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New Romanian cinema: new realism for the new millennium

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ABSTRACT

One of the most exciting cinematic movements that emerged over the first two decades of the twenty-first century is New Romanian cinema. In both critical and scholarly literature New Romanian cinema has been characterised first and foremost as “realist.” Yet, both the implicit and explicit assumptions about realism which are utilised in such characterisations are rarely interrogated. Andre Bazin’s writing are often invoked, but the question of how his conception of realism, which was originally developed in relation to Italian neorealism, can be applied to a cinematic movement which appeared some fifty years later, is not addressed. Responding to this gap in scholarship, this thesis places the discussion of New Romanian cinema in the context of broader and more comprehensive interrogation of realism in cinema.

The aim of this thesis is to define the specific traits of New Romanian cinema and to revise the theoretical concept of realism for the twenty-first century. In doing so, this thesis focuses on eight significant films from the New Romanian canon which span just over a decade between the emergence of the canon and its coming into maturity. The films are: *Stuff and Dough* (*Marfa și banii*, Puiu 2001); *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* (*Moartea domnului Lăzărescu*, Puiu 2005); *12:08 East of Bucharest* (*A fost sau n-a fost ?*, Porumboiu 2006); *California Dreamin’* (*California Dreamin’ (nesfârșit)*, Nemescu 2007); *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (*4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile*, Mungiu 2007); *The Legend of the Party Photographer, Tales from the Golden Age* (*Legenda Fotografului Oficial, Amintiri din epoca de aur*, Hofer et al. 2009); *Police, Adjective* (*Polițist, Adjectiv*, Porumboiu 2009), and *Beyond the Hills* (*După dealuri*, Mungiu 2012).

This thesis explores four significant aspects of New Romanian cinema: the types of narrative construction prevalent in this canon; the self-reflexive acknowledgement of the cinematic apparatus and mediated technology; the mobilisation of intertextuality and

intermediality and finally, the materiality of speech. Combining narrative theory with close textual analysis, Chapter 2 foregrounds important characteristics of narrative construction in New Romanian cinema such as its reliance on found stories and the prevalence of “real time” storytelling. Yet, at the same time narratives in New Romanian cinema are often elliptical, open-ended and seek to thwart the audience’s expectations. Chapter 3 examines how New Romanian filmmakers use self-reflexive strategies to disclose the working of the cinematic apparatus and expose the mediated nature of the filmic image. It explains how such strategies impact the spectator’s interpretation of the text, and whether such mediation undermines the realist form. In Chapter 4, selected films are examined through intermedial and intertextual lenses, analysing how intermediality and intertextuality inhibit or facilitate realist expression. Finally, in Chapter 5, an under-explored portion of Siegfried Kracauer’s work will be utilised to explore how several of the New Romanian films access materiality through the spoken word.

Overall, this thesis seeks to reconcile the paradoxical relationship between the highly mediated form of New Romanian cinema and the traditional notion of realist cinema as giving direct access to reality. Its key findings relate to how modernist and postmodernist influences contribute to, or create tension with, the realist aspirations of this cinema.

Despite gaining a strong festival and critical following, New Romanian cinema has been the subject of only a few monographs in the English language. Subsequently, there is a dearth of attention given to how the realist language of New Romanian cinema redefines realist theory. It is the aim of this work to make a case for New Romanian cinema to be recognised as a new form of realism that is universally relevant and unique in its perspective, and therefore of vital academic importance.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.



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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Historical background

Something monumental happened to Romanian cinema in the early 2000s. Firstly, in 2001 Cristi Puiu's film *Stuff and Dough* (2001), was selected for competition in Cannes, then the same director won the Berlin Golden Bear Award in 2004 for his short film *Cigarettes and Coffee* (*Un Cartus de Kent si un Pachet de Cafea*, 2004) and the Un Certain Regard award at Cannes in 2005 for *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* (2005). Subsequently, other Romanian directors such as Catalin Mitulescu and Corneliu Porumboiu began winning important prizes at film festivals, culminating with Cristian Mungiu's Palme d'Or for best feature film at Cannes in 2007 for *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (2007). Eventually, New Romanian Cinema gained enough recognition that it has now been claimed by Dominique Nasta to have been "integrated into, the great discourse of the European cinema and culture" (*Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 197).

In both critical and scholarly literature New Romanian cinema has been characterised first and foremost as "realist." Yet, both implicit and explicit assumptions about realism which are utilised in such characterisations are rarely interrogated. Andre Bazin's writing are often invoked, but the question of how his conception of realism, which was originally developed in relation to Italian neorealism, can be applied to a cinematic movement which appeared some fifty years later is not addressed. Responding to this gap in scholarship, this thesis will place the discussion of New Romanian cinema in the context of a broader and more comprehensive interrogation of realism in cinema. The overall aim of this thesis is to define the specific traits of New Romanian cinema and to revise theoretical concept of realism for the twenty-first century. In so doing, this thesis focuses on eight significant films from the New Romanian canon which span just over a decade between the emergence of the

canon and its coming into maturity. The films are: *Stuff and Dough*; *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*; *12:08 East of Bucharest* (Porumboiu 2006); *California Dreamin'* (Nemescu 2007); *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*; *The Legend of the Party Photographer* (Hofer et al. 2009); *Police, Adjective* (Porumboiu 2009), and *Beyond the Hills* (Mungiu 2012). The project offers a detailed analysis of how New Romanian cinema aligns with traditional understandings of realist cinema as proposed by the foundational theories of Siegfried Kracauer and Andre Bazin, and how it simultaneously challenges realist form. The characteristics of New Romanian films that diverge from realist form will be analysed using theories of intermediality, modernism and postmodernism. Ultimately, the thesis argues that New Romanian cinema is fundamentally realist but has been influenced by modernism and postmodernism to evolve into a new type of realism that is relevant for the twenty-first century.

This interpenetration of realism with modernism and postmodernism was already anticipated by a number of Romanian films in the 1960s and '70s. For instance, Liviu Ciulei's *The Forest of the Hanged* (*Pădurea spânzuraților*, 1964) used many modernist techniques, such as deliberate discontinuity and self-reflexive subject positioning as well as extended shots, with the latter trait suggesting a realist approach. *The Forest of the Hanged* received the Best Director Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, which at the time was seen as heralding a new dawn of Romanian cinema (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 22). It was Lucian Pintilie's 1969 film, *The Reconstruction* (*Reconstituirea*), described by Nasta as "Romania's essential contribution to the cinema of the 1960s," that heralded a new turn in cinematic realism (*Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 25).

The Reconstruction was a scathing critique of mindless authoritarianism as well as a transgressive experiment with realism and modernism. Using slow, deliberate pacing and based on a true story, *The Reconstruction* exhibited realist tendencies; however, Pintilie

added modernist gestures such as the continual reference to the cinematic apparatus, which appeared to work against traditional concepts of cinematic realism. Besides drawing on earlier subversive Romanian films, Doru Pop argues that New Romanian filmmakers have been influenced by previous European new wave cinemas, such as the Nouvelle Vague (French New Wave) and Italian neorealism, as well as purposely taking a stand against classic Hollywood-style cinema (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 28).

In the late 1990s, Romanian cinema entered a transitional stage between the communist oeuvre and the New Romanian canon (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 122). Among a small number of filmmakers active during this decade, several figures stood out. Nae Caranfil was an important director in this transition period, making films that utilised an ironic, tragi-comedic tone to address serious social topics (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 123). Additionally, Dan Pița won an Honourable Mention at the Berlinale for *Paso Doble* (*Pas în doi*, 1985). Even though few feature films were made between the fall of communism and the Romanian film industry's resurgence from 2001, short films were produced in the country, and some of these were awarded international prizes at film festivals. For instance, one of Cristian Mungiu's first short films, *Zapping* (2000), attracted attention in Romania and internationally (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 141).

From the year 2000, a fertile ground for a new cinematic wave was prepared through an increase in funding being offered by the Romanian National Film Office, new film production companies, and training being offered alongside film festivals (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 140). Two other important processes occurred that contributed to the development of New Romanian filmmakers. Firstly, training and inspiration were offered by important international filmmakers who started making films in Romania, for instance Bertrand Tavernier and Costa-Gavras (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 141). Secondly, close collaborations between Romanian writers, producers and

directors blossomed. For instance, the writer Răzvan Rădulescu worked with Cristi Puiu, Cristian Mungiu and Radu Muntean, amongst others. Yet, even as the scene was set for the emergence of New Romanian cinema, the first film to be considered part of this canon, *Stuff and Dough*, nearly did not make its debut at Cannes, as the funding that had been promised by the National Film Office was withdrawn due to differences between the director and state officials and post-production was only possible due to private financial intervention (Filimon Puiu 40).

Yet, as Rodica Ieta explains, it is surprising that New Romanian filmmakers chose realism as their artistic expression of choice, given that realism was stigmatised in “former Communist countries due to its original application as socialist realism” (Ieta “Impressions” 24). However, she explains that the latest East European filmmakers radicalised realism’s potential, which “at its best does establish[es] a relation between experience and memory (Ieta “Impressions” 24). This attitude is consistent with Kracauer’s *Theory of Film*, which is concerned more with the *discovery* of lived experience than with a complete accurate reflection of it (Hansen *Cinema and Experience* 261). Therefore, although cinematic realism is the basis of New Romanian cinema, it has purposely been moulded be more of an ambiguous reflection of reality than was evident in earlier forms of cinematic realism, for instance, Italian neorealism. Due to New Romanian cinema’s success in the festival circuit, this cinema can be seen as a conduit of renewal for the realist form of cinema as well as promoting the potent promise of Romania’s filmmakers and their unique expression.

By 2019, according to Christina Stojanova, New Romanian cinema comprised approximately 72 films, which have collectively won 200 prestigious awards, including the top prizes at international film festivals (Stojanova “Filmography of the New Romanian Cinema” 297-302; Stojanova “Introduction” 1). These films were produced by directors including Cristi Puiu, Cristian Mungiu, Corneliu Porumboiu, Cristian Nemescu, Radu Jude,

Radu Muntean, Tudor Giurgiu, Calin Peter Netzer, Catalin Mitulescu and Nae Caranfil.

However, as there is no manifesto or shared ideological principles, the directors have never publicly claimed to be part of a film movement (Stojanova “Introduction” 3).

As a group, the New Romanian directors share membership of the “decree generation,” born during Communist Romania’s strict sanctions against birth control and abortion (Stojanova “Introduction” 5). This means that they were all born and raised in the Communist era, witnessed its collapse, and subsequently dealt with its aftermath. Thus, their films share a concern with how the trauma of the past is processed and what the Revolution means for their generation. Additionally, a significant number of New Romanian directors attended Universitatea Națională de Artă Teatrală și Cinematografică “I.L. Caragiale” (Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film; UNATC) in Bucharest, which goes some way to explain their common thematic concerns and similar filmmaking styles.¹

Despite the earlier Romanian cinema as well as the French New Wave contributing to the style that evolved in New Romanian cinema, I would argue that Italian neorealism is the most important antecedent to this canon. Italian neorealism defines a relatively small body of films produced in Italy shortly after World War II, which stood in contrast to both the genre films that had been produced in Italy during Fascism and also the classical Hollywood films of the era. Rather than providing entertainment value only (which was the subject of most Italian films prior to this), the new cinema of Italy “constituted a serious contribution to cultural and political debate over the creation of the new Democratic nation,” which interrogated the “material and social conditions of hitherto unknown areas of the country (Wagstaff 37). André Bazin, the famed French cinema critic, “championed Italian neorealist

¹ Corneliu Poromboiu, Cristian Mungiu, Cristian Nemescu and Cătălin Mitulescu all attended UNATC. Cristi Puiu originally studied painting at École Supérieure d’Arts Visuel in Geneva, and subsequently switched to filmmaking, still in Geneva.

cinema ... as the major new aesthetic force in cinema” (Wagstaff 39). In the decades since its heyday in the early 1950s, Italian neorealism has continued to attract significant scholarly attention.

In a similar way, New Romanian cinema emerged from a trauma-ravaged country, which had previously produced films conforming to communist ideals, mass genre films or literary adaptations (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 14, 15). The conditions of production of the two cinemas were similar, as they were made in countries experiencing upheaval and where resources were severely limited, which resulted in spare means of expression. It has been suggested by some scholars that the style of New Romanian cinema can be attributed to budgetary constraints, the small pool of acting and technical talent in Romania, and even the limited equipment available for rent. The Romanian director, Cristian Mungiu stated in 2009 that those New Romanian directors who have had international recognition had all used the same camera equipment as there was only one such camera for rent in Bucharest at that time, which then became known as the “one ‘magic’ camera” (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 33). Although Doru Pop interprets the comment as a joke, he does go on to suggest that Mungiu’s words hint at a certain “cinematographic determinism” to the commonality between the films in the New Romanian canon (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 33).² Likewise, Italian neorealist films have a consistent look and feel that has been attributed to the lack of high-quality film stock in postwar Italy. Additionally, the scarce resources available to filmmakers in Italy meant that the use of outdoor and location shooting was both an aesthetic choice as well as an economic one. New Romanian films are also notable for the

² One other factor contributing to the commonality was the writing of the films. Pop notes that Răzvan Rădulescu was “screenwriter for some of the most important films of this generation, including *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* and *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*” (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 43).

on-location shooting, with the cramped interiors of socialist era houses contributing to the shot choices and the resulting claustrophobic atmosphere.

Thus, both cinemas have a consistency of form due to constraints on the availability of resources, suggesting that the apparatus is implicated in the consistency visible between films within each canon. When form is defined by the apparatus, it raises questions about the indexicality of the filmic image, and how the camera or film is contributing to the mediation of the resulting text. Besides these historical and material contexts of both cinemas, the mode of storytelling is also an important point of comparison.

The narratives of both Italian neorealism and New Romanian cinema are not solely concerned with identity but are also concerned with processing trauma. Where Italian neorealism deals with the fraught process of recovery from World War II, New Romanian cinema is concerned with “the traumatic relationship with the past [which] plays an important role in the development of the stories and visual narratives” (Doru Pop “Grammar” 110). However, even as the underlying assumption of cinematic realism strives to “find aesthetic equivalents for psychological and social truth” (Bazin “Wyer” 4), “the filmmakers of New Romanian Cinema point out the necessity of keeping history alive and open by suggesting its fundamental polysemy” (Strausz 120). It is this acknowledgement of the impossibility of establishing one overriding truth that signals that new Romanian cinema’s mobilisation of realism has been inflected by both modernism and postmodernism. Yet, while there are similarities between the two cinematic canons, this thesis contends that in New Romanian cinema, realist aesthetics are modified significantly through contact with modernism and postmodernism into its own unique form of realist cinema.

Bazin observed that Italian neorealism is concerned with “unexceptional” people who are interacting within a harsh social and political environment (Bazin *Neorealism* 25).

Similarly, in New Romanian cinema, the protagonists encounter small-scale, everyday events. As Siegfried Kracauer, whose legacy provided another major inspiration for this study, argues, it is the ordinary and ephemeral that gives greater access to truth (Hansen *Cinema and Experience* 254). The ordinary and the ephemeral are apparent in both New Romanian and Italian neorealist films. New Romanian cinema frequently turns the camera towards Romanian people who are living on the margins. Similar to Italian neorealism, New Romanian films deal with “small people with even smaller satisfactions” (Georgescu 33).

The characters of both New Romanian cinema and Italian neorealism often inhabit urban spaces and are confronted by a limit situation that leads to a confrontation with their own mortality. Monica Filimon describes Cristi Puiu’s characters as being “observed confronting death and, more significantly, what exists beyond the ephemeral artefacts that conjure one’s historical and social identity” (Filimon “Beyond” 31). They are people who exist on the cusp of a crisis, the substance of which exposes the fissures in society, and in particular, the vulnerability of people who are already occupying liminal spaces where they are neither protected by social institutions that may have offered protection under communism, nor have access to possible positive opportunities offered by capitalism.

Just as in postwar Italian cinema, where issues of Italian identity were central, issues of identity loom large in New Romanian cinema. In Doru Pop’s words, the “incapacity to deal with identity . . . belongs to the preferred themes of the new [Romanian] cinema” (*An Introduction* 83). The search for a viable identity is shared between individuals and the country as a whole and can be attributed to both the geographical location of Romania as much as the social and political upheavals of its recent history. According to Călin Andrei Mihăilescu, Romania “has been accustomed to a full-time choir lamenting its lack of luck, inconvenient geographical position, linguistic and cultural marginality, bad rulers and not quite dependable subjects” (189). This supports the notion that a search for a reliable identity

is central to the Romanian psyche. Marian Țuțui and Raluca Iacob propose that Romanian filmmakers are “mapping the identities of characters living on the margins” by foregrounding a “perception of periphery” in the spaces they occupy (217). Apart from the exploration of liminality inherent in the films under discussion, it is important to recognise that after Communism, the ability to traverse borders means that “the possibility and the freedom to move became a primary tool in the identity construction of the post-socialist citizen” (Strausz 158).

Another important characteristic of many films of the New Romanian canon is that the narratives are often inspired by real events, for instance, a newspaper article or an event retold by a friend or family member, which suggests an almost documentary commitment to the real. According to Kracauer, the “found story” is “inseparable from films animated by documentary intentions” and therefore “render incidents typical of the world around us” (Kracauer 246), thus contributing to cinematic realism. Demonstrating this tendency, the famed Italian neorealist film *Stromboli* (Roberto Rossellini, 1950) was based on a chance meeting of the director with a female prisoner in an internment camp in Northern Italy (Rossellini 45-46). This imperative for film to reflect life, without imposing unnatural or unnecessary narrative formulas “over living social facts,” according to Cesare Zavattini, contributed to “great victory” won by Italian neorealists (64). For example, *California Dreamin’* and *Beyond the Hills* are based on real events, which are adapted by their respective filmmakers into fictional narratives. Thus, these films demonstrate a commitment to the real through the anchoring stories in actual events.

Thematically, New Romanian cinema offers a systematic analysis of post-communist life in Romania. Several New Romanian films share the theme of institutional disfunction and how that interferes in the lives of Romanian citizens. *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* is one such film and follows a retired engineer as he traverses the labyrinth of the healthcare system

when he suddenly becomes seriously ill. Unfortunately for Mr Lăzărescu, his illness coincides with a bus crash which fills the emergency rooms of several hospitals, making it difficult for him to attract the attention of the overworked medical staff. While the story is told as a Dante-esque journey through Hell, the gentle humour and humanity exhibited by the protagonist and the paramedic who accompanies him enlivens its fatalistic narrative and stark bleakness. Also concerned with institutional failure is *Beyond the Hills*, although rather than a hospital, the action takes place in a monastery in a remote region of Moldavia. The two young women who are at the centre of the action are victims of political and social neglect, as post-communist Romania provides little in the form of a safety net for the poor. Shot during winter, the characters' lack of available choices is shown in the desperate struggle of the monastery's inhabitants as they survive without running water or adequate heat or nutrition. Similar to *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, *Beyond the Hills* is based on a real event, which infuses its narrative with truthfulness. While both films expose the irresponsibility of social institutions tasked with assisting the vulnerable, they leave the audiences asking themselves uncomfortable questions about their own complacency.

The judiciary is not spared the attention of New Romanian cinema, with *Police, Adjective* focusing on policing and the corruption of justice. Standing as an outlier of the canon for its interest in language and the meaning of words, this film draws attention to how the insidious corruption of public life has continued to infect Romania since the collapse of communism. While the protagonist, Cristi, is motivated by doing what is right, he clashes with his superior's dictionary definitions of justice, law and morality. Also concerned with judicial ethics is Călin Peter Netzer's *Child's Pose* (*Poziția copilului*, 2013), which exposes the shadowy machinations of bribery and law enforcement. The action follows a mother who concocts a scheme that will see charges dropped against her son for killing a child with his car whilst driving under the influence. Here, the concern for her son overrides all other

motivations, including justice and natural consequences. Both films ask questions about the success of the 1989 Revolution, and if the remnants of communism continue to haunt Romanian society.

The theme of transition or transformation concerns several New Romanian films, including *California Dreamin'* and *Stuff and Dough*. Both these films adopt travel as a metaphor for the process of transition from communism to capitalism. *Stuff and Dough* follows three young adults as they drive to Bucharest to deliver illicit substances to a local drug dealer. When they begin the trip, they are ignorantly blasé about the potential for disaster and, although they narrowly avoid serious injury when attacked, they appear to return home unscathed. However, the fatal consequences of their actions will haunt their lives forever and most likely draw them into the criminal underworld permanently. The film's slow pace, meticulous framing and spare means of expression marked it out as the first New Romanian cinematic offering, and it attracted widespread critical acclaim. The later film, *California Dreamin'*, sees a train carrying American troops to the Kosovo war, stopped in a remote village in Romania, where they are held hostage by a hostile stationmaster. Filmmaker Cristian Nemescu makes the most of the cultural clash between the visitors and the inhabitants of Căpâlnița, which is played for laughs but at the same time operates as a metaphor for American intervention in Romanian politics during and after World War II. Nemescu manages to create a realist film with political import, while wielding a light touch that refuses to make judgement or adopt a didactic tone. *California Dreamin'* succeeds in demonstrating how the unresolved past continues to stymie progress towards a brighter future.

Processing the past is a consistent thread throughout films in the New Romanian canon, and *12:08 East of Bucharest* addresses the 1989 Revolution, but in a unique manner. The film follows the production of a television talk show that will discuss whether a

concurrent revolution occurred in a small town “east of Bucharest” at the same time it did in Bucharest. The ironic humour and parodic intermedial references in this film make it the most postmodern of all the New Romanian films, while it functions as a serious critique of history and truth. This critique is embodied in the lives of the three protagonists, for whom the Revolution has had little positive impact. While the camera is a critical eye, it does not condemn any individual, but instead relies on the audience’s own engagement to construct meaning. *The Legend of the Party Photographer* also addresses the past and historic truth by telling the story of newspaper photographers tasked with photographing Romanian leader Nicolae Ceaușescu and French president Valéry Giscard d’Estaing. Told as a comedy of errors, the filmmaker continually introduces the television screen and photographs of Ceaușescu into the shot as reminders of the mediation of history through photography and the televisual. This biting satire is both a refreshingly unique take on a minor historical event as well as an important critique of political interference on the media. However, not all New Romanian films address large historical events, and instead operate on a purely familial level.

Familial relations are minor plot points in several New Romanian films (such as *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*); however, they are the main theme of *Tuesday, After Christmas* (*Marți, după Crăciun*, Muntean 2010) and *Sieranevada* (Puiu 2016). The former film follows a middle-aged man Paul as he considers breaking up his marriage so that he can be with his child’s young orthodontist. Having become adept at keeping his marriage and his mistress apart, inevitably he makes the break and deals with the inevitable backlash. A raw and confronting film that refuses to judge Paul’s choices, the film exposes the tension between familial ties and personal freedom in post-Revolution Romania. Cristi Puiu’s *Sieranevada* also tackles a family in flux in a tale that focuses on a day where a family congregates to pay tribute to their recently deceased patriarch. Intricate camerawork in a small apartment compartmentalises family alliances in separate rooms, while the corridor acts as a conduit

through which characters negotiate relationship dynamics. The discussion of conspiracy theories amongst the family members leads to clashes, forcing each person to take sides. In keeping with the narrative structure of other films in the canon, neither of these films offer any satisfying resolutions for the families in question, but rather interrogate old values and their relevance in the increasingly globalised country.

While national politics is a persistent theme through New Romanian cinema, it is the politics of the intimate that is the focus of *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*. Set shortly before the Revolution, the consequence of the state insisting that it have control over the bodies of women is shown in its brutality in this film as Otilia (Anamaria Marinca) seeks an abortion for her friend, Găbița (Laura Vaslui). The trauma the two friends experience over a 24-hour period is told in a neutral and objective manner. However, the green and grey colours infuse every scene with a sickly atmosphere, while also complementing the realistic period look. This powerful work attracted the highest award at Cannes, and still resonates with audiences today. Also concerned with the intrusion of the state in women's intimate lives, Radu Jude's most recent work *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn (Babardeală cu bucluc sau porno balamuc, 2021)* takes aim at hypocritical attitudes to female sexuality and institutional abuse in modern-day Romania.

By 2015, the peak of the New Romanian movement had passed. While the directors of New Romanian films continue to make movies, the focus on communism has waned. The various directors who contributed to the New Romanian canon have taken their cinematic work into either more genre-based cinema or further into realism, choosing subject matters from a wide range of issues. For instance, Cristi Puiu utilised long takes, oblique dialogue and sparse exegesis to the extreme with his three-hour film *Aurora* (2010), which follows a murderer in almost real-time as he prepares the groundwork to kill various members of his family. While the film's style does adhere to realist aesthetics, it does not continue the

thematic concern of New Romanian cinema of communism and its aftermath. Rather, *Aurora* is an examination of one man's journey into madness. Puiu's latest film, *Malmkrog* (2020), is a wordy costume drama based on a 1900 novel by Vladimir Solovyov and represents a significant departure in style and subject matter for the director.

Corneliu Porumboiu, after making several films contributing to the New Romanian canon, explored different territory with *The Treasure (Comoara)* (2015), which is a treasure-hunting comedy with a poignant and unexpected ending. His latest film, *The Whistlers (La Gomera)* (2020), moved further away from realism, leaning towards the Hollywood gangster genre, with its attending glossy surface and fast-paced action. However, *The Whistlers* does continue the director's interest in language and meaning (previously seen in *Police, Adjective*), as the whistling language of El Silbo is a feature of the film, and the film does include naturalistic dialogue and acting.

The dual commitment to realism and stylistic innovation in New Romanian cinema is further exemplified by Radu Jude's triumph at the Berlinale in 2021, where his latest feature, *Bad Lucking Banging or Loony Porn*, won the Golden Bear. Shot with the limitations of the pandemic, Jude's film pokes fun at the hypocrisy of people who are poised to destroy a woman's life for being featured in a sex tape that becomes viral, where other more graphic and disturbing activities are available for viewing via any computer linked to the internet. Filmed in a disinterested style, Jude punctuates the film's realism with a montage of deliberately shocking images that implicate many of Romanian society's most venerated establishments in criminal activities, bringing this frequently humorous film into the realm of serious political critique (Debruge 14). Previously, Jude's debut feature *The Happiest Girl in the World (Cea mai fericită fată din lume)* (2009) won the CICA Prize at the Berlin International Film Festival. Borrowing much from Jude's past career making television advertisements, this film follows a day's shooting of a commercial for orange juice, featuring

a girl, Delia (Andreea Bosneag) who has won a car in a competition run by the juice company. Demonstrating the generational divide through the conflict between her father (Vasile Muraru), who wishes to sell the car to start a commercial venture, and a daughter who sees it as an opportunity for freedom, it can also be read as an examination of pre- and post-Revolution attitudes.

The modernist film-within-a-film structure of *The Happiest Girl in the World* pre-empted Jude's startlingly modernist film, *Uppercase Print* (*Tipografic majuscul*, Jude 2020), which is an interpretation of a true story of the persecution of a young man during communism. In *Uppercase Print*, Jude sheds most realist traits to make way for a modernist cinematic form. From the non-realistic sets, to the deliberately deadpan acting, this film has been described as "a spare, visually striking evocation of the methods of Ceaușescu's secret police" (Romney 3). The film's style successfully creates an atmosphere of foreboding through adopting an unfamiliar form and theatre-style mise-en-scène. However, by using a true story that is told through transcripts of interviews and surveillance recordings as the basis for the script, and by focusing on a tragedy enacted on a marginalised person, he has retained some contact with the ethics of realism.

Several of Cristian Mungiu's films are featured in this thesis and his latest film, *Graduation* (*Bacalaureat*, 2016), stays close to the aesthetic regime and thematic concerns of New Romanian cinema, focusing on how corruption remains an insidious blight on Romania in post-communist society. Winning the Best Director Prize at Cannes, this film focuses on a middle-class family and the education system, and particularly how education abroad is seen as offering more opportunities than those available in Romania. Acknowledged by the director as a more "accessible" film, it also aligns with the personal concerns of the director, who had school-aged children at the time of production (von Wong 3,7). Mungiu has not directed a film since *Graduation* and has instead been involved in producing films and

television. Cristian Nemescu died in a traffic accident while *California Dreamin'* was in post-production, thus he was never able to follow up on the enormous promise evidenced by the seven films he completed before his untimely death at the age of 27.

Each of the directors of New Romanian cinema have evolved in different directions; however, the films made during the peak of the canon remain influential and important inclusions in European art-house and realist cinema. Each of the filmmakers began making films when official funding was scarce, with the situation having improved somewhat with the Romanian Film Centre currently awarding interest-free loans and with European capital available. However, competition is fierce, and strict rules make raising the necessary capital extremely difficult (Uricaru “Minimalism and Melodrama” 53).

An important aspect of New Romanian cinema is how it addresses history and identity through its cinematic form. It will be argued in this thesis that this is because film and television have been implicated in history and historical construction in Romania throughout communism and in its immediate aftermath. However, this is not only true of Romania, but the entire history of the twentieth century and beyond. This is supported by Laura Mulvey’s statement that cinema is “so entwined with its recording of the history of the twentieth century” that our understandings of history and identity are inextricably linked to the accompanying vision displayed on screens (Mulvey 142).

Theoretical frameworks

There are many authors whose works have made a substantial contribution to understanding and conceptualising New Romania’s specific language. Here I will be outlining the key scholars who have published in this area, highlighting their relevance to this thesis.

Subsequently, the four main theorists whose work forms the theoretical underpinning of my

study, will be discussed. In *Contemporary Romanian Cinema: The History of an Unexpected Miracle*, Dominique Nasta tracks the development of Romanian cinema from the 1970s through to New Romanian cinema, focusing on specific filmmakers during each period, in order to analyse how their work influenced their successors. Importantly, Nasta provides a cultural, social and political context that is especially useful to the non-Romanian reader. She also pays special attention to several films that have been important precedents for New Romanian cinema. However, as this book was written in 2013, it does not completely cover all of the New Romanian canon. Nasta has continued to write journal articles about the canon and contributed a chapter to the 2020 book *The New Romanian Cinema*, edited by Christina Stojanova, which is very useful in describing the modernist elements in New Romanian cinema. Also written before the peak of New Romanian cinema is Doru Pop's *Romanian New Wave Cinema*, which interrogates its styles, themes, humour and gendered representation, while convincingly arguing that New Romanian cinema is fundamentally realist. Additionally, Pop's careful exploration of New Romanian cinematic grammar is an important stepping-stone for scholars beginning to decode the various characteristics that make up this unique artistic expression. Rodica Ieta also tackles the task of describing New Romanian cinema as it relates to Romania's history in her chapter in *European Visions: Small Cinemas in Transition*, which is a vital resource for understanding the social context of Romanian cinema. Likewise, Călin Andrei Mihăilescu's chapter in the same volume provides insight into Romanian humour and how the geographical and imaginary construction of place is expressed through New Romanian cinema. Țuțui and Iacob also tackle geographic and identity in the same publication.

Another work that seeks to define the study of New Romanian cinema is László Strausz's *Hesitant Histories on the Romanian Screen*. Offering "hesitation" as a method of production and a thematic thread, Strausz's book is a unique and productive exercise that is

both useful and full of detailed analysis. This thesis references Strausz's book frequently. Another influence piece is Chris Robé's *The Spectre of Communism*, which is very useful in understanding how the feeling of living under communism is refracted through New Romanian cinema.

While we speak about New Romanian cinema as a canon, researching individual directors is also a productive endeavour. Approaching New Romanian cinema from the point of view of auteurship, Monica Filimon has made a considerable contribution to scholarship with her book on Cristi Puiu, as well as publishing interviews with Puiu and Cristian Mungiu. Additionally, her 2014 article in *Cineaste* (Beyond New Romanian Cinema: Old Traps and New Beginnings) critically engages with the evolution of New Romanian cinema and discusses what the future could look like for Romanian filmmakers. Andrei Gorzo has also looked at New Romanian cinema through the auteur lens, writing about Cristi Puiu, but also addressing how realism defines the canon. Additionally, several interviews with New Romanian filmmakers are on YouTube and are an important resource for scholars seeking production detail and access to motivations and influences.

Apart from auteur theory, another foundational film theory that is useful when studying New Romanian cinema is genre theory. As the road film trope is mobilised in several New Romanian films, Lucian Georgescu's journal article is an excellent resource for questioning why so many New Romanian films adopt this trope. In addition, Katerina Korola's article on how genre operates in the films of Jim Jarmusch is helpful in explaining how genre theory can be applied to art-house films.

