

Tipografic Majuscul

Radu Jude (director), Bucharest, February 2020, 128 minutes

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Abstract: *‘Tipografic Majuscul’* (*‘Uppercase Print’*), Radu Jude’s latest feature, is the story of a highschool student who, during the communist regime, had the courage to write protest messages on his hometown walls. In 1981, Mugur Călinescu, 16 at the time, wrote slogans against the oppressive and dictatorial government which impelled the Secret Romanian Police (*‘Securitate’*) to open two files regarding this subject matter. The film is an adaptation of Gianina Cărbunariu’s documentary play presenting excerpts from those two files, *‘The Panel’* and *‘The Student’*. Radu Jude’s film impeccably knits cold dialogues with excerpts of propaganda footage from Romanian TV programmes of the time, creating a discrepancy between the cruel communism reality and the images presented on the National Television. The *‘Securitate’* arrested and investigated Mugur Călinescu, serving him each time during the interrogations an unavoidable coffee which was speculated to be poisonous and connected to his death in 1985.

Key words: communism, protest, Securitate, investigation, propaganda

‘Tipografic Majuscul’ (*‘Uppercase Print’*), an unusual documentary drama, had its release on the 21st of February 2020 in Bucharest, but its very first public projection took place a week before, in Botoșani, on the 13th of February 2020, at exactly 35 years after Mugur Călinescu’s death. Mugur Călinescu was a highschool student who wrote protest messages against the dictatorial regime on the walls of his native town, Botoșani. The

rebellious slogans demanded freedom, unoppressed syndicates and an end to the food queues, so common in Romania in the communist era.

Radu Jude, the director of this film, was fascinated not only by the story itself, but also by the way Gianina Cărbunariu staged the homonymous play, a drama created of a collage of texts taken out from the Securitate files that Cărbunariu had at her disposal and of the interviews she had taken. The ‘Securitate’ was the Secret Police Agency of the Socialist Republic of Romania, a state institution very much feared in those times.

‘Uppercase Print’ presents the story of Mugur Călinescu, a teenager from a north-eastern town of a communist Romania, who was considered a hero because, in 1981, he wrote in chalk on the walls of Botoșani a series of slogans against the oppressive communist regime of the time. For a while nobody knew who was responsible for this action and the Securitate opened the first secret file on the matter, ‘The Panel’. Here is how the action was noted by the Secret Police:

‘The uppercase print letters were drawn in blue chalk, 10-12 centimeters tall, at a height of 1,60 meters. The guard has tried to scratch them off but failed, due to the irregularities of the surface. As traffic there is intense by day, the writing could only have been done between 23:00 and 06:00 o’clock. Two or more people may have been involved, with one writing and the others watching out for the gatekeeper or passers-by.’ Although the Securitate agents suspect the involvement of more than one person into the matter, they have never been able to prove it and Mugur Călinescu has never mentioned any accomplices.

The Securitate had Călinescu arrested and interrogated. Each time they had him in for investigations they served him an unavoidable coffee. His parents were convinced that the coffee that their son was made to drink was poisonous. The Securitate agents were torturing Călinescu by placing him in front of a lamp

and keeping him there for hours. On the door of the building where he was interrogated there was a radioactive symbol image which made people suspect that Mugur was irradiated during the long and numerous interrogations, which led to him being diagnosed with leukemia and later to his death, in 1985. This year, in 2020, he would have turned 55, but he didn't even reach the age of 20.

It was only in 2013 when Mugur Călinescu's death grabbed Gianina Cărbunariu's attention, who was inspired to stage his actions and cruel destiny. She made use of the two files the Secret Police Agency had on the matter: 'The Panel' and 'The Student'. 'Uppercase print' was played at the Odeon Theatre in Bucharest.

Cărbunariu's play inspired Radu Jude to bring this story to the global masses so, in collaboration with Cărbunariu, Jude wrote the script of the film of the same name as the play and it was screened as world premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival in the Forum section at the beginning of March 2020.

Radu Jude, born in 1977, in Bucharest, graduated from the Media University of Bucharest. He then worked as an assistant director. Afterwards he signed his own short films and in 2009 won the CICA Award at the Berlin Film Festival with 'The Happiest Girl in the World', Jude's feature film debut. In 2015 he won the Silver Bear for Best Director in Berlin with 'Aferim!', which had Roma's enslavement in the 19th century as a theme; and in 2016 Jude won several prizes with 'Scarred Hearts' among which the Silver Astor for the best director in Mar del Plata.

Jude's work often brings dark chapters of Romanian history back into the public eye. His film 'I Do Not Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians' (2018) presents the complicity Romania carried on its shoulders in the Holocaust matter, while the 'Exit of the Trains' (2020) witnesses the victims of the Iași pogrom that the Romanian dictator Ion Antonescu carried out in 1941. The

film ‘Uppercase Print’ presents the old propaganda and the forgotten horrors of the Ceaușescu’s dictatorship. Although the last two of Radu Jude’s films have the communism as a center piece, the director claims that ‘there is no common intention of connecting them’. (Q&A session, after the preview of the film ‘Uppercase Print’, on the 17th of February 2020, Bucharest, *translation mine*)

Jude adopted a quite uncommon idea of constructing a film, he made use of materials that conventionally do not belong to the cinema. He said for the Calvert Journal that ‘Cinema can be much more than a way of storytelling; it’s something to provoke thinking.’ (March 2020)

