unravelling of the story of the young victim of the panopticism of communist times in *Uppercase Print*, the abjection of pornography and the social abjection of the "porn-teacher" providing an angle for a wider inspection of contemporary reality in *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*).

Moreover, Jude's films allow us to revisit the interrelated terms of montage and collage both theoretically and historically. Using examples from experimental films recycling found footage, Aumont argues that the term collage is justified for "that kind of montage in which the only relation between the film's shots (or its 'fragments' [...]) is established by and for the film, as they have no relation with reality or an *istoria* (a fiction)," collage is therefore a way to "push the principle of montage to its limit" (2020, 50, italics in the original). Then again, Jude's films, demonstrate that a collage effect in film involves complex relations to profilmic reality (questioning the role of mediation) as well as to narrative possibilities of media (often multiplying narrative voices through verbal testimonies confronted with the elliptic, condensed expressivity of visual representations/presentations). They explore alternatives both to the type of avant-garde experimentation identified by Aumont, on the one hand, and to the feature length compilation films piecing together archival clips, on the other. If the essence of montage is defined by an Eisensteinian rhetoric that creates "a form that thinks," according to Aumont

(2020, 62; quoting Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, 1988–98), then collage, as a form of intermediality, allows each medium involved and fragment “to think” for themselves, to bring forth their own sensuous, affective and cognitive qualities and not just to “rethink” and subvert each other (see the rich connotations of texts and photographs perceived both interactively and autonomously in the photofilms, or the contrast and association of theatre and television in *Uppercase Print*). Furthermore, each medium that becomes self-reflexively visible, and is not incorporated through existing conventions, brings into play tensions between the cinematic and the uncinematic that can reinforce, or at times oscillate and blur the distinction between collage and montage (see the way photographs are inserted into the film in *The Dead Nation* compared to *The Exit of the Trains*, in which photography first enters then leaves the narrative space of film).

Seen in a historical perspective, Jude's aesthetic of intermedial collage initiates a dialogue with a long tradition in art. Frankenstein's monster, stitched together from lifeless fragments into an organic whole and brought to life, was a powerful symbol for the God-like potency of the Romantic artist, a potency that was sought to be reclaimed by auteur-centred modernism (in conjunction with a drive to demolish pre-existing models), and that was simultaneously mimicked and questioned by the postmodern relativism of viewpoints. The Surrealist collage, on the other hand, shifted the emphasis from authorship to a highly performative “art of practice, dissolving objects into the processes which produce them” (Cohen 1994, 46). The *cadavre exquis* (along with other Dadaist collages), a bizarre entity whose existence hinged on contingency was conceived symbolically “between battlefield and fairground” (Adamowicz 2019) as a ludic and politicized reaction to both the absurd horrors of war (echoed in the monstrosity of the cut-ups) and the new cult of consumerism and functionalism pervading every aspect of life (see Laxton 2019, 271). It was also an art transcending the limitations of the fragment and gesturing towards the infinite, which provided an inspiration for Walter Benjamin's idea of “profane illumination” ([1929] 1999, 209) emanating from “the revolutionary energies that appear in the ‘outmoded’ – in [...] the earliest photos, objects, [...] the immense forces of ‘atmosphere’ concealed in these things to the point of explosion,” ([1929] 1999, 210) and for his own eminent collage texts in *One-Way Street* and *The Arcades Project*. Jude's strategies reconnect with the Surrealists' and Benjamin's practices, rediscovering “energies” in filling the screen with “outmoded” media and enhancing their “forces of atmosphere” through leaps between Brechtian reflexivity and intense affective immersion, enabling divergent positions of spectatorship.