Language is examined in Chapter 5, and several papers have been valuable in understanding its use in New Romanian cinema. Andrei Gorzo's article about the use of words in *Police, Adjective* is an important text when analysing language and its meaning in

Porumboiu's film, as is Catalina Florina Florescu's chapter on the same film, which appears in *Small Cinemas in Global Markets: Genres, Identities, Narratives*. Jennifer Stob also makes an important contribution to the use of language in the same film in her article in *Film Criticism*. Gorzo has also published a paper on realism and New Romanian cinema, which is pertinent to this thesis.

One of this thesis' prime interests is how realism is influenced by modernism, so papers which address how modernism has infiltrated New Romanian cinema are important resources. Irina Trocan traces the beginning of artistic minimalism to accurately define what the term truly means in *New Romanian Cinema*. Both Dominique Nasta and Ioana Uricaru tackle modernism in the same volume, greatly expanding the knowledge of an area of research into New Romanian cinema that up until now has been under-researched. Uricaru's experience as both a scholar and filmmaker give a unique and nuanced understanding of the canon, especially in the area of production, in the same volume.

This thesis includes a chapter on intermediality, and there are many scholarly articles and books that have informed the content and structure here. Firstly, Ágnes Pethő has written extensively on intermediality and Eastern European film and especially New Romanian film, with her two books, *Caught In-between* and *Cinema and Intermediality*, forming an important and necessary part of my research into this topic. Likewise, Lúcia Nagib has also written a number of important pieces about intermediality, with her latest book *Realist Cinema as World Cinema* offering alternative strategies for conceptualising intermediality. No study of New Romanian cinema and intermediality would be complete without these two authors. Closely related to intermediality is the detailed framing employed by New Romanian filmmakers and for this Zsolt Gyenge makes a worthwhile contribution, as does Maria Ioniță. Again, the work of Ágnes Pethő is valuable here.

While the scholarly work mentioned above has made an important contribution to this thesis, it is the intention of the author to mobilise the theoretical legacy of André Bazin and demonstrate how Bazin's foundational work can help us to understand realist features of New Romanian cinema. Furthermore, it will be suggested that New Romanian cinema's cinematic language can be read productively through the influential German cultural critic and film theorist Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film*. The theory states that "films may claim aesthetic validity if they build from their basic properties . . . that is, they must record and reveal physical reality" (Kracauer 37). In addition to this, I draw on Lúcia Nagib's *World Cinema and The Ethics of Realism*, as it is also useful in understanding New Romanian cinema as delivering a new type of realism for the twenty-first century. One of the key realist characteristics of New Romanian cinema is the simplicity of the narrative. However, each of the films under discussion in this thesis refer to or include intermedial references within the *mise-en-scène* that often serve to broaden the films' meaning. In order to explain what effect this has on the films in question and their realist aspirations, the work of Lúcia Nagib and Ágnes Pethő will be the most important scholarly sources. Despite New Romanian film having sparse dialogue, the use of language is a thematic concern in several of the films. Utilising a mostly overlooked aspect of Kracauer's theory, this thesis will examine how language can give access to material reality in ways that directly confront truth and prejudice.

I contend that this cinema has its impetus in realist cinema but has come of age after modernism and during postmodernism. Therefore, the examination of modernist and postmodern approaches are necessary to understand the specificity of New Romanian cinema. New Romanian cinema reflects historical and geographical but also political threads that are offered in a manner that requires decoding by the audience through their own creative endeavour. By combining realist characteristics with modernist and postmodernist gestures and through manipulation of the cinematic image, what is offered by New Romanian

directors are minimalist texts that are transformed through the spectatorial process into richly relevant reflections of life in a fascinating country dealing with its difficult communist past and fraught democratic present.

André Bazin: Defining realism in cinema

Having reviewed the historical context and current scholarship on New Romanian cinema, I will now introduce the key theorists who will provide the methodological basis for the study.

André Bazin was a film critic, theorist and a founding editor of celebrated French journal *Cahier du Cinema*, who “influenced a generation of directors and is considered to be the father of the French New Wave” (Hill 16). Bazin’s theorisation of film was based on “the faith that the cinematic image could reveal the world in fact and spirit” (Hill 16). In Italian neorealism he saw a “revolution in film language” that led to a “regeneration of realism in storytelling” (Bazin *What Is Cinema I* 38, 39).

While putting a Bazinian label on contemporary Romanian cinema would be “simplistic and reductionist,” according to Doru Pop, “the legacy of neorealism is fundamental in understanding any New Wave cinema of the world” (*An Introduction* 52, 53). This thesis thus draws on a nuanced reading of Bazin’s legacy in order to demonstrate how and why Bazin’s ideas on realism can advance our understanding of New Romania cinema.

Bazin argues that on the most obvious, objective level, realism adopts a filming and editing style that avoids unnecessary editing, allowing filmmakers to unite storytelling and real time (Bazin *What Is Cinema I* 39). By presenting the action at the pace of real life, the audience is better able to identify with the characters because the real-time experience on film mirrors their own. In his praise of the Italian neorealists, Bazin said, “They never forget that the world *is*, quite simply, before it is something to be condemned” (Bazin *What Is Cinema 2*

21). The presentation of how the world *is*, without making any judgement, contributes to the realist aesthetic of New Romanian films. However, as Bazin posits, such an approach also allows for the “fundamental humanism” they offer to be savoured (*What Is Cinema 1* 21). One overriding theme of both Italian neorealism and New Romanian cinema is resistance against oppression and “the search for elementary humanity” in people “oppressed by political circumstances beyond their control” (Bazin *Neorealism* 19; Gundle 77, 78).

Persistent in Bazin’s writing on realism in cinema is the realist filmmaker’s ethical imperative to present the world as it exists in actuality (Bazin *Neorealism* 3, 19). To Bazin, the “aesthetic core” of film is “the shot, the unedited gaze of the camera on to the world before its lens” (Hill 16). Thus, the depth and length of the shot are the driving force behind film’s potential to present the world in “wholeness and continuity of time and space” (Hill 16). The lack of the filmmakers’ intervention in presenting the world also necessitated, for Bazin, the invisibility of the cinematic apparatus, as he said that in realist cinema “the *mise-en-scène* [should] . . . efface itself,” thus allowing for a clearer view of the world (“Wyler” 2). This is where we can see one of the biggest diversions of New Romanian cinema from Italian neorealism: unlike Italian neorealism, New Romanian cinema often draws attention to the apparatus, highlighting the mediated nature of representation.

Despite realism being closely related to the visible, realism is also located in the narrative, particularly in the relationship between events and their consequences. Bazin underscores the elliptical nature of cause and effect in Italian neorealism as a core characteristic of its language (Bazin *What Is Cinema 2* 35). Gilles Deleuze extends Bazin’s theory to state that Italian neorealism’s “dispersive, elliptical, errant or wavering” form demonstrates that “the real was no longer represented or reproduced, but aimed at” (1). Similarly, in New Romanian cinema, the “narratives [are] dominated by ambiguities and symbolic references” rather than commitment to narrative exposition (Doru Pop *An*

Introduction 95). Consistent with this characteristic, both cinemas often leave the narrative unresolved, which allows the audience a “freedom to decide how to understand what they saw on the screen” (Kuhn and Westwell 345).

Central to my thesis is that Bazin’s interpretation of realism is not reliant on “photographic realism” but, instead, on a “critical realism” which, in tune with a modernist turn, rejects the “formulaic or codified” nature of Hollywood cinema in favour of “narrative fragmentation, impressionistic depiction and dislocation” (Aitken *Realist* 54). This fragmentation can be seen in New Romanian cinema, as it presents events in a manner that “confound[s] a unified perspective” (Strausz 115). Rather than offering a solid, impermeable reality, New Romanian cinema tends to offer pieces of reality that need to be amalgamated into an interpretable form by the spectator.

The critical realism described by Bazin in relation to Italian neorealism is also evident in New Romanian cinema. The cinema of the Italian neorealist film, as described by Bazin, registers a natural location, in all its ugly, war-damaged decrepitude (Bazin *Neorealism* 20). Similarly, the New Romanian films are most often (but not exclusively), filmed on location, which Pop sees as a “critical artistic gesture” that also reflects “the need for realist representations of life” (“Grammar” 16).

Bazin describes the Italian realist filmmaker Roberto Rossellini as wielding his camera with “tact,” much like a sketch artist, working quickly to render a film in a deft “stroke” (Bazin *What Is Cinema* 2 32). Bazin refers to the sketch work as bringing a “dynamism” due to the movement of the director’s “hand,” and describes this process as resulting in “varying hesitations of the artist’s hand” (Bazin *What Is Cinema* 2 33). In a way echoing this assertion of Bazin’s, László Strausz describes the protagonists’ actions in New Romanian films as “hesitant,” as they arise from an inability to “make sense of the complex,

often impenetrable social realities they are faced with” (Strausz 2). Thus, we can interpret the New Romanian cinema’s hesitancy through Bazin’s interpretation of realist sketching, which neatly unites form and content to render a broad realist approach.

Bazin saw the Italian neorealist films as “a succession of fragments of imaged reality” where “the ordering of the images and their duration on the screen . . . [determine their] import” (Bazin *What Is Cinema* 2 31). Thus the story is in itself less important for Bazin than “the revelatory effect of the camera’s gaze” (Hill 16). Bazin describes this method of storytelling as a creation of a “personal universe which is defined by the nature of the facts reported” (Bazin *What Is Cinema* 2 31). According to Bazin, Italian neorealist films privilege “the ambiguity of reality” over “unity of meaning of the dramatic event” (Bazin *What Is Cinema* 1 37, 36). This suggests that reality cannot be fully rendered by film, and that there are some other aspects to realist film that are arrived at through interpretation at the point of reception. This is also true of New Romanian films, where ambiguity and the unresolved character of narratives loom large.

Bazin’s writings on film were heavily influenced by his religious beliefs (Aitken *Theory* 179). He stated that “cinema has always been interested in God,” and he even referred to film as “kind of a miracle (Bazin “Theology” 61). This allows me to relate Bazin’s writings to New Romanian cinema’s religious iconography and themes, which infuses the objects filmed with “extraphysical meaning,” which is a tendency that could work against traditional notions of realist cinema (Braudy 69). It is important to mention here that realism as theorised by Bazin is not compromised by the “incantory use of real objects” (Braudy 69). Instead, Bazin posits that “Catholicism does indeed show specific affinities with the cinema considered as a formidable iconography” even though he states that resulting films are sometimes religiously “insignificant” (Bazin “Theology” 65). In New Romanian cinema, religious motifs are mobilised as a form of sense-making by aligning the actions of the

characters with universal themes of morality or ethics without, however, resorting to preaching.

Comparing the two aspects of Bazinian writings on the objective and subjective traits of realism poses a conundrum for the film scholar. Bazin places his trust in the realism created by specific stylistic features; however, he also speaks of ethics and interpretative strategies required of some realist texts, which suggests a more modernist approach to the study of cinema. My position is that Bazin recognises that cinema has the potential to expose the real on film but he also understands the inherent insufficiency of the medium. Therefore, he privileges not photographic verisimilitude which can convey reality but film's capacity to search and articulate truth. Following Bazin, this thesis recognises that realism resides not only within the mimetic film universe, but within the relationship between the film and the audience's ability to perceive the truth for themselves.

Siegfried Kracauer: Film's relationship to physical reality

Siegfried Kracauer was a noted German writer, social and cultural theorist and philosopher who was associated with the Frankfurt School before emigrating to America and writing extensively on many subjects including film. In his book *Theory of Film*, Kracauer describes film as a medium that is "uniquely equipped to record and reveal physical reality and, hence, gravitates toward it" (Kracauer 28). Film's affinity with reality is a key assumption of Kracauer's theory, and one of the ways this is expressed is when films are based on actual events. Kracauer's definition of the "found story" is "all stories found in the material of actual physical reality" (Kracauer 245). In *The Theory of Film*, Kracauer contends that films based on true events "are inseparable from films animated by documentary intentions" because they tend "to render incidents typical of the world around us" (Kracauer 245). The raw material of life is essentially present when the truth is told, and film's ability to "render

incidents typical of the world around us” is best expressed when “dramatized actuality” is employed within the realist film (Kracauer 245, 249). Previously, the found story had also been used in Italian neorealism (for example, *Stromboli*), and has been recognised as contributing to that canon’s “mimetic realism” (Bayman 55). Half a century later, directors of New Romanian films will take an item brought to light in newspapers or from their own experience and create a film narrative around that story.

The slow pace of Romanian film is a recognisable component of its mode of production, which gives the viewer an opportunity to absorb filmic events. The effect can be understood through Kracauer’s theory of realism, where he describes long-held shots as allowing the audience to appreciate the images in all their “allusiveness, which enables them to yield all their psychological correspondences” (Kracauer 71). Kracauer’s understanding of realism contends that the end result of this style of filming not only records the world but also represents the photographer’s (or cinematographer’s) “attempt to assimilate and decipher” what he records (Kracauer 20). Similarly, in New Romanian cinema, spectatorship involves absorption, assimilation and recodifying, as Romania’s history is reconstituted by both the filmmaker and the audience, such as in *12:08 East of Bucharest*.

Miriam Bratu Hansen contends that Kracauer identifies film and photography as “crucial site[s]” in the “go-for-broke game of history” in the Weimar Republic (Hansen *Cinema and Experience* 256). I would argue that a similar critical battle over the meaning and ownership of historical events is also evident in New Romanian cinema. By rendering events open to interpretation, the directors are taking a stand against politically partisan historical myth-making (Strausz 120). They also create a cinematic language that advances the socially progressive narratives that they are telling. In this way, what Kracauer calls the “‘right’ balance between the realistic tendency and the formative tendency” is achieved (Kracauer 38).

Addressing the relationship between historical events and material surroundings, Kracauer states that “when history is made in the streets, the streets tend to move onto the screen” (Kracauer 98). For Kracauer, “fortuitousness is an important characteristic of photography and film” and that fortuitousness is “most strikingly demonstrated by its unwavering susceptibility to the ‘street’” (Kracauer 62). This is because, as Kracauer says, the street is the location where “the accidental prevails over the providential” (Kracauer 62). New Romanian Cinema, which deals with the fall of communism in Romania and its consequences, locates much of the action on the streets of Romanian cities and towns, and therefore confirms Kracauer’s insights.

Kracauer’s theory opens up the concept of realism to encompass “the bodily encounter with the image as it undergoes transformation” (Harbord 1). Kracauer’s conceptualisation of cinematic realism is not a call for the maintenance of the integrity of the index/referent relationship, but is encompassed by a recognition of the transformative potential of cinema to shatter “the integrity of individual identity” while bringing the viewer into a closer relationship to psychological reality (Hansen *Cinema and Experience* 262). This is of particular relevance to New Romanian cinema, as the theme of personal and societal transformation runs through many of the films in the canon. Kracauer says that “photographs do not just copy nature but metamorphose it,” and this is certainly also true of film (15). According to Hansen, Kracauer sees film’s ability to fragment and reify reality as central to its realist potential (Hansen *Cinema and Experience* 263). Of particular significance to New Romanian Cinema is how social order and political life have been reified in the wake of Romania’s 1989 Revolution and the government’s failure to create a fully participatory democratic government (Bardan “Aftereffects of 1989” 147). The operation of this kind of cinema is interpretative, even though it positions the spectator as an objective observer of what appears to be unstaged reality. For Kracauer, unstaged reality is dependent on the

photographer or cinematographer absorbing his environment “with all his senses strained and his whole being participating in the process” (Kracauer 15). This means that film must present action as close to lived reality as possible, but the director must also be aware of what outcomes, either expected or contingent, result from the filming process. It is, however, the spectator’s responsibility to make sense of the scenes drawing on their own interpretative capacity.

New Romanian cinema’s refusal to make judgements or interpret the actions of its characters involves a decision to eschew the form of cinema that exists only for didactic or entertainment purposes, satisfying what Kracauer described as the audience’s “leanings and longings” (Kracauer 163). Instead, by forcing the spectator into an experience of reality, and by asking them to participate in the making of meaning, New Romanian Cinema offers a full realisation of Kracauer’s conception of how film can attain harmony between its “realistic tendency” and “formative tendency” (Kracauer 38). By doing so, directors of this cinema bring their audience into a confrontation with “what is commonly drowned in inner agitation” (Kracauer 56, 57); that is, uncomfortable truths that they have repressed or transfigured.

Hansen notes that Kracauer favours cinema that valorises “chance, improvisation, the in-between, and provisional” (Hansen *Cinema and Experience* 277). While some critics contend that “fatality is indeed at the core of the Romanian psyche,” New Romanian cinema offers an interpretation of fatality that belies its inevitability by instead “asking questions more than answering them,” it gives power back to the people to reconfigure their past and imagine a different future (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 5, 141). In this way, these films correspond to Kracauer’s contention that by representing the world as endless, the filmmaker offers “hope that, if things could be this way or another, different configurations of reality might be possible or, rather, not impossible” (Hansen *Cinema and Experience* 277).

Finally, utilised in this thesis is a section of *Theory of Film* that has received little scholarly attention: how language can give access to material reality. Kracauer warns against speech being the dominant feature of film, and only approves when the dialogue is “de-emphasized in favour of the visuals” (Kracauer 264). However, he makes an exception where the meaning of speech is in its “material qualities” (Kracauer 109). This is particularly relevant for New Romanian film because dialogue is sparse and frequently the content is inconsequential. Doru Pop argues that New Romanian cinema consists of “visual narratives” as opposed to narratives that are driven by dialogue (*An Introduction* 17). Frequently *what* is said is less important than whose interpretation of the words is given precedence. Similarly, Kracauer states that when “alienated voices ... have been stripped of all the connotations and meanings normally overlaying their given nature” they are experienced “for the first time in a relatively pure state” (Kracauer 109). Therefore, he states that “words presented this way lie in the same dimension as the visible phenomena which the motion picture camera captures,” and therefore “affect the moviegoer through their physical qualities” (Kracauer 109).

Applying this aspect of Kracauer’s theory to New Romanian film exposes how dialogue can provide more than narrative exegesis or character motivation but give access to material reality. Kracauer contends that using speech to expose its “material qualities” gives it the power to manifest nature in a manner not available in other art forms (Kracauer 109). This thesis demonstrates how Kracauer’s theory, when applied to New Romanian cinema, makes a useful and powerful case for the role of language in accessing material reality.

Lúcia Nagib: the ethics of realism in cinema

Originally from Brazil but now living and working in Britain, renown film scholar Lúcia Nagib has written widely on world cinema, however her work spans many areas of scholarly

interest, including intermediality, realism and Japanese cinema. Lúcia Nagib's theorisation of realism addresses questions of space and time continuity, but also questions belonging and identity. She is particularly interested in how the body can be inscribed in its environment and often focuses on world cinema that depicts native peoples enacting events in their natural environment. For instance, Nagib's realist position requires the actor to enact the physical event and that the event be captured in its temporal completeness (*Ethics* 64). By presenting the actor as authentically performing an event in the landscape, Nagib contends that the camera uncovers the material existence of the characters, and that this reinforces "truth," which she refers to as "revelatory realism" (Nagib *Ethics* 67, 51). The shock that is referred to by Kracauer is also addressed in Nagib's theory, but the latter refers specifically to the shock of pain being a sign of realism, because discomfort is more closely associated with the real (Nagib *Ethics* 71).

Nagib's work is relevant here because we can analyse the material and psychological reality of the characters of New Romanian cinema through the way they move in their environments. The environments of New Romanian cinema are not so much naturally harsh, as in the films addressed by Nagib, but are made harsh by the failure of men. Nagib's work will be invaluable for analysing the importance of location and the body in New Romanian cinema, and particularly how the filmmakers bring a "realist attitude" while creating a "distinct communist structure of feeling" in this cinematic canon (Nagib *Ethics* 50; Robé 1). Nagib's points are relevant to the physical experience of extended time and discomfort that often feature in New Romanian cinema where "a sense of duration is pronounced" (Nagib *Ethics* 27).

The way the characters in New Romanian cinema inhabit their space, represents what Nagib calls "presentification" (Nagib *Ethics* 41). As they move around decrepit urban spaces, their bodies mimic the state of decay of the surrounding landscape. I propose that "the actor's

physical link to real locations,” as described by Nagib, where their physical bodies display a natural affinity with the environment, contributes to the realist effect in these films by producing “an immediate inscription of the body into the environment” (*Ethics* 45). Thus, while characters wander around their urban communities in repetitive ways, they become “intertwined with ... [the] environment (Robé 13).

The body’s inscription in the environment is also made evident where actors are chosen for their particular relation to the location of the action. This is evident in *Beyond the Hills*, for example, as the film focuses on the relationship between the physical and the spiritual, which resonates with Nagib’s emphasis on “the actors’ physical link to real locations” (*Ethics* 45). Nagib’s realist ideas can be extended to the environment in New Romanian films, where physical and mental defeat is often imprinted on the body of the actor.

While the Bazinian concept of cinematic realism assumes an objective attitude to the subject, Nagib posits that the camera in realist films acts as an accomplice in order to elicit “spontaneous sympathy” in the audience (*Ethics* 67). Nagib contends that this is achieved through “tactilism,” a term she uses to explain the feeling elicited in the audience where they feel a physical affinity with the actor (*Ethics* 67).³ When describing the documentary approach of François Truffaut in *400 Blows* (*Les Quatre Cents Coups*, 1959), Nagib states that it manages to uncover “the material existence of characters and objects, in such a way as to reinforce the truth of the fable” (*Ethics* 67). The idea of tactilism can be extended to New Romanian cinema, for example, in the frequent depiction of characters eating, drinking, preparing food and doing myriad other mundane tasks in a measured, meticulous way.

³ An example of this occurs in *400 Blows* when the camera is placed within the rotor machine at the fairground, thus giving the audience a feeling of the centrifugal forces experienced by the characters when taking the ride, Nagib *Ethics* 67.

Additionally, this “desire to uncover the truth of the situation” through the eating of food reveals New Romanian cinema’s indebtedness to Italian neorealism, and in particular, the film *Ossessione* (Visconti 1943), where the scene of Giovanna eating her spaghetti became emblematic for neorealism’s approach to interrogating physical reality (Bondanella 29; Wood 113). Another example occurs in *The Bicycle Thieves* (*Ladri di biciclette*, de Sica 1950), where the father and son visit a trattoria to eat a simple meal while better-heeled people gorge on far more elaborate food.

Another aspect of Nagib’s *Ethics of Realism* is how attention given to the filming apparatus can contribute to the realist effect. For instance, where the “triangular disposition of the characters” is used, it can “blur any clear sense of opposition” (Nagib *Ethics* 62). Instead, by placing characters on the same plane, protagonists are presented not as opponents but as equal members of society, thus creating a realist effect. I argue that by democratising how characters appear in the frame, New Romanian filmmakers are destabilising the hierarchical constructs of society and problematising power relations between people. Nagib’s work is therefore useful in understanding how this technique enhances the realism of these films.

Intermediality

In this thesis I argue that New Romanian cinema is inherently realist; however, it also includes characteristics that might be seen as conflicting with traditional understandings of realist cinema, one of which is intermediality. As acknowledged by Valerie Robillard, intermediality carries with it not only a “plethora of perspectives” but also “demonstrates the slipperiness of the term” (150). A closely related term, intertextuality, was first developed by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s as an extension of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism (Stam

Film Theory 155). For Kristeva, the meaning of a text is not transferred directly from the text to the reader but is mediated through other texts already experienced by the reader. In literary theory it is understood that

any work is inevitably shot through with external references, quotations, and influences ... because the reading or reception of a text is always informed by all the other texts and readings that the reader brings to it. (Kuhn and Westwell 231)

Brigitte Peucker suggests that a similar dynamic is also relevant to cinema, where film “as a latecomer among the arts ... alludes to, absorbs, and undermines the language of the other arts in order to create its own idiom” (Peucker 20). While the concept of intertextuality has been productively used in relation to film for many years (for example, Mikhail B. Ĭampol’skii’s magisterial *The Memory of Tiresias*, which was published in 1998), over the last decade another concept – intermediality – started to proliferate in cinema studies. In this context, Irina O. Rajewsky highlights the “proliferation of heterogenous conceptions of intermediality and heterogenous ways in which the term is used” (45). In this thesis, I follow the influential work of Ágnes Pethő, who uses the term “intermediality” to signify instances in film when it references other media (*In-Between* 1). Pethő notes that studies of intermediality have struggled to find the same acceptance in the academy as did literary intermedial studies (“Intermediality” 42). The shift to intermediality in film scholarship is timely, however, as highlighted by Nagib, who argues that “intermedial studies has never been more relevant than today, in the post-cinema era. Convergence and remediation are all around us” (Pethő “Interview with Lúcia Nagib” 219).

While intermediality might appear to go against realist cinema’s aspirations towards veracity, both Bazin and Nagib demonstrate that intermediality and realism are not only compatible but, in fact, can reinforce each other. Nagib states, “Cinema, whose nature as a

meeting point of all other arts is universally recognized, is particularly prone to the celebration of hybridity” (“Impurity” 21). In addition to this, according to Jennifer Friedlander, reality cannot be claimed purely by capturing a “profilmic event,” because “the execution of indexical fidelity is not sufficient for guaranteeing a film’s truth status” (49). Instead, Friedlander proposes that another intervention is needed that “beckons the real” (49). This beckoning is necessary because, as stated by Nagib, cinema cannot exist as a “self-sufficient medium” (“Impurity” 23). This means that film ideally invites other media into the filmic space in order to fill the gaps that cinema alone cannot hope to occupy.

One such cinematic gap is contextual. The audience cannot know what has happened prior the event they witness on screen and can therefore feel they are plunged into a filmic world without adequate context. Mikhail Īampol’skiĭ states that “cinema seeks reality by increasing its textual links to culture” (83). Following Īampol’skiĭ, I propose that “by increasing its textual links to culture” (83), New Romanian cinema allows the audience to access cultural memory, history and artistic experience that is not available through film narrative alone. The use of intermediality in New Romanian film aids in the meaning-making process, and also contributes to narrative exegesis, but in a subtle way,

The storytelling of New Romanian cinema can be seen as a challenge to the classical narrative system because it is “founded on de-centred plots, having indirect and psychological motivation and ‘parametric’ forms of narration” (Doru Pop “Grammar” 35).⁴ Pethő contends that “there is nothing surprising in the fact that, in times of dictatorship and a general ban on individual and artistic freedom, a work of art deploys techniques that raise the concrete elements of the story into the realm of the symbolic” (Pethő *In-Between* 395). This is evident in the manner that Porumboiu deals with his characters in *12:08 East of Bucharest*,

⁴ Parametric narration as described by David Bordwell is where “the film’s stylistic system creates patterns distinct from the demands of the syuzhet [plot] system” (Bordwell 275).

placing them as if in a holy trinity. Thus, the use of symbolism in New Romanian cinema is both representative of a cultural legacy from traditional forms of Romanian storytelling as well as a response to a repressive political environment. The intermedial components of New Romanian cinema are frequently covert – rather than featuring a painting or a sculpture, these films often use oblique verbal references such as wordplays in a manner similar to Aesopian speech that add layers of cultural meaning to enrich the text.

Ágnes Pethő defines three different but related paradigms for approaching intermedial studies. These are crossing media borders, in-betweenness, and as a connection point between media and reality (Pethő *In-Between* 40). The latter approach is favoured in the work of Lúcia Nagib, who champions intermediality as a bridge to reality, rather than a working against realism in cinema (*Realist as World Cinema* 173).

While Nagib makes a strong case that reality can be accessed through intermediality, this thesis recognises an inherent tension *is* created when film incorporates the intermedial. This is because realism in film is predicated on representing the world as it is and intermediality deliberately complicates the visual field by puncturing its surface with something other than itself. However, this thesis follows Nagib's premise that the use of symbolism and references to other artforms activates a certain kind of spectatorship that allows the audience access to lived experience that would be inaccessible otherwise (*Realist as World Cinema* 33). Thus, the relationship between realism and intermediality is a dynamic one that can serve to enhance realism by opening access to reality or compete against realism by offering a more esoteric reading of a film through what Pethő describes as “radical heterogeneity” (*In-Between* 45).

Nagib contends that intermediality challenges the borders of cinematic specificity but, as it does so, it “establishes new relations between reality and appearance” (“Impurity” 37).

While Pethő states that intermediality is “a system or a network of interrelations ... a system of media convergence and transformation” (Pethő “Intermediality” 56), Nagib goes further to propose that the resulting texts have not absorbed other media but have created dissensus within the text (“Impurity” 30). The resulting tension “multiplies the meanings of the referent” (“Impurity” 31), even as it represents a point of crisis. In Nagib’s more recent work on intermediality, she refers to the crisis as “the fleeting moment where both film and life merge before becoming themselves again” (*Realist as World Cinema* 175). Nagib demonstrates how intermediality and realism of world cinema can be reconciled.

Intermediality also plays a crucial role in how New Romanian cinema reconfigures realism through its modernist and postmodernist perspective. The intermedial film can be seen as “a reflexive experience” that calls for the spectator to “oscillate... perception between media and form” (Pethő “Intermediality” 57). Thus, while adding layers to meaning, the intermedial also fosters a self-reflexive attitude, which is arguably the biggest departure of New Romanian cinema from earlier forms of cinematic realism.

Modernism

As a cultural form, cinema is defined by the technological developments of the modern age (Stelmach 5). However, it is also deeply implicated in issues of societal, political and personal transformation that has marked the transition to modernity. Cinema is therefore a product of the modern age and also an active participant in how modernity has shaped the world. Cinematic modernism began in the 1920s, and originally it mimicked artistic movements outside of cinema. In its earliest form, modernist cinema came to be “concentrated mainly on the technical aspects of the medium as a foundation of its aesthetic specificity” (Kovács 18). Thus, moving images were activated as a means to access reality

while backgrounding narrative exegesis. There were, however, different permutations of early cinematic modernity, for instance, French Impressionism, that effaced plot and chronological logic in favour of impressionist visual poeticism and German Expressionism, which used abstract visual form but still relied on narrative-based plots (Kovács 19).

Broadening the terms of analysis, Miriam Hansen associates modernism with “mass production, mass consumption” which necessarily includes mainstream cinema within its scope (Hansen “Mass Production” 242). Reflecting on this, James Donald argues that “the modernism of cinema, as well as its modernity, may be found just as much in the vernacular experience of cinema as in supposedly modernist films” (Donald 11). Therefore, modernism and realism in cinema can coexist, although not always comfortably.

The later permutation of modernist cinema gave birth to what is often defined in academic terms as “modernist film” which came of age during the 1960s and ‘70s through the work of such key directors as Michelangelo Antonioni, Jean-Luc Godard and Alain Resnais (Hill 21). This “second wave” of modernism in cinema, however, inherited a number of stylistic and philosophical concerns from its earlier predecessor. These include a broad mobilisation of intertextuality, the exploration of abstraction and a heightened interest in the mental states of characters (Kovács 19-20). Also shared by both the foundational modernist cinematic texts and the later form is the experimentation with the medium and a drive to exploit the possibilities of the cinematic art (Stelmach 3).

Taking stock of modernist cinema’s definitions, Susan Hayward concludes: “It questions *how* it represents and *what* it represents. Modernist cinema turns the gaze into a critical weapon, turns the camera as an instrument of surveillance upon itself, starting with fragmentation, destruction or **deconstruction** even of classical **narrative structures**” (Hayward 245). Speaking of the relationship between modernism and realism, András

Kovács warns that while “a more realistic film form” did arise during the “transition to modern art cinema ... modernism proper is not to be identified with this realism” (Kovács 168). Departing from Kovács’ assertion, this thesis asks to what extent New Romanian filmmakers adopt modernist gestures within their films and how those gestures affect the reading of these films as realist.

Described by Christina Stojanova as “existentialist realism,” New Romanian cinema absorbs the modernist self-reflexive approach to depicting the world (Stojanova “Introduction” 8). Consistent with a key modernist attitude, New Romanian filmmakers “suppress moral judgements” while leading the spectator to “self-knowledge” (Stojanova “Introduction” 10). Furthermore, New Romanian cinema follows the second wave of cinematic modernism, which engaged in “aesthetic self-criticism” (Donald 4). This is evident in its attention to the form: New Romanian cinema is highly self-conscious and often displays medium-subjectivity (Stelmach 3). The latter is evident in the frequent references to media technologies, including cinematic apparatuses and television, and the process of production of the moving image.

