

Attempt- *Different Mothers*

Movie Reviews

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I have seen *Different Mothers* at Arta Cinema in Cluj, during a screening which had all the signs of a private one, owing to the nature of circumstances. It was five o'clock on a Saturday evening when my girlfriend and I went to the cinema by ourselves, and the film was on only for us. I think the film deserves more attention. Not because it can be considered a truly successful project, but because it attempts to try its strength against the history of cinema (trying to offer its version of Antonioni or Kieslowski's films), and because it attempts to find a relevant position from which to speak about the qualities of the film itself (first, the fact that it is a film about films, and secondly, the fact that the characters who make a film within a film discuss what they should capture in their films and what the cinematic construction means in general). It also deserves more attention because it is a project made with enthusiasm and personal resources by Mihai Ionescu and Tiberiu Iordan.

I neither agree with, nor do I consider appropriate the majority of the authors' narrative choices, however I hardly believe that the film offends the viewer (as stated in the text written by Iulia Blaga, which can also be read on LiterNet's website). It is true that it does not move the viewer, for I have experienced it myself. The weakness of the film resides in the fact that the authors excessively highlight each and every moment they consider important for their story (such as the discourse on cinema, the relationship with Antonioni or Kieslowski), and that every situation of this type is rather superficially rendered, lacking a certain subtlety. However, the film can be easily watched from beginning to end, as it does not become unbearable, like many other films which have swallowed up serious money from the National Council of Cinematography (CNC), such as *Orient Express* or *Marilena*. On the other hand, *Different Mothers* could be a good example for those interested in filmmaking to understand why not all cinematic references work well (that is, they are beneficial to the respective project) in the universe of postmodernist intertext, why sometimes it is better for a



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slashed body not to be shown on-screen, or why the elements which support the cinematic choice (in this case, the suitcases left in the left-luggage office) must be in accordance with reality in order for them to be credible in visual terms.

As overall aspect, the film's sequences, however interesting or exotic their initial idea might seem (be it the discourse on cinema, or the man who sings his jokes in the railway station), turn dull by the end of the film. This happens either because of an excessive highlighting of the things discussed in each sequence - for example, when they mock the idea of *6D Cinema*, the camera circles around the characters in order to simulate the specific span of those screening halls -, or because the sequences are unjustifiably long - the man who sings his jokes while playing the guitar is not amusing, for if you want to present the novelty of railway stations it is enough to listen to him for a minute; if you watch him on-screen for about five minutes, it becomes annoying, as the authors' choice of insistently showing him as if his performance were good is a fake. The characters also are rather limited, behaving gregariously, not as individuals: when they speak on the phone, they all speak at once. When they go for a drink, they all go... Only at the police station, when they wait for their footage to be returned, do you feel that the on-screen characters have a certain consistency, not being just the pieces of a machinery which must deal with certain pre-established ideas.

When they refer to significant moments in the history of cinema, the authors of the film do nothing more than take over the plot of the respective film (Kieslowski's story from and about **Dworzec/Railway Station**, a 1980 film) and re-present it in the Northern Railway Station's terms. The difference between the two stories consists in the fact that the diary format is much more concentrated with Kieslowski (as his short film lasts for ten minutes). Also, in his film, Kieslowski discusses (in Orwell's style) the importance of the video camera in a totalitarian system, while the Romanian authors discuss the way in which the cinema can act similar to a video surveillance system (so that it becomes a totalitarian system itself). The fact that Kieslowski was asked by the police to show them the footage so that they could solve a crime case in the station is taken over as such in the Romanian film as well. It also reminds of Antonioni: the boys accidentally shoot the crime just like the photographer in *Blow-up*.

Literally taking over these ideas does not work. They should have been introduced into a new context, from which to steal a glance at this or that particular moment in the history of cinema. The modern intertext presupposes a dialogue on an idea, a dialogue which must not repeat the facts but the



spirit of the idea. The different context will emphasize the reference, and the latter will elevate the current project. Without this return ticket, the current film will be no more than the poor relative of its forerunners from whom it borrows a couple of clothes; it will be a mere second-hand story.

The poverty of the film is even more obvious at the end, due to the solution found by the authors. Sometimes, the film shows its redemptive face in relation to reality, rising above its diabolical nature, its manipulations and lies. This seems to be the ultimate message expressed by the authors: a girl has killed her mother and is caught thanks to the footage filmed by the boys who create the film currently being watched at the cinema. Thus, the social evil is defeated by the aid of the film. This is too hard to take in, because you have to prove your identity when you leave your suitcase in the left-luggage office, a service for which you also receive a receipt or another proof of payment. So, it is very clear who owns which luggage. Therefore, the policemen did not need the footage to solve the case, it is rather the authors of the film who needed this trick to end the story. And when the film does not have enough vigour, it always remains the possibility to shock the viewers, with violent images, worthy of the sensationalist *five o'clock news*.

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