Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques • No. 92 • 2026: 270 – 282

ORIGINAL PAPER

Florin Şerban's Cinematic Perspective

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Abstract
Florin Şerban is a prominent contemporary film director and a leading figure of the Romanian New Wave Cinema. He has achieved international success with his films.
Throughout his career, Florin Şerban has moved from humanist observations of Romanian society to hermeneutic interpretations of love, then challenged classic theater with his postmodern thriller adaptation of Hamlet, creating one of the most original discourses in contemporary cinema.
If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle (2010), and Box (2015) are social-realist films. Love 1: Dog (2018) and Love 2: America (2020) are philosophical and poetic love stories. Meanwhile, Hamlet (2024) is an experimental horror film.
These films also trace the Freudian Oedipus Complex, the Foucauldian Oedipus Complex, and Deleuzian & Guattarian anti-Oedipus interpretations.
With his philosophical background and cinematographic style, Şerban represents the director-philosopher cinema.
Cinema and philosophy advance in tandem; however, certain directors create a distinct category of cinema through their unique rhetoric on existentialist research into meaning.
This study aims to characterize Florin Şerban's cinema, determine the meaning and significance of the Oedipus story for his films and cinema more broadly, and explain the features of the Director-Philosopher's Cinema using a descriptive method.

Key words: *Florin Şerban, If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle (2010), Love 1: Dog (2018), Love 2. America (2020), Chora, Oedipus, The Director- Philosopher's Cinema*

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Introduction

Florin Șerban (b. 1975) studied philosophy, hermeneutics, and cultural theory in Transylvania, and film directing at the Academy of Drama and Film in Bucharest, then continued his studies at Columbia University in New York, where he graduated in 2008. He is a Romanian New Wave Cinema director and represents the contemporary director-philosopher's cinema. His films have received numerous international nominations and won many awards.

This article examines five of his films—If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle (2010), Box (2015), Love 1: Dog (2018), Love 2: America (2020), and Hamlet (2024).

By the time this study is completed, Șerban's latest film, Nu e locul tau aici (You Don't Belong Here, 2026), will have been released and won the Golden Leopard for Best Film at the 2026 Locarno Film Festival. Therefore, unfortunately, it could not be included in the text.

Șerban's poetics presents an eclectic panorama incorporating elements of social realism, hermeneutics, and postmodern experimentalism. Consequently, a fertile ground for analysis emerges, encompassing Freudian psychoanalysis, Foucauldian analyses of power, the Deleuzian-Guattarian structures of Anti-Oedipus, and, ultimately, Bellour's Oedipian narrative of cinema.

The essay also discusses themes such as love, desire, power, the representation of social micro-power, social inadequacy, freedom, existential uncertainty, and the human-nature relationship, incorporating contemplative, intuitive, political, naturalist, and transgressive dimensions.

Thus, Șerban's Romanian stories become clear signifiers of the 21st-century Zeitgeist.

If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle (Eu când vreau să fluier, fluier, 2010)

Just before he is released from juvenile detention, Silviu learns from his younger brother that their mother has returned home. She has found a job in Italy and wants to take him with her. But her mother is a woman who creates trauma in her children's lives with her lifestyle. Meanwhile, Silviu also develops an interest in Ana, an intern at the prison. Then, Silviu struggles to stop his mother, risking losing his freedom again.

Despite his disadvantaged and socially marginalized position, Silviu wages a powerful internal struggle against all odds through his stubbornness and determination, ultimately achieving his goal of protecting his brother. In this context, the film's title is significant; it represents the protagonist's existential motto. If "If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle" is taken as a fundamental principle, then any endeavor stemming from it will succeed, whatever the cost.

It could be argued that this social realist film also contains a particular interpretation of the classical Oedipal complex; Foucault (1974) defines Oedipus as follows: So I answer you in Deleuzian terms—and here I am entirely Deleuzian—that this is absolutely not a fundamental structure of human existence, but a certain type of *contrainte,* a certain power relation that society, the family, political power, etc., establish over individuals".

In this context, although not in a special dramatic sense, the detention center institutionally represents patriarchal authority, political power, and eventual oppression; at this point, Silviu himself assumes a personalized Oedipal authority for a while to protect his brother from their mother. Thus, he copes with the entire system by staying within its interior.