Furthermore, New Romanian cinema is characterised by the tension between the drive to reflect reality and the abstraction of reality, a strong modernist impulse. New Romanian films often feature “a systematic reduction of expressive elements” which is consistent with understandings of cinematic modernism (Nasta “Beyond Modernity” 27). Minimalist cinema is, according to Kovács, “the strongest and most influential trend of modern cinema” (140). Minimalism is a term often associated with films from the New Romanian canon. In her discussion of minimalism in New Romanian cinema, Irina Trocan quotes Kovács’ description of minimalist cinema as a “reduction of redundancy” (Trocan 38). The minimalism inherent in New Romanian cinema can be seen as consistent with arthouse films in general, which

seek to “make [spectators] ... fully conscious of the circumstances of the screening and their film-viewing awareness” (Trocan 38).

This minimalism is evident first and foremost at the narrative level. New Romanian films often cover a short period of time, for instance a 24-hour period, punctuated by ellipses. Therefore, New Romanian films appear as episodic and somewhat fragmented. These films also often incorporate *temps mort* (dead time). Described by Kovács as “a time sequence in the protagonist’s life, where nothing happens” (158), *temps mort* is a technical device frequently employed by modernist film director Michelangelo Antonioni, who would distance the camera from important events included within the diegesis or omit them all together (Kovács 158). In a similar vein, certain New Romanian films use ellipses to slow or halt the action of the narrative, which gives the impression of “self-conscious prolongations of actions” that David Bordwell describes as “dilations” (Bordwell 83). Doru Pop proposes that halting the action in this way encourages “internal resolution and deconstructing dynamics for emotions and psychological build-up of tension, without dynamic interventions” (“Grammar” 35-36).

Key to defining the grammar of New Romanian cinema is identifying where its inherent realism is inflected by modernist or postmodernist gestures. This thesis demonstrates where these gestures can be identified and unpacks their significance for the development of this realist canon. In addition to the influence of the modern on New Romanian cinema, these films frequently also adopt a postmodern attitude, which will be discussed next.

Postmodernism

The term postmodern refers to the post-industrial age, characterised by globalised capitalism and the intrusion of the commodity form into every aspect of culture. It is seen as a response

to the modernist era and questions assumptions about progress, truth, rationality and order (Kuhn and Westwell 323). In the opening paragraph of his book *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson explains that the postmodern condition can be best grasped as “an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place” (*Cultural Logic* ix). According to Jameson, this has resulted in the necessity to rethink ideological standpoints and to coordinate “new forms of practice and social and mental habits” to replace those that have been discarded from modernism (*Cultural Logic* xiv). Despite the fact that there is a “confluence of purported endings of communism, modernity, the twentieth century – even the millennium” which suggest postmodernism represents a specific historical moment, there is little agreement between scholars about whether postmodernism “constitutes a rebellion or extension of modernity” (Meštrović 2).

However, the question of whether postmodernism is a continuation of modernism or a distinctly different phase characterised by its own philosophical zeitgeist and aesthetics is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, this study makes a case that some of the postmodern attitudes bear significantly on the New Romanian cinematic output, and the cause of this can be attributed to the links between the post-communist condition and postmodernism. If traditionally postmodernism is tied to the questioning of assumptions such as progress, truth, rationality and order, in the post-communist context, such questioning has a particular poignancy and distinctive inflections (Epstein 54). As Julia Vassilieva argues, the period of communist dominance in Eastern Europe nearly exhausted “the categories of truth, reality, individuality, authorship, time and history” (1). If postmodern culture flattens hierarchies of art, then communist politics hollowed out ideology. These joint dynamics lead to equal value assigned to the object as its representation or simulacra, and in some cases, the

“representation of the thing replacing the thing” (Friedberg 178). As a result, the concept of reality becomes a particularly shaky one in the post-communist, postmodern context.

Subsequently, in the Eastern European post-communist world, truth becomes continuously deferred, while the questioning of whether establishing of ideological, historical and social truth is possible at all intensifies. Jameson states that in a “society bereft of all historicity... the past as “referent” finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts” (*Cultural Logic* 18). The concept of reality, therefore, loses its meaning as it remains continuously out of reach. While these features of an Eastern European postmodern mindset would seemingly contradict the realist aspirations of New Romanian cinema, this thesis demonstrates that this development has absorbed several key postmodern attitudes, which are essential for the understanding of both thematic and stylistic specificity of the movement.

Nowhere is this tendency more obvious than in how New Romanian cinema approaches history. The postmodern attitude tends to flatten history and erases historical difference, obscuring the meaning of historical events and activating the possibility of several alternative interpretations of what happened (Jameson *Cultural Logic* 325). This attitude can be identified in a number of New Romanian films (Strausz 2). In these films, the foundation event of the new era of Romanian history – the 1989 Revolution that overthrew Nicolae Ceaușescu’s regime – serves as a point of departure, a moment to go back to over and over again in order to understand both the potential of the Romanian Revolution and its thwarted promises. *12:08 East of Bucharest* dramatises this search most directly by focusing its thematic concern on the establishment of what actually happened during the Revolution, while simultaneously demonstrating that such facts cannot be established with any degree of certainty or precision, which feeds into problems of the meaning of this event in the post-communist period.

An important antecedent for this attitude can be seen in the documentary *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu* (*Autobiografia lui Nicolae Ceaușescu*, Ujică et al., 2013), see Figure 1. During the 1989 Revolution, dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena, fled by helicopter from the Palace of the People, only to be captured later and brought to trial. Depicted in the footage is how, after a short interrogation and being sentenced to immediate death, the couple were taken to a courtyard with their hands tied behind their backs to be executed by firing squad. What can be seen and heard in the documentary is gunfire and the accompanying smoke gradually being replaced by the bloodied and lifeless corpses of Elena and Nicolae lying open-eyed and contorted on the bare ground. That footage, which was initially broadcast on television shortly after the Revolution, appears to show the execution of the dictator and his wife; however, it is unlikely that the camera was operating when the shots rang out and the murderous moment was later re-enacted for the sake of recording it for posterity (“Execution Faked”). This re-enactment has become emblematic of the historical moment in Romanian history, in a postmodern space where even historical images contain ambiguities that bring “old metaphysical problems related to the original, the legitimacy and the identity” to the fore (Toader 62).



Figure 1. The execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, which was possibly a re-enactment, screen grab from *Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu* (Ujică et al.).

Florin Toader suggests that the visual media's possibility of facilitating the "identification of the viewer with the images on the screen" and the adoption of alternative realities is a condition of postmodernity (62). The seminal event recreated and presented as the simulacrum of the real event, shown on television as evidence of judicial expediency, results in "changing completely the concept of reality" (Toader 62). The event and its recreation is an example of how "the simulacrum became the emblematic figure of postmodern culture" (Toader 62). I propose that the broadcast is a significant postmodern moment in Romanian history and New Romanian cinema, which is consistently invested in probing the events of 1989, must necessarily be influenced by this unforgettable, yet possibly contrived, historical moment. John Hill, when describing the postmodern condition, states that "media images and signs, are increasingly identified as a key, if not *the* key, reality for the modern citizen" (98). This suggests that in the postmodern context, whether the image is

a faithful representation of truth is immaterial for the modern citizen, because what they see on screen, is their “primary reality” (Hill 98).

The knowability of truth is a condition of postmodernity. In the words of Jean-François Lyotard, “Knowledge ... is a question of competence that goes beyond the simple determination and application of the criterion of truth” (18). New Romanian cinema carries over a questioning of the knowability of truth into the area of its formal strategies. The postmodern probing of the nature of truth and historical certitude is enacted on screen through the denial of access to the complete picture of the worlds depicted in the films, which thwarts the spectator’s assumption that “they have everything dramatically relevant under observation” (Trocan 41). Frequently, the spectator is denied complete access to the action or the protagonists, obscuring the causal agents. This is often achieved through the use of deliberate framing, highlighting the mediation inherent in any moving image, and raising the “question of (un)presentability” (Nicholls 7), or indeed assumptions about the knowability of truth.

Another aspect of postmodernism that is relevant to New Romanian cinema is its ironic attitudes to character and plot. Parodic representations in the postmodern context are activated to “challenge the external boundaries of cinema,” especially “to question ... the role played by ideology in shaping the subject and historical knowledge” (Toader 61). New Romanian cinema addresses political failures without itself defending an ideological position, creating a critical space without taking an ideological standpoint. The post-communist condition that seeks an alternative ideology to replace those values which were discarded when Ceaușescu fled has led to a cinema that trains a careful eye on the fissures exposed between rhetoric and lived experience. Overall, reality is not “reconstructed according to ideological stances” (Kovács 357), but is left open ended and ambiguous to allow for the spectator to find their own truth within the text.

Additionally, postmodernism marks a return to cultural specificity, in what Mikhail Epstein describes as increased “attention on the ethnic, social, gender, and age identification of individuals, who are primarily judged as representatives of particular groups and minorities” (59). Films of the New Romanian cinema are considered consistent with the Romanian sensibility and are also emblematic of the postmodern. Dominique Nasta states that “black humour, spontaneity and ironic wit” is “at the core of the Romanian psyche” (*Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 5). Therefore, it seems natural that Romanian cinema includes the same sense of the absurd. While accepting that irony is the mainstay of Romanian humour, the centrality of its use in postmodernist cinema suggests that it is activated in New Romanian cinema in new ways that contend with the “frictions between the subjective and the objective ... through the ambiguity of irony and ironic modes” (Stojanova “Introduction” 9).

The emphasis on “the primacy and uniqueness of language” is an important consideration of the postmodern (Jameson “Temporality” 706). Language, in its semantic and pragmatic aspects, represents a frequent subject matter in New Romanian films. While the canon itself is described as “minimalist” (Lutas 107), the indeterminacy of the spoken word and language’s use as a metaphor for the indeterminacy of knowledge, law and history is a consistent theme. Nasta describes the soundscapes of New Romanian films as focused on “the importance of the extremely well crafted, often tragi-comic or absurdist dialogues ... with multiple national and regional subtexts” which ultimately outdo “the purely mimetic ... potential of the visuals” (Nasta “Beyond Modernity” 33). Going further, slippery meanings of the spoken word could be seen as consistent with postmodern “pluralism” (Hayward 284). This is explicitly explored in Corneliu Porumboiu’s *Police, Adjective*, in which the title itself foregrounds the importance of language, a concern which is also of interest in several other

films in the New Romanian canon, drawing attention to the difficulty in fixing an ultimate meaning to words in a distinctly postmodern gesture.

The intermediality of New Romanian cinema often has a distinctly postmodern inflection. This is where intermedial references take a self-conscious approach or take the form of pastiche (Hill 101). This can be seen in certain New Romanian films where other art forms are either referred to in some way or explicitly included but the references are emptied of meaning and exists only for parodic purposes.⁵ It is important to note that intermediality in New Romanian cinema is not always a postmodern position, as often the meaning associated with the included “other” still carries the weight of the inherent meaning.

This thesis contends that New Romanian cinema is neither a modernist or postmodernist cinematic canon, yet it frequently uses devices from modernist or postmodernist traditions. Cristian Mungiu once replied to an interviewer who asked him about the meaning of an item in the mise-en-scène of *Beyond the Hills* that “nothing signifies anything” (Filimon and Mungiu 22). While this comment may be that of a director who is tired of explaining every artistic choice he makes while filming, it could be taken to mean that he is at least partly influenced by postmodernism and its eschewing of ideology in favour of surface superficiality. I contend that after the fall of communism, Romanians struggled with abandoning old beliefs and placing their trust in new ones, especially where their hope in the capitalist dream has been constantly deferred. Therefore, the postmodern attitudes often taken in New Romanian cinema are as much a part of the post-communist condition of a country still dealing with the 1989 Revolution as they are a part of the post-industrial, late-capitalist age. Importantly, however, is that this cinema remains fundamentally realist but under new modes of production and with the inclusion of attitudes appropriate for its context.

⁵ This is seen in *12:08 East of Bucharest*, where references outside of the film are parodic.

Case studies

This thesis examines eight films from the New Romanian cinematic canon. The films chosen for this study were selected for how they demonstrate different aspects of New Romanian cinema. *Stuff and Dough* is considered the first film of the canon and it represents a template that other filmmakers followed while also demonstrating how realist films can adopt genre tropes and still stay faithful to realist aims. *California Dreamin'* was made several years later and also adopts the road trope while addressing a different thematic concern. Both these films are utilised to demonstrate how narrative is constructed in New Romanian cinema and how form and plot are united to pose questions about the past and future of Romanian society.

12:08 East of Bucharest was chosen as an example of how New Romanian cinema addresses the past through a postmodern lens. Using wry humour and questioning personal recollections, this film draws attention to the mediation of televisual and cinematic depictions of events and exposes the cinematic apparatus. *The Legend of the Party Photographer* draws attention to the questionable veracity of photographs and television by constantly depicting both on the screen. These two films represent two different approaches to historical enquiry; however, both focus on mediated technology.

One of the most critically acclaimed of all of the films in the canon, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, has been chosen as an exemplar for films that employ intermediality to infer meaning. Another film by Cristian Mungiu, *Beyond the Hills*, is included because of its use of iconography and speech. Both films offer extra information to the audience thus creating multiple opportunities to explore alternate meanings for the critical audience.

The three films explored in Chapter 5 were chosen because of the manner in which language was mobilised. *Police, Adjective* is notable for its attention to words and how they can be manipulated. Likewise, *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* uses speech as a conduit to

material reality in a unique and interesting manner. Lastly, *Beyond the Hills* activates language to infer multiple meanings, both in a religious sense, as a means of power and manipulation. These three films are essential texts for understanding diverse ways that speech can be used to infer meanings beyond the plot. The following section describes each of the films examined in this thesis.

Stuff and Dough: where corruption proves fatal

Considered the first film of New Romanian cinema, *Stuff and Dough* attracted international attention for its director Cristi Puiu and stands as a reflection on “the obstacles and dangers his own generation faced when pursuing otherwise unspectacular dreams” (Filimon *Puiu* 39). Filmed in a documentary style and featuring naturalistic dialogue, *Stuff and Dough*’s narrative follows a trip undertaken by three young adults to deliver a package of illegal goods from their home in Constanța to central Bucharest. Despite being instructed by the orchestrator of the scheme, Marius Ivanov (Răzvan Vasilescu), to complete the trip alone, Ovidiu (Alex Papadopol) asks his friend Vali (Dragoș Bucur) to accompany him, and the latter also brings his new girlfriend, Betty (Ioana Flora).

Stuff and Dough, sometimes referred to as a “gangster thriller” is notable for being the first appearance in film of Dragoș Bucur, who has since become “one of the major Romanian actors working today” (Porton and Porumboiu 28). Also appearing in the film in the role of Vali’s mother, Caty, is Luminița Gheorghiu, who is described by Nasta as “Romania’s shining star” and who starred in many films in the New Romanian canon, including several discussed in this thesis (Nasta “Beyond Modernity” 35). While not based on real events, the film was inspired by Puiu’s brother-in-law, who died in a car crash in 1998 while attempting to expand his own small business (Filimon *Puiu* 42). The film hits a slightly

nostalgic note, given its structure as a road film, and also due to the similarities between it and Lucian Pintilie's *The Reenactment* (1968).⁶ The age of the protagonists and their naivete, coupled with their tacit agreement with doubtful authority figures without recognising the possible disastrous consequences, creates strong parallels with the earlier film.

Filmed in long takes and structured in near real time, the characters' experiences seem episodic in nature due to the stop-start rhythm of the editing and a film style that also adopts "frugal yet expressive camera-work" (Filimon "Beyond" 31). Coupled with almost no dialogue, this requires the audience to connect the narrative threads themselves. The trip is punctuated by two terrifying moments where graphic violence breaks the trip's monotony. The first violent episode occurs 30 minutes into the film, which up until now has been concerned with observing "the smallest, most banal details of human behaviour" (Scott "A New Wave" 30), when the van's occupants become the victims of what seems like a random assault by two men in a red car. The second episode occurs towards the end of the journey and is no less terrifying, showing the men in the red car killed in a violent attack. While the three friends' journey is eventually complete, in common with *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, "a lingering, haunting sense of inconclusiveness remains" (Scott "A New Wave" 30).

Stuff and Dough allows a glimpse into the lives of "disenfranchised young people" while adhering roughly to the road film trope (Filimon *Puiu* 46). The three young people are caught in the shifting sands of social and political upheaval, where ethics and morals are replaced by money and contingency. Filimon describes *Stuff and Dough* as an example of how New Romanian cinema shows "the rise and disillusionment of the precariat in a postnational, postpolitical world" (Filimon *Puiu* 43).

⁶ *The Reenactment* follows two young men who are forced to reenact a fight that took place at a resort, for the sake of making an instructional video. The boys have agreed to comply in order to avoid a criminal conviction. However, those in charge do not protect the young men from harm, and eventually one of them is killed after being forced to repeatedly fall down a sharp incline.

California Dreamin': American imaginings clash with political expediency

Based on an obscure incident that appeared in the “miscellaneous column of a Romanian tabloid” (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 215), *California Dreamin'* concerns a NATO convoy that is stopped at remote village in Romania, Căpâlnița, and becomes trapped by the stationmaster for not producing the correct paperwork to allow transit through his checkpoint. For five days, the Americans attempt to negotiate with the Romanians, only moving on after many competing priorities of the townsfolk are played out through the appearance of the troops in their midst. Constructed in a form that is “much closer to the standards expected by mainstream audiences,” the film “proved one of the rare authentic Romanian box-office hits” (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 219).

Instead of having a simple and linear narrative, as is typical of classic realist cinema, this film has a “complex structure ... alternating past and present, fantasy and reality, hilariously comic moments and utterly tragic ones” (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 216). As Nemescu’s only full-length film before his untimely death, it manages to combine important contextual information about Romania’s relationship with America with comical and deeply tragic elements. Due to post-production not being completed before the director’s death, the decision was made to keep the subsequent editing minimal. Therefore, the film “sprawls shamelessly” which nonetheless emphasises the “ultimate futility of its narrative” (Sarris). The sophistication of the film belies its status as a debut feature, although Nemescu had previously released several short films which attracted “important prizes both in student festivals across Romania and abroad” (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 213).

As the key protagonist in the film, the stationmaster, Doiaru (Razvan Vasilescu) sets himself on a collision course with the American Captain Doug Jones (Armand Assante) when he has the NATO train shunted to a siding due to some missing bureaucratic documents. Doiaru’s hostility towards the Americans seems to be due to his own traumatic experiences

during World War II, which unfold in flashback sequences. While the soldiers and their commander are stranded in the town, the mayor (Ion Sapdaru) and the rest of townspeople attempt to manipulate the situation for their own individual purposes.⁷ Captain Jones activates different strategies to extricate his train and its military intelligence equipment from Doiaru, including diplomacy, bribery and threats. Eventually, a successful escape is managed by setting the two factions in the town against each other, whereby the Americans slip away undetected during the ensuing carnage.

California Dreamin' has several threads to its narrative and includes graphic violence rather than the implied violence of *Stuff and Dough*. However, what is perhaps more stunning is the manner in which the film blatantly implicates America in political turmoil in Eastern Europe. According to Ioana Luca, “Romania plays a central role in the US foreign policy in the area through its strategic geopolitical position,” yet there exists “overlapping and contradictory Romanian ideologies in relation to the US” within Romania itself, especially around access to American political or economic prosperity (Luca 821, 819). Nothing in Nemescu’s film is offered as a simple answer to the question of how to atone for the past or how to bring healing to a community marginalised by forces on a global scale that has struggled with integration and dependence on a wider European community since its revolution in 1989 (Turcus 216).

The Legend of the Party Photographer from *Tales from the Golden Age* (Höfer, Mungiu, Popescu, Uricaru, Marculescu 2009): When a photo obfuscates the truth

The second text under discussion in this chapter is the short film *The Legend of the Party Photographer*, which forms part of the omnibus film *Tales from the Golden Age* (Mungiu,

⁷ Ion Sapdaru also appears as Professor Manescu in *12:08 East of Bucharest*.

Uricaru, Höfer, Popescu 2009). In a similar way to *12:08 East of Bucharest*, *Tales from the Golden Age* deals with memories of the “state socialist past” in a humorous way (Strausz 136). The title refers to the way Ceaușescu described Romania during his reign, but takes an ironic turn in these short films, as the lives of the protagonists are anything but golden (Scott “A New Wave”).

Although listed as only one of many directors for the series, Cristian Mungiu was the author of all the screenplays for the project that resulted in *Tales from the Golden Age*, which won Best Film at the Stockholm Film Festival and the Grand Prix at the Warsaw International Film Festival. Based on urban legends that reflect the absurdities of living under communist rule, as of September 2021, Box Office Mojo reports that the film grossed a modest US\$494,486 at the box office (“Tales from the Golden Age”), but it was nevertheless popular enough with Romanian audiences to win the Audience Prize at the Gopos Awards in 2010. Having previously worked as a journalist, Mungiu’s writing style combines a strong interest in socially significant stories with an observational style that is committed to truth. Although Mungiu does not identify any particular influence on his filmmaking, he does admit “to feel[ing] very close to Italian neorealism” as well as other realist cinemas (von Wong 10).

The Legend of the Party Photographer is set in an urban environment, mostly inside the House of the People, the huge public building built by Ceaușescu in the middle of Bucharest. In the course of one day, two photographers (Avram Birau and Paul Dunca) need to photograph Ceaușescu as he greets the French leader Giscard d’Estaing at the airport, then return to headquarters and edit the photo to meet official guidelines regarding the appearance of the Romanian leader.⁸ The urgency is necessary so that the newspaper can be printed and distributed to workers to read the following morning. However, in the rush to both make

⁸ French President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing’s visit to Romania in 1979 was for the purpose of signing an agreement to build a Citroën factory in Romania (Abraham 60).

Ceaușescu appear taller than d’Estaing and also make it appear that the former is wearing a hat like the latter, a vital detail is overlooked, and that is that the Romanian leader already has a hat in his hand. The humour centres on the absurdity of the situation, where a communist leader must appear as above others, and the lengths the party will go to in order to maintain the leader’s image. This film highlights the unreliability of media representation and it utilises intermediality to this end.

4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days: A tale of suffering and solidarity in Communist Romania

4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days cemented New Romanian cinema’s reputation as an important new development when it won the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 2007.⁹ The film follows two young women, Otilia (Anamaria Marinca) and her friend Găbița (Laura Vasiliu), students who live in a college dormitory. Găbița is pregnant, and during the 24-hour period of the diegesis, Otilia undertakes the perilous journey of procuring an abortion for her friend and dealing with the aftermath.

Mungiu’s feature was a financial success, which, according to Box Office Mojo, has amassed a worldwide gross of over US\$10 million as of September 2021 (“4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days (2007)”). In order to maximise audiences in Romania where cinema attendance is generally perceived as low, a caravan toured the country showing the film, reaching an audience, which was reported by Film New Europe, of approximately 18,000 viewers (Blaga). In addition to announcing Cristian Mungiu as an “important new talent” (Scott “Friend Indeed”), *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* is emblematic of the “common practice in several of these movies ... of the theatrical display of the characters in front of the

⁹ In 2016, BBC Culture named *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* the fifteenth best film in their list of the best 100 films of the twenty-first century (Marinca).

camera, and by a carefully planned connection with the storytelling” (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 39). This is therefore an essential inclusion in any discussion of intermediality in New Romanian cinema as well as an important contribution towards the canon itself.

Though the film is about Găbița’s abortion, the director chooses to follow Otilia as she undertakes all of the tasks necessary to obtain the illegal procedure for her friend. Although the audience is lead to trust in Otilia’s competence and resourcefulness in the perilous journey she has undertaken, both friends are unprepared for the cost demanded by Mr Bebe (Vlad Ivanov) to operate on Găbița. Mr Bebe insists that both women consent to sexual intercourse with him. He justifies this by stating that there are far higher legal ramifications as well as medical risks the closer the pregnancy is to the expected birth and Găbița has concealed how far along she is in her pregnancy.

Raising questions about personal ethics and individual solidarity, the film works on “dissolving various historical binaries and the monolithic reading of the past” which is “carried by the film’s modernist style” (Strausz 128). Despite a dedication to faithfully rendering the past, the film leaves ample space for a variety of interpretations. Strausz describes the film as seeking “to complicate the relationship between various collective individual factors impacting on the narrative by hinting at their entanglement” (132), which suggests wider implications behind the film’s narrative arc.

Through an examination of *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 4 Days*, this chapter analyses the use of intermediality in New Romanian cinema. It further demonstrates how this particular film provides a blueprint for how the intermedial reconfigures realism in New Romanian cinema.

The Death of Mr Lăzărescu: A Dante-esque journey through the Romanian healthcare system

Similarly to many other films of the New Romanian canon, *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* is based on a true story, in this case, the tragedy of Constantin Nica, a desperately ill homeless man who was left on the doorstep of a Romanian hospital to die (Filimon Puiu 60).

According to Pop, this film also has an autobiographical dimension, drawing on Cristi Puiu's experience with the healthcare system during his own father's illness (*An Introduction* 65).

The narrative follows the last 24 hours in the life of Dante Remus Lăzărescu (Ioan Fiscuteanu), an elderly, retired widower, as he is transported from hospital to hospital when his health suddenly deteriorates. Unfortunately for Mr Lăzărescu, his health emergency coincides with a catastrophic traffic accident that resulted in multiple serious casualties, and therefore his paramedic, Mioara (Luminița Gheorghiu), has difficulty having him admitted at each successive hospital where they seek treatment.

Due to his chronic use of alcohol, the medical professionals consulted are reluctant to investigate his complaints, and it is not until Mioara is able to convince a technician to perform a medical scan on Lăzărescu that his symptoms are finally properly diagnosed. The title of the film leads viewers to believe that Mr Lăzărescu's diagnosis has occurred too late, yet the intermedial references intervene with the fatalistic narrative, creating a transcendent atmosphere that forestalls a complete descent into hopelessness.

It has been suggested by some scholars that there was a "radical influence" of *Mr Lăzărescu* on *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* as well as a "dramatic influence" on *12:08 East of Bucharest* (Filimon Puiu 58).¹⁰ Both Găbița and Mr Lăzărescu are complicit in the difficult situations in which they find themselves and are unable or unwilling to make the effort to

¹⁰ *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* and *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* share a director of photography, Oleg Mutu, which can account for the similar shooting styles of the two films. Mutu was also the cinematographer for *Beyond the Hills*.

seek help until it is almost too late. In both cases, it is a challenge for the audience to understand how or why the heroes continue to help, despite the antipathy of the people in need of their assistance.

There are abundant religious references in *Mr Lăzărescu*, which I suggest appeal to a higher spiritual or humanistic power while not resorting to blatant religious messaging. This is achieved through the use of intermedial references, which aid in making sense of the film's meaning as they reach beyond the immediate circumstances of the plot into realms outside Mr Lăzărescu's individual experience. This universalising aspect of intermediality gives depth to cinematic realism and represents a vital component of New Romanian cinema.

Beyond the Hills: A tale of people who are abandoned by the system that insisted they be born

Beyond the Hills is based on a true story of a young girl whose brutal treatment during an exorcism in a monastery in rural Romania leads to her death. The 1995 story of Irina Cornici inspired two non-fiction accounts by Tatiana Niculescu Bran, which in turn inspired Cristian Mungiu to write the film's screenplay (Béar 50). Having won both the best screenplay and joint best actress for the leads, Cristina Flutur and Cosmina Stratan, at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival, it was also Romania's entry into the Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards. Produced through Mungiu's production company Mobra Films, it was made with financial support from the Romanian National Centre for Cinema (Centrul National al Cinematografiei) and Eurimages and which, according to Box Office Mojo, has amassed a worldwide gross of over US\$600,000 million as of September 2021 ("Beyond the Hills"). Differing from the rest of the films in the New Romanian canon and other realist films, which are almost exclusively set in an urban environment, *Beyond the Hills* is set in a rural

community. The monastery had to be built especially for the film because the Orthodox Church would not permit the production company to use a real church. In addition to this, Cristian Mungiu was aware of sensitivities with the crew about working in a sanctified space (Mungiu “On *Beyond the Hills*”).

Voichița (Cosmina Stratan) resides in a monastery located in eastern Romania after growing up in an orphanage. Her best friend, Alina (Cristina Flutur), returns from working abroad with news that she has found work for them both on a cruise ship in Germany. However, Voichița has already committed her life to the order of nuns and does not want to follow Alina nor resume their (presumed) intimate relationship (Strausz 198). Following this revelation, Alina has a mental episode which results in her being admitted to a hospital and, after being stabilised by medication, she is released to the care of the monastery. Following her release, Alina visits the foster family who cared for her after she left the orphanage but who have spent the money she had entrusted to them and employed another “foster child” to help them on their farm. Now out of options and wanting to remain by Voichița’s side, Alina returns to the monastery, however, she finds it difficult to adapt to the austere life and suffers another mental collapse, this one including violent outbursts. Following lobbying by the Mother Superior (Dana Tapalaga) and the rest of the nuns, the Priest (Valeriu Andrieuță), agrees to perform an exorcism on Alina, however, after a brief moment of lucidity, Alina collapses and is pronounced dead at hospital.

As with *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, *Beyond the Hills* features protagonists who are victims of the natalist policies instituted by the Ceaușescu regime. The two young women at the centre of the narrative spent their childhoods in an orphanage, which they were required to vacate after reaching the age of 18, with no support network or vocational skills. Subsequently, the girls have little opportunity to either gain employment or pursue an education and are therefore vulnerable to exploitation. As a companion piece to *4 Months, 3*

Weeks and 2 Days, the dire circumstances of Alina and Voichița can provide an answer to what possible outcome could be imagined for the baby had Găbița not proceeded with her abortion (Chahine 59). The fact that *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* was set in the late 1980s and *Beyond the Hills* in 2005 creates a symbolic link between the two films (Filimon and Mungiu 20), as both Alina and Voichița would have been born around the same time as Găbița's baby was due.

The temporal link, along with the thematic threads that run through both films, brings to mind the intertextuality of Cristi Puiu's films, where the characters in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* appear as secondary characters in *Aurora* (2011) (White 5). While these details may not be immediately accessible to the audience, they might create a possible causal link, which adds depth to the fictionalised narrative. Religious symbolism is recognisable through the film which gives authenticity to the mise-en-scène due to its setting in a monastery but also suggests further, more universally interpretable meanings.

***Police, Adjective*: police procedural where nothing much happens**

Set in post-communist Romania, *Police, Adjective* follows a policeman, Cristi, who is tasked with uncovering evidence of drug dealing by a young man, Victor (Radu Costin), who has been identified by an informer. Having garnered much acclaim, including the Un certain Regard at Cannes in 2009, this film shares with the other films of the New Romanian cinema a real-time pace that supports a realist aesthetic. Although there are necessary ellipses throughout the film, the film does not use montage to suggest the passing of time, instead activating long shots of dead time to give what Andrei Gorzo calls a "temporal weight" that serves to impress on the audience the tedious passage of time ("*Police, Adjective*" 23). As with *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* and *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, there is a sense of

urgency for the protagonist because, in this case, Cristi must find a way to prevent the prosecution of the youth before his captain, Anghelache (played by Vlad Ivanov), intervenes (Gorzo “*Police, Adjective*” 22). Unlike *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* and *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, however, the dilemma Cristi faces is relatively minor, and is more of a crisis of conscience than the life and death struggles faced by Dante Lăzărescu or Otilia (Gorzo “*Police, Adjective*” 22).

Sitting within the “police procedural” genre, the film only ever allows the audience to watch the watcher, never allowing them to adopt the detective’s perspective or directly see what he is observing (Gorzo “*Police, Adjective*” 22). Thus, the meaning behind the long periods of surveillance eludes us until Cristi writes his report. According to Gorzo, this is a deliberate strategy by Porumboiu to illustrate “the mutual alterity of things and words” (“*Police, Adjective*” 23). However, it also presents actions and events as only having meaning once words are constructed to describe them.

Much of *Police, Adjective* is concerned with the “repetitive, banally quotidian activities” of Cristi as he follows Victor (Gorzo “*Police, Adjective*” 22). This is a story where nothing much happens, and little evidence of drug dealing is uncovered. Despite writing copious reports on his observations and being concerned with the effects of a charge of drug dealing on Victor, Anghelache insists that the letter of the law be followed and a sting operation planned. Cristi is a man of few words and this, combined with the solitary watching that he conducts during his working day, results in a film with little spoken language.