Gianina Cărbunariu’s play, which Jude considers to be drama with elements that do not belong to drama, caught the director’s eye: all the dramaturgy he saw in the play seemed semi-conventional and all that Cărbunariu did was to rearrange the text that she had found in the two Securitate files; she didn’t write a single new line, everything was a collage. Jude claims that his interest is ‘to make films that contain elements which traditionally do not belong to the cinema’ and ‘to force the borderlines of what is usually referred as film’ (Calvert Journal, March 2020) and, in his intent, he makes use of the discovery made by Sergei Eisenstein, who, in the 1930’, developed the Montage Theory, which relies mainly upon editing. The Soviet film theorist noted in his article ‘A Dialect Approach to Film Form’ that ‘montage is the nerve of cinema’. His view that ‘montage is an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots’ was of great influence. Jude himself relying on the intent of telling a story, not by realizing a narration, but by putting together images or images and words or images and sounds and by outlining certain aspects that are not present in those specific images, words or sounds, but which result from those juxtapositions. The Romanian director

claims that he has chosen a poetic version of ‘putting together ideas which do not have a direct causality relationship’ (Bucharest, February 2020). In order to do that, Radu Jude had to gradually discover his own interest for the archives. He made use of the rich Romanian National Television Archives with the thought of making use of the most official material. The propaganda footage selected for the ‘Uppercase Print’ film was from the exact same period of time as Mugur Călinescu’s inquiry took place: the end of 1981- the beginning of 1982 until early 1985, according to their broadcast dates.

While Radu Jude, along with Gianina Cărbunariu, have signed the ‘Uppercase Print’ screenplay, Ada Solomon has signed the production, Marius Panduru – the director of photography, Cristina Iliescu was the assistant director, Cătălin Cristuțiu was responsible for the film editing, Bianca Boeroiu -responsible for the artists’ make up, Domnica Bodogan – responsible for hairstyling, Irina Moscu was the production designer and Dorin Negău - the costumes designer.

The cast of ‘Uppercase Print’ was wisely chosen: Mugur Călinescu, a paradoxical character, a thrifty student, who has risked more than he could ever think about and who is not entirely aware of the consequences his actions might lead to, is played by Șerban Lazarovici, a teenager who shares his hometown, Botoșani, with his character, as well as the high school where they both graduated from, the ‘A. T. Laurian’ National College. Mihai Călinescu, Mugur’s father, is played by Șerban Pavlu, a film and theatre actor, having had roles in more than thirty films since 1995. The part of Maria Uncescu, Mugur’s mother, was distributed to Ioana Iacob, who had a leading role in one of Jude’s other films ‘I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians’ (2018). Bogdan Zamfir plays the part of the Securitate officer, his first role in a Romanian film. On the poster of the

'Uppercase Print' film there are also the names of: Robert Arsenie, Bogdan Romedea, Alexandru Potocean, Silvian Vîlcu, Constantin Dogioiu, Ruxandra Maniu, Ilinca Hărnuț, Eduard Cîrlan, Nicodim Ungureanu, Iosif Paștina, Alexandru Bîscoveanu, Marian Râlea, Doru Cătănescu, Ion Rizea, Florin Kevorkian, Rareș Hontzu, Eugen Ciurtin, Claudia Ieremia, Ilinca Manolache, Doriană Talmazan and Irina Vacarciuc.

In order to make the viewers feel the fear people had to face back in the communist regime and the lack of home intimacy the Romanians experienced during Ceaușescu's dictatorship, the director of this film has thought of asking the actors to try a cold and mechanical drama style using the exact dialogues and texts registered in the surveillance Securitate files. The characters' lines are told coldly, facing the camera, on a neutral tone, displaying a formal 'spirit'. The costumes the actors wear are quite dull, according to the fashion style of the period the action takes place in, 1981-1985, with a preference towards dark colours, making the actors and the film action itself seem depressing.

The viewers of Radu Jude's latest feature are to be connected to a mixture of moods and feelings during the 128 minutes while the film lasts, from a painful, unpleasant, depressing mood, passing through a frightening, dangerous, resigned mood to feeling angry and confused, disgusted and compassionate and even nostalgic, while watching the archive footage. The propaganda material used in the film has the purpose of emphasizing the discrepancies between the everyday life the Romanians were to face during the communist regime and the ideal life presented on the Romanian National Television.

The film's main symbols are the huge images of a radio and a Tv set, which appear in the background while the dialogue scenes are screened. They have a double meaning: on the one hand they represent means of mass media, a way of getting informed

(Mugur Călinescu used to listen to Free Europe on the radio), or a way of getting misled (all the television programs that presented a perfect country with a perfect leader) and on the other hand, a way of being watched and listened to by the Secret Police Agency of the Socialist Republic of Romania.

Jude's view that 'a drama constructed through montage seemed very interesting from the very beginning' (Q&A session, after the preview of the film 'Uppercase Print', February 2020), convinced him to decide to construct making use of materials that are not traditionally properly cinematographic. He made use of: Securitate files, drama play, television footage, which all, eventually, became cinema, while trying to create a story as credible as possible.

Radu Jude alternates between a drama performance, as on stage, of the transcripts of the dialogues found in the two Securitate files and propaganda archive material. He uses quite a faithful recreation of the play *Gianina Cărbunariu* staged at Odeon Theatre in 2013.

The film about a teenager's tragedy who dared to express his own opinions and ideas about the dictatorial system, into a country which was limiting this type of actions was of great impact, although some of the viewers would say that the director does not necessarily construct ideas, but an atmosphere and that the archive footage was excessively used as compared to the real story.

Today's Romanian youngsters and the teenagers from the communist regime represent two parallel dimensions, but these two universes sometimes get to bleed into each other. A town, a high school building, a commemorative plaque on a wall, a teacher, a neighbour or two, an old lady lighting a candle at her son's tomb, all of these can interfere with our own destinies,

making us part of Călinescu's story without having to pay the price he and those close to him have paid.