In addition, perhaps in the spirit of the exquisite corpses' procedure of pouring volatile content into a fixed order, the distinguishing trait of Jude's films is the co-presence of fragmentation with clearly identifiable structures (using photos belonging to a single archive in the photofilms, the organizing principle of *mise-en-abyme* in *I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians*, the parallelism of *The Marshal's Two Executions, To Punish, to Discipline* and *Uppercase Print*, the symmetry of *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*, and continued in the frame of the filmed photo album in his subsequent short film, *Memories from the Eastern Front / Amintiri de pe Frontul de Est*, 2022). The frequent use of mottoes, quotations, allusions, and variations also contribute to creating structural and semantic patterns and guidelines managing the contingency of the fragments. This reconciliation with structure and containment may be Jude's response to what has recently been claimed as the exhaustion of the subversive potential of montage or collage. In today's digital culture free reinterpretations through fragmented mashups are common practice and no longer count as rebellious acts. "As capitalism reorganized itself and became more open to 'networking, creativity, intuition, and difference,'" montage in itself "reduces politics to a matter of subjectivity" and "becomes the naturalized expression of late capitalist ideology" (Sarah Hamblin 2019, 365, 366). Advocating not for subjectivity but for sensibility, in Jude's films patterns are not decomposed or subverted by fragments but reaffirmed through repetition as firm anchors for processes through which the collage persistently leans into the jarring sensations of media differences, the lacunae, and the interstices. The images gravitate towards liminal areas where representation meets the unrepresentable, the visible folds into the invisible, the sensuous gives way to abstraction, and we can also contemplate our own position facing a Benjaminian exquisite corpse of history constructed from images "propelled" from the past towards the future.

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List of Figures

Figures 1–4. The mirror structure of *The Marshal's Two Executions* (2018): side by side Sergiu Nicolaescu's *The Mirror* (1994) and the footage from 1946, filmed by Ovidiu Gologan.



Figure 5. *I Do Not Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians* (2018): a *mise-en-abyme* structure connecting past and present, mediation and reality.

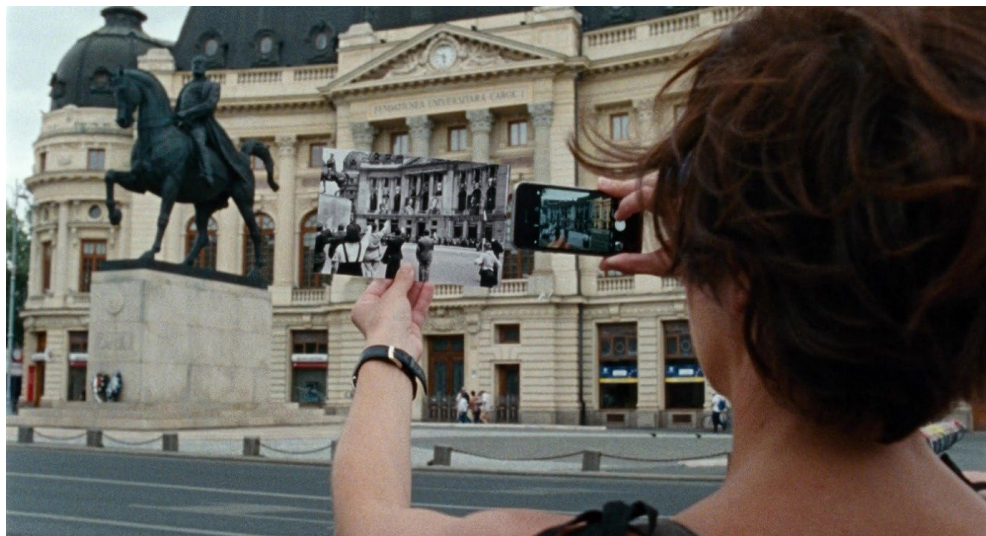


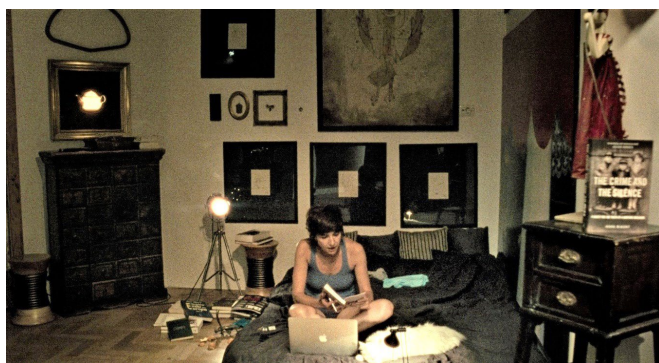
Figure 6. *I Do Not Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians*: the cameo appearance of Radu Jude (in black T-shirt and shorts) with people looking at the camera.