Director: Florin Șerban; Script: Cătălin Mitulescu, Florin Șerban, Andreea Valean; Cinematography: Marius Panduru; Editing: Sorin Baican; Producer: Cătălin Mitulescu, Daniel Mitulescu; Cast: George Pistereanu (Silviu), Clara Voda (Mother), Marian Bratu (Brother), Ada Condeescu (Ana), Mihai Constantin (Penitentiary Director).

If I Want to Whistle, I Whiste won, Berlin International Film Festival 2010 Silver Berlin Bear Jury Grand Prix; 2010 Alfred Bauer Award; Cleveland International Film Festival 2011 Best Film Best Central & Eastern European Feature Film; Santa Barbara International Film Festival 2011 Jury Award Best Eastern Bloc; Zlín International Film Festival for Children and Youth 2010 Best European Debut Film European Debuts Competition; Transylvania International Film Festival 2010 Best Romanian Film Best Romanian Feature Film; Annonay International Festival of First Films 2011 Grand Jury Prize; Medias Central European Film Festival 7+1 2011 MECEFF Jury Award Best (https://www.imdb.com/it/name/nm2758521/awards/).

Box (Box, 2015)

Cristina is a theater artist in her thirties with a boring marriage. Alongside her stage work, she teaches dance to children. Rafael is a young boxer who works at a car wash. Both belong to minority groups. Cristina is Hungarian and Rafael is Romani. In fact, their lives are like two wings of a butterfly. Meanwhile, Rafael becomes obsessively in love with Cristina and occasionally follows her around the city.

On the other hand, Cristina's husband, the theatre director, box office manager, and organizer, each represents a form of micro-power. Yet, despite their ceaseless toil and struggle, Cristina and Rafael are both demoralized. Their status as a minority adds further layers of complexity to this repressive and unjust environment.

According to Deleuze & Guattari (2009): "Oedipus is like the labyrinth; you only get out by re-entering it -or by making someone else enter it. Oedipus as either problem or solution is the two ends of a ligature that cuts off all desiring-production" (p.79). When tracing this metaphorical expression in the film, the following variation could be proposed: Oedipus is like the labyrinth or the boxing ring. Then, finally, Cristina responds to Rafael's love. Their desire signifies not only sexual attraction or solidarity between two people, but it's also a meta-Oedipal silent challenge, despite the difficult conditions and limitations.

Director: Florin Șerban; Script: Florin Șerban; Cinematography: Marius Panduru; Editing: Eugen Kelemen; Producer: Florin Șerban; Cast: Rafael Florea (Rafael), Hilda Péter (Cristina)

The film Box won the FIPRESCI Prize at the 2015 50th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (https://www.imdb.com/it/name/nm2758521/awards/).

Love 1: Dog (2018) (Dragoste 1: Câine, 2018)

Simion is a lonely middle-aged man who lives in an isolated mountain cabin in the middle of the forest with his dog. One day, while wandering in the forest, he finds a wounded young woman named Irina. Then he carries her to the cabin; he treats her injuries but forbids her from leaving the cabin. Bizarrely, he falls in love with her over time. They truly started living together. One day, Simion killed a man who was pursuing her. In doing so, he saved Irina's life and secured her freedom in the future. In the end, Irina leaves, and he is alone again.

Simion's desire for, and control over, Irina in the intimate setting of the mountain cabin reflects a pre-Oedipal schema of dependency. He acts as both a caring mother figure

and an authoritarian father figure. On the other hand, Simion both desires and tries to suppress that desire; from a Deleuzian &Guattarian perspective, the desiring-machine and Oedipus confront each other. "Desiring-machines establish the non-Oedipal life of the unconscious" (2017, p.558). "What defines desiring-machines is precisely their capacity to form an unlimited number of connections in every sense and in every direction" (2017, p.559). Deleuze & Guattari define "desiring-machines" by examining the works of avant-garde artists—such as Victor Brauner, Marcel Duchamp, Fernand Léger, and Pablo Picasso—that are based on machine forms. This formation indicates "*machinic repetition against the Oedipal design*" (p. 560). Nevertheless, the desiring machines need the Oedipus factor to function. However, the Oedipus factor categorizes desire and turns it into a pretext for controlling people and the social system. "*Oedipus is the entropy of the desiring machine*" (2017, p. 561). But the film's real protagonist is nature itself; Simion, Irina, a few others, and the dog are simply elements of nature, like trees, rocks, and animals. Amidst the forest's vastness, Simion becomes a desiring-machine, and desire is experienced as an intact intensity with Irina. This interpretation finds a symmetrical counterpart in the film's cinematography, reminiscent of Caspar David Friedrich's Romantic style, with tiny human figures immersed in nature or identified with it.