Police, Adjective is important to this thesis for a number of reasons. First it is another example of how Porumboiu uses framing and music to infer meanings that sit alongside the narrative. Secondly, truth and justice are important themes of this film, and it is therefore a continuation of the director’s examination of truth begun in *12:08 East of Bucharest*. The

search and ultimate elusiveness of truth is a postmodern concern and, once again, this film demonstrates how a film can be realist while including characteristics that create tension with the realist form.

12:08 East of Bucharest: "I get good ratings, especially in winter"

12:08 East of Bucharest was director Corneliu Porumboiu's first full-length feature film, however, he had previously written and directed several short films that have also attracted international film festival acclaim, including 2003's *Liviu's Dream* (*Visul lui Liviu*). *12:08 East of Bucharest* was highly successful on the festival circuit, winning nearly a dozen prizes at international film festivals, including the Camera d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 2006. In his 2010 interview with Richard Porton, Porumboiu attributes his interest in the absurdity of post-communist Romanian life to the work of Eugène Ionesco and also acknowledges the influence of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett because, he explains, they have a similar sense of humour to Romanians (Porton and Porumboiu 27).¹¹ This attitude aligns Porumboiu with modernism and postmodernism. In *12:08 East of Bucharest* he uses "irony and ironic modes ... as preferred forms of authorial commentary" (Stojanova "Introduction" 9). This stance is demonstrated by proposing to find the truth about the 1989 Revolution by assigning authority to people who were not active participants or witnesses to those events. The use of irony in *12:08 East of Bucharest* activates the text as both an investigation into the truth of an historical event and suggesting that the full objective truth is unachievable. Frederic Jameson calls the inability for the subject to "organise its past and future into coherent experience,"

¹¹ In the same interview, Porumboiu admits to likening his film sets to a theatre stage, the influence of which can be seen in the placing of the characters in the television studio in *12:08 East of Bucharest*.

“the crisis of historicity” (*Cultural Logic* 25). Such a crisis is amply illustrated in Porumboiu’s film.

The film was an independent production that received no official funding and was financed by Porumboiu’s own father’s business with labour offered for free by the film’s crew (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 166). Receiving overwhelmingly positive reviews both in Romania and internationally, the film nonetheless reported modest box-office success even as it continues to garner interest at art-house cinemas and in DVD distribution (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 171). Porumboiu admits that all his films deal with people living in an “intermediate world” of Romania in transition, yet in this film, they have “distorted history in order to survive” (Porton and Porumboiu 28).

The narrative of *12:08 East of Bucharest* follows three main protagonists, bringing them together for an amateur talk show to discuss the events of Christmas 1989 to determine if a revolution happened concurrently in Bucharest and their own hometown of Vaslui (which is east of Bucharest). Firstly, we meet Professor Tiberiu Manescu (Ion Sapdaru), a high school history teacher who is an irresponsible alcoholic who is struggling to pay his debts to his barman or meet his commitments at school.

Next we are introduced to the talk show host, Virgil Jderescu (Teodor Corbin), who owns and operates a television station. The third key protagonist is Emanoil Piscoci (Mircea Andreescu), a widower living alone, who is constantly being annoyed by the antics of the local young children but whose claim to fame is his yearly appearance as Santa Claus.

The television talk show that is the subject of *12:08 East of Bucharest* does not begin until nearly halfway into the film, and what follows is a comedy of errors that visually and dialogically parody the very premise of the television program. According to Alice Barden:

by foregrounding the characters' efforts to probe the question of "the event," to describe it, de-signify it, and designate its importance, the film makes visible the discursive practices used to understand and negotiate historical events. (Bardan "Aftereffects of 1989" 137)

12:08 East of Bucharest is an essential study for any scholar of New Romanian cinema and especially this thesis, as it "represents a deliberate exploration of the limits of cinematic realism" (Ioniță 174). It achieves this through creating a discourse on truth, reality and national identity. By investigating the 1989 Revolution 16 years after the fact, the director adds a "timeless, *suspended temporality*" to the film (Bardan "Aftereffects of 1989" 126), which gestures to postmodern notions of ahistoricity.¹² Additionally, the apparent search for truth in this film, which is approached in a parodic manner, mirrors the postmodern attitude that objective truth is unattainable except as a fragile construct within the spectator's consciousness (Toader 58).

Chapter descriptions

This thesis is divided into four main chapters, each of which interrogates a different aspect of New Romanian cinema and analyses how these aspects conform to, challenge or modify cinematic realism. These aspects are the narrative of New Romanian cinema; the cinematic apparatus and mediated technology; intermediality; and finding reality in the spoken word and musical interludes.

Chapter 2 examines the narrative structures of New Romanian cinema, beginning with how this cinema bears a close relationship with Italian neorealism. The chapter is broken into

¹² According to Susan Hayward, postmodern cultures are inherently "a-historical" (Hayward 286).

four parts that focus on different aspects of narrative analysis. The first section deals with how character and identity are reflected in the film *Stuff and Dough*, which is both a foundational film from the canon and a metaphor for Romania's identity politics since the fall of communism. The deployment of the road trope, a staple of Hollywood cinema, is discussed as well as what it conveys about transformation in Romanian society. The next section in Chapter 2 concentrates on how the contrast between stasis and movement affects the flow of the narrative and what this can tell us about New Romanian cinema's specific language. The thwarting of narrative expectations is the subject of the next section, and here the case is made for this tactic offering a self-reflexive effect, which aligns with a postmodern attitude. Useful here is previous scholarly work on the use of genre in New Romanian cinema. Next, Chapter 2 addresses the expression of female agency in *California Dreamin'*. This section builds on the work of Dana Duma on female agency in New Romania cinema. Finally, Chapter 2 addresses how complicity is implied through the direct-to-camera gaze in several films of the New Romanian canon.

Chapter 3 addresses the "medium reflexivity" of New Romanian films. This chapter is broken into three sections, focusing on the television, the apparatus and framing. Televisions frequently appear in the mise-en-scène in New Romanian films as a modernist tactic of drawing attention to the importance of television in Romanian historical construction. Chapter 3 also approaches how the films of New Romanian cinema give glimpses behind the veil of cinema. This chapter demonstrates that these films question the assumption that the image can be trusted to reflect truth. Finally, Chapter 3 explores the complicated framing employed in New Romanian cinema, and how it can be understood as central to the meaning-making of these films. Understanding how the filmmakers are able to reconcile their dialectic approach to truth with the realist form of cinema is a central concern of this chapter.

Chapter 4 focuses on intermediality in New Romanian cinema. I suggest that intermediality serves both to enrich meaning and generate alternate readings of the texts. An important question addressed here is how intermediality can be mobilised within the broadly realist tradition of New Romanian cinema. This chapter mobilises Pethő's and Nagib's theories of intermediality, which offer a promising way to address this issue. The first section in Chapter 4 focuses on instances in New Romanian film where religious iconography is included in the *mise-en-scène*. While Bazin recognised that cinematic purity is an impossible goal, the inclusion of other media within film creates a tension with its realism. *Tableaux vivants* is the next focus in Chapter 4, with attention given to how, by styling the shot as if the characters are in a painting, the flow of the narrative is interrupted and therefore its naturalistic depiction of everyday events is called into question. Next, the chapter addresses how both intertextuality and intermediality are mobilised through a film's dialogue. Here, the film *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* is examined, as it contains a plethora of intertextual references both in the dialogue and in the names of the characters. The way Puiu draws mythology and religion into the narrative and what that means for the film's meaning is explored, as well as what this contributes to our understanding of New Romanian cinema's approach to language.

Chapter 5 mobilises an underutilised aspect of Kracauer's theory of film that relates to how the spoken word can give access to material reality. The first section analyses *Police, Adjective* to demonstrate how language is used in a metaphoric manner as well as a literal signifier. The second section analyses *Beyond the Hills* and the use of language in its religious setting. Here both the work of Kracauer and Nagib are utilised to explore how the accents and appearance of the two main protagonists were vital for the film's realist integrity. While the film is based on a real event, the narrative is fictionalised; however, Mungiu's ethical imperative to present the film as truth is evidenced in his commitment to language

here. Poverty, superstition, societal collapse and political failure are all implicated in the tragedy that ensues in this film, but how words are manipulated as a means of coercive control, is shown to be heavily complicit. The next section analyses *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, looking at how the repeated recitation of the eponymous character's name is a demonstration of his corporeal state. The use of the linguistic motif throughout *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* gives direct insight into his deterioration and, without attention to how he says his name, the doctors are unable to notice his imminent death. Finally, Chapter 5 addresses the use of diegetic music in *12:08 East of Bucharest*. Diegetic music is sparingly used in New Romanian cinema; however, in this film, Porumboiu employs it to humorous effect.

CHAPTER 2 – NARRATIVE AND NEW ROMANIAN CINEMA

This chapter will analyse the narrative characteristics of New Romanian films with a particular focus on *Stuff and Dough* and *California Dreamin'*. First, it will provide an overview of the narrative and stylistic features that firmly ground these films in realist tradition. These characteristics include having only a basic narrative structure and using found stories, featuring everyday characters, constructing a linear chronological narrative, maintaining unity of space and time and utilising long takes. I will then proceed to analyse how the seemingly simple narrative structures of these films become complicated through the use of ellipses, dead time, flashbacks and circularity and how they re-work genre conventions, thwart audience expectations and break the fourth wall. For instance, I explore how they modify realism through the adoption of modernist and postmodernist devices and tactics.

Stuff and Dough is an interesting case study in relation to how the narrative is constructed in realist films and particularly in New Romanian cinema. It deploys a simple plot as scaffolding upon which to build a multidimensional fictional world that can be read as a metaphor for Romania itself. In addition to *Stuff and Dough*, this chapter will analyse a later film, *California Dreamin'*, in order to understand how narrative genre conventions are mobilised to raise questions about identity construction, both for the individual and in wider Romanian society. These films can be considered companion pieces, as they both utilise the road movie genre as narrative structure. *California Dreamin'*, while also recognisably realist, uses that genre and activates the flashback for contextual exegesis. Therefore, this film is an important text in how it is possible to stay true to realist aspirations while utilising a structure that does not fit agreed definitions of realist cinema. In discussing Corneliu Porumboiu's

films, Maria Ioniță describes the director's intention to "represent a deliberate exploration of the limits of cinematic realism and a polemic engagement with cinema's ability to present an objective snapshot of the real" (174). Both *Stuff and Dough* and *California Dreamin'* will be analysed for their specific narrative tactics in order to demonstrate how the thwarting of narrative conventions prompts questioning about Romania's past and present social, economic and political status.

This chapter will also examine issues of gender, with a focus on how female characters can be mobilised as agents of change. As noted by Dana Duma, New Romanian cinema frequently employs female characters in "decisive role[s] in the narrative structure," which sets these films apart from those made in Romania prior to 1990 (167, 168). In several New Romanian films, the role of women in society is critiqued and, indeed, specific women's issues are frequently highlighted that were pertinent both during communism and in post-communist Romania. In this thesis, I will analyse several films in which women have central significance, for instance, *Beyond the Hills*, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* and *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*. However, this chapter will address how female agency in *California Dreamin'* subverts both the notion that Romania itself is powerless to enact positive change within its political landscape or society, and that women are unable to exercise their own agency or enact meaningful change. This chapter will conclude by examining the use of the "direct to camera gaze" to show how this self-reflexive gesture implies complicity in the films *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* and *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*.

New Romanian cinema and the realist legacy

Arguably, nothing grounds narratives in New Romanian cinema more than the use of the found story. Similarly to Italian neorealist film, New Romanian films are often either inspired

by or are based on real events. For instance, inspiration for a film may be derived from a newspaper article (as in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*), or an event retold by a friend or family member (as in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*) which suggests an almost documentary commitment to the real. Other examples in New Romanian cinema where the filmmaker was inspired by true events include *Beyond the Hills* and *California Dreamin'*.

According to Kracauer, the found story is “inseparable from films animated by documentary intentions” and therefore “render[s] incidents typical of the world around us” (Kracauer 246). Roberto Rossellini’s *Stromboli* was based on a chance meeting of the director with a female prisoner in an internment camp in Northern Italy (Rossellini 45-46). Similarly, the real events of *California Dreamin'* and *Beyond the Hills* are transformed by their respective filmmakers into fictional narratives but given, the films’ relationship with real events, retain a strong link to unmediated reality.

For most of the films discussed in this thesis, events are presented in a linear chronological order. However, there are frequent ellipses that elide vital information from the syuzhet with no flashbacks or recounting that could communicate prior events to provide contextual or character information.¹³ For example, in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, the circumstances leading to Gabita’s pregnancy are never explained and the father of her baby is never mentioned, meaning the audience is left with uncertainty. Similarly, in *Beyond the Hills*, the past of the two main protagonists is only obliquely referred to, and so the true nature of the relationship between the women remains ambiguous, forcing the audience to fill in the gaps themselves. This attitude is similar to that of the Italian realist filmmakers who, as stated by Andre Bazin, “force the mind to draw its own conclusions about people and events, instead of manipulating it into accepting someone else’s interpretation” (Bazin “Germany”

¹³ The terms syuzhet and fabula are derived from Russian formalism, where fabula is the raw material of the story, and syuzhet is the way the story is organised in the film (Kuhn and Westwell 314).

124). However, eliding important background information from the audience also marks the narrative structures of these films with distinct modernist character.

In some instances, the narrative organisation deviates from linear, chronological structure even further, leaning towards a postmodern style of storytelling. Notable examples include *California Dreamin'* and *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*. *California Dreamin'* begins with a flashback and also includes several flashbacks throughout the film. The flashbacks form their own narrative logic, which in turn feeds the context for the present-day motivation of the key protagonist. Doiaru (Razvan Vasilescu), the stationmaster who prevents the train of Americans passing through the town of Căpâlnița, never recounts his past to explain his attitude to the Americans occupying his town, however, the audience is able to piece together his family's trauma through the flashback sequences that present their contact with Americans during World War II. This dearth of contextual exegesis represents an attitude of New Romanian filmmakers who refuse to "locate the depicted characters and stories in a fixed cause-and-effect nexus" but rather invite the spectator to draw their own conclusions based on limited information (Strausz 1).

A notable aspect of New Romanian films is their tendency to tell stories "from reality with an economy of means" (Trocan 37), while including scenes in which the protagonists enact everyday activities in their temporal completeness. Doru Pop identifies the key attributes of the films considered part of New Romanian cinema as being "based on a certain unity of time and space" ("Grammar" 25), which echoes the Italian neorealist canon, notable for its long takes and minimal editing. For example, the famous pasta-eating scene in *Obsession* (*Ossessione* Visconti, 1943) resonates with a scene showing a policeman eating

soup in *Police, Adjective* (Porumboiu 2009).¹⁴ Long takes that linger in a scene beyond any narrative value is extracted allow what Zavattini describes as a “minute, unrelenting, and patient” examination of life as it truly exists (65). Furthermore, the tension between spare narrative explication and detailed character of the mise-en-scène in New Romanian cinema challenges the spectator to “examine the act of reception” (Trocan 47). Thus, the audience is encouraged to critically engage with the material, rather than relying on the filmmaker to explicitly state their intentions. Irina Trocan’s argues that the minimalism of New Romanian cinema has its roots in the “refusal to submit to institutional conventions” (Trocan 47). In this chapter, I will examine how certain cinematic conventions, such as causal narrative structures, are eschewed in the films addressed.

Conflicts, trajectories, identity: The impossibility of reaching other realms

A recurrent theme in the films of the New Romanian canon, showcased by *California Dreamin’* and *Stuff and Dough*, is the exploration of the issues “who are we?” and “where are we going?” That both *Stuff and Dough* and *California Dreamin’* utilise the road motif is significant, as it seemingly implies that the films’ protagonists are on a journey to a clear destination. However, both films challenge the notion that identity is a fixed point with well-delineated borders. Instead, by adopting genre tropes and then undermining them, both *Stuff and Dough* and *California Dreamin’* demonstrate the complex processes that contribute to the identity formation project, the non-linear nature of profound societal change, and the

¹⁴ In Visconti’s adaptation of James Cain’s 1934 novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, the female protagonist, Giovana (Clara Calamai), comes into her kitchen, which is filled with dirty crockery and sits down to eat some pasta. The director holds the camera on Giovana for two minutes while she tries to stay awake long enough to eat, but she eventually is overcome and falls asleep.

necessary self-reflexive work required to process historical events and generational trauma. Lucian Georgescu describes the approach of interrogating identity issues as reflecting the country “not just having a problem in finding its current identity in a very confused social and historical context, but also giving up on any effort of finding it out” (26). This is evident in both *Stuff and Dough* and *California Dreamin’*, where the narratives rely on continuous movement to signify the process of change, yet the goal appears ultimately contentious and out of reach.

The manner of constructing protagonists in New Romanian cinema has been described as “caring about characters without using them as moral agents” (Ieta “Impressions” 25). However, by staying with the characters, the narrative develops them not just as individuals, but also transforms them into metaphors for Romania and Romanian society. Transformation is also frequently the subject of films in this canon, and is used as a “tool to express the disillusionment that accompanies the large-scale social change of the post-socialist setting” (Strausz 158).

Early in the story of *Stuff and Dough*, the goals of the main protagonist, Ovidiu (Alexandru Papadopol), is identified. He wants to make enough money to rent his own flat, finance his own market stall and aid his parent’s similar venture. However, the audience is left with “the inevitable conclusion that it is impossible to reach other realms, both physically and spiritually” from where he begins (Georgescu 29). Being unemployed and a drop-out makes Ovidiu vulnerable to the offer of US\$2000 made by Ivanov, and he is too naïve to realise the risks associated with the endeavour. Filimon states that *Stuff and Dough* reflects the effects of privatisation on Romania post-communist, where former state employees were forced into the new “precariat” class of the working poor (*Puiu* 43). The young precariat could be easily persuaded that there were “quick fortunes to be made from this or that temporary “opportunity”” and were therefore ripe for exploitation (Filimon *Puiu* 43).

As a snapshot of Romania's struggling lower class, there are clues everywhere in this film that the protagonists and perhaps Romania itself sees the means to escape the crushing struggle of poverty lie in following America through the full adoption of capitalism. The first view of Caty's (Luminița Gheorghiu) shop sees her selling Coca-Cola to a neighbour, and she asks Ovidiu and Vali (Dragoș Bucur) to stock up on the drink when they visit Bucharest. Once on the road, the two young men discuss a construction site they pass, with Ovidiu mentioning it is to become a car park, car wash and petrol station, and it will be "cool, like in the West." The adoption of Coca-Cola as the drink of choice of this group of young people and their characterisation of the destruction of historical buildings to build a car park as an attractive attribute of Western culture suggests the emptiness of that aspirational goal.

Georgescu posits that *Stuff and Dough* gives access to the new liberalised economy of Romania post-communism, where a country with limited production seeks economic independence by trading in cheap imports but inevitably "pay[s] commission on the price of nothingness" (33). Ovidiu, by eschewing education and aspiring for full participation in a capitalism, is choosing to be exactly what his parents are: small cogs in a meaningless system of barter that will lead to more of the same. Interestingly, while travel and the road are key to understanding the narrative in *Stuff and Dough*, the director counters the freedom usually associated with the road film with a feeling of claustrophobia through his stylistic choices.

Puiu traps his characters in a world that they have little chance to escape, either physically or economically, through what Filimon calls "conscientious framing" and "minute attention to mise en scène" ("Beyond" 31). In the opening scene, within the cramped flat and makeshift shop tacked onto the front of the living space, the characters are filmed in either close-up or medium close-up, with the hand-held camera following one person after another, as if it were another character trying to follow what is happening. There is too much furniture and shop inventory in the space for people to be able to move freely, and even the bathtub is

full of beer being chilled for customers. In the tiny kitchen that accommodates only two chairs for a family of four people, the characters have to push past each other to traverse the suffocatingly small room.¹⁵ The literal entrapment in the apartment provides some of the motivation for Ovidiu and his friends to take to the road, to escape the small spaces that enclose small lives. The inclusion of the grandmother into the home suggests another form of enclosure: that of being unable to speak or eat without aid. The other characters interact with the old woman, but she is unable to respond as she is in a “closed-in” state, unable to either care for herself or exercise any personal autonomy. Given she is the matriarch of the extended family, her immobile state is scarily prescient for the future of the other members of the family: thwarted from enacting any meaningful changes in their lives, wedded to the same routines, waiting for their inevitable demise. The contrast between the enclosed spaces within the home and the promise of escape on the road can be read as a drive to construct an alternative identity for the young travellers. Looking outside the prescribed confines of their limited experience to the possibilities offered by travel mirrors the search for belonging in other films that involve travel (two examples being *Walkabout* (Roeg 1971) and *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* (Elliot 1984)). However, *Stuff and Dough* also operates as a metaphor for Romania and Romanians who look beyond their country’s boundaries for a more abundant future or a more meaningful identity.¹⁶

In *Stuff and Dough*, Puiu creates a world where people are under pressure to adapt to a life where the Revolution has released them from autocratic rule but, conversely, the state no longer offers a “social safety net” (Filimon *Puiu* 42). Filimon states that the framing utilised by the director activates the “sensation ... of claustrophobia, of a universe isolated

¹⁵ Like most other films in the New Romanian canon, the scene was shot on location. The cast and crew were squeezed into a small space, which limited the shot choice. This goes some way to explain the claustrophobic atmosphere, and is a significant contribution to realism in New Romanian films, (Doru Pop “Grammar” 33)

¹⁶ Romanian films that have problematised migration as a route to a better life include *Francesca* (Păunescu 2009) and *Graduation* (Mungiu 2016), but it is touched on in several films.

within its four walls, yet increasingly susceptible to the incursions of the mercantile world outside, or of the larger evil that is part of a parallel dimension” (*Puiu* 47). This is noticeable in the opening scenes, and also once the three protagonists begin their journey to Bucharest.

On the road, the camera remains in the back seat of the van, which is driven alternatively by Ovidiu and his friend, Vali. The placement of the camera in the rear seat behind the driver, as if it were another passenger, means the view of each protagonist is from behind and the view of the outside spaces is through the windows and between the heads of the characters sitting in the front seats.^{17,18} This framing suggests limited access to the spaces through which the van traverses, even as it allows “for the gradual, almost imperceptible revelation of small details of apartments and cars, or urban landscapes” (Ioniță 176). In a similar vein, Jim Jarmusch road films frequently utilise an identical camera placement, which Katarina Korola describes as “the unique visuality experienced through the vehicle” (20). But, it is the parameters placed on the fictional world created by Puiu that contradicts the argument made by Maria Ioniță that New Romanian films usually offer an “exhaustive field of vision” (177). This filming strategy occludes much of the landscape the protagonists pass from the view of the audience, in much the same way as the meticulous framing does, as discussed in chapter 3. This strategy works against the techniques used by neorealist directors, who used deep focus to give access to the totality to the scene and its context. This perspective, therefore, makes it difficult for the spectator to cast judgement on events, as they do not have all the available information to do so.

The deliberate camera position that offers only a restricted perspective tends to mirror the view of the characters, whose own perspective is hampered by the lack of complete

¹⁷ In an interview with Monica Filimon, Puiu describes the camera in *Stuff and Dough* as the “fourth character” (Puiu and Filimon 128)

¹⁸ Mungiu uses a similar ploy in shooting his characters from behind in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*.

information about the world and its dangers. Additionally, this limited perspective equates with the marginalised characters this cinema depicts: our view of the world in *Stuff and Dough* is compromised and the characters live on the margins, just as Romania is on the margins of Europe. Thus, the filmmaker has used film style to demonstrate the liminal nature of the world he is depicting, both in the physical space occupied by the protagonists and in their narrow views of the outside world. The limited perspective of the camera in *Stuff and Dough*, mirroring the perspective of the protagonists, transforms Vali, Ovidiu and Betty into ciphers of Romanian society. This is one example of how characters are transformed into metaphors in New Romanian cinema, but here Puiu goes further, in mobilising film form to enact this transformation.

Stasis versus movement: where stasis implies existential significance

While the road trip trope which encompasses a significant proportion of narrative in *Stuff and Dough* imbues the film with frenetic speed, it is carefully balanced with another impulse – that is, towards stasis and stillness. Stasis is staged most vividly within the domestic sphere – first of all, within Ovidiu’s family home. This can be witnessed in *Stuff and Dough* when Caty is feeding her mother in the kitchen.

The camera is privy to her boiling milk and then breaking biscuits into the warm drink to feed the catatonic woman in an act of intimate and tender care, which acts as a foil for the environment all the characters inhabit, one that has lost most of its ethical and moral touchstones. There is little dramatic tension in this scene, but it is infused with dramatic power through the close and deeply humanistic actions of Caty. In the stifling kitchen, the audience comes to understand how difficult it is to maintain human decency in the face of

pressing economic inequity and without a social safety net. But this scene also acts as a contrast to the frenetic movement of the road, as experience by Ovidiu, Vali and Betty. They are speeding towards what they hope is financial success, while Caty sits quietly tending to the needs of family.

There is another important moment where the action is halted in *Stuff and Dough* and the characters remain still. The scene occurs 42 minutes into the running time and is notable for several reasons (see Figure 2). Firstly, in a film that has up until this moment been filmed almost entirely in close-up or medium close-up, this scene is filmed in medium long-shot. The composition of the frame is unusual as it is horizontally divided in almost equal halves, between the grass in the foreground and the sky, van and occupants in the top half, in the near distance. This scene is reminiscent of the approach of Italian neorealism, where the camera lingers on a scene longer than necessary to allow the audience to take in every aspect of the *mise-en-scène*. Another explanation for the use of this narrative tactic is proposed by Strausz. He suggests that the deployment of the contrast between stasis and movement in New Romanian cinema mimics the stop-start nature of the Romanian communist economy. Due to the absence of raw materials, industries were often shut, however, when materials were available, the government authorities seized labour to make up for lost time. This forced tempo, therefore, leads to a staccato rhythm being imposed on people's lives (127). This rhythm is therefore both a narrative ploy as well as a stylistic tactic that forces the audience to experience this aspect of the communist condition.

As a counterpoint to the feverish action during the preceding attack on the trio on the side of the road by a rival drug gang, this moment of rest and recuperation in the open air places the protagonists in a frame within a frame, this time within the open door of the van. Filming from below also gives a sense they are rising above the perspective of the audience. The scene where the trio take a moment to sit by the side of the road demonstrates how

isolated they are from any assistance; they are figures destined to fight for their own survival, abandoned and alone.



Figure 2. The friends take a break on their trip to Bucharest, screen shot from *Stuff and Dough*.

Stasis is also a persistent motif in *California Dreamin'*, most obviously in the central narrative conflict of this film: that the Americans are prevented from leaving the town of Căpâlnița, that Captain Smith describes as being located “in a fold on a map in the middle of Romania” (Figure 3). The stationmaster, Doiaru, diverts the American’s train to a siding so they cannot move their transport without his approval or that of a central transport bureau, so they are held hostage both in a remote location and within a labyrinth of circuitous bureaucratic minutiae. Likewise, the townsfolk of Căpâlnița are trapped by Doiaru, who is a black marketeer, regularly stealing the contents of trains passing through the station, and who

is purposely acting to destroy the economic basis of the town, the local steel factory.¹⁹ Thus the town can be seen as a metaphor for the rest of Romania, whose progress away from communism is stymied by the remnants of bureaucratic disfunction on one side and the lack of educational access and investment on the other. *California Dreamin'* undermines an image of capitalist America as an aspirational goal while also interrogating Romania's long held belief in America as a saviour, both during World War II and since (Luca 820).



Figure 3. Captain Smith discusses the Americans' predicament, screen shot from *California Dreamin'*

California Dreamin' contains four storylines: as a child (Doiaru) is separated from his parents in the aftermath of World War II; that same child, as an adult stationmaster, encounters a train full of Americans who wish to travel through his station; the townspeople's enthusiastic reception of the Americans in the town and, the romance between the stationmaster's daughter (Monica) and one of the American soldiers (David McLaren)

¹⁹ In one of the flashbacks in this film, we discover that the steel factory used to be owned and operated by Doiaru's parents but was confiscated after World War II because it contributed to Germany's war machine. Doiaru appears to be trying to bankrupt the factory so that he can acquire it cheaply.

(Luca). As noted by Ioana Luca, this allows the film to “revisit and play upon fantasises and projections of the US in recent Romanian history and popular imagination” (Luca 824). The presence of Americans as a part of NATO troops within the small town amplifies the townspeople’s marginalised status. Furthermore it draws attention to “Romania’s historical, cultural and geopolitical peripheral position towards Western Europe” and how its dependency on other European nations has aggravated rather than decreased “the disparity with the centre of global power” (Țuțui and Iacob 213). The Americans, however, are forced to experience the frustration of being unable to wield any sort of power within the town in order to forward their goal to take weapons to Kosovo. According to Luca, the NATO bombings in Serbia were a “controversial matter for the Romanian public at large” in 1999 (the time in which the film was set), despite the Romanian government offering “official political and military support” to the action (824).²⁰ We can therefore see the position of the American army in *California Dreamin’* as being ransomed against mythologised images of America as a “dreamland/land of opportunity/measure of prosperity and value” (Ieta “A Decade” 199). This is made evident in the position of the most prominent representative of American power in the film, Captain Smith, whose previous experiences as an army commander could not have prepared him for the bizarre behaviour of the people of Căpâlnița.

Captain Smith’s nemesis, Doiaru occupies a position where he witnesses people constantly moving through his station to their future, where he is stationary, never able to escape from his past. The “crushing impact history has upon” Doiaru is explained through the film’s flashbacks (Luca 827). The first flashback shows his family fleeing American bombing during World War II, while later in the film we are privy to his parents being sent to

²⁰ The Kosovo conflict was in effect two wars, a civil war between Serbia and Kosovar Albanians, and a war between Yugoslavia and the United States, where the latter country and NATO sought to intervene in the civil war (Vasquez 106-107). According to Luca, Romanians were not universally supportive of the bombing of Kosovo, because they had an ongoing peaceful relationship with Serbia (Luca 824).

detention at the end of the war because of their cooperation with German forces. The powerlessness of the small boy in the face of war leads the grown man to resist the pressure to allow the troops to pass in an act of “ideologically motivated stubbornness” (Tuțui and Iacob 215). By forcing the Americans to remain in the town, Doiaru is forcing them to confront the “ideological complexities of Americans and US culture” in Romania in the post-Cold War period (Luca 822). The denouement announces the futility of such a confrontational exercise, although the film itself may provide a more instructive reconciliation between the two sides.

Stasis as a narrative tactic in *California Dreamin'* creates a dialogical space where two nations, in the form of two powerful men, Doiaru and Captain Jones, negotiate competing priorities and past trauma in a remote location, far from powerful political influence. Luca contends that the film successfully creates a dialogue between the two nations and “can become an ideal model for approaching the US in the Eastern European space” (Luca 822). But, the film also successfully creates a dialogue between the past and the present, demonstrating how unresolved aspects of the past can remain intractable. Nemescu’s choice of using black and white footage for the past and colour for the present highlights the difficulty in assimilating the past for Doiaru. However, by ensuring that multiple perspectives are presented, the director eschews passing judgement on any character, while also challenging teleological determinism or concrete constructions of history. The creation of a dialogic space suggests that the future is not preordained or necessarily prescribed by the past but is yet to be determined and is limited only by the imagination of the next generation. For *California Dreamin'*, I propose that stasis as a narrative tactic contributes to this dialogic space and forms an interesting departure point in a film that has mobility and crossing transnational borders as a core theme.

Despite arguing against equating modernity with slow cinema, Lucia Nagib proposes that “self-reflexive stasis” points to the political status of films and “the reality of the film medium” (Nagib “Slowness” 32). Further, Lucian Georgescu states that it is “the profound inclination of the New Romanian Cinema towards the static, thus drawing its existential significance precisely from the lack of movement” (30). Thus, moments of stasis serve as apolitical tactics that radically strand the protagonists in limbo between the action of the past and their future, while critiquing the notion that rapid movement equals the progress inherent in the capitalist promise. Fundamentally, though, stasis raises questions about where Romania wishes to go and how she can find a means to get there.

Thwarting narrative expectations

The trope of the road movie is recognisable in both *Stuff and Dough* and *California Dreamin’*, as both films centre around a journey. However, as I will now demonstrate, they both incorporate modernist and postmodernist attitudes that suggest new ways of interpreting the trope and also provide possible parameters for how the road movie can be reimagined in the twenty-first century. These films will be analysed in terms of how the thwarting of narrative conventions prompts questioning about Romania’s past and present social, economic and political status.