Figure 7. *I Do Not Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians*: evoking the Odessa massacre in a multimedia performance uncannily resonant with the public pageants of the Ceaușescu era.



Figures 8–9. Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920) [height: 31.8 cm, width: 24.2 cm, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=25188355>]; and a magnified mirror image reproduction of the painting hanging in Mariana's room in *I Do Not Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians*.



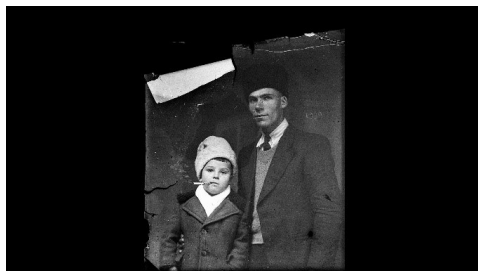
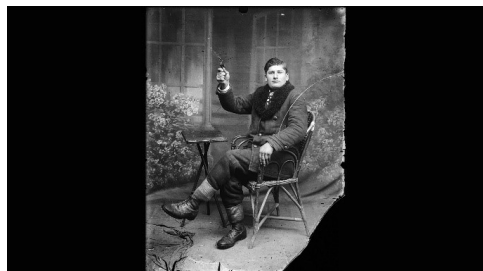
Figures 10–11. *I Do Not Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians*: dummies reproducing an archival photograph of people executed on the gallows.



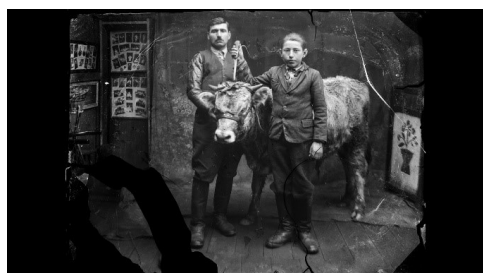
Figures 12–17. *The Dead Nation* (2017): group photos from the 1930s and 40s, taken by Costică Acsinte, a professional photographer from a small, South-Eastern Romanian town showing people of varying social strata and professions.



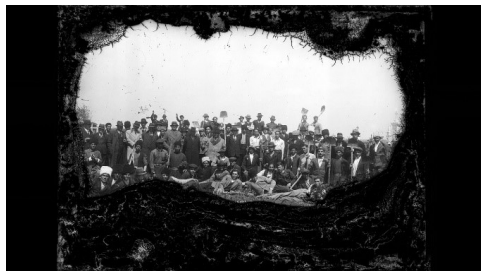
Figures 18–21. *The Dead Nation*: an uncanny fascination with manliness and weapons; children photographed with cigarettes, guns and performing the Nazi salute.



Figures 22–23. *The Dead Nation*: people posing with a slaughtered pig. Two men photographed in Acsinte's studio with the younger holding a knife above the head of their calf.



Figures 24–25. *The Dead Nation*: a sinister halo of blackness seeping into the picture preceding the blank screen and the voice-over reflection on the gas chambers, followed by the photo of the small-town jazz band.



Figures 26–27. *The Dead Nation*: the sensuous texture of decomposition of the glass plates.