Director: Florin Șerban; Script: Florin Șerban; Cinematography: Marcin Koszalka; Editing: Florin Șerban; Production: Oana Iancu, Florentina Onea, Florin Șerban; Cast: Simion (Valeriu Andriutã), Vitalie Bantas (Gheorghe), Hritcu Florin (Mircea)

Love 1: Dog won the Sarajevo Film Festival 2018 C.I.C.A.E. Award Best Film; 2018 Cineuropa Award Best Film (https://www.imdb.com/it/name/nm2758521/awards/).

Love 2. America (Dragoste 2. America, 2020)

This movie follows two lovers, Anton and Beatrice, over the final twenty-four hours they spend in an old house deep in the forest. He leaves for America the next day, and she returns to her husband. Their love story has already turned into an impossible relationship.

The film begins with a quote from Saint Augustine: "Love first and do whatever you please. For the soul trained in love will do nothing wrong". The film then continues with images from Leonardo da Vinci's codices. The film consists of four sequences: Andante, Tango, Zohar, Leda. Throughout the film, reality, fantasy, and memory intertwine, blurring their boundaries through an Alain Resnais-style contemplative aesthetic.

Deleuze (1989) describes the Alain Resnais style: "Typically, the present begins to waver, seized by uncertainty, scattered amidst the comings and goings of the characters or already absorbed by the past" (p. 132).

Consequently, the love story between Anton and Beatrice is mapped out in philosophical terms.

Andante is the film's narrative rhythm. Tango is the film's passionate and intense narration. Zohar is the hermeneutic dimension of love; as a word, Zohar (זֹהַר) means splendor, and as a book, it "encompasses all the spiritual states that individuals will experience as their souls evolve" (n.a. n.d.). It's "a pseudepigraphic work which pretends to be a revelation from God communicated through R. Simeon ben Yoḥai to the latter's select disciples. Under the form of a commentary on the Pentateuch, written partly in Aramaic and partly in Hebrew, it contains a complete cabalistic theosophy, treating of the nature of God, the cosmogony and cosmology of the universe, the soul, sin, redemption,

good, evil, etc. It first appeared in Spain in the thirteenth century" (Jacobs & Broydé). In an Eleusinian Approach framework, Leda is a mythological figure who illustrates the continuously changing, transformative roles of man and woman in a romantic relationship.

In this regard, one might define the act of interpreting and labeling a contemporary phenomenon across any field by drawing on classical mythology, art, or literature as the "Eleusinian Approach". This approach traces its origins to the Eleusinian Mysteries, celebrated in the ancient Greek world; the three phases associated with this cult represent fundamental components of our civilization: deiknymenon (things shown), dromenon (things done), and legomenon (things said). While he may not have used this specific term, Jan Assmann (1995, p. 131) points to the comprehensive vision this framework encompasses.

The film's title includes "America", and the America associated with freedom and new beginnings, as cliché, is absent in the film, like Carlos Reygadas' Japón (2002);

The film is set in Mexico, yet its title is simply Japón. This is a kind of paradoxical "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" phenomenon. The phrase "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" appears as a calligraphic compositional element in René Magritte's painting La trahison des images (The Treachery of Images) (1929). It depicts a pipe, and the inscription "Ceci n'est pas une pipe /This Is Not a Pipe" appears beneath the image within the painting itself. According to Foucault (1983): "On the one hand, overhead, the polished, silent, visible shape, on whose proud and disdainful evidence the text is allowed to say whatever it pleases. On the other hand, below, the text, displayed according to its intrinsic law, affirms its own autonomy regarding what it names" (p.25). Here, the calligraphic pipe displaces the visualized pipe, creating an atmosphere of ostranenie (defamiliarization). In Reygadas's case, the film's title bears no relation to the film itself. Similarly, in Șerban's film, America remains merely a matter of the title; there is no common denominator like the pipe. Nevertheless, the discrepancy between the film and its title intensifies the analytical attention it draws.