As David Bordwell explains, while closure, resolution and explicit deadlines are important parameters of classical narration, other cinematic traditions do not obey these structural devices (Bordwell 207). Thomas Elsaesser notes that facing a challenge with an uncertain resolution is one of the prime traits that distinguishes European cinema from classic Hollywood narratives. He writes:

American movies are based on the assumption that life presents you with problems, while European films are based on the conviction that life confronts you with dilemmas – and while problems are something you solve, dilemmas cannot be solved, they're merely probed. (Elsaesser 34)

California Dreamin' denies such narrative satisfaction, as “this text is in itself a journey that at the point of departure still has an uncertain ending” (Georgescu 26). This is not the only way that the director thwarts the audience's expectations. For example, in *Stuff and Dough* when the protagonists refuse to adhere to the deadline Ivanov gives them for fulfilment of the delivery, they appear to escape unpunished. Thus, what seems to be a simple task with a concrete outcome becomes a metaphor for a journey from innocence to cynicism that leaves the protagonists with an uncertain future.

Puiu creates a “nervous atmosphere” in the mise-en-scène from the beginning of *Stuff and Dough* by using a hand-held camera that mimics the sharp movements of the protagonists and their “frantic conversations” (Strausz 163). Similarly, during the car journey, “agitated” camerawork magnifies the panic in the young people as they are followed and then attacked by mobsters who threaten their lives (Filimon *Puiu* 47). The camera's perspective does not allow the audience to view the assailants clearly enough to identify them, but the resulting “visceral experience of the event ... destabilizes viewers' perceptions,” forcing them to engage emotionally and intellectually with the action (Filimon *Puiu* 48). The unexpected nature of the attack and the unpreparedness of both the protagonists and the audience to process the resulting trauma makes the attack to appear at first as a mere episode along the path to the journey's success. The audience is left wondering if the attack is “causally significant” or whether, in keeping with Bordwell's description of art cinema, it will leave open the “outcome of a causal chain” (209). Surprisingly, those same assailants are in fact central to Ovidiu's transformation, as they appear in a later scene murdered in their car. It is

not clear who is responsible for the murders, but they seem to be linked to Ovidiu's phone call to Mr Ivanov. Thus, Puiu brings back the attackers, not for them to again attempt to confront Ovidiu and his crew, but instead as victims of Ivanov. So, while the director has not severed the causal chain, the effects are multiple and ongoing, and spread out in unexpected ways.

Because the narrative of *Stuff and Dough* is predicated on the successful (or otherwise) delivery of the package to Bucharest by a certain time and the protagonists do not meet the time parameters, the spectator is primed to expect that a dramatic climax will be forthcoming when the package is eventually delivered. As such, in *Stuff and Dough* spectators have made inferences based on the protagonists' traits and also their actions, which results in them forming what Bordwell describes as a "*suspense hypothesis*," which "sets up anticipations about forthcoming events" (Bordwell 37). The audience is aware that Ovidiu has placed himself in mortal danger and he is likely to be killed or injured for not adhering to Ivanov's instructions, and therefore expects there to be a reckoning at the point of delivery. According to Liviu, this film exploits the audience's "genre awareness" and thus allows Puiu to "either meet ... [audience] expectations or frustrate them on various levels" (111). After examining the contents of the duffle bag delivered by Ovidiu, the receiver of the illegal goods, Mr Doncea states that it contains the wrong quantity of drugs. The audience is primed at that moment for a violent showdown as Ovidiu is by now surrounded by thugs who would easily be able to punish the young man for the apparent transgression. However, after a short phone call with Ivanov, Mr Doncea sends Ovidiu on his way. The audience's expectations are thus frustrated and the suspense and expected violence deferred.

The upending of narrative expectations contributes to a feeling of unease or confusion in the audience that contributes to a sense of authenticity as it represents the "crude nature of reality [where] everything happens by chance, sometimes without explaining why or how"

(Doru Pop *An Introduction* 64). Kracauer, when discussing *Rashomon* (Kurosawa 1950), speaks of the how Kurosawa, by interrogating different perspectives of an event, manages to “impress upon us the inexhaustibility of the causal continuum” (Kracauer 66). Similarly, by avoiding obvious narrative climactic moments, Puiu brings his film closer to reality through recognition of the role of the fortuitous in real-life experience. While it is only by luck that Ovidiu and his companions are spared reprisal from their failure to follow Ivanov’s detailed instructions, Ovidiu’s later trauma is an unexpected consequence of his one phone call to the mobster.

The thwarting of narrative expectations also places the audience in a state of disillusionment, which mirrors that of the main protagonist, Ovidiu (Strausz 162), who is eventually left in a state of guilt and fear, never knowing when, or if, he will be called to account for the consequences of his flippant decisions. Unfortunately, the bleak outlook for Ovidiu can be read as a metaphor for the Romanian nation, caught between the restrictions of communism and the abandonment of social and political institutions completely to market forces.²¹ The resulting chaos appears to leave the marginalised working-class to the vicissitudes of organised crime and corrupt authority figures, with little opportunity to improve their lot. While the film ends on an ambiguous note, it carries a portentous atmosphere that leaves little doubt that Ovidiu’s life will be marred by the day’s events. Narrative simplicity, paired with complex narrative interpretative possibilities, is a consistent characteristic of the films under examination in this thesis.

California Dreamin’ also thwarts narrative expectations, and one of the ways it does this is by setting up genre expectations and then foiling them. A theme in the film is the

²¹ As explained by Filimon: “Toward the end of the 1990s, consumption also accelerated, and small mom and pop stores, like the one Ovidiu’s parents own, cropped up everywhere ... The counterbalance to this apparent prosperity was the dramatic deterioration of the social safety net,” (Filimon *Puiu* 42)

persistent expectations of the American intervention of Romania being repeatedly thwarted.²² That the narrative expectations in *California Dreamin'* are continued raised and then thwarted, means that the film's content and form are thus aligned. As explained by Ioana Luca, *California Dreamin'* problematises the "contemporary overlapping and contradictory Romanian ideologies in relation to the US" (819). By approaching the film from Luca's American studies approach, a picture of how the multiple political interests of America were played out on Romanian soil. Luca's paper argues that "by mapping the overlapping terrain of the foreign and the domestic past and present, the film critically reconfigures the space between the US and one of its main supporters in the "New Europe." (Luca 819). From such an approach, it can be deduced that Romanian expectations of America are implicated in the Romanian characters' attitude to the American troops. We see Doiaru's childhood trauma as told in flashback, as his parents are arrested after the war because their factory helped to supply Germany. As they leave the small Doiaru, the couple promise that they will return when the Americans arrive in Romania and liberate them from Soviet rule. Doiaru clearly articulates the imagined heroic intervention of America in the Romanian psyche when he states, "We waited for the Americans to save us from Germans, Russians, communists, Ceaușescu. It's funny that you come here, finally. Better late than never." Though his words have a cynical tone, they take on a more poignant resonance after Captain Jones asks him why he speaks such good English. Doiaru replies, "I told you, I was waiting for you." This could be seen as a reaction to the America's use of Romania as a pawn of history both during and since World War II, and Doiaru's attempt to secure America's acknowledgement of Romania "as an important country, one that history simply cannot afford to abandon," which

²² According to Țuțui and Iacob, there was a "widespread belief from the immediate post-war years, the Americans were expected to save Romania from the Soviets" (220)

would thus restore the “national pride and confidence which communism deprived people of” (Schwab 104).

A metaphoric reading of Doiaru’s narrative arc can therefore be seen as an attempt by Romania to “interrupt the all-levelling march of history, drawing attention to itself, affirming its capacity to make itself heard and its equal right to existence” (Schwab 106). Nasta contends that Doiaru’s aversion to Americans ... has its roots not only in his troubled childhood but also in the form of disillusionment shared by millions of Romanians (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 218). Thus, Doiaru’s failure to hold the Americans accountable for his personal losses during World War II and its aftermath mirrors Romania’s failure to force America to accept their role in political failures in Romania; in particular, to acknowledge that their decision to interfere with “the destinies of such countries ... without any close knowledge of the human beings that inhabit them” has led to tragic consequences (Schwab 108). This casts Doiaru as a metaphor for Romania, obsessed with America and its possible positive interference in Romanian politics. Frustrating the narrative expectations of the audience, Doiaru’s storyline re-enacts the thwarting of the expectations of Romanians of America’s positive intervention in their country while also demonstrating a practice of resistance against Americans imposing their will on countries for their own political gain.

However, *California Dreamin’* also suggests that force is not the only way America imposes its will, as can be seen in the various tactics Captain Smith uses to gain Doiaru’s cooperation. Initially, the captain attempts to negotiate his train’s release with Doiaru through forming a friendship with the Romanian stationmaster and also offering him a large sum of American dollars. However, both moves fail to result in Doiaru releasing the train. The captain then rallies to the mayor’s attempt to overthrow Doiaru’s stranglehold over the town. With the two men united against Doiaru, it appears that the narrative’s rising tension has a possibility of ending in a satisfying resolution, at least for the mayor and the captain. As

proposed by Schwab, the film highlights the cultural differences between the Americans and Romanians while simultaneously forcing the Americans to inhabit a space of marginalisation and dislocation, like the Romanians themselves (109). This raises the expectation of Captain Smith experiencing a revelation, where he is able to unite his own cause with the mayor's to both of their mutual satisfaction, thereby leading to a conclusion where the prosperity of the town and the release of the NATO train are simultaneously secured.

Despite the promising alliance between mayor and captain, the film's climax is both unedifying and deeply troubling because the captain does not fulfil his promise to help the mayor in confronting Doiaru's tyrannical rule of the town (Luca 827). Instead, he sets the two competing factions against each other, in a violent and futile battle which guarantees further trauma for the already traumatised Romanian town. While a fight-to-the-death is played out in a struggle not unlike a Wild West shootout, the captain and his precious cargo sneak away towards the already resolved civil war in Serbia. The similarity between the violent confrontation and a Wild West film allows for a comparison between the real and imagined Wild West and the "imaginary and the mythological" existence of Americans as "a saviour who is expected to intervene at any time and bring justice to those wronged by history" (Schwab 113). In this comparison, the Romanians could have imagined Captain Jones as a John Wayne figure, fighting for the rights of the hard-done-by townsfolk against the greed of the rich and powerful bad guy. However, Captain Jones' aim was not to serve the greater good, but to extricate himself from the grasp of the stationmaster, and therefore, he is averse to risking any resources to fight another man's battle. While Luca states that "the relationship between Doiaru and Jones serves as a microcosm for the narrative of Romanian expectations regarding the US and its role in the region" (Luca 828), there is no possible way that Doiaru could have his lifelong expectations of the American intervention in Romania fulfilled. Likewise, the mayor's expectations of the successful American intervention in local politics

is bound for failure, not because the captain does not engage in the offered “cultural intimacy” in Căpâlnița (Luca 832), but that his end goal is not aligned closely enough with that of the mayor. Although Jones “assumes the role of democratic saviour fighting tyranny and despotism,” it is only rhetorically (Luca 833), for when the fighting starts, he has already coupled the carriage of his train with the engine and continued his mission eastward.

However, Dioaru is not the only character to have ulterior motives when interacting with the Americans. The mayor of Căpâlnița (Ion Sapdaru) offers generous hospitality to the American troops, hoping to encourage investment in the town, however, despite his wildly optimistic attempts to woo the soldiers with entertainment his goal is frustrated repeatedly. Initially, he organises a party that is a repeat of a recent centenary celebration for their town. Included as entertainment is a Romanian Elvis impersonator who changes the lyrics of Elvis’ hit single “Blue Suede Shoes” to “Don’t step on my gypsy shoes.” The town has been decorated in American themed bunting, the mayor wears an American flag tie, and a number of badly painted portraits of famous Americans are lined up against the centre stage. The local interest in America and the mayor’s attempts to prove his cultural fluency in America is constantly undermined by the fact he does not actually know any English. Similarly, the young women of the town have been coached in seduction skills in the hope that their sexual allure can be exchanged for international mobility and an improved economic future, even though they are also not fluent in English. Both the mayor and the local young women are projecting an “intensely enduring collective dream” of America as economic and possibly, political, saviours (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 218). Once the mayor realises he has failed to garner interest from the Americans to invest in the town, he changes tack and enlists their help in stopping Doiaru’s corrupt actions, which are destroying the financial viability of local factory, thus stymying economic prosperity in Căpâlnița.

None of the Romanian characters within the different narrative threads in *California Dreamin'* realise their ambitions, and this disruption of narrative expectation mirrors the disruption of expectations regarding American intervention in Romanian politics that has occurred over time. Doiaru's parents did not return and the Americans did not help restore the family's factory to his ownership after the war. Likewise, America not only failed to "rescue Romania from the takeover of communists and Soviet influence" but rather facilitated it through the negotiations at the Yalta conference in 1945, which effectively allowed the Soviets to exercise control over Romania in return for concessions elsewhere in Europe (Luca 826). The fact that Romania was held as a bargaining chip in Yalta reveals its importance as the border between the east and west of Europe, which is also demonstrated in *California Dreamin'* through the necessity of accessing a train route from the West to Serbia through Romania.

The slow pace of the narrative of *Stuff and Dough* can be seen as a realist trait, but it can also be associated with cinematic modernism when "the narrative's focus is on the diffuse mental effects of the protagonist's interaction with the exterior world rather than on the material and existential concerns resulting from this interaction" (Kovács 64). This description is also applicable to both Jarmusch's *Paterson* (2016) and *Stuff and Dough*.²³ Both *Stuff and Dough* and *Paterson* can be described as "slow cinema," which is, according to Nagib, a characteristic that carries a political agenda (Nagib "Slowness" 26). While the plot of *Stuff and Dough* could be considered "banal" (Filimon Puiu 40), its richness lies in its mobile subject positioning and the subsequent array of possible interpretations. Whether it is seen as a critical examination of the relationship between father and son (Filimon Puiu 39) or a parable concerning a young man's journey from naïvete to cynicism (Strausz 163) depends

²³ Puiu credits Jarmusch's film *Stranger than Paradise* (1984) as inspiring him to abandon painting for cinema (Filimon Puiu 51).

on individual interpretation. As stated by Bazin, “Isn’t this, then, a sound definition of realism in art: to force the mind to draw its own conclusions about people and events, instead of manipulating it into accepting someone else’s interpretation?” (Bazin “Germany” 124). According to Ian Aitken, “What Bazin means by ‘realism,’ is, therefore, a mode of expression in which neutral detail links the concrete to the abstract in a manner that promotes active but composed scrutiny within the spectator” (Aitken “Tradition” 185) . However, while a self-reflexive subject positioning is inherent in realist cinema, it can also be seen as a postmodern attitude.

Although dealing with residual trauma from the distant and more recent past, *California Dreamin’* does not end on a pessimistic note, According to Ieta, “Romanians have a penchant for expecting to be ‘saved by the bell,’ for receiving unexpected favourable turns of fate and for meeting with better luck” (Ieta “A Decade” 205). Despite every effort to seduce the American forces into mediating in local matters, all hope at the end of the film seems lost. While the denouement of *California Dreamin’* appears to thwart all the Romanians’ expectations, there is hope in the final scene. Doiaru’s daughter, Monica, despite losing her father in the bloody fight for supremacy in the town, does not seek future prosperity through contact with the American soldiers, but exercises her own agency by deciding to study in Bucharest as per her father’s wishes. So, while the expectation of the characters in *California Dreamin’* to be rescued by American intervention or assistance or to have some redemption through resistance, Monica is enabled to search for a better future through internal mobility in Romania itself. While it could be argued that this last scene changes the tone of the film and may have eventually been excised from the final cut had the director lived, it does infuse the film with a hopeful quality, which undermines the depressing fatality of the penultimate scene.

While grappling with past injustices and the resulting social, political and economic fallout, *California Dreamin'* eventually returns the responsibility and power to enact positive change squarely within the remit of the Romanian people themselves. By creating narrative expectations and then dispersing the resulting rising tension, the director recognises yet dismisses any remnant of blame or bitterness and replaces it with a nascent hope for the next generation. While the Romanian fatalistic world view is definitely reflected in the plot and aesthetic design of the film, the film's inherent humour and the final scene with Monica and Andrei creates a dialectic space where old trauma and new horizons can speak of alternate futures for Romania's people.

Female agency: women as agents of change

One of the four narrative threads in *California Dreamin'* follows Doiaru's daughter, Monica, and her budding romance with an American soldier, David McLaren (Jamie Elman). Before the two meet, we learn that Monica has been in a relationship with the mayor's son, Paul (Constantin Dita). Paul is a self-important rich kid who drives an expensive car and flaunts his wealth with his peers at school and around town. Two issues are at play in Monica's story arc: the narrow choices afforded to women in post-communist Romania both economically and socially and the insidious systemic mechanisms through which geographical mobility is restricted within Romania and transnationally. There are other films within the New Romanian canon deal directly with the "post-1989 return to essentialist gender politics" (Strausz 213), for instance, *Tuesday, after Christmas* (Muntean, 2010), that focuses on infidelity and marital conflict. *California Dreamin'*, however, makes a more positive statement about gender norms. I argue that despite Monica being offered two choices to ensure a secure economic and social future through a man, the film offers a third choice that

frees her from traditional gender roles and which also thwarts traditional narrative expectations.

While previous discussions in this chapter have addressed mobility and the geographically marginalised nature of Romania, here the gendered nature of East and West will be addressed in relation to *California Dreamin'*. I argue that like her father, Monica enacts resistance, but in her case, not against American interference in Romania but against the orientalist gender constructions of Eastern European women imposed from outside the country as well as the “rebirth of the patriarchal model” that occurred within post-communist Romanian society itself (Duma 168).

Interestingly, Călin Andrei Mihăilescu describes contemporary Romanian cinema itself as representing the “poetics of filmic resistance” (189), which suggests that in *California Dreamin'*, through combining a minimalist aesthetic with a narrative of resistance, unites form and content. The concept of united content and form seems to contradict the Bazinian realist construct that the director “who mediates least” has the strongest “disposition toward reality” (Bazin *Neorealism* 8). However, Bazin also praises works that utilise montage, such as *Citizen Kane* (Welles 1941), which are considered by him as holding true to realist principles because they exercise “selectivity just sufficiently to put us in much the same relation of regard and choice toward the narrative as we are toward reality in life” (Bazin *Neorealism* 8). I propose, therefore, that *California Dreamin'*, by matching form and content, does not deviate from realist conceptualisation, but indeed this aspect contributes to its realist credentials, as it does indeed create “a model of reality” (Țuțui and Iacob 222) that has its roots in Bazin’s understandings of cinematic realism but has been adapted to the specific Romanian twenty-first century context.

One of the institutional mechanisms in Căpâlnița which hinders freedom of movement for the town's young people is that Spanish is the only foreign language taught in the local school. Spanish is much less useful as an international language than English and therefore prevents the young people easily communicating with the Westerners in their midst and also lowers their chances of communicating with other Europeans outside Romania. While Romania occupies an "historical, cultural and geopolitical peripheral position towards Western Europe" (Țuțui and Iacob 213), attempts to be more engaged with other countries in the European Union would surely be greatly disadvantaged by linguistic limitations. Once the Americans arrive, Monica seeks out a peer who she knows is competent in English, Andrei (Alexandru Margineanu), who has a crush on her, to help her learn to communicate with Sergeant McLaren. While Andrei does assist Monica in learning some English, when she asks him to translate conversations between herself and David, Andrei purposely misinterprets the words in an attempt to derail the romance. While this action on Andrei's behalf is humorous, it does infer the layers of control men exert over women. Dana Duma, when describing another New Romanian film *Francesca* (Păunescu 2009), talks of how women in a patriarchal society are "bound by the symbolic order ... through linguistic command" (173). In the case of Monica, she is restricted in exercising her will through Andrei's manipulation of language. He seeks to prevent her from forming a romance with David by misinterpretation and, by implication, seeks to prevent her movement away from Romania.

Similarly, Doiaru initially expresses disappointment about the prospect of Monica leaving Căpâlnița by enumerating all the consumer goods he has provided for her enjoyment, aiming to ensure her compliance with his will (Figure 4). This scene demonstrates how women are viewed as commodities within the town, which is further emphasised in the humorous scene where young women are instructed on how to dress to secure the attention of

the American men. It is assumed in the latter exchange, that sexual attractiveness may give access to material wealth and possible international mobility. The issue of exercising female agency and international mobility is central to other films within the New Romanian canon, for example *Francesca* (Păunescu 2009) and *Ryna* (Zenide 2005), where movement away from Romania is positioned as essential for personal and financial growth (Duma 169-173). Monica's story arc is only one of the narrative threads in *California Dreamin'*, meaning it is not the central preoccupation of the film. However, Monica is a notable character within Romanian film due to her apparent success in making decisions about her own future and also successfully negotiating movement, albeit inside Romania. While the film itself is set in the past, it is posited by Duma that "gender inequality in the present day" is still a significant issue and it is unfortunately not a frequent concern of New Romanian cinema (174).



Figure 4. Doiaru lectures Monica after she is discovered as a stowaway on the train packed with American soldiers, screen shot from *California Dreamin'*.

Described by Stojanova as a work that "foster[s] an understanding of the West as neither panacea nor arbiter" in the "evolving Eastern European drama" ("Overview" 276),

California Dreamin' also brings into focus the dichotomous relationship between the West and East, casting the former as the centre of the world and the latter as the "other." Despite Eastern Europe no longer existing behind an ideological Iron Curtain, a "cultural legacy" of othering remains, which, although Romania is now included in the European Union, endures (Godeanu-Kenworthy 101). According to Oana Godeanu-Kenworthy, ideological trends that have resulted from engagement with the West post-1989 have seen women seeking marriage outside Romania as a means of securing "upward mobility and gender equality that Romanian society did not seem to offer" (101). The behaviour of the young women in *California Dreamin'* sees them "marketing themselves as potential wives" in response to the "chronic lack of perspectives at home" (Godeanu-Kenworthy 101). However, as pointed out by Nasta, bonding with American men "has always been an enduring collective dream" of Romanian women (*Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 218).

Despite being initially keen to escape Căpâlnița to begin a relationship with David, which itself indicates a willingness to access the West through him, Monica ultimately repudiates the expectation of mobility gained through men and rejects further contact with the American. Instead of seeking to travel outside of Romania, she instead travels to Bucharest to study at university. Therefore, while Monica does travel to improve her future security, she does so without the intervention of a man and, indeed, her "choices illuminate the ability that Romanian women and men have to negotiate their gender in more meaningful ways" (Godeanu-Kenworthy 112). Therefore, the character of Monica proposes a different narrative to that where the West was seen "as a promise of economic security and upward mobility for women" (Godeanu-Kenworthy 104) or that she remain under the influence of a male father figure.

Additionally, apart from undermining the neo-traditional patriarchal model that was "reflected in the gender dynamics" in the 1990s (Godeanu-Kenworthy 102), Monica's story

arc also challenges genre tropes, in how her romance is developed. While *California Dreamin'* overall could be considered a journey film, Monica's narrative thread has a resemblance to the romance genre. Yet her romantic relationships are configured to advance her journey of self-discovery. At the beginning of the film, there are three possible romantic partners identified from which Monica can choose: Paul, the rich playboy, Sergeant David McLaren, the American soldier, and Andrei, a school friend. In classic narrative theory, the heterosexual romance line is a frequently utilised as a narrative thread, and one in which resolution would be expected to be yield some kind of "poetic justice" at syuzhet's conclusion (Bordwell 157, 159). *California Dreamin'* does not meet with heteronormative expectations that Monica choose to partner with one of the men with whom she is involved. Additionally, Monica does not meet the expectations that relate to how Romanian women use sexuality "in a new global marketplace of marriage" (Godeanu-Kenworthy 104). Instead, she chooses to exercise her own agency in order to seek an education in Bucharest and therefore become the author of her own destiny. The hope for the future that Monica represents can be interpreted as offering hope for Romania's future through the female gender. Monica is therefore both a representative of women who can seek out prosperity through their own individual endeavours and also a metaphor for the possibility of Romania constructing her own prosperous future.

In other films in the New Romanian canon, such as *Beyond the Hills* and *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, women's struggle for control over their lives and their bodies are depicted in violent and visceral terms. In *California Dreamin'*, although Monica struggles against constraints imposed on her self-determination, there is no violence enacted upon her. Rather the violence inflicted upon her father enables her eventual escape. In the final scene, Monica meets up with Andrei, who is also studying in Bucharest, however, neither pursue further contact and it seems this moment of contact serves only to draw their relationship to a close.

What is surprising is that Monica does not accept any overtures from Andrei, who was, from the beginning of the film, infatuated with her. Monica is no longer the exotic “other” upon whom an American man attaches an erotic fantasy or the target of a playboy who manipulates her for sexual favours. In this way, Monica, in common with other women in New Romanian films, such as Andrian Hanganu (Mirela Oprişor) in *Tuesday, After Christmas*, refuses to be dominated by a man (Duma 175), or see her own future happiness as contingent on having a romantic partner; indeed, she appears to actively avoid such an alliance.

The other three narrative threads in *California Dreamin’* focus on the male perspective and, had the film only contained these three perspectives, the film would have been devoid of hope for the future. However, Monica’s story arc suggests that women, as agents of change, are capable of finding new paths for Romania’s future. Godeanu-Kenworthy proposes that despite the gendered roles assigned women both during communism and after 1989, and the persistent imaginaries that the West offers greater opportunities than are offered at home, suggesting that change and mobility can both be achieved within Romania on one’s own, personal terms (111). This is a radical departure for a romantic narrative thread for Romanian women seeking social and economic security and also for those who see America as a saviour. With the death of Doiaru, the weight of past injustices and the trauma of wounds inflicted by foreigners uninterested in a country so far from power is released, and a more nuanced understanding of national identity becomes possible and offers a poignant, but no less hopeful, view of the future.

Complicity: Where blame is shared by perpetrators and spectators

Moral compromise was at the core of Romanian politics in the first two decades after the fall of the Iron Curtain, when the refusal to confront and take responsibility for the past ensured the ex-Communist Party officials a comfortable grip on power.

Resistance, however, was only around the corner. The NRC [New Romanian cinema] was born in opposition to such moral compromise (Filimon *Puiu* 14).

New Romanian cinema is a cinema of resistance and critique, presenting images that challenge historical memory, but also exploring the complicity of a whole generation to the horrors of the past (Parvulescu 5). Kalling Heck, for example, contends that *Beyond the Hills* implicates the austerity politics that form a part of neoliberalism as the prime cause of the plight of the female protagonists in that film (Heck 154). In contrast, Constantin Parvulescu notes that any “black and white incrimination of a perpetrator is always accompanied by an act of forgetting one’s own complicity” (3). In this section I examine how the modernist techniques deployed in New Romanian cinema problematise the heroes and villains of the past. I propose that the cause of political and social failure is dealt with in New Romanian cinema by refusing to cast judgement. The key tactic is the direct-to-camera look, which is both a self-reflexive tool that breaks the fourth wall and a means of bringing the audience into a relationship with the events depicted. As a spectator watches a film, they remain at a psychological distance from what they see, however, when the protagonist looks directly into the camera, they draw the viewer closer to the text.

As mentioned previously, in Cristian Mungiu’s seminal film *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, while there is a definite villain (the abortionist and rapist Mr Bebe, played by Vlad Ivanov), the blame for the suffering of the two protagonists, Otilia and Găbița, can be spread

further afield. In 1969 the communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu issued Decree 770, effectively banning abortion or any form of contraception. The resultant rise in the population occurred at the same time as a succession of poor harvests (Ioan Aurel Pop 144). These circumstances resulted in an increase in malnutrition and one of the highest incidences of infant mortality in Europe by the late 1980s (Roper 56). Additionally, Ceausescu pursued a policy of paying down foreign debt that exacerbated food shortages, the lack of medical care and unreliability of access to gas and electricity (Roper 55).

Heck observes that the films of the New Romanian cinema are pitched to “major European powers” who are complicit in the austerity policies imposed by the Ceaușescu regime because they directly benefited from them (Heck 159). He argues that like Italian neorealism, New Romanian cinema is “addressed outward,” using the appearance of “damaged human bodies” to appeal “directly to the international community” to act to alleviate the plight of the people who have suffered as a result of political failure (Heck 159). This is a contentious opinion, which has not really been addressed by other scholars. A more nuanced view might take into account how important film festivals are to the New Romanian canon, and therefore drawing overseas audiences into the sphere of complicity, makes these films more universally relevant.

Patrick Barnard explains the Western attitude towards Ceaușescu and his government as follows:

The fellow [Ceaușescu] was useful, and since “we” knew all about him, we must now distance ourselves from his unpleasant memory as forcefully as possible. The Socialist Party’s Lionel Jospin, who was France’s interim Prime Minister in December, told the real story of the West’s collective attitude toward Ceaușescu in an interview given to Radio Luxembourg on the Friday that Ceaușescu was overthrown.

The desire to exploit Romania's independence from Moscow had created, Jospin admitted, "an unquestionably excessive indulgence toward that which we already knew about, namely the regime's internal harshness". (1)

This suggests that Western countries knew the difficulties facing the Romanian populace and that they downplayed or ignored them because it was economically and politically expedient to do so.²⁴

Karl Schoonover proposes that Italian neorealism presents "cinematic encounters with the violenced or physically compromised human form [as a] means of exploring the ethics of witnessing" (Schoonover xvii). This witnessing then "authorizes the foreign gaze to adjudicate local politics" (Schoonover xvii). Similarly to Italian neorealism, New Romanian cinema provides a critique of local politics but, unlike Italian neorealism, the films use distinctly modernist techniques to do so. Three scenes in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* demonstrate this tendency. In these moments, Mungiu has the protagonist look directly at the camera, achieving "a high level of self-consciousness and reflexivity" (Stelmach 3). I propose that in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* the audience is forced to confront the reality of the communist condition.

As previously discussed, the film covers a 24-hour period in the life of Otilia as she and her friend Găbița go through the preparations for and deal with the aftermath of procuring an abortion for Găbița. Aside from being the victims of a society that positions women's bodies as tools of the state, both women also become victimised by the abortionist who insists they have intercourse with him as payment for his services. Set during communism shortly before the fall of Ceaușescu and in a social and legal atmosphere of fear

²⁴ Amongst the deals Ceaușescu made with Western powers were the purchase of nuclear reactors from Canada and aircraft from Britain, neither of which exchange proved to be to Romania's longterm benefit. Also, around US \$10 million worth of loans flowed to the Romanian government for infrastructure and capacity projects, which failed to produce expected prosperity. (Barnard 2)

and constant surveillance, the risk to both life for Găbița and very real risk of legal and social consequences of their actions for both of them, are dealt with in a starkly realist style.

Prior to Găbița's abortion, the two women and the abortionist discuss the payment options. Unfortunately, in Găbița's only prior contact with Mr Bebe, she failed to ascertain what the cost would be, and assumed the amount. Additionally, Otilia had to spend some of the money already because Găbița failed to make the required hotel booking and a more expensive hotel was the only option. It is also significant that Găbița is further along in the pregnancy than she has disclosed to either Otilia or Mr Bebe and the abortion is thus riskier from both a legal and medical standpoint. Unbeknown to both women is that Mr Bebe is not interested in a monetary payment, and instead asks "who will go first," thus implying they must submit their own bodies for payment for Găbița's medical procedure. After a harrowing few minutes where Găbița pleads with the man to allow her friend to be spared the act, Otilia submits so that her friend can have the abortion immediately. As Găbița leaves the hotel room, she looks back, and Mr Bebe looks directly at her while Otilia removes her clothes, and he removes his shoes and socks (see Figure 5).

Uricaru describes the filming style of Mungiu as "a careful but unflinching camera" that I believe also describes the gaze of Mr Bebe in this shot (Uricaru "The Corruption of Intimacy" 13). Mungiu refuses to spare the audience the excruciating details of the procedure that Mr Bebe performs on Găbița, even as that scene is not "conventionally gruesome" (Uricaru "The Corruption of Intimacy" 14). Likewise, Mr Bebe's look at Găbița as she excuses herself from the room while he violates her friend makes no mistake that he blames Găbița for what is about to take place, made somehow more explicit by the view of his bare feet. By placing the camera in the position of Găbița, Mungiu is casting the blame outwards to the audience, allowing the culpability of Găbița to be shared with all those who are witnesses to what is about to take place. According to Pop, the exploitation of the two women

is a metaphor for Romanian communist politics which, while “enforcing on the body of the social group, the communist leadership considered the silent acceptance as an act of submission, yet was confronted with a similar silent disgust, as manifested by the tacit resistance of the two women” (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 201). While the gaze here is less a call to action, as per Schoonover’s argument, I believe it is instead a question of culpability that must be shared with those countries who benefited from the regime’s economic and social policies.²⁵



Figure 5. Mr Bebe looks at Găbița, prior to his rape of Otilia, screen shot from *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*.