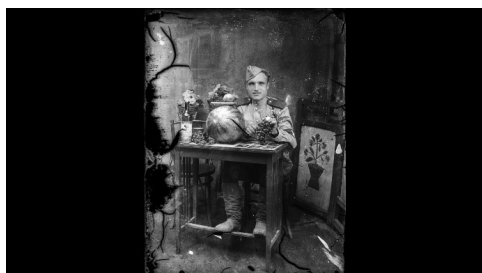
Figures 28–29. *The Dead Nation*: photos taken at the funerals of children.



Figures 30–31. *The Dead Nation*: the movement of life accidentally inscribed onto the photos.



Figures 32–33. *The Dead Nation*: *tableaux vivants* of people enacting a picture for posterity.



Figures 34–35. *The Dead Nation*: people looking into the lens with a fierce, fixed stare.



Figures 36–37. *Punish and Discipline* (2019): excerpt from the memoir of Colonel Grigore Lăcusteanu and a selection of pictures from the archive of Costică Acsinte's photographs.

Era o zi frumoasă în ziua aceea și armenii se așezau afară pe bănci cu cafeaua și ciubucurile lor. Întrebai unde este locuința acelor doi armeni. Îmi răspunseră, cu dispreț, că Hagî... nu știe unde s-așeză, iar cel de al doilea zise : „Eu sînt, ce-mi vrei ?” I-am zis : „Dumneata ești arestat, și să poți să mergi cu cazacu la ge-neralul comandant”.

— Ce fel, îmi zise, pe jos ?

— Ba nu, o să-ți aduc o caretă ?!

Afînci toată armenimea se opuse, strigînd că nu vrea să-l dea. Unii mă întrebau : „De unde ai dumneata porunca să-l ardci ?” Alții, să meargă la Fuad și Omer pașa, să-l dea de știre. Alții, pe la consulatul lor, că sînt suđii străini...

Apoi, vîzînd că trvoirise armenii de prin toate ulițele, am strigat la cazaci : „Katai !” (Leagănă-l) și, au început cazacii cu gîrbacele să-l croiască, iar ei au rupt-o la fugă tipînd, iar eu strigam cazacilor să-l croiască mereu !... Tată și o patrulă de husari. Le-am strigat :

— Săbiile afară ! Șand they started to whip them.

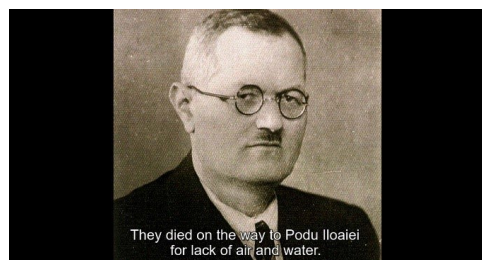
Astfel că această scenă înspăimîntătoare le-au rămas multă

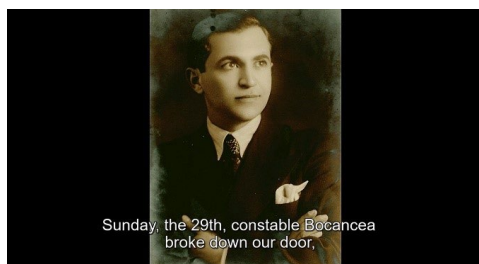


Figures 38–39. *Punish and Discipline*: photos from the life of a country policeman.



Figures 40–45. *The Exit of the Trains* (2020): photographs of the victims killed during the Iași pogrom and testimonies of the survivors read in voice-over.





Figures 46–51. *The Exit of the Trains*: photographs that document the pogrom as it happened.



Figures 52–53. The poster of *Uppercase Print* (2020) reminiscent of Fritz Lang's film, *M* (*A City Searches for a Murderer* / *Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder*, 1931).