In the end, Anton still wanders around the train station with his old-fashioned suitcase. The suitcase is a signifier, expanding and anachronizing the film's timeline. It's not just a postmodernist leap; rather, it's modernism absorbed into anachronism.

Within the film, the story largely takes place in that old house filled with books and paintings. As a result, Anton and Beatrice's love story extends into artistic and intellectual territory. One particularly noteworthy drawing on the house's wall is an important clue. It is Leonardo da Vinci's sketch, "The Fetus in the Womb" (c. 1511). The film's credits also include this and related Da Vinci sketches. Furthermore, Beatrice and Anton also look through Leonardo's album while walking together. The mother's womb symbolizes the Platonic concept of Chora (Timaios, 52 a-b). Chora is a place and an endless source of becoming. It is a third kind of being, besides ideas and phenomena. It is between the abstract and the concrete, the visible and the invisible. It is formless yet receptive; It is anachronistic yet intuitively represents Aion. In short, Chora is a Platonic cosmological design (Plato (Eflâtun), 1943, 52 a-b; p.60). Love 2. America is a sublime description of the Chora, realized in a multilayered, spherical environment composed of desires, passions, immense nature, a shared home once upon a time, Beatrice's existence, books, and Da Vinci imagery.

Director: Florin Șerban; Script: Florin Șerban; Cinematography: Oleg Mutu; Editing: Florin Șerban; Production: Florin Șerban, Oana Iancu, Bogdan George Apetri; Cast: Igor Babiac (Anton), Emőke Pál (Beatrice), Constantin Dogioiu (David).

Hamlet (2024)

A theater director calls five actresses to an audition room to cast a Hamlet production as Ofelia, Polonius, Gertrude, Claudius, and Laertes. Still, they become trapped there, and acting becomes a deadly struggle. It is a Script so anti-feminist that it creates an irony: one man is pitted against five women, forcing them to play a game of life and death.

This film is an experimental, horror-genre adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet. Moreover, it's a postmodern pastiche. The director, with a totemic Hamlet mask, begins to threaten them. Moreover, the Hamlet-Totem frightens the actresses with these misogynistic tone words: "Your whole life has been a show, a provincial one. Leaving this place is no longer an option".

According to Freud (2010): "According to the view which was originated by Goethe and is still the prevailing one today, Hamlet represents the type of man whose power of direct action is paralyzed by an excessive development of his intellect" (p. 282).

Consequently, these critical words of Hamlet-Totem become a statement that restricts victims' freedom. But what is tragicomic is his narcissistic self-confidence and his failure to realize that he, too, belongs to or is condemned to the same place as the others.

Șerban's Hamlet-Totem is a transgressive, almost ludicrous figure, and in this adaptation, Hamlet serves merely as context. The primitive totem mask establishes a menacing authority behind which Hamlet conceals himself. It is an intellectual trap. Hamlet-Totem uses Hamlet.

As is known, Hamlet's story displays a panorama of the classical Freudian Oedipus complex. He is jealous of his mother; he desires her. According to Freud (2010): "Shakespeare's Hamlet has its roots in the same soil as Oedipus Rex"; "In Oedipus, the child's wishful phantasy that underlies it is brought into the open and realized as it would be in a dream. In Hamlet it remains repressed; and—just as in the case of a neurosis—we only learn of its existence from its inhibiting consequences" (p.282).

Shakespeare has created a realm of challenge for those who stage, adapt, and interpret his works. In every era, in light of prevailing paradigms, the Zeitgeist and Shakespeare enrich and diversify one another, as Șerban's adaptation shows. Moreover, Hamlet's restlessness remains a compelling subject.

Director: Florin Șerban; Script: Florin Șerban; Cinematography: Andrei Butică; Editing: Florin Șerban; Production: Florin Șerban; Cast: Igor Babiac (Hamlet), Roberta Antonie (Isabela/Ophelia), Andreea Gramosteanu (Adriana/Polonius), Sabrina Iaschevici (Tania/Gertrude), Cristina Lupu (First girl), Cosmina Stratan (Cosmina/Laertes), Irina Tufescu (Irina/Claudius).