²⁵ Patricia Gonzalez Aldea states that Ceaușescu fostered an image as a “champion of peace and disarmament” in his foreign relations, which seemed to have encouraged a positive response from overseas officials. She continues: “In Madrid, Ceaușescu was given the ‘Key to the City.’ The West bestowed the dictator with various other honours, like the ‘Legion of Honour’ in France, and similar honours in Great Britain, Italy, and Greece,” (14). America honoured Romania with “most favoured nation” status in 1975, after years of influence, on the pretext that it “can help improve human rights in Romania and encourage a degree of political independence from Moscow,” (Pacepa 26).



Figure 6. Otilia suffers the first of a series of nosebleeds, screen shot from *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*.

The violence enacted on the women is not explicitly shown; however, it is reinforced through the repetitive motif of nosebleeds that Otilia suffers. The first one occurs after Otilia leaves the hotel where the abortion procedure takes place, travelling by tram to meet her boyfriend Adi (Figure 6). The bloody nose represents both the physical cost of obtaining the illegal abortion for her friend as well as Otilia's affinity with her friend who she has left bleeding in a hotel room. Furthermore, the corporeality of the bloody nose is indicative of how the environment of the subjugation in 1987 Romania inscribes itself upon the female body. Uricaru suggests the nosebleeds create a nauseated feeling in the audience, similar to seasickness, that is a haptic response to the "impression of confinement" Mungiu creates in this and other scenes ("The Corruption of Intimacy" 14). Following Schoonover, I suggest that the display of physical trauma that Otilia suffers is offered as an opportunity for the audience to "exercise ethical judgements" (159), not against the women at the centre of the plot but about how they might act in similar circumstances.



Figure 7. Otilia looks at Găbița after her rape by Mr Bebe, screen shot from *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*.

The second direct-to-camera gaze occurs after Găbița has been raped (she is assaulted after her friend has intercourse with the abortionist). Otilia faces the mirror as Găbița runs behind her into the bathroom (see Figure 7). In keeping with the frame within the frame device discussed earlier, this shot is replete with rectangles: in the mirror, the door and the jarringly bright blue tiling. However, rather than a haven where the women can be safe from their attacker, the bathroom itself is the repository of the aftermath of the violence inflicted on both women. This is where the foetus is left after it has been aborted; this is where the women try to cleanse themselves from the gruesome assault; and, this is where the multiple framing visually reinforces the motif on confinement. However, I contend that Otilia's gaze at Găbița and the camera at the same time encourages the audience to question their own ethical values and limits of compassion.

When Otilia watches Găbița crying in the corner, her eyes are darkened and her face is heavily shadowed by the unforgiving lighting in the bathroom. Rather than watching her friend to condemn her, Otilia appears to be asking a question: "How could this have happened?" Later Otilia asks many questions of her friend, but here she is both asking her and the audience the same question. The discomfort inherent in Otilia's direct gaze is haunting in its directness and challenge, but it also invites active engagement by the audience, to fill the void with meaning. It is therefore an example of how modernism is incorporated within the realist aesthetics of the film. While the film appears as realist, it approaches the problems caused by Romania's form of communism with wider implications for the world at large in a modernist gesture that opens "up an imaginative space in which to negotiate, the inherent strangeness of being-in-the-(modern)-world" (Donald 15).

The final scene in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* is much discussed, as it contains many self-reflexive traits that suggest multiple meanings. It is one of the few moments where Otilia and Găbița speak to each other while both appearing in the frame. They sit opposite each other, talking about food, and agreeing never to speak about their horrific ordeal again (Figure 8). The scene itself is notable for its use of double framing, with the glass window that occupies a space between the camera and the characters, as well as the breaking of the fourth wall by Otilia. According to Parvulescu, Mungiu's use of "self-reflexive tropes [serves] to remind the viewer that the ontological claim of its representation is limited" (Parvulescu 3). Otilia's gaze opens the meaning to interpretation by establishing "a fissure" in the film, that argues for the "unreachability of history" (Strausz 135).



Figure 8. Final scene of the film, Otilia looks directly at the camera, screen shot from *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*.

As Strausz notes, this moment is a “quintessentially modernist gesture ... [an] accentuation of the viewer’s complicity in the establishing of the past” (Strausz 135). We cannot know what motivates Otilia to make such huge effort for her ungrateful friend, although having made the decision to help Găbița, she could not have known “its full set of implications” (Uricaru “The Corruption of Intimacy” 16). Mungiu himself states that only people who would not be prepared to commit to such a program of solidarity would need to ask why Otilia undertakes such enormous responsibility (Uricaru “The Corruption of Intimacy” 16). As Monica Filimon suggests, Mungiu aims to provide “viewers’ epiphanies,” particularly as they relate to “human knowledge and conscience in general” (“Beyond” 31-32). In the final scene, Mungiu effectively invites the audience to recognise the multiplicity inherent in any interpretations of events, people or localities they witness. Importantly, this scene is reminiscent of the radically ambiguous ending of François Truffaut French New Wave masterpiece *400 Blows*, where the camera is trained on Antoine’s face in the final scene of the film, who is looking at the camera lens, in a gesture that “made the freeze-frame

technique a favoured device for expressing an unresolved situation” (Thompson and Bordwell 445). Just as in *400 Blows*, in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, any closure or resolution about why the events unfolded as they did is unlikely, just as the framing techniques employed “dismiss the possibility of any final closure in our production of the past” (Strausz 135).

The Death of Mr Lăzărescu also uses the direct-to-camera gaze to both break the fourth wall and to draw the audience into the sphere of complicity. At just the moment the audience is certain Mr Lăzărescu has breathed his last breath, he slowly and deliberately turns to the camera, barely opening his eyes (see Figure 9). While suggesting that Mr Lăzărescu’s frail body may live beyond the story, I contend that this gesture serves to knit together all the complex threads Puiu has teased apart and challenges all to recognise the shared humanity of the body on the table. As previously discussed, Puiu has made comparisons between Mr Lăzărescu’s plight and that of Christ, who is considered by Christians as God made flesh. Here, the protagonist invites comparisons between himself and all those witnessing his demise. Puiu’s network of interrelations that relies heavily on intermediality allows everyone to see themselves in Mr Lăzărescu, and here I believe the narrative and the use of the intermedial collide to produce opposite meanings, for instance, to look into the future.

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to recognise that the search for meaning in post-Romanian society has been problematic. As explained by Strausz:

The dominant popular recollections of the past ... need to be interpreted as a reaction to the monolithic narratives of state socialism, which were quite simply reversed ... Alternative accounts, which do not depict state socialism as a repression of the overwhelming majority of Romanian society by a small elite, are generally rejected

... Imagining Romanian society as a collective victim of the dictatorial regime has been emotionally much easier for the population. (Strausz 118)

Therefore, both the mobile subject positioning in New Romanian cinema generally and the drawing of the spectator into a relationship with the past through the direct-to-camera gaze problematises an “oversimplified oppressor-oppressed binary” by insisting on the “heterogeneity of the phases within history of the Ceausescu regime” (Strausz 119). Instead of offering one particular truth, the films challenge collective memory, thus allowing the possibility of reconciliation with the past through recognising the almost endless patterns that can be created by its multitudinous knotted threads.



Figure 9. Mr Lăzărescu looks towards the camera at the end of the film, screen grab from *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*.

Both Mr Lăzărescu’s and Otilia’s haunting gazes challenge and question the preceding events in a modernist gesture of breaking the fourth wall. Uricaru posits that Otilia’s look “builds and crosses a bridge of human solidarity” (Uricaru “The Corruption of Intimacy” 16) and is perhaps the finest example of how New Romanian cinema’s oblique and

challenging cinematic style brings the audience into the meaning-making process at the same time as brings them into a relationships with profound moments of reckoning. The power of both closing scenes is how the realist language pushes against a modernist stance, and thus changes what realism could mean to European cinema.

Conclusion

This chapter began with an analysis of the narrative structure that typified Italian neorealism, with the aim of identifying where New Romanian cinema aligns with that structure and where it diverges. The analysis demonstrated that while New Romanian cinema does closely resemble Italian neorealism, it has adopted several narrative tactics from modernism and postmodernism.

Firstly, by examining how characters are developed and events depicted, this chapter showed how in *Stuff and Dough*, Puiu uses unreliable narration to interrogate identity construction. Implicated in this theme is the complex historical relationship between Romania and the West, and the former's fraught transition from communism to capitalism. Both *Stuff and Dough* and *California Dreamin'* use the trope of the journey to structure their plots, but by thwarting narrative expectations, they problematise both the assumptions made about the progress towards that transition and about whether the goal is either achievable or even worthwhile.

The tactic of limiting the spectator's field of vision is used consistently throughout the New Romanian canon and runs contra to the Italian neorealist attitude of providing everything within the frame that the audience needs to follow the plot. The omission of necessary information is a prominent trait in the films discussed in this chapter, and can be seen as thwarting narrative expectations, but is also consistent with the view that this cinema

is about the *exploration* of the real, rather than making a claim that what is captured by the camera represents a direct translation from reality to the screen.

Next, this chapter addressed the manner in which movement and stasis is mobilised in the films under discussion. I proposed that there is an existential significance in placing moments of stasis alongside frantic movement. As discussed, both *Stuff and Dough* and *California Dreamin'* explore themes relating to Romania's communist past and the transition to democracy and capitalism. Here, it is argued that the tactic of adopting moments of stillness is a deliberate gesture that infers a postmodern attitude that repudiates any value placed in ideology. However, by drawing on the work of Kracauer in this section, I demonstrated that contrasting movement and stasis is also consistent with the realist specificities of the canon.

The thwarting of narrative expectations in *Stuff and Dough* and *California Dreamin'* was compared to tactics employed by Italian neorealism and by art-house cinema in general. I argued that by changing the expected narrative arc, the directors are drawing attention to the crude nature of reality, which is governed more by happenstance than direct cause and effect logic. Reminiscent of Italian neorealist cinema, such narrative ploys add the realist effect.

The chapter also examined how a female character is positioned as an agent of change in *California Dreamin'*. In Chapter 4 in this thesis, hope is inferred with the use of intermediality; however, in this film, hope is channelled through Monica. Despite offering various options for the future through the men who show an interest in her, this character chooses to exercise her own agency through choosing education in Bucharest rather than a romantic relationship. I argued that Nemescu is championing Romania's future through equal opportunities for women and concluded that Nemescu's film is a revelatory work that suggests that the future is gendered, and that gender is female.

Finally, this chapter discussed the self-reflexive tactic of the direct-to-camera gaze and how complicity is implied by this gesture. I contended when characters direct their gaze at the camera they “draw the viewer into a particular relationship with the screen” (Chirujitaru 209) that invites an intimate contact with the protagonist while denying the opportunity of detachment. This form of address allows the director to raise questions about complicity and, in some cases, spread it outward. While this tactic conflicts with the use of the intermedial, that, as discussed, can activate a distancing effect, both these aesthetic choices enable the spectator a unique perspective of the events occurring on screen. The key attributes of New Romanian cinema discussed here deconstruct any preconceived notions about the nature of truth in cinema and activate a certain kind of spectatorship which is at times deeply uncomfortable yet brings the viewer ever closer to knowing – and experiencing – the full, unadorned truth in all its messy complexity.

This chapter delivered four key interventions. Firstly, it adopted an American studies approach to the films analysed, through the work of Ioana Luca. Integrating her analysis of *California Dreamin’*, which takes a historical and geopolitical position regarding textual analysis, allowed me to probe the depth of the film and discover deeper meanings.

Secondly, this chapter extended, Lucian Georgescu’s scholarship on the workings of the road genre within New Romanian film. This allowed me to explore how genre can be used as a background against which expectations can be thwarted, imbuing genre films with a substantial degree of realism. I have integrated this exploration of genre with Morris’ work on the self-reflexive aspects of the road movie which strengthened my argument that New Romanian cinema inflicts its strategies with a postmodern attitude.

Thirdly, I developed further the work of Dana Duma on female agency in New Romania cinema which has addressed other female-focused films. Taking Duma’s work as a

point of departure, I explored gendered themes in *California Dreamin'* and demonstrated how women can be positioned as agents of change and channel hope for the future.

CHAPTER 3 – THE CINEMATIC APPARATUS AND MEDIATED TECHNOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to interrogate how New Romanian cinema maintains its claims to be realist cinema while revealing the constructed nature of cinema. Two films are analysed in depth to demonstrate how this is achieved: *12:08 East of Bucharest* and *The Legend of the Party Photographer*. Several tactics employed by the filmmakers will be addressed that are relevant to this argument.

András Balint Kovács observed that after the 1950s, neorealism went through a “substantial metamorphosis” (Kovács 255). For example, Fredrico Fellini, whose work shows a profound debt to Italian neorealism, nevertheless “used extreme intensification of the visual surface” and “intensive psychological characterisation” in his films in the absence of political or social commentary (Kovács 256). Michelangelo Antonioni took a different approach, as while he was influenced by neorealism, by prioritising the visual surface, he “emptied out the characters even more than the neorealist auteurs” (Kovács 256). Further metamorphosis of neorealism has occurred through New Romanian cinema, as will be demonstrated in this chapter. By applying certain modern or postmodern gestures to their fundamentally realist aesthetic, but within a recognisably Romanian context, New Romanian filmmakers stake out new parameters for a form of “critical realism” that defines a very particular time and place.

New Romanian cinema cannot be straightforwardly conceptualised as a postmodern or modern form of cinema, for, as stated by Kovács, “Modernism proper is not to be identified with ... realism” (168). While the lineage of New Romanian cinema can be traced from Italian neorealist cinema through the cinema of the French New Wave as it emerged in the first decade of the twenty-first century, it also absorbed modernist and postmodernist

influences. This argument goes against the influential position of Doru Pop, who insists that New Romanian cinema is “direct cinema” in the sense that each film interrogates a single social or political issue in a documentary style (“Grammar” 32). Instead, this thesis demonstrates that while New Romanian cinema does exude a “reality affect,” the cinema is highly stylised through careful and deliberate construction to imply multiple meanings and invite alternate interpretations. In doing so, I follow scholars such as Monica Filimon who suggests that New Romanian cinema signals a “turn toward a modernist investigation of the real” because its films demonstrate “experimentation with form and plot” (Filimon “Beyond” 30).

While the previous chapter discussed narratives in New Romanian cinema, this chapter will focus on several aspects of style. It will explore three specific tactics frequently used by New Romanian directors: drawing attention to the cinematic apparatus to highlight the artifice of the production; deliberate and calculated framing which encourages self-reflexivity, and the frequent inclusion of television sets within the *mise-en-scène*, questioning the limits of realist representation and the ideological function of this very modern form of media. In the following sections, I will demonstrate how these modernist or postmodernist gestures interact with the films’ realism with the intention of expanding our understanding of New Romanian cinema’s cinematic grammar.

The chapter will also discuss why these tactics have been employed in New Romanian cinema and what this could mean to current understandings of realism in cinema. I propose that the social and political context of post-communist Romania gave rise to a breed of filmmaker who was motivated to draw attention to both the failures of the past and the stark realities of the present. A significant aspect of New Romanian cinema is how it takes a reflexive stand in such a way that both allows it to remain a realist cinema while employing the modernist tactics of “reflexivity and subjectivity” (Kovács 62). According to Pethő, after

the fall of communism Eastern European cinema demonstrated how “the confrontation with cinema’s materiality, historicity and temporality can create productive tensions between the documentary value of the image and its rhetorical dimension” (*Introduction* 5). Further, Pethő indicates that realist cinemas arising from Eastern Europe (including Romania) after the fall of communism shared a historic approach that sought to combine realism with more complex cinematic processes in a dialectic relationship (*Caught in-Between* 1).

While New Romanian cinema closely resembles Italian neorealism as described by André Bazin through its reliance on long takes, deep focus, natural lighting and use of non-professional actors, it also owes a debt to modernist cinema in its insistence that the audience construct the “social real” (Strausz 6). This “social real” is not inconsistent with Bazin’s view of realism, as noted by Feroz Hassan, where he recognised that realism does not simply imply objective verisimilitude (Hassan 38), but it is also relevant to the modernist, hybrid media landscape. However, New Romanian cinema *does* draw attention to the mediation of the filmic image, and therefore fails to deliver on Bazin’s advice that “the whole tendency of the *mise-en-scène* is to efface itself” in order to give the “clearest and most powerful” image of the narrative and characters (Bazin “Wyler” 2).

Inherent in Bazin’s realist writings is the link between the continuous shot and the “ambiguity inherent in reality” (Bazin “Wyler” 8). Bazin contends that through continuous shots and by avoiding excessive editing, the director can remove his own subjective interpretation of events. According to Gorzo:

not attempting to represent expressionistically the phenomena of their inner lives [of the characters] but representing such a phenomena only through the ways in which they echo and reverberate in behaviour; such a cinema can renew the viewer’s apprehension of the ambiguity of the real. (Gorzo “Ambiguity” 4)

The ambiguous subject positioning in the films discussed in this thesis facilitates the interrogation of institutionally created shared historical memory. The resultant oblique and ambiguous texts are testament to the impossibility of arriving at an agreed consensus on any one version of the truth. Strausz characterises this tendency in New Romanian cinema as “hesitation,” implying the difficulty of revealing a single truth by offering a mobile subject through conflicting narratives (11). Such subjective interpretations of cinema do not run against the film’s realist conventions, for, as Miriam Bratu Hansen states, physical reality “also constitutes, because of its relative indeterminacy of meaning, a membrane for a range of cultural and subjective meanings” (Hansen *Cinema and Experience* 253). Therefore, realist films also require interpretative work by the audience. In the postmodern world where truths are negotiated, a new kind of realism shows the concrete truth of people and things while simultaneously questioning assumptions made about events and subjective experiences. This is particularly evident in New Romanian cinema’s approach to history, as one of its main focal points. While Pop rightly proposes that the “haunt of history” is prevalent in all New Romanian films (Doru Pop “Grammar” 27), history is not presented as unchallenged truth; instead, the films themselves argue for the impossibility of coming to any agreed consensus.

Historical and cultural memory have been important subjects, both implicit and covert, in Romanian cinema since Liviu Ciulei’s *The Forest of the Hanged* (1965). However, New Romanian cinema does not attempt to describe historical events or assign meanings to them, but instead draws attention to how events are mediated, and it does this through modernist and postmodern tactics. It is a cinema that is primarily concerned with the past, and particularly invested in the “reality of the past, asking what was the truth behind the lived experiences of recent history, and even deeper, what is the real nature of historic evidence” (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 71). The historical moment of the 1989 Revolution and the violent overthrow of the communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu forms an important context

for New Romanian cinema and the films in this chapter focus on the past and how historical constructions of events of the past are open to revision and reconstruction.

While realist theory is concerned with how cinema can reveal facts, Feroz Hassan states that Bazin recognised that “history is inevitably compromised by individual subjectivity” (Hassan 42). I propose that New Romanian cinema takes the position of interrogating historical events through the subjectivities of ordinary Romanian people, both during communism and afterwards, in a realist manner, consistent with Bazin’s theoretical writings on Italian neorealism. However, the self-reflexive manner of this canon’s approach adopts modernist and postmodernist attitudes that refuse the typical realist self-effacement. Two films that directly address history are examined in this chapter: *12:08 East of Bucharest* and *The Legend of the Party Photographer*. While not all self-reflexivity in cinema is considered subversive (Stam *Film Theory* 152), the two films addressed in this chapter seek to use self-reflexivity to deconstruct the dominant narrative of Romanian Revolution of 1989. Each of the films take a different view of history. *The Legend of the Party Photographer* is set during the country’s communist era, so it investigates how history and memory were fashioned during the Ceaușescu years, and the pressures brought to bear on people who were part of the machinery of media production. The other film analysed, *12:08 East of Bucharest*, is trying to understand how people remember the past and how memories differ wildly depending on individual perspectives. Each of these films produce a realist effect, however, they also mobilise postmodern or modernist gestures that challenge the immutability of truth, language and memory.

This chapter is concerned with how the apparatus of cinema is revealed within the diegetic universe of the films analysed, which is in direct opposition with Bazin’s theory that realist cinema should seek to “efface itself” (Bazin “Wyler” 2). Instead, the films discussed put the mechanics of cinema and television on display, exposing how media are implicated in

history. Revealing the apparatus of film is common in many films in New Romanian cinema; however, it is not a new phenomenon and is associated with many modernist films, for instance *Persona* (Bergman 1966), *Beware the Holy Whore* (*Warnung vor einer heiligen Nutte*, Fassbinder 1971), *Day for Night* (*La Nuit américaine*, Truffaut 1973), *Contempt* (*Le Mépris*, Godard 1963), and continuing with the films of David Lynch, Charlie Kaufman and Quentin Tarantino.

In the Romanian film canon, a film that is seen as a precursor of New Romanian cinema, *Reconstruction* (Pintile 1969), includes many references to the apparatus of cinema, using a repetitive motif of loading a camera with film. More recently, Corneliu Porumboiu's film *Metabolism* (*Când se lasa seara peste Bucuresti sau Metabolism*, 2013) is a film entirely about the production of a film, which simultaneously references film techniques, such as shots of extended duration, and adopts those same techniques. According to Nagib, when attention is given to the "reality of the medium," it "enables revelatory realism to interact with anti-realism, so as to produce the emblem of a nation" (*Ethics* 50, 52). This self-reflexive gesture, which is common in modernist film, brings the audience into the process of identity creation (Chiru-Jitaru 209).

It is my contention that the tension between the realist aspirations of New Romanian cinema and the modernist and postmodernist self-reflexivity in its cinematic expression is an important and intriguing aspect of its cinematic grammar. Although drawing attention to the apparatus of cinema creates tension with the realist affect, this postmodern inflection brings the spectator closer to truth, even if that truth is subjective in nature.

The privilege accorded to the cinematic apparatus by New Romanian directors echoes the recent Romanian past where the audio-visual recording of historical events played a crucial role. The 1989 overthrow of communism in Romania was filmed and made widely

accessible via the televisual apparatus; however, the way the revolution was televised obscures the causal agents, creating ambiguity and calling for interpretation of the audience. This process was examined by Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică in *Videogrammes of a Revolution (Videogramele unei revolutii, 1992)*, which pieced together amateur footage of the 1989 event to challenge the received understanding of what has variously been characterised as a popular uprising or a military coup. Farocki and Ujică showed the manipulation possible through the televisual apparatus, made more powerful by the multiple perspectives included of the same event which all focus on different individual actions and actors. Farocki and Ujică's analysis of how the event of Romanian revolution was constructed via television is consistent with the postmodern position that questions assumptions about the possibility of a unitary truth. This is because the plurality of conflicting images makes it difficult to arrive at one version of events and their meanings.

Strausz writes that television broadcasts of the 1989 Revolution represent a “fundamental break in the ways pictorial representations impact on our understanding of historical processes” (83). Therefore, television not only disseminated the facts of the revolution but was instrumental in the construction of shared historical memory. I suggest that this represents a decisive break with Italian neorealism, with significant implications. While Italian neorealism placed trust in the absolute truth in the filmic image, especially through deep focus, New Romanian cinema recognises the multiplicity inherent in truth, the complex nature of which should acknowledge *how* the image is produced.

It is important to note the earliest television programming mostly consisted of programs that were broadcast live and therefore a close temporal relationship between the event and the act of viewing gave a realist impression. Moreover, televisual content has also long been associated with realism, as stated by Fiske:

We can thus call television an essentially realistic medium because of its ability to carry a socially convincing sense of the real. Realism is not a matter of any fidelity to an empirical reality, but of the discursive conventions by which and for which a sense of reality is constructed. (21)

However, as discussed further by Fiske, the reality effect is frequently arrived at through the filming conventions that “are designed to give the impression that the camera has happened upon a piece of unpremeditated reality which it shows to us objectively and truthfully” (30), when it is actually carefully disguising its own constructed nature. It is therefore significant when New Romanian films reference the televisual apparatus within their diegesis, because they are drawing attention to the constructed nature of their own text while critiquing the manipulation inherent in “live” televisual events. I propose that New Romanian cinema, like television, is a highly constructed form of cinema but, unlike television, it draws attention to its own construction while also providing a realist effect.

László Strausz proposes that the television broadcasts that accompanied the 1989 Revolution in Romania were important precursors for New Romanian cinema because they demonstrate not just how media events manipulate the truth but also how they can influence “the actual events on the streets in real time” (2, 3). This is illustrated in Radu Muntean’s 2006 film *The Paper will be Blue* (*Hârtia va fi albastră*), where active participants in the regime change are glued to the television screen to follow the events as they occur. Similarly, televisions appear in several other New Romanian films, including *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, and *Philanthropy* (*Philanthropique*, Caranfil 2002), and I propose that there are three main reasons for its inclusion. The first is because Ceaușescu used huge, staged televised events to exert his power and rally the population, with what Strausz calls a “mediatized dissemination” of political ideologies (87). This is supported by the theory of Raymond Williams, who proposes that television is frequently utilised for “direct political

and social control” in societies where the government exercise coercive control over the population, such as in Fascist regimes (Williams 17). Secondly, the television set is a reminder that history is a discursive project prone to attributions of fake causality and post-historical manipulation (Strausz 87). This is because, as is explained by Strausz, “consensus is a product of modern media performances” rather than based on clear objective events that are transparent to society at large (87). This is demonstrated in *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu*, which uses archival footage of Ceaușescu from early in his political career right through to his pathetic demise to illustrate how, by the clever use of propaganda and the exploitation of visual media, Ceaușescu manipulated the Romanian public and the rest of the world (Weissberg 35). Thirdly, as mentioned above, the centrality of the televisual image to community experience of the overthrow of the communist government also explains why the television apparatus features in many films in New Romanian cinema.²⁶ This thesis examines the way the historic infiltration of the television into the construction of history is represented in the films under discussion.

The inclusion of the television apparatus in the films of New Romanian cinema is also prefigured in the work of one of the canon’s important predecessors, Lucian Pintile. His recurrent use of televisions in *The Reconstruction* played with real and fictional time as well as spatial perception (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 92), while also examining a real event in a fictional narrative. This film highlights how, even though television could be considered a particularly realist form of screen technology, it has been deliberately used for manipulation and control over the Romanian population. The depiction

²⁶ There is a possible fourth reason why televisions are included in the frame of New Romanian films. The 1989 Romanian Revolution began near the western border of Romania, in Timosoara. Being so close to the border, the region was able to access television reception from neighbouring Hungary, which itself experienced a peaceful transition from communism to democracy just two months before Romania’s revolution. It could therefore be surmised that the initial uprising in Timosoara was in some way inspired by news of Hungary’s overthrow of communism.

of the televisual apparatus in the films of New Romanian cinema reminds the audience that even as the events depicted on television may have a strong mimetic relationship with reality, they often allow a degree of manipulation and reconstruction to meet cynical political expediencies. This is because there is an acknowledgement that audio-visual products have the potential to manipulate the audience and this cinema makes an ethical stand against such manipulation. In this way, New Romanian cinema aligns itself with the ethical stance of Italian neorealism that offers the audience freedom to make their own moral judgements (Kuhn and Westwell 345).

The third issue this chapter explores is framing. Issues of framing are essential to any discussion of the potential of cinematic realism, questioning one of the embedded views on cinematic realism as a “window to reality.” This questioning addresses the inherent conflict between the assumption that the audience will be “duped by the cinematic apparatus” into believing that what they witness on screen is real despite the fundamentally illusionary nature of the cinematic experience (Allen 226). As Pethő explains, any framing that brings attention to the artificiality of the cinematic experience “may paradoxically heighten *both* the sensation of reality and that of artificiality,” as it both draws the spectator into the screen’s illusionary world and maintains a distance between the viewer and the screen (“Exhibited Space” 67, 66). When a shot is organised into a box-like structure that encloses the action and which restricts the spectator’s view, a distancing effect is achieved, but it also has the potential to draw them into a closer relationship with the scene. This affords the viewer a contemplative space where they are drawn “more deeply into the flow of the film (Pethő “Exhibited Space” 66). The result is a tension that emphasises “the duality of the illusion of immediate access to the real and the perceivable mediation of the ‘image’” (Pethő “Exhibited Space” 67). I contend here that the perceptual real that is experienced by the spectator, although different to that created by the Italian neorealists, still lies in the realm of realist cinema as posited by

Bazin and Kracauer. This is because New Romanian cinema allows the spectator to see where the manipulation of the image takes place and can therefore discern how real the image actually is.

Framing also allows the films to draw intermedial connections, with multiple possibilities explored through the long history of painting (Peucker 30). While framing techniques such as those discussed here are not inherently modernist gestures, I propose that the way in which they are deployed in New Romanian cinema means they function as self-reflexive gestures that reflects the constructed nature of the shot and that draws the audience into the meaning-making process. This chapter will explore how the New Romanian films balance the mediation inherent in the meticulous use of framing with New Romanian realist aspirations.

The mediatised dissemination of history: the television

In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer states that “when history is made in the streets, the streets tend to move onto the screen” (Kracauer 98). Similarly, we can say that when history is made in the television studio, the television apparatus tends to move onto the screen. When the Romanian revolutionaries took over Bucharest, they immediately occupied the main television studio of the country, thus controlling the dissemination of information to the citizens of the country. This helps to explain the ubiquity of the television apparatus throughout New Romanian cinema and the importance of this self-reflexive motif in *12:08 East of Bucharest* in the context of historical events.

At the heart of the film *12:08 East of Bucharest* is a television program, therefore the use of the televisions within the mise-en-scène adds weight to my argument that the apparatus plays an important aesthetic and narrative role in constructing meaning. One significant scene

where this occurs features talk show host Jderescu as he is trying to construct a panel for his talk show and his wife, Radica (Luminița Gheorghiu), who is trying to convince him to give their daughter money to buy skis for an upcoming holiday. While they both negotiate their conflicting agendas, a television news program is playing in the same room, discussing the events of December 1989, while another television sits on a sideboard, switched off (see Figure 10). The placement of both television sets suggest that they are looking over Virgil's shoulder.



Figure 10. Virgil Jderescu and his wife, Radica, *12:08 East of Bucharest*.

Later we learn that Virgil has much to be secretive about and, in hindsight, the television newsreader in this scene appears as if she could look over Jderescu's shoulder and see to whom and what he is texting on his mobile phone. That the actual newsreader is Virgil's mistress adds to the intrigue, because while he is denying his wife money, we know he also financially supports the newsreader. By positioning the figure on the television in a mirror, Porumboiu creates a peculiar, disembodied spectre who is not noticed by the protagonists. She exists as a spectator bound by the dimensions of the television, but not by

the dimensions of space and time; similarly, she influences the relationship of the couple while not being physically present. While on one level, this scene suggests the risk Virgil takes in his duplicitous relationship, on another, the multiple framing and the foregrounding of the televisual highlights an awareness of the wider issues of the film as they relate to public and private realities in the face of the political upheavals in Romania's past.

While the visibility of televisions is vital to interpreting the modernist and postmodern inflections within the scene, the scene – just as the film is as a whole – is distinctly realist. The segment deals with ordinary people and takes place in a real apartments with minimal editing, employing a fixed camera position, consistent with Bazin's theorising of realist cinema. Moreover, the naturalistic acting and dialogue is so effortless that it feels like it is barely scripted, which all combines to create an almost documentary feel. Kracauer lauds the use of the street in film, as allowing for the capture of the "flow of life" (Kracauer 74). I propose that scenes such as this one in *12:08 East of Bucharest* also give the impression that the camera is capturing "the flow of life" inside people's homes – which, in the case of Romanian cinema, are not constructed film sets, but people's actual dwellings, remnants of the communist brutalist mass architecture. So the filmmaker, by managing to construct a believable fictional narrative, has produced what Kracauer would refer to as "dramatized actuality" (Kracauer 249).