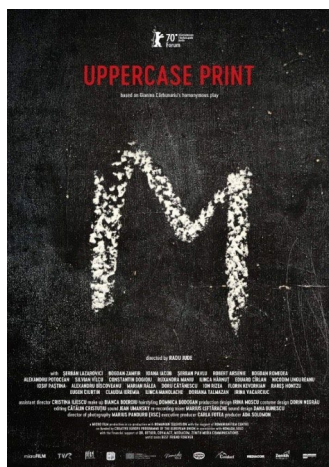
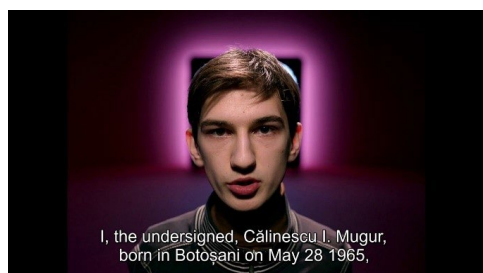


Figure 54. *Uppercase Print*: the panopticon-like set arranged in a circle on a sound stage resembling a TV studio.



Figures 55–58. *Uppercase Print*: actors reciting official statements in frontal and symmetrical compositions.



Figures 59–64. *Uppercase Print*: excerpts from various TV shows broadcast in the 1980s.





Figures 65–66. *Uppercase Print*: a glitch occurring during the televised recording of a political propaganda show.



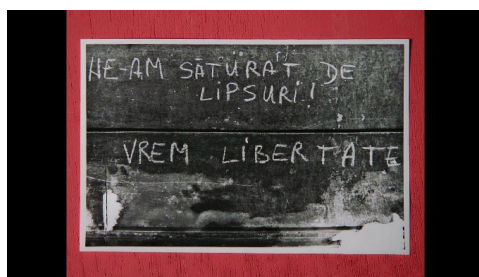
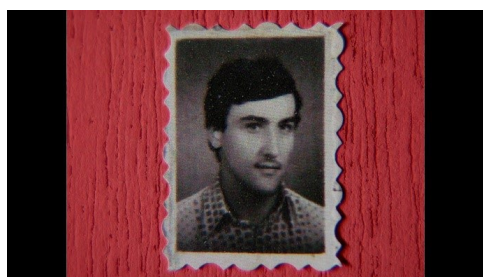
Figures 67–68. *Uppercase Print*: the panorama of a postcommunist patchwork city.



Figure 69. *Uppercase Print*: a makeshift *tableau vivant* of Leonardo's *Last Supper* constructed from the elements of the soundstage with the buffet table of the crew.



Figures 70–71. *Uppercase Print*: the archive photo of the real Mugur Călinescu and one of the original chalk graffiti inscriptions photographed by the police.



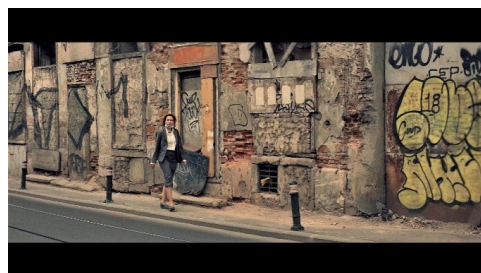
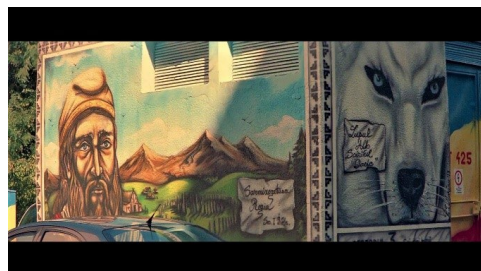
Figures 72–73. *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*. The fascination with the eroticized technology. Constantin Brâncuși's *Infinity Column* printed on a dress in the background.



Figures 74–75. *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*: a dictionary of ideas with illustrated quotations from Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, Virginia Woolf, André Malraux, etc.



Figures 76–81. *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*: *flânerie* through contemporary Bucharest.



Figures 82–83. *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*: the former child actor recalling the absurdities of filmmaking in communist times. The typical cluttered apartment.



Figures 84–85. *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*: the *Infinity Column* as nationalist kitsch object placed in the hallway and the scene of the mock trial at the school.