Oedipus Story, **Oedipus Complex and Its Cinematographic Context**

> "Je suis Œdipe. Quarante ans d'âge, vingt ans de règne. Par la force
> de mes poignets, j'atteins au sommet du bonheur. Enfant perdu,
> trouvé, sans état civil, sans papiers, je suis surtout heureux de ne
> devoir rien qu'à moi-même". ACTE PREMIER 1
>
> (André Gide, Œdipe, 1931)

The story of Oedipus is recounted in the tragedies by Sophocles (496 BC, Colonus – 406 BC, Athens) titled Antigone (c. 442–441 BC), Oedipus Rex (c. 429–425 BC), and Oedipus at Colonus (c. 406–405 BC).

The story of Oedipus, based on these works, is briefly as follows:

Oedipus is the son of Laius, King of Thebes, and his wife Jocasta. However, according to a prophecy, the child to be born would one day kill his father. Consequently, his parents bound the baby's feet and gave him to a shepherd to be left to die; yet, the shepherd could not bring himself to harm the infant and instead handed him over to King Polybus and Queen Merope of Corinth. They raise him as their own child. As he grows up, Oedipus hears this prophecy and flees Corinth to avoid harming Polybus and Merope, whom he believes are his real parents. On the way, during a quarrel, he kills Laius—who is, in fact, his biological father. Later, he arrives in Thebes. He saves the city by solving the Sphinx's riddle. The riddle is: What creature walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening? The answer is: a human being. For a human crawls on all fours as an infant, walks on two legs as an adult, and walks on three legs—using a cane—in old age. Because of this heroic deed, the Thebans proclaim Oedipus king and marry him to Jocasta, who is actually his mother. They have four children together: Antigone, Ismene, Eteocles, and Polynices. After years of successful, stable rule, a terrible plague breaks out in Thebes. Another prophecy reveals how the plague will end: the murderer of Laius must be found and banished from the city. Oedipus is determined to do whatever it takes to save Thebes, yet he remains unaware of the truth. Ultimately, the seer Tiresias reveals the reality, and mother Jocasta commits suicide. Oedipus blinds himself with the pins from her robe and, accompanied by his loyal daughter Antigone, arrives in Colonus near Athens after years of exile. There, King Theseus receives him with respect and compassion. Then one day, Oedipus vanishes without a trace. (Sophocles, 2026; Sophocles,2023)

The story of Oedipus endures as a source of inspiration in art, science, and philosophy; like Prometheus, Demeter, or Electra, he offers a lens for defining, analyzing, and narrating our existence through his story and personality.

The same holds for Freudian psychoanalysis. In this context, "The Interpretation of Dreams was finished in all essentials at the beginning of 1896. Nevertheless, we can now add some qualifications. Thus, the existence of the Oedipus complex was only established during the summer and autumn of 1897 (Letters 64 to 71) and "his interest began to be centered at that time on his self-analysis, which was to lead during the summer to his discovery of the Oedipus complex" (Strachey, 2010, p. xviii).

Thus, Freud creates a criterion for criticism and analysis that remains constantly relevant and encompasses an entire life; accordingly (2010): "It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father" (p.280).

On the other hand, as Freud (2010) emphasized, the plot of Oedipus and the process of psychoanalysis are similar processes: "The action of the play consists in nothing other than the process of revealing, with cunning delays and ever-mounting excitement—a process that can be likened to the work of a psycho-analysis—that Oedipus himself is the murderer of Laïus, but further that he is the son of the murdered man and of Jocasta" (Freud, 2010, p.279).

However, since its inception, the classical psychoanalytic perspective centered on Oedipus has evolved from merely offering a solution to becoming an instrument of political and social constraint. In this context, Deleuze & Guattari revolutionized the field

with their 1972 book Anti-Oedipus, and Foucault did the same with his 1973 lectures titled La Vérité et les formes juridiques. In other words, they liberated Oedipus.

Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's book Capitalisme et Schizophrénie, I: L'Anti-Oedipe (Paris, Éd. de Minuit, 1972), Foucault (1974) makes the following observation: "Oedipus, then, would not be a truth of nature, but an instrument of limitation and constraint that psychoanalysts, since Freud, have used to contain desire and fit it into a family structure defined by our society at a specific moment in time… The tragedy of Oedipus is therefore the story of a search for the truth; it is a truth-seeking process that strictly adheres to the Greek judicial practices of the time".

In this respect, Oedipus is examined not only from a psychoanalytic perspective but also as a figure of power.