One of the untrustworthy participants in the *12:08 East of Bucharest's* talk show is Emoil Piscoci, and his relationship with his television introduces both the bumbling nature of his character and the unreliability of the televisual device. While he attempts to disentangle his Christmas lights, a television in the corner advertises Virgil's program that is due to air later that afternoon. However, the television set repeatedly requires Piscoci to hit it in order to bring it back on air, either because of faulty electronics or problems with the television transmission. As the audience shares Piscoci's attempts to watch to what is being said on the

television (the visuals are not available to us, only to Piscoci), we share the old man's frustration over the intermittent voice emanating from the unreliable machine. The very unreliability of the television is a humorous reminder of the unreliability of what is depicted on the television, with the presenter's unfinished sentence hanging in the air, a metaphor for the manipulation inherent in omitting vital information in television broadcasts. Due to the adoption of realist tactics, however, even with the implications of the televisual apparatus suggesting the unreliability of media dissemination, both this scene and the film as a whole maintain a realist aesthetic.

The Legend of the Party Photographer explores more directly the political use of the televisual apparatus during the Ceaușescu regime. It achieves this through the use of actual footage from television newscasts as well as television sets playing the same footage in the mise-en-scène (see Figure 11 and Figure 12). However, there is another way in which the filmmaker uses the television apparatus in this short, and that is where the image of Ceaușescu is seen in supposedly live footage that is playing in the background, while the party official and the newspaper men decide on which photo to use in the newspaper (see Figure 13). In a similar manner in which the newsreader looks over the shoulder of Virgil in *12:08 East of Bucharest*, Ceaușescu appears to be looking at the photographs on the table with the men in the foreground. In this way he appears as both a participant and a spy. All present are aware of the importance of how the leader insists on being depicted, and he appears to be literally surveilling their efforts. Although this approach is highly mediated, it is realist in nature because reality was under constant threat of being observed and manipulated during communism.



Figure 11. A still from footage played in *The Legend of the Party Photographer*.



Figure 12. A television playing the same footage as Figure 11, screen shot from *The Legend of the Party Photographer*.



Figure 13. A television playing supposedly “live” footage of Ceaușescu in *The Legend of the Party Photographer*.

The surveillance implied here is a reminder to all Romanians of how the state insinuated itself into their private lives by conducting surveillance on its citizens and by enacting laws that policed the human body.²⁷ Through the inclusion of the televisions, this scene is transformed into an uncomfortable gesture towards duplicity, surveillance and technological complicity in the politics of power. This approach differs from the approach of Italian neorealism, which is predicated on the objective presentation of the world “without the creative intervention of man” (Bazin “Ontology” 7). Yet, this scene demonstrates that while the filmic action in *The Legend of the Party Photographer* is highly mediated, the mediation forces the audience to take a critical position which encourages and facilitates their search for truth and meaning in the observed reality.

²⁷ In his 2020 interview with Dilan Gunawardana, Corneliu Porumboiu spoke about the formulaic language in common use during communism, necessitated by the ever-present surveillance by the secret police, even in the home (Gunawardana).

Chris Robé tells us that the “ever present surveillance” depicted in New Romanian cinema contributes to the “communist structure of feeling” that is created through “the very form of its film” (2). The scene selected here is emblematic of such a feeling, demonstrating how the communist past still haunts those who remember its terrifying reach.²⁸ But also, while surveillance suggests an all-encompassing power of knowing, the attempts at ascertaining the truth through the television talk show are ultimately fruitless. Through the framing technique employed by the filmmaker, the film “draw[s] attention to the fact that there is no simple truth” to unearth (Trocan 40). Therefore, the tension between looking and knowing is disconcerting, especially where those people who are subject to surveillance seek to obfuscate the truth. This aspect of New Romanian films does not align with traditional notions of cinematic realism; however, it is a consistent concern of the canon. I contend that moments where New Romanian filmmakers refer to or mimic features of surveillance footage in their films bring the canon into a unique national and historical context that has resonance in the context of the increased political and social monitoring of citizens.

The constant presence of Ceaușescu in the frame mirrors the surveillance of ordinary people during the communist ruler’s reign. I propose, therefore, that the images of Ceaușescu as artwork on the wall, photographs on the table, or in the television broadcast playing the background, are examples of what Kracauer describes as “configurations of semi-abstract phenomena” that represent a “rendering of physical existence” (Kracauer 53). This is because Ceaușescu’s image and his ideology infuse all aspects of Romanian life during communism, just like his visage infiltrates the very fabric of this film.

²⁸ Porumboiu explores surveillance more overtly in his later film *Police, Adjective* (2009), which is discussed in chapter 5 of this thesis.

Additionally, by showing Ceaușescu on the screen, the filmmaker draws attention to the mediation of the image through the televisual apparatus. Meanwhile, in the foreground, men are arguing about how to best manipulate the image of Ceaușescu for publication in the socialist newspaper, thus multiplying the possibilities of interpretation of the scene. When presented in this way, the audience can be left wondering if the image itself maintains what Kracauer terms “representational verisimilitude for its own sake” (Kracauer 261), or has it become just a projection of the mediator’s subjective intent? In this scene, the highly mediated form in this film mirrors the reality constructed around Ceaușescu’s leadership and ideology. Therefore, form and content are closely aligned in this film, as mediation is both the subject of the film and part of its artistic expression. This position is supported by Kracauer’s statement that in order for a film to be realist, it must produce the “‘right’ balance between the realistic tendency and the formative tendency” (Kracauer 38). Therefore, despite the constructedness of the filmic image in *The Legend of the Party Photographer*, a realist effect is achieved through the neat alignment between form and content.

Strausz argues that the television broadcasts that portrayed the 1989 Revolution were constructed from an unstable subject position that left “open questions about the interpretation of the past and present, also maintaining an uncertainty that was profitable for various political actors” (88). Those people who sought to legitimise the “incoming power formation” created a narrative that the revolution was a “bottom-up quotidian struggle” (Strausz 84). Therefore, as well as critiquing the actions of the Ceaușescu regime to consolidate power through the television medium, *The Legend of the Party Photographer* also critiques the narrative of a people’s revolution, the facts of which “became known to most solely through television, and entered into the global consciousness as such” (Uricaru “The Square and the Screen” 138). This contention is supported by the attitude of the revolutionaries as they occupy the television studio as depicted in *Videogrammes of a*

Revolution (see Figure 14). Their insistence that they “need” the television is a recognition on their part that the television a vital co-conspirator in the manufacturing of historic narratives.



Figure 14. Screen shot from *Videogrammes of a Revolution* showing revolutionaries trying to convince the television executives to allow them to use the television station for their revolutionary goals.

In *The Legend of the Party Photographer*, even though the photographers realise the photograph needs significant work, they have already been warned about not speaking up against the Party officials, so they follow orders to the letter. In the next scene, party officials ignore the photographer’s warning that although they had glued a hat on the leader’s head, they still need to do additional retouching, and instead they grab the photograph for immediate publication.

It is only once the paper is printed and on its way to the workers that the mistake is identified, with each person responsible for the disaster left bewildered and defeated. The

duality of Ceaușescu wearing one hat and holding another is both comical and emblematic of the duality of his stated purpose and his personal goals. The fact that it took a manual labourer in the factory to notice the error suggests that by Giscard d'Estaing's visit to Romania in 1979, ordinary citizens were not fooled by the overblown efforts of Ceaușescu to project a god-like image and instead could see it as the clumsy posturing of a despotic leader. One interesting aspect of this screwball comedy is that while all the people involved in the production of the paper, from the party officials to the official photographers, are seen to be incompetent, the lasting impression left by the film is the pathetic efforts of Ceaușescu to project a heroic image in the face of economic and social collapse. By attempting to fool the population, Ceaușescu made a fool of himself and all the people who were employed in supporting his façade. This film also draws attention to the role of average people in the construction of the Leader's heroic persona, and in so doing, brings the citizens of Romania into the realm of complicity for their role in perpetuating his image. Kracauer argues that when confronted with realist depictions of historical events, the spectator is confronted by how "he himself has blindly adopted conventions which now seem naïve or cramped to him" (56). *The Legend of the Party Photographer* represents the type of revelatory cinematic event described by Kracauer, despite the constructed nature of its filmic stylisation.

Behind the veil: revealing the internal mechanics of cinema

Key to understanding the grammar of New Romanian cinema is identifying the aspects of the films that diverge from traditional understanding of cinematic realism. One of those aspects is the modernist tactic of exposing the apparatus of filming, serving to both enrich the films themselves and to raise questions about the relationship between verisimilitude and mediation in realist films. While the films discussed in this thesis are not considered modernist, they

activate modernist gestures that require the audience to engage actively in the construction of meaning. Yet, the inclusion of modernist attributes in realist films is problematic, as they create a tension between the objectivity inherent in realist films and the subjective position encouraged by the self-reflexive device. While Bazin's theory of realist cinema highlights the representational nature of realism, Nagib's later work recognises the revelatory effect of calling attention to "reality of the medium" (*Ethics* 50).

Interest in the role of the medium, shared both by modernism and postmodernism, could have been brought about or intensified by the historical developments in Romania in the second half of the twentieth century. The post-communist condition of Romania has fed the examination of historical truths through the films of New Romanian cinema. This is consistent with the modernist trend of seeking new truths and adopting a new approach to objectivity (Donald 9) as well as a postmodern position that unitary truth cannot be achieved and that truth is always provisional. While this could be seen as running counter to the aims of realist cinema, which attempts to present the cinematic image as fact, I propose that what we understand as fact and historical truth has changed through contact with modernism, and New Romanian cinema reflects this enquiring, but never definitive, approach to events.

According to Susan Hayward, one of the defining features of cinematic modernism is how it "turns the gaze into a critical weapon, turns the camera as an instrument of surveillance upon itself, starting with fragmentation, destruction or **deconstruction** even of **classical narrative** structures" (Hayward 245). Such gestures are evident in the film *Blow-up* (Antonioni 1966), a highly modernist film that references the fragmentation of reality through the deconstruction of the photographic image (Kovács 346). In a 2013 interview, Corneliu Porumboiu references Antonioni as a significant influence on his development as a filmmaker, while also mentioning his own obsession with reality ("Corneliu Porumboiu Interview (Excerpt)"). Porumboiu's commitment to realism became infused with modernist

gestures due to an interest in how Antonioni abstracted reality. However, where *Blow-up* suggests the meaningless of life in the modernist age (Kovács 346), Porumboiu's cinema is essentially humanist and, therefore, unlike Antonioni's corpus, does not give into nihilistic sentiment. This aspect of Porumboiu's work aligns closely with that of Roberto Rossellini, whose Italian neorealist films, such as *Europe '51* (*Europa '51*, 1952), expressed a deep compassion for the human spirit (Bazin *Neorealism* 124).

Demonstrating his commitment to realism, throughout *12:08 East of Bucharest*, Porumboiu maintains a temporal continuity by having the diegesis occurring in near real time, thereby creating a tension between the employment of remediation devices and realist aesthetics. The maintenance of temporal continuity is a significant aspect of realist cinema, as it allows the audience to perceive the film as they perceive life. Bazin goes so far as to say that the duration of an event as it happens on screen determines its importance (Bazin *What Is Cinema* 2 31). While eschewing editing as, for example, in the television station scene in *12:08 East of Bucharest*, Porumboiu is adhering to principles of realist cinema; that is, that it shows its "allegiance to phenomenological time" (Nagib *Ethics* 27). However, references to the apparatus allow the audience's attention to shift away from the main narrative action. As Stam notes, a self-reflexive gesture such as this can be used as a political device (*Film Theory* 152). This seems to be the case with New Romanian cinema – while reflexivity here stretches the conventional understanding of realism, it represents an aesthetic choice deployed for political and social use.

Another modernist device which New Romanian cinema adopts is the recognition of the cinematic apparatus. Where classical Hollywood cinema is predicated on creating an illusion of reality by making the production invisible, New Romanian cinema, in common with modernist cinema, draws attention to the cinematic apparatus as an exercise of self-reflective knowingness. According to Robert Stam, "Reflexive films subvert the assumption

that art can be a transparent medium of communication” (*Reflexivity* 9), which New Romanian cinema achieves in both form and content.

As an exemplary demonstration of how the apparatus is made visible in New Romanian film, the set where the television talk show is filmed both draws the audience into the filming of the program at the same time as it creates a distancing effect through multiple framing (Figure 15). The television studio is decrepit, with a faded and dated backdrop depicting the local town hall square that appears to be held up with string. In addition to this, the studio’s plywood panelling gives the appearance of an old and tired public building which has outlived its usefulness. This shot comprises an odd and disconcerting framing that allows the audience to see behind the televisual façade and therefore gain access to the apparatus of production. Rather than centring the figures inside the shot, the trio are off-centre, questioning the authority of the program’s participants. The deliberately decentred framing in this scene also draws the spectator’s eyes to the faulty framing itself, thereby disrupting the illusionary nature expected of film. This causes a tension between the acceptance of the film as an accurate mimetic representation or an artfully constructed minimalist artwork.

While the film deals with the minutiae of the characters’ lives, the decentring allows the viewers’ eyes and attention to wander. Pethő argues that such a technique widens the reach of the narrative’s meaning away from just a meditation on the lives of these three protagonists and into the realm of “ironic social commentary” (Pethő “Absorption, Abstraction Etc.” 49). In the postmodern twenty-first century and Romanian context, New Romanian cinema evolves as a cinematic canon that explores the tension inherent in a society that has rejected communism yet is still haunted by the traumas of the past.

The scene that depicts the production of the broadcast contains dialogue “obviously influenced by Romania’s long-standing theatrical tradition and its consistent penchant for a

corrosive, sarcastic humour,” as noted by Nasta, (Nasta “Continuity, Change and Renewal” 46).²⁹ The scene is also layered and dense, using intermedial references to add meaning and richness to what is, according to Alexandru Serban, “the most minimalist experiment ever attempted in Romanian cinema” (18). From the moment Virgil Jderescu (Teodor Corbin) sits down at the table in front of the camera and boasts of his program: “I get good ratings, especially in winter,” the mood is set for broad comedy. Both Emanoil Piscoci’s fussing over where to put his hat and Professor Tiberiu Manescu’s claim that he needs to scull more alcohol because he is nervous colour the film in a way that perhaps the dull and uninspiring mise-en-scène does not.



Figure 15. Our first glimpse inside the studio where the television talk-show will be filmed in *12:08 East of Bucharest*. From left to right: Piscoci, Jderescu and Manescu.

²⁹ Speaking about his choice of long shots in this film, Corneliu Porumboiu stated that the actors easily adjusted to the technique, because they are all theatre actors (Porumboiu “Corneliu Porumboiu on *12:08 East of Bucharest*”).

Then the shift, which is key for our discussion, takes place. The camera shooting the film becomes the same camera that is filming the talk show. This is represented by the camera apparently trying to focus on the protagonists but actually moving side to side and then up and down, and eventually zooming in to capture the three men in medium shot. This change of camera position produces a change of subject position, thus changing the spectator from a viewer of a film about a television show to a viewer of the television show triggering, almost unavoidably, a moment of profound self-reflexivity. The perceptual change that is demanded of the audience through the change of subject position involves a complex process of remediation of the cinematic image, where the audience are reminded that they are both a spectator of a film and a consumer of a televisual event. The viewer is invited to see themselves as an audience member of the television show as the cameraman and a spectator of the film itself, each of these subject positions requiring an adjustment of perspective.

The changing perspectives inherent in this one self-reflexive moment mirrors the different mobile subject positioning taken by Farocki and Ujică in *Videogrammes of a Revolution*. Perhaps Porumboiu was inspired by that documentary in the way he changes the audience's perspective in this one important scene. As noted by Bardan, "The 'live' coverage of events relies on mechanisms of selection, intervention, interpretation, filtering, or framing: 'what is shown to us live'" (Bardan "Aftereffects of 1989" 132), therefore, even when witnessing an event "live," an audience is only ever able to experience a limited number of perspectives, in order to ascertain their meaning of the event. This scene stages the experience of an audience member adjusting their perspective and therefore enacts the process of understanding that one event can be seen from multiple subject positions and thus have multiple subjective meanings, even when it is captured and broadcast on live television.

The "visual errors" created by the deliberately shoddy camerawork in this scene appear to demonstrate a literal hesitation on the part of the diegetic cameraman, as he has

little filming experience, while putting the audience in the position of cameraman themselves (Strausz 115, 149). This activates multiple perspectives for the audience and points to the “multiple histories” evoked in any discussion of the events of December 1989. This double-positioning invites the audience “to play along with the meaning-making process” (Stojanova and Duma 9). Bardan suggests that the unpredictable camerawork here represents the cameraman’s attempts to “find the truth in all the different versions of the story,” whereas at the end he gives up, letting “the camera fall, and at the very end he doesn’t know what to think anymore” (Bardan “Aftereffects of 1989” 141).³⁰

The camerawork in this scene is also reminiscent of the deft and dynamic strokes of Roberto Rossellini’s filming, which Bazin described as “sketching” (Bazin *What Is Cinema* 2 33). This is, therefore, another similarity between Italian neorealism and New Romanian cinema, where the filmmaker gives only an impressionistic account of events, with little overt exegesis. This “reduction in means of expression” is sometimes referred to as minimalism (Trocan 37). Such a method demonstrates the impossibility of discovering a definitive explanation for the events culminating in Ceaușescu’s downfall, even from those people who self-identify as active participants in those very events (such as Piscoci and Manescu). The scene in question is one example of how New Romanian cinema creates a dialectic space that invites the audience to transform the text through their own interpretative and critical work, or to fill out the film’s meaning where the director has only created an artistic “sketch” of the outline. Therefore, by using a self-reflexive strategy, the aesthetics are deconstructed at the same time as the historical memory of revolution is also deconstructed, creating a meta discourse that is deeply political, while highlighting the impossibility of consensus. The

³⁰ The mistakes made by the diegetic cameraman in *12:08 East of Bucharest* are reminiscent of the camerawork of Ceaușescu’s last speech (which is included in *Videogrammes of a Revolution*), as the television cameraman eventually abandons his post. The final footage only captures sound, as the camera is no longer focused on the leader.

commitment to politics in New Romanian cinema is thus realised, not in taking a concrete ideological stand but, instead, in inviting the audience to interrogate their own meaning-making process as well as what constitutes shared historical understandings

When seams are showing: visual framing

Despite proposing that deploying multiple framing can produce a distancing effect, Pethő contends that the experience can “heighten *both* the sensation of reality and that of artificiality” (Pethő “Exhibited Space” 67). This is of vital interest in relation to *12:08 East of Bucharest*, as both the subject matter, which probes the history of the 1989 Revolution, and the filmic form traverse a liminal space of realism and mediated representation.

Pethő argues that *12:08 East of Bucharest* “rests its whole argument on reframing and de-framing,” which contributes to the film’s overarching “leitmotif of incongruity and displacement” (Pethő “Exhibited Space” 67, 69) that also aligns with the film’s theme of a country still grappling with the meaning of its revolutionary past. A characteristic of modern art is the fragmentation of images that serves to undermine narrative continuity (Kovács 121); therefore, the director’s approach can be seen as a modernist gesture, encouraging the audience to read against or across the plot. Yet, the use of multiple framing within this film can also be seen as running against the common understanding of realist cinema. This is because realism is seen as largely reliant on a close relationship between events and cinematic representation. For instance, framing in the film undermines Doru Pop’s argument that *12:08 East of Bucharest* seeks to “represent actions as continuous in a continuous space” in a tradition close to “direct cinema” (Doru Pop “Grammar” 32). However, the multiple framing evident in Figure 17 and Figure 10, for example, is carefully constructed, with remediated images that make no claim to objectivity.

Furthermore, as the mediation inherent in this cinema appears to reject traditional realist modes of representation, it concurrently rejects previous “politicised and media discourses as a betrayal of reality” such as those prevalent during the Ceaușescu regime (Uricaru “The Square and the Screen” 137). In this way, *12:08 East of Bucharest* recognises the discursive nature of history, which it renders not only in content but in the very form of the film itself.

The deliberate and meticulous framing in this film means that space is fragmented. As a result, the audience becomes disoriented, both because not everything significant is included within the frame and because the frame is manipulated specifically for self-reflexive purposes. Yet, despite the very constructedness of the frame in this scene, the naturalistic acting and dialogue and the worn bleakness of the set, the film is rooted in “everydayness” that infuses it with realism (Nasta “Beyond Modernity” 28), similar to the effect achieved in Italian neorealism. Additionally, the film relies heavily on ironic humour, and this is expressed in the dialogue, the physical actions of the protagonists, and through framing.

The distancing generated by framing and camerawork is enhanced by allowing the viewer to witness the characters’ efforts to occupy a significant place in front of the camera. While Jderescu places himself firmly in the foreground of the shot, Piscoci’s attempts at staying within view of the camera (see Figure 17) represents his claim of relevance, presented in an ironic way. Piscoci is watching himself in the television monitor; that is, he is watching a facsimile of himself as he appears to viewers. However, he is unable to judge whether he is fully in the picture, which also casts doubts on his claims to accurately recount historical events. Katalin Sándor contends that the act of forcing yourself into the frame of the television, is evocative of the

the first chaotic television broadcasts during the December 1989 events, in which the revolutionaries were struggling to fit within the camera frame at the moment when the making of a televised media events and the making of history could not be separated. (85-86)

The way in which Porumboiu has filmed this scene gives the spectator reason to doubt their reliability as witnesses. In common with other authority figures in Porumboiu's films (such as the police chief Angelache in *Police, Adjective*), the characters imbued with authority by their appearance on the television show are "defective authority figures" due to their irrelevance in the context in which they are embedded (Doru Pop "Grammar" 29).



Figure 16. The tableau vivant of Piscoci, Jderescu and Manescu, *12:08 East of Bucharest*.



Figure 17. Piscoci valiantly attempts to stay in frame while looking at the monitor, while Manescu's face is cut from the shot, *12:08 East of Bucharest*.

Maria Ioniță compares images in *12:08 East of Bucharest* to Belgian modernist artist René Magritte's paintings because, like the latter's portraits of Edward James (see one such portrait, Figure 18), the film's "almost photographic character belies the playful opacity of what they purportedly represent" (Ioniță 173). This film, therefore, challenges cinema's claim that it can reflect objective reality. In another comparison with modernist art, Dominique Nasta argues that New Romanian directors "deliberately introduce framing errors" to imply a subjective position, similar to modernist painters such as Pierre Bonnard (Nasta "Beyond Modernity" 30-31). In the scene in question here, the struggle of Piscoci to remain in frame and the erasure of half of Manescu's face suggest the impossibility of fully knowing the truth of the events, while also thwarting the audience's expectation that they have access to all the "dramatically relevant" information within the diegesis (Trocan 41). In addition to this, as Pop notes, recollections are problematic for those who both witnessed and participated in history because, according to Pop, the survivors are rarely completely innocent (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 91). As the scene involves discussing an event that is of continuing relevance to

Romanians, the audience is encouraged to ask themselves questions about their own recollections of 1989.



Figure 18. René Magritte's *Not to be Reproduced*, author's own photo, taken June 2018, Rotterdam Museum of Art, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

Along with the manipulated framing in *12:08 East of Bucharest*, the director also makes ample use of double-framing. Strausz explains such framing techniques as employed above as “suppressed mnemonic realism” (151), because the film is set during the current time and relies on its characters to explain the past. I suggest, though, that this film also uses a more obvious form of modernist presentation in its double-framing, which is less about how the past is constructed and more about how it influences the present. For context, Porumboiu gives access to the present lives of each of the three protagonists and Piscoci's life appears lonely and bare.

Each of the protagonists' lives is given context by the camera following them as they prepare on the day leading up to the talk show. For Piscoci, we see him eating breakfast alone, wrestling with Christmas lights, and scolding the neighbourhood boys who leave fireworks on his doorstep. Following these events, a neighbour asks Piscoci to play Santa Claus for the local Christmas party, and it is in this scene that Porumboiu adopts a mise-en-abyme, or a frame-within-a-frame (see Figure 19). In the near distance, Piscoci negotiates his role in the Christmas party, the scene's framing visually depicts how he occupies a liminal space both literally and figuratively, where he is both part of the post-communist Romanian society yet denied access to any benefit from the promises of the capitalist venture. While the television program at the centre of the film's plot is celebrating the December 1989 Revolution, the manner in which this scene is framed runs against any suggestion that capitalist modernity may lead to greater inclusiveness for all Romania's citizens. Here, Porumboiu has complicated the scene in order to invite alternative interpretations. The postmodern self-reflexive framing forms a strong contrast with the vintage-looking mise-en-abyme.



Figure 19. Emanoil Piscoci, seen through a doorway in his apartment, *12:08 East of Bucharest*, note the photograph in the right foreground.

By framing Piscoci and his neighbour within the doorway, the film encourages the audience's attention to wander away from the protagonists (Pethő "Absorption, Abstraction Etc." 49), taking in the objects nearer the camera, including the texture of the wooden doorway itself. In the foreground of the scene, to the right of the door frame is a pinboard, onto which is secured a sepia photograph of a young woman (see Figure 19). We can assume that this is a photograph of Piscoci's late wife, of whom he speaks in the final scene of the film. Despite his current life being one of ridicule (as evidenced by the pranks played on him by the neighbourhood children) and loneliness, the photo is a reminder that he once shared love and hope, but that these have been eroded by time, poverty and death.

As in Cristi Puiu's *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, lights appear as a motif, as they bookend the film and feature in Piscoci's efforts with his own Christmas lights. As the unreliability of electricity supply was a constant source of frustration in Romania during Communism (Strausz 127). I propose that the use of lights in this way draws parallels

between the past and present resource scarcity in Romania. They also trigger a particular effect in the audience, because although the narrative does not achieve a denouement that represents the tying up of loose ends or satisfies the aims of the protagonists, it does suggest a kind of diegetic symmetry that seems fitting. I contend that the lights turning on and off is a significant motif in this film and is mirrored in Cristi Puiu's *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, as lights are a feature of an early scene in that film, and a pronounced black screen at the end of that film appears to also draw a line satisfactorily at the story's end. Such motifs are signs that can trigger a certain response in the audience that, in a similar way to the framing, opens fissures in the realist effect without completely relinquishing realism's power to access the human condition.

Conclusion

The directors of *12:08 East of Bucharest* and *The Legend of the Party Photographer* were born during the more difficult years of the Communist regime, where poverty and restrictions stifled personal or community agency. The subtlety of their cinema speaks of the secrecy and surveillance they experienced during their formative years. Coupled with the dearth of resources available to them and a commitment to truth, Porumboiu, Mungiu, Puiu and others within the New Romanian canon were responsible for a bleak yet complex cinema.

In this chapter, I demonstrated that although fundamentally realist, the films of New Romanian cinema also contain a high degree of constructedness that veers away from traditional views of what defines realist cinema. This chapter further developed the argument that the realism of New Romanian cinema has absorbed modernist and postmodernist influences. The first modernist technique tackled in this chapter is the attention to cinematic apparatus and, specifically, the use of television sets within the *mise-en-scène*. Here I have

demonstrated how the films analysed mirror the use of televisual media both throughout Communism and during the 1989 Revolution. By including this medium within the frame, the filmmakers are drawing attention to the mediation and manipulation that is inherent in televisual media, and how malleable truth is to creative construction.

Secondly, this chapter analysed how New Romanian cinema gives access behind the veil of cinema, employing a modernist tactic that makes visible the constructedness of both the cinema and media in general. As a result, New Romanian films can allow the spectator to question how they create their own personal truth as well as raise larger questions of identity, both personal and cultural. However, several New Romanian films, of which *12:08 East of Bucharest* is an exemplar, take an ironic stance towards historical truth. The way this film approaches the Romanian revolution from a distance and examines it from a quotidian dimension allows the events of 1989 to be defamiliarised and estranged from the march of history compromising any judgements along ideological lines. While Italian neorealism deferred judgement, *12:08 East of Bucharest* takes a step further, exposing the impossibility of discerning even the most basic facts. This discloses a deep affinity between *12:08 East of Bucharest* and a postmodern attitude, where truth is undermined or deferred, even as the film maintains stylistic and narrative links to realism through its unrelenting focus on the everyday event and small characters.

This chapter attended to the paradox between realism that the films analysed display and the dialectic position they take towards truth. My theoretical intervention relates to how the realism expressed in New Romanian cinema finds its inspiration in Bazin's model but modifies this model in the context of modernism and postmodernism. In this chapter, I have demonstrated that New Romanian cinema can maintain a realist stance while drawing attention to its constructed nature. I proposed that New Romanian cinema needs to be understood as a realist form that exists on its own terms rather than a direct type of cinema or

a fictional narrative cinema adopting a documentary-like aesthetic. Its unique cinematic form is attuned to Romania's specific cultural landscape and historical circumstances. New Romanian cinema is primarily a social and political commentary, with reflexivity an aesthetic choice deployed for political and social use. Yet, echoing Bazin's imperative, New Romanian cinema does not take a concrete political stand, but instead calls into question historical constructions of the past.

CHAPTER 4 – INTERMEDIALITY: WHERE REALISM ABSORBS OTHER MEDIA

New Romanian cinema is notable for its mobilisation of symbolic and iconographic visual markers to impart information and tap into the cultural heritage experiences of its audience, who are then invited to construct their own meaning of the text. This chapter aims to answer the question of how a cinema that is reliant on rich intermedial connections and referencing visual motifs can still position itself as realist? Christina Stojanova describes New Romanian cinema as “existentialist realism” that expresses “the existentialist necessity of integrity and individualism” that “encodes the existential metaphysics of the ethical experience into the ironic ambiguity of its aesthetic representation” (“Introduction” 8). In a similar vein, intertextual references are also identifiable in New Romanian cinema, where they represent a dialogue between the arts that “forms an intersection of textual surfaces” (Stam *Film Theory* 201). I argue that as well as the ironic modes and the testimonial ethos of this cinema, intermediality and intertextuality represent keys components of New Romanian cinema’s ambiguous aesthetic. I further suggest that intermediality and intertextuality are consistent with Bazin’s theory of realism and are relevant for the twenty-first century cultural, social and political context where convergence and remediation are ubiquitous.

The chapter is divided into three sections: tableaux vivant, intertextuality and religious iconography. Each of these parts interrogate specific examples of the use of intermediality within several representative films. The key films in this chapter are *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* and *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*; additionally, *12:08 East of Bucharest* and *Beyond the Hills* will also be analysed.

There are several aspects to the exploration of intermediality. First, I examine how and why the directors use intermedial references and what effect this has on the meaning of the resulting texts. Second, I interrogate how intermediality interacts with the realist aspirations of the films. Third, I integrate intermediality into a new definition of cinematic realism that is appropriate for the twenty-first century.

László Strausz notes that early analysis of New Romanian cinema observed that these films “create a transparent universe” (Strausz 13). However, more recent works, such as those of Ágnes Pethő, argue that these films need to be seen in the “contemporary context of the post-media age,” where complex linkages and convergent technologies create a realist approach that goes way beyond the verisimilitude of the cinematic image (Pethő “Exhibited Space” 65). In her latest work, Pethő notes that “when in-betweenness has become the key term in almost all aspects of life, quite a lot of Eastern European films seem to resort, time and again, to a diversified poetics of intermediality” (Pethő *Introduction* 1). This suggests that the complex nature of interrelations in the liminal space of Eastern Europe encourages an intermedial approach to the cinematic artform. As quoted by Pethő, Yvonne Spielman speaks of intermediality as a process of transformation, where differing media converge (Pethő “Intermediality” 56), which is relevant to both the form of New Romanian cinema and the content, which frequently deals with political and societal upheavals. Intermediality is indeed a key attribute of New Romanian cinema, and as it “often emerges in a tense interplay with unsettling subject matters ... even a repulsive naturalism of scenes” (Pethő “The ‘Chemistry’ of Art(Ifice)” 242). Thus, realism and intermediality confront each other, existing in a state of tension that requires interpretative work by the audience to grasp the full meaning of the text. The spectator needs to “be either conscious of media processes or the film has to use a reflexive strategy that makes media processes visible” (Pethő “Intermediality” 57). Yet, intermediality can be linked not only with the modernist and postmodern reflexivity, but also

with the postmodern condition of artistic hybridity. Additionally, intermediality often destabilises narrative through multiple references to other texts and artworks, leading to the deferral of meaning, which is also a postmodern attitude. If intermediality leans so much towards postmodernism, how then can New Romanian cinema still be considered fundamentally realist? I contend that in New Romanian cinema, intermediality grounds the text in cultural and artistic traditions, but can also serve to universalise the meaning of the narrative as well as challenge its outcome.

My logic takes Bazin's position on intermediality as a point of departure. Bazin observes that the use of intermediality allows the spectator to recreate certain "physiological or mental givens of natural perception" (Bazin "Wyer" 7), which suggests that contextualising is vital for meaning-making. Philip Rosen suggests that fusing film and reality is impossible without the audience's active participation, stating:

The problem for a subject seeking ways to believe in the reality of an image is that there is a real, objective gap between film and reality. If film and reality can never completely fuse in an objective sense, then any quotient of belief in the reality of existents conveyed by the image depends on a subjective investment. (Rosen 6)

Lúcia Nagib further expands on Bazin and argues that not only does intermediality multiply "the possibilities of the film medium," it also represents "a moment of crisis of the medium which requires another for its completion" ("Impurity" 37). Nagib proposes that the intermedial film, by breaking boundaries between different artforms, "is tantamount to the fusion of art and life" ("Impurity" 29). For Nagib, the intermedial represents a "metaphorical surplus to fill in the gap of a medium insufficiency" ("Impurity" 29). Film medium specificity has been the subject of robust scholarly discussion and postmodernism specifically challenged medium specificity by dissolving the hierarchies or borders between artforms. But

if we follow Nagib's logic, by including other artworks within film, the spectator is not necessarily removed from reality, as postmodern logic where intertextuality replaces ontology would suggest (Frow 47), but can be drawn closer to reality. Therefore, intermediality maximises film's potential to give access to the real, rather than working against realism – the reason, I believe, why New Romanian cinema mobilises intermediality as an aesthetic regime.

Siegfried Kracauer was also concerned with how cinema captured reality; in particular, "film's ability to discover and articulate materiality" (Hansen *Cinema and Experience* 261). This can be considered an ethical imperative to present truth in cinema, by "suggest[ing] a reality which may fittingly be called 'life'" (Kracauer 71). Although Kracauer recognises that the "flow of life" is a material rather than a mental phenomenon, he did state that it extended "into the mental dimension" (Kracauer 71). The tension between "materiality" in realist cinema and the intermediality of New Romanian cinema can be encapsulated in the "mental dimension" as intermediality can serve a purpose of activating other signifiers that ensure that "several different discourses are legible" (Îampol'skiï 17). M. B. Îampol'skiï argues that without memory, facts are meaningless (2), therefore we can conclude that facts were never enough on their own to activate a profound realist impression. I contend that intermediality does not counter realism but instead creates linkages to memory that allows the fragmented images to form coherent narratives. Drawing on Kracauer and Îampol'skiï, I assert that intermediality as expressed in New Romanian cinema is a function of activating memory and is therefore a significant contributor to making sense of lived experience as well as understanding this cinema's mode of address.

Two uses of intermediality in New Romanian cinema, namely, tableaux vivant and religious iconography, and one case of intertextuality will be discussed here. Two filmic texts will be interrogated on how they employ intermediality and how these devices support or

destabilise understandings of cinematic realism. My analysis starts with religious iconography. Despite the apparent simplicity and narrative linearity of the themes of the films discussed, intermediality is frequently employed to challenge, undermine or destabilise narrative to suggest alternative readings. According to Ágnes Pethő, “There is nothing surprising in the fact that, in times of dictatorship and a general ban on individual and artistic freedom, a work of art deploys techniques that raise the concrete elements of the story into the realm of the symbolic” (Pethő *In-Between* 395). The symbolism apparent where intermediality is employed is therefore purposely obtuse, while still allowing for “a systematic multiplication of meanings on different levels of the cinematic text” (Pethő *In-Between* 396).

An important feature of New Romanian cinema is the incorporation of intermedial references into a “tableau,” a shot taken by a static camera focused on a scene composed like a painting. When this occurs, the narrative recedes into the background to make for “the compelling visual attraction of carefully constructed, autonomous frames” (Pethő “The ‘Chemistry’ of Art(Ifice)” 239). By employing such a tactic, the resulting films form a link between the Eastern European cultural context and Western European artistic traditions, essentially dissolving “cultural boundaries” (Pethő “The ‘Chemistry’ of Art(Ifice)” 240). But also, in a similar manner to the framing discussed in the previous chapter, tableau incorporated in New Romanian cinema can create a “distanciating effect generated by conspicuous artificiality and stylisation (Pethő “The ‘Chemistry’ of Art(Ifice)” 241). This fragmentation, while necessarily bringing together cultures, aligns cinema with the greater cultural movement of globalisation and therefore the postmodern condition. The boundary-crossing and hybridisation of cinema gives rise to what Nagib refers to as dissensus (“Impurity” 37), a condition that challenges cinema’s expressive limits and multiplies possible meanings.

Tableaux perform another function in cinema: they arrest the viewer's attention, just as the action on screen is arrested. In this way, according to Brigitte Peucker, "Tableaux in their different permutations exemplify the merger of representation with reality with which we are concerned here insofar as they present the 'real' body as an arrested image in a variety of scenarios" (14). This both draws attention to film's potential to depict the contrast between movement and stasis, but also brings to life images from paintings that appear as in death (Peucker 26). I argue that this aspect of intermediality is particularly pertinent in this chapter, where the films under consideration confront issues of life and the potential for life and death.

While intermediality is the prime concern of this chapter, one use of intertextuality will be examined here in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*. Intertextuality is closely related to intermediality, as both terms concern the references of other texts within a text. Intertextual references can operate by offering the reader the opportunity to read a text through the mediation of another text. In the case of New Romanian cinema, the audience can interpret the text directly through the narrative, but other meanings can be construed through the consideration of the intertextual references. In *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, naming conventions and dialogue refer to classic literature and mythology to infer alternate meanings to the narrative. How this occurs and what other meanings can be identified through the intertext will be discussed in this chapter.

Tableaux vivant

The use of tableaux vivant is a tactic of intermediality frequently employed by New Romanian filmmakers in their mise-en-scène. Brigitte Peucker proposes that "tableaux in their different permutations exemplify the merger of representation with reality ... as they

present the ‘real’ body as an arrested image in a variety of scenarios” (Peucker 14). Thus, by the careful construction of the shot in a way that characters appears as “the static embodiment of well-known paintings” (Peucker 30), the spectator is brought closer to reality.

The moments where the action of the film is arrested by tableaux, the viewer’s attention is drawn to film’s inherent capacity to capture both stasis and movement, a tactic identified by Kracauer:

Characters or parts of them abruptly ceasing to move – produces a shock effect, as if all of a sudden we found ourselves in a vacuum. The immediate consequence is that we acutely realize the significance of movement as an integral element of the external world as well as film. (Kracauer 44)

Stasis thus represents one of the core characteristics of cinema through its ability to connect film to “the material aspects of nature in the raw” (Kracauer 158).

In addition to this, by staging a two-dimensional picture as part of the *mise-en-scène*, tableaux brings to life a still image and, in this way, the intermedial object both enriches the film as well as animates the image in what Peucker calls “a moment of intensified intermediality” (Peucker 26). Such aesthetics challenge realist conventions due to the “duality of the illusion” by making visible the constructedness of the shot and therefore the mediation of the cinematic image (Pethő “Exhibited Space” 67).

In addition to the function of bringing attention to constructedness of the image, tableaux vivant also serve allegorical purposes that go to the very heart of philosophical understandings of cinema. Pethő speaks of how tableaux essentially fossilise the subject into “‘dead’ iconographic forms,” which serve to both heighten the opposition between art and life as well as create a “tense interplay with unsettling subject matters” (Pethő “The ‘Chemistry’ of Art(Ifice)” 244, 242).

The use of tableaux is prominent in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* – a film about the process of dying, which follows the key protagonist through the Romanian healthcare system until he ultimately succumbs to his illness. It is therefore fitting that the director, Cristi Puiu, references a famous Renaissance artwork depicting death in the closing scene as a note of respect for the dying man and a recognition of the sacred dimension of the process of death. As seen in Figure 20, the shot configuration of the last scene bears a close resemblance to *Dead Christ* by Hans Holbein, shown in Figure 21. While this connection has been previously identified by Liviu Lutas, he does not examine in depth the full implications of such an evocation (Lutas 115). I suggest that in spite of the title of the film, this intermedial reference lifts the film’s meaning above the fatalistic narrative, that assigns solemn dignity to what would otherwise be a pitiful death. Mr Lăzărescu’s appearance, reminiscent of Christ, is a reference to the possibility that the final scene does not spell the end of the protagonist’s story, just as Jesus’ death did not spell the end of his. By mirroring the appearance of *Dead Christ* in the final scene, Puiu is making a claim to the value of human life beyond the physical body, while uniting all humanity with the suffering of this old, ailing man. Thus, the image of Mr Lăzărescu is sutured to the religious and iconographic tradition of Christian faith to represent something more than a pointless death alone in a sterile hospital room. I propose that the final scene represents a use of intermediality that traverses the barrier between life and death as the film also traverses the barrier between different artforms. The border crossing facilitated by the intermedial paradigm therefore becomes a method as well as a subject in this profound moment, where the figure of the dying man is transported to a “rhetorical dimension” where alternative outcomes may be possible (Pethő *Caught in-Between* 5, 40). This aligns New Romanian cinema with the theories of Bazin, who identified cinema’s possibility of demonstrating spiritual transcendence (Bazin “Theology” 63). This is further enhanced by the intertextual reference of the title and within the script of the film.



Figure 20. The final scene of *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, reminiscent of Hans Holbein's *Dead Christ*.



Figure 21. Hans Holbein's *Dead Christ*.

Intertextuality

Beside the intermedial elements present in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, the film also contains intertextual references. Liviu Lutas suggests that the intertextual references in the script of *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* only serve as unimportant similes, which are either unrecognised by the spectator or too complicated to interpret definitively (Lutas 114). Pop, in contrast, argues that even though every reference may not be immediately readable by the audience, Puiu's complex web of intertextual sights and sounds means that Mr Lăzărescu is "metonymically replacing an entire past," effectively utilising his story as a "translation of the ordeal of the Romanian society as a whole" (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 106). Although the film appears to be concerned with the immediate condition of Mr Lăzărescu's health, the complexity incorporated within the diegesis opens the narrative to include the circumstances of Romania in the political and social realm. Strausz proposes that *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, like *Beyond the Hills*, traces the illness of the protagonist not to corporeal factors but to failures of Romania's social and political institutions (Strausz 183). This is only possible through the aesthetic mode of which intertextuality is a vital component.

Mr Lăzărescu's given names are Dante Remus, the first referring to the revered and much quoted Dante Alighieri, the famous Florentine thirteenth century poet, who is considered the "greatest poet to write in the Italian language" (Diskin). Dante's three volumes of poetry deal with his imaginative journey through the nine circles of Hell, with the ancient Roman poet, Virgil, as his guide. He traverses the inferno of Hell, Purgatory and eventually Paradise, but the quest has many trials before its completion. During the journey, the companions encounter mythical creatures as well as lost souls condemned to eternal damnation, all while trekking onward on the circular terrain of the underworld. Similarly, the narrative of *Death of Mr Lăzărescu* has a circular structure, whereby the protagonists

experience the same situations in each hospital they visit, with little progress being made towards treatment for the sickening patient.

After Mr Lăzărescu is refused treatment at the first hospital the ambulance visits, Moirar and her charge are met with a chaotic scene at the second hospital. Outside the scream of sirens and the flashing lights of ambulances create an eerie atmosphere, while inside, the feverish movement of gurneys containing serious wounded patients creates a cacophony of sound and movement (see Figure 22 and Figure 23). Nasta describes the hospital waiting room as appearing as an “anteroom of death” (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 160), which, given the first name of the key protagonist, invites further comparison with Dante’s *Inferno*, especially the third canto:

Through me you go to the grief-wracked city.

Through me to everlasting pain you go.

Through me you go and pass among lost souls

...

Nothing till I was made was made, only

eternal beings. And I endure eternally.

Surrender as you enter every hope you have. (Dante 21)



Figure 22. The scene at the entrance to the second hospital visited by Mr Lăzărescu, that has become a trauma centre for a local bus crash, in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*.





Figure 23. Chaotic scenes of suffering and carnage inside the hospital as multiple victims of the bus tragedy are wheel in for treatment, in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*.

While the *Inferno* graphically enumerates the punishments for canonical sins on people entering the underworld, *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* does not apportion suffering as punishment for sin, although each doctor in turn castigates the poor man for his alcoholism.

What the intermedial reference here invites is comparison between the environment of the hospital and the environment of Dante's underworld; that is, endless, futile suffering.

Although the film can be interpreted as a critique of the Romanian medical establishment, the comparison with Dante's underworld remediates what the screen observes and asks the spectator to reflect on the futility of suffering on a wider scale. This use of intertextuality further illustrates how it opens the meaning of the film text, while still presenting a realist aesthetic. What intertextuality offers to the audience, by using references to Dante, is access to what Nagib (quoted in Pethő) calls "differing points of view regarding reality" (*In-Between* 49).

Janine Teodorescu and Anca Munteanu note that:

All three names of the protagonist, Dane Remus Lăzărescu, are important elements of the film; all are symbolic and operate under the sign of death ... Remus, one of the two mythical founders of Rome, was slain by his brother for having trespassed the borderline drawn by Romulus. (61)

Romanians are descended from ancient Rome, and as such share the foundational myth of Romulus and Remus with Italians (Ioan Aurel Pop 5, 26).³¹ Thus, Mr Lăzărescu's name can be seen as an attempt to link him with a foundational figure of Romanian history and identity and therefore invite the audience to identify with his plight.³²

Mr Lăzărescu's travelling companion in the film is the paramedic Moiră, whose name is, according to Nasta, a diminutive of "mioritza," a lamb from Romanian myth, who accompanies a dying shepherd (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 158). Additionally,

³¹ A statue of Romulus and Remus and the she-wolf appears in a main street of Cluj-Napoca, the capital of Transylvania, Romania, see Figure 24.

³² Despite this, Nasta states that Romanians culturally identify most strongly with France, (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 4)

one of the stretcher carriers is called Virgil, a name familiar as Dante's guide to the underworld. The implications of Moiră's name here is that the Romanian myth associates earthly trials with fatalistic beliefs. The relationship between the narrative of *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* and the myth infuses the narrative with the stoic acceptance of death's inevitability.



Figure 24. Statue of Romulus and Remus and the she-wolf, in the Transylvanian capital, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Photo by the author, June 2019.

The reference inherent in the surname of Mr Lăzărescu is to the biblical story of Lazarus. According to the Biblical story, Jesus performed a miracle to raise Lazarus from the dead (Drum). By referring to the Bible in the title and in the title character's name, Puiu is playfully linking the title character to the biblical story of Lazarus. By referring to the Bible story in the title and in the title character's name, Puiu is challenging the audience's expectations of the film's trajectory. Are we to trust the title in stating that it is about

Lăzărescu's death, or believe in the miracle of being raised from the dead? Thus, the name transposes the gruesome end of the film into an allegorical realm, casting the old man's death not as a hopeless case of societal neglect and pitiful ineptitude, but as part of the rich cycle of life and death, where grace replaces the minutiae of death's inevitable indignity. In this case, intertextuality reaches into liminality as it serves to subvert the narrative's teleological determinism.

Religious iconography: Where Christianity and communism collide

Pop contends that New Romanian cinema's continual reference to religious symbolism is indicative of the influence of Andrei Tarkovsky on Eastern European cinema (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 150). However, Tarkovsky infuses his films with religious significance, while in New Romanian cinema the spiritual dimension it is frequently undermined, due to a "spiritual crisis" ... feared in contemporary Russia and Eastern Europe" (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 150). Contrary to this view, I suggest that some New Romanian films engage with religion seriously. Just as Bazin stated that "cinema has always been interested in God" (Bazin "Theology" 61), the films of the New Romanian cinema frequently turn to religion for spiritual purposes, making an appeal to the spectator to recognise the value of the Christian message. This could be interpreted as the directors choosing to offer an alternative template for life other than communism or capitalism, and instead recognise the value of some of the basic tenets of the Christian faith.

As discussed above, the intermedial dimension of the films in this canon complicates their readings. An example of this is the scene in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* where Otilia attends the birthday celebration of her boyfriend Adi's mother (played by Luminița

Gheorghiu). By decoding this scene through its intermedial references, the audience can discover the wider thematics that override even the politics of abortion.

This scene depicts a group of middle-aged people crowded around a table laden with “a wealth of food” (Strausz 132). Otilia is positioned in the centre of the frame, with her boyfriend, Adi, behind her, and his mother to Otilia’s right (see Figure 25). Otilia has crossed town to attend this party at the behest of her boyfriend but is deeply concerned about her friend Găbița, who is going through a life and death event alone in a distant hotel room.



Figure 25. *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, Otilia attends the birthday of her boyfriend Adi’s mother (seen to Otilia’s right in red).

The mise-en-scène created here is reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper*, with Otilia’s placement suggesting her sacrificial actions for her desperate friend (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 194). Yet, Pop interprets the use of Christian iconography in the film negatively, as indicating that as the characters in the film are “incapable of producing any miracle ... [they] are surrogates of the archetypal hero, Christ the Saviour” (*An Introduction* 146). I propose that Otilia’s act of resistance in helping her friend procure

an abortion has other Christ-like qualities. Firstly, as in da Vinci's masterpiece, Otilia is positioned in the centre of the group, embedded in the scene but not an active participant. The other characters speak around her and about her but rarely directly to her. They spout their middle-class rhetoric, while she is focused on other concerns, like her friend's dangerous predicament. Similarly, Jesus in *The Last Supper* is a static and silent figure amongst movement and chatter (see Figure 26).

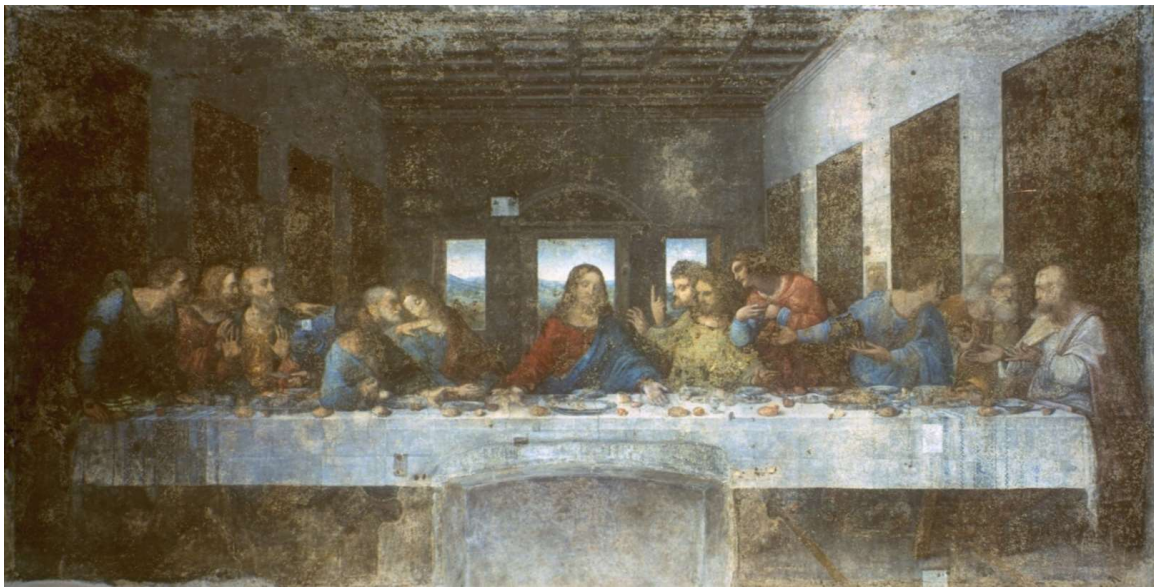


Figure 26. *The Last Supper* (da Vinci)

Significant in this scene is the flatness of the filmic image. Unlike deep focus photography, which allows the audience to examine different planes of the shot, only the people around the table are in focus, and they appear as if on the same plane. The almost painterly depiction of Otilia and the rest of the dinner party participants grounds the scene in the European artistic tradition as well as drawing on the audience's recognition of religious symbolism. This form of intermediality does not include an artwork directly within the film but refers to it by adopting the structural characteristics of a recognisable painting. In her typology of intermediality, Rajewsky calls this kind of intermediality an “intermedial

reference” (52).³³ Rather than a fusion or hybridisation of film, the image exists as a heterogenous visual artefact, creating dissensus within the film, which, when talking of another film, Nagib states “establishes new relations between reality and appearance, the individual and the collective ... challenging its own limits and the power of representation” (Nagib “Impurity” 37). Integrating Pethő and Nagib’s approaches, I consider the dinner party scene as a moment of profound dissensus within the film. By separating Otilia from the rest of the group visually and fashioning this presentation on the image of Christ, Mungiu positions her as a non-conforming dissenter within the shot. This reinforces other, more obvious, dissensus: Otilia’s refusal to participate in an insignificant conversation around the table, and possibly, by doing so, refusing being part of the middle-class rat-race and her friend’s refusal to consent to her body or identity being subsumed by the State’s laws over reproductive rights.

The intermedial aspects of this scene are both painterly and theatrical. The manner in which the actors are placed and the extended temporality of the scene are reminiscent of a stage scene. The theoretical significance of this placement is that theatricality is historically associated with non-realist film. Kracauer was particularly scathing of films that rely on theatrics, not least because he believed an excess of dialogue tends to undermine the primacy of the visual. Theatrical scenes, for him, also exclude the contingency and spontaneity that film, in its most realist form, aspires to (Kracauer 60). This position is contested by Nagib, as she acknowledges the possibility that theatrical filming can enable spectatorial agency through “a surplus of space and time “ (“Impurity” 28). The implication is that the spectator must feel that they are present at the event depicted on screen and be aware of the

³³ Rajewsky’s other two typologies of intermediality are hybrid forms, which fuse and combine different artforms to create a new form of media, for instance mixed media installations; and, “medial transposition” which is involves transposing one medium into another, for example, adapting a book into a film (Rajewsky 51-52)

theatricality of the moment, which may or may not be applicable to the scene under discussion. Although in the case of *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, the source material is not a play, the staging here is realist based on fidelity to the thematic concerns of the film. In his interview with Amir Ganjavi, Mungiu states that *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* is essentially about “sacrifice, friendship and growing up” (Ganjavi 5). Similarly, the final days of Jesus’ life could also be seen highlighting the issues of sacrifice, friendship and growing up, therefore the intermedial inclusion of *The Last Supper* into the film draws the film and painting into a close relationship. Nagib describes the intermedial event as providing a passage to reality and it is a “fleeting moment where both film and life merge, before coming themselves again” (*Realist as World Cinema* 175). The inclusion of intermedial references in this scene provides contextual information about Otilia that is not evident elsewhere, encouraging the audience to compare her life and actions with the biblical figure.

Modelling the placement of all the participants in the dinner party on *The Last Supper* also allows Mungiu to position them on the same plane and, by eschewing the traditional shot-reverse-shot method of filming, the characters are democratised. Nagib refers to such a technique as “blur[ring] any clear sense of opposition” (*Ethics* 62), which in the case of this scene in works against the dialogue, where middle-aged middle-class professionals are asserting their superiority over Otilia. As such, Mungiu’s placement problematises the empty posturing and rhetoric of the privileged adults and can be considered an example of what Nagib calls “revelatory realism” (*Ethics* 52).

The dinner scene was filmed in a continuous, uninterrupted shot, which runs for over eight minutes, and took over two days of shooting (Uricaru “Minimalism and Melodrama” 51). Thus, the events occur in a linear fashion that closely aligns to the audience’s experience of real time and this “diegetic integrity” (Uricaru “Minimalism and Melodrama” 52) asserts a close relation to lived “truth.” Bazin explained that the duration of an image on screen

determines its import (Bazin *What Is Cinema* 231), and Otilia's position of entrapment in the dinner party of her boyfriend's parents is agonising in the length of time she (and the audience, witnessing) has to endure the participants' only slightly veiled insults.

Similar to the careful attention to framing discussed in the previous chapter, this scene is also framed meticulously. The camera captures only the hands holding cutlery and disembodied voices of some of the dinner party guests, rendering faces invisible. As mentioned in the previous chapter, where framing devices are used in such a way, the resulting *mise en scène* "heighten[s] both the sensation of reality and that of artificiality" (Pethő "Exhibited Space" 67). This is the key difference between da Vinci's painting and the scene in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, because in the former, every apostle is included within the frame. Therefore, the film excludes some of the characters from the frame deliberately, in order to frustrate the viewer's desire to access all necessary information to make their own critical judgements.

It is important to return to how intermediality as a research method can help describe the process by which the reference to artwork interacts with filmic realism here. This scene can be understood through Nagib's proposal that intermediality forms a bridge to reality (Nagib *Realist as World Cinema* 173). If there was ever a moment in film that represents the impossible choices available to a character, this is it. The intense clashing of art and film mirrors the intense clashing of opportunity and privilege with struggle and trauma at the dinner table. Film alone cannot capture the irresolvable differences between Otilia's life experience and those of the Adi's parents and their friends at the table. She represents the "other," just as the reference to artwork represents the "other" to film. With startling clarity, when reference to *The Last Supper* is included here, we witness the devastating effects of her decisions and know that she will never be able to occupy the table again. She is lost to Adi as Jesus is lost to the disciples.

The dinner party scene represents a turning point in the film's narrative, a point after which everything in the protagonist's life will change. The stillness of Jesus in *The Last Supper* and Otilia at the birthday party belies the frantic machinations that have occurred prior to the scene and the monumental turning point that it represents. Mungiu explains that he intentionally employed a moving camera in the scenes where Otilia is moving, and in this scene, where she is still, his camera was static (Mungiu "On 4 Months, 3 Months and 2 Days"). This was to represent the different mental and emotional states of the protagonist throughout the narrative. Otilia and Gabita are victims of events that are outside their control, which eventually leads to death and the everlasting taint of trauma. This manner of drawing attention to the dramatic turning point in the plot is in contrast to the means of drawing attention to dramatic turning points in other realist traditions, for example, Italian neorealism.³⁴ For instance, Roberto Rossellini used frantic movement and close-ups of Karin (Ingrid Bergman) in *Stromboli* at the climax of the film to represent the mental breakdown point of the character (see Figure 28). Similarly, close-ups of Antonio (Lamberto Maggiorani) in *The Bicycle Thieves* are employed to register the trauma of the father who is searching for his son, Bruno (Enzo Staiola), who he suspects is the victim of drowning (see Figure 27).

It has been argued elsewhere in this thesis that New Romanian cinema differs from Italian neorealism in its use of intermediality. However, there is an exception and that is in influential Italian neorealist filmmaker Roberto Rossellini's *Germany, Year Zero* (*Germania anno zero*, 1948). The film follows the life and activities of a young boy, Edmund, while his whole family is living in difficult circumstances in Berlin in the year after the end of World War II. In the absence of a meaningful role model, Edmund becomes influenced by a Nazi-sympathising former school teacher. As a result of the stress and the contact with Nazi

³⁴ Melodrama was frequently adopted in Italian neorealism, however, it is an overlooked aspect of this canon.

ideology, Edmund kills his father, although, given his father was extremely ill, no-one suspects Edmund has poisoned him. At the film's climax, Edmund throws himself out of a derelict building, and in the last view the audience has of him, he is lying on the ground beside a passerby who witnesses the suicide (Figure 29). The tableau created by Rossellini in this scene is reminiscent of the Michelangelo's *Pietà*, a sculpture of which is located in St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican (Figure 30).³⁵



Figure 27. Antonio watching as a group of men rescue a child from drowning, suspecting his own son is the victim, in *The Bicycle Thieves*.

³⁵ Interestingly, direct reference to the same artwork can be seen in the advertising material for the recent Romanian film *Monsters* (*Monștri*, Olteanu 2019), see Figure 31, demonstrating a continuing interest in, and use of, intermedial religious references in Romanian film, post-New Romanian cinema. The image as depicted does not appear in the film's diegesis but enriches the film by implying sacrifice and trauma through the intermedial in the extradiegetic space.



Figure 28. Karin reaches her breaking point in *Stromboli*.



Figure 29. Edmund lies dead after purposely falling from a derelict building, *Germany, Year Zero*.



Figure 30. *Pietà* (Buonarroti), St Peter's Basilica, Vatican City.

This poignant moment allows the spectator to compare the suffering and ultimate death of Edmund to Jesus' death, which cleanses him of the guilt of hastening his father's demise. There are strong parallels with Rossellini's use of the *Pietà* imagery in this scene and Mungiu's use of religious symbolism in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*. Both Edmund and Otilia have committed actions that have resulted in death, but both have been expunged of guilt through the forgiveness inherent in Christian theology. Both films use the static shot to allow the spectator to recognise the mirroring of classic art in the tableau created to contemplate the wider implications of the trauma. In *Germany, Year Zero*, Edmund's guilt for the death of his father ripples out to encompass those in the international community who insisted on punishing the German people for the regime of

cross of wood (Figure 32). There is a parallel in this action to Christian theology, most notably Jesus being nailed to a cross and crucified. By placing the distressed women in such a position, Mungiu is inviting comparisons with the suffering of Jesus, but also with the injustice enacted on an innocent. Although the nuns and the priest in the film clearly care for Alina, their ignorance and lack of resources lead them to violent and ultimately fatal harm to the vulnerable young woman. At first sight, it might appear that Mungiu is asking spectators to compare the punishment of Alina's body and psyche with the punishment of the poor and vulnerable in post-communist Romania. However, seeing this film as religious would be misguided because the director critiques "lethargy, unprofessionalism, and callousness [that has] permeated all social strata" (Filimon and Mungiu 20), not sparing organised religion. As Strausz points out, the hospital and the convent are depicted as equally guilty of failing Alina and are symbolic representations of "crumbling institution authority" that seems incapable of discharging their duties to the vulnerable under their care (201).



Figure 32. Nuns constructing a makeshift cross in order to restrain Alina for her exorcism, screen shot from *Beyond the Hills*.



Figure 33. Alina is tied to a cross, while nuns pray and cry over her obviously suffering body, screen shot from *Beyond the Hills*.

Drawing on Nagib's work, we can understand this staging of crucifixion as one of dissensus ("Impurity" 30), which binds intermedial references and lived experience. While immediately shocking and upsetting, this scene seeks to activate memory and cultural specificity to enrich the film's narrative. Thus, the film does not assimilate this iconographic reference, but introduces it to rupture the fictive surface of the film and amplify meaning.

In the exorcism scene, the priest (Valeriu Andriuță) is weaponising the cross of Jesus against Alina because she is thought to be harbouring the Devil (see Figure 33). However, neither the priest nor the nuns are allocated the blame for the tragic outcome of her death. Rather, in keeping with New Romanian cinema's non-judgemental position, guilt is cast wide to encapsulate the failures of both the communist and post-communist governments and society as a whole.³⁶ In the case of both *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* and *Beyond the Hills*,

³⁶ In an interview, Mungiu suggested that one point of view on the priest's actions, is that he did indeed succeed in exorcising the demon from Alina. (Mungiu "On *Beyond the Hills*")

the circumstances the protagonists find themselves in are, in the words of the director, “limit situations, morally speaking, in which one needs to take a stand not only in relation to the story itself, but in relation to one’s life” (Filimon and Mungiu 23). Mungiu therefore appeals not to religion in *Beyond the Hills* as the answer to the problems presented, but to his audience to ask themselves questions about their own values and their culpability in perpetuating social injustice. As a follow-up to *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, *Beyond the Hills* provides a possible scenario to what might have happened to Găbița’s baby were it not terminated, as many unwanted children or those born to impoverished parents were taken in by institutions such as that which housed Alina and Volchita when they were children.

Both *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* and *Beyond the Hills* invoke religious iconography to infuse the narrative with extra meaning in a way that suggests religious concerns such as the suffering of the innocents. It can be assumed that most Romanians would recognise such imagery, as according to Cristian Mungiu, 85 per cent of Romanians identify as being religious (Filimon and Mungiu 22).³⁷ However, neither film suggests that religion provides the answer to the questions the films confront; rather, they encourage the audience to consider institutional and personal indifference to the suffering of others. These devices are common throughout New Romanian cinema and are a partial explanation of the canon’s unique address and what sets it apart from other realist cinemas, such as Italian neorealism.

In contrast to *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* and *Beyond the Hills*, *12.08 East of Bucharest* uses religious intermedial references in a more ironic way. This is particularly evident during the final scene when the television program is being taped and the three protagonists are placed in a composition similar to the Holy Trinity, see Figure 34. At first

³⁷ In interview, Mungiu explains that he never had a religious education (Mungiu “On *Beyond the Hills*”)

sight, the reference to the Holy Trinity here would appear to align with a postmodern approach, indicating that beliefs are emptied