In this search, answering one question reveals half the truth, yet another question must be answered for the remaining half. As for the killer's name, the play turns to prophecy, though here, too, a twin structure of opposites exists: Apollo represents light, yet his spokesman, Tiresias, is blind. Yet the seer Tiresias tells Oedipus he is the murderer. The truth has come to light, yet there is no witness to the killing. Oedipus remembers having killed someone on the road to Thebes, but that is all. The investigation stalls once again, for this is a double murder. Oedipus killed King Laius and, at the same time, his own father, yet he still believes Polybus, the King of Corinth, is his father. At this juncture, a slave arriving from Corinth to announce the King's death reveals to him that Polybus was not his real father. Meanwhile, the shepherd, the slave from Mount Cithaeron who had rescued the infant Oedipus and entrusted him to Polybus in the past, fills in the final missing piece of the story (Foucault, 2020, pp. 180–181)

Truth is constructed slowly, step by step, piece by piece through symmetries, equivalent contrasts, causes and effects, and the events of the past and their impacts on the present.

Foucault (1974) interprets the subject he examined in detail as summarized above in the following way: "This form, truly impressive in Sophocles' Oedipus, is not merely rhetorical. It is at once religious and political. It consists of the famous technique of *the symbolon*, the Greek symbol. An instrument of power, or of exercising power, that lets someone holding a secret or authority break an object, such as a ceramic piece, into two parts, keep one, and entrust the other to a person responsible for delivering a message or attesting to its authenticity. By fitting these two halves together, one can recognize the message's authenticity, that is, the continuity of the power being exercised. Power manifests itself, completes its cycle, and maintains its unity through this interplay of small fragments separated from one another of a single whole, a unique object whose overall configuration constitutes the manifest form of power".

On the other hand, the art of cinema and cinematographic narration should also be added to the list of symbolon mentioned here. Consequently, while the Freudian Oedipus complex serves as content within films, the Foucauldian Oedipal symbolon is the formal equivalent of cinematographic narration. Investigating Oedipus's truth in Sophocles' tragedy lays the foundation for narrative realization and performance in general.

In 1979, film theorist and critic Raymond Bellour defined the structure of cinematographic narrative in his book L'Analyse du film using the narrative logic of Sophocles' Oedipus story. Francesco Cassetti then updates Bellour's perspective by analyzing examples from Hitchcock's cinema in his book Teorie del Cinema (1993). Accordingly, even before considering drive dynamics in general, the structure underlying

classical narrative cinema leads us back to the central crux: the emergence of desire and its submission to the law, Oedipus. "One must understand the destiny of Oedipus and castration down to the minutest textual operation as a continuous vibration" (Bellour, 1979, p. 245). Indeed, the Oedipus complex is intimately familiar with repetition based on difference, using it as a means of resolution to exorcise transgression (attraction to the mother), effect a substitution (another woman in place of 'her'), mask a fear (of castration), and enforce a return to order (familial and social). Diversity and similarity, rupture and recomposition are the hallmarks upon which Oedipus is founded. (Casetti, 1993, p.184).

Therefore, every film, every cinematographic narrative, is in fact an Oedipal performance.

"The film is subject; it submits to the story, just as the subject submits to the Oedipus complex. It thus narrates what the body of the film never ceases to mime: the transition from one state of equilibrium to another, from a first term to a second that repeats and resolves it" (Bellour 1979:244; Casetti 1993: 185).

Freud, Deleuze & Guattari, and Foucault coexist within the realm of psychoanalysis, yet one or the other comes to the fore depending on prevailing cultural paradigms; consequently, this dynamic naturally emerged when approaching Florin Șerban's cinema from an Oedipal perspective.

At this point, one might ask a playful question: Could the Lumière Brothers have invented cinema without Sophocles?

As Casetti highlights (1993): "In short, there is a correspondence between the kinship system portrayed, characterized by difference and mirroring, and the game upon which the film rests, a game itself woven from mirroring and difference. Once again, we find an intimate solidarity between the various levels on which cinema operates: just as there was previously a bond between the film's body and the narrative exercise, there is now one between the film's body and the events being narrated—an intimate solidarity under the sign of Oedipus" (p.186).

The director-philosopher's cinema

> "Nous avons besoin maintenant du présent et du témoignage du passé:
> le témoignage présent de ce qui est réellement arrivé".
>
> (Michel Foucault 1973)

The director-philosopher's cinema is a distinct genre proposal.

Florin Şerban, especially with his films Love 1: Dog (2018) (Dragoste 1: Câine, 2018) and Love 2. America (Dragoste 2: America, 2020) belongs to a class of contemporary director-philosophers such as Terrence Malick, Béla Tarr, Carlos Reygadas, Lav Diaz, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, and Ryūsuke Hamaguchi.

Directors such as Carl Theodor Dreyer, Robert Bresson, Ingmar Bergman, Michelangelo Antonioni, Alain Resnais, Jean-Luc Godard, and Andrei Tarkovsky are historical precursors of "director-philosopher's cinema".

Furthermore, certain directors representing "director-philosopher cinema" also fall into the category of Slow Cinema. However, the formalist characteristics of this cinema as described in the quote below do not fully encompass "director-philosopher cinema".

However, according to de Luca and Barradas (2015): "One of the first to coin the expression 'cinema of slowness' was the French film critic Michel Ciment, in 2003, citing, as exemplary of this trend, directors such as Béla Tarr (Hungary), Tsai Ming-liang (Taiwan) and Abbas Kiarostami (Iran) (Ciment, 2003). In 2008, taking up Ciment's expression, Matthew Flanagan would expand its theoretical application in his influential article 'Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema', which he described as based on 'the employment of (often extremely) long takes, de-centered and understated modes of storytelling, and a pronounced emphasis on quietude and the everyday" (2008, p.1).

On the other hand, generally every film has a philosophy. Every film director eventually develops a philosophy. But according to Deleuze (1984): "It seemed to us that the great auteurs of cinema could be compared not only to painters, architects, and musicians, but also to thinkers. They think in terms of movement-images and time-images, rather than concepts" (p. 11).

Therefore, defining "director-philosopher's cinema" as a distinct genre is difficult. Moreover, this is not a criterion for criticism. Many significant directors in cinema history never held the title of theorist, yet this poses no problem. The only issue is whether a cinematographic poetics belongs to this genre, as with any other genre. In this context, Deleuze (1989) again distinguishes between cinema and philosophy: "Cinema itself is a new practice of images and signs, and philosophy, as a conceptual practice, must develop a theory of it" (p. 308). However, representatives of the director-philosopher's cinema have rendered this distinction transparent. They structure the labyrinths of existence by immersing themselves in nature; the tragedies of the historical past and political adversities emerge within the ordinary flow of daily life—appearing only to vanish—yet they remain always present. Ordinary people represent the reality of life—with all its good and bad—in a non-dramatic manner, simply continuing on their way; it is like a silent moral lesson. Everything can be perceived simultaneously: physical and metaphysical dimensions, reality and metaphor, the real and the imaginary; at times, this world and a science-fictional universe. Moreover, all of this unfolds generally in a Bakhtinian dialogic form. Ultimately, this is a meta-cinema initiative.

The characteristics of the director-philosopher's cinema are as follows:

- It is a becoming cinema.
- It is an intuitive cinema
- It is a contemplative cinema.
- It is sometimes an anachronistic cinema.
- It is a naturalist cinema
- It is sometimes a transgressive cinema
- It is a political cinema
- It is an observational cinema
- It is sometimes a silent cinema in the sense of establishing an almost telepathic relationship between the director and the audience.
- Each time, cinematographic spectacle becomes an Erfahrung.
- Each time, cinematographic spectacle is an Erlebnis of the "I watched a film and my life changed" variety.
- It is a cinematographic performance to research the Janus design of life as existential meaning or existential meaninglessness.

Conclusion

By designing narrative and philosophical symmetries in his films, Florin Şerban explores desire, power, challenge, freedom, and existential struggle within love, institutional authority, minority issues, social constraints, human relationships, and the relationship between humans and nature.

Oedipus's theories are clearly identifiable in his films through Freudian, Foucauldian, Deleuzean & Guattarian, and Bellourian lenses.

Florin Şerban exemplifies the director-philosopher's cinema through contemplative visuality, expressive silence, an individualist social-realist manner, sophisticated transgression, identification with nature, experimental challenge, a de-dramatic, cool vision, and an original Oedipian style.



Florin Şerban Portrait After Caspar David Friedrich and Leonardo Da Vinci 2026 © Simber Atay
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Article Info

Received: October 17 2026
Accepted: November 10 2026

How to cite this article:

Atay, S. (2026). Florin Șerban's Cinematic Perspective. *Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques,* no. 92, pp. 270 - 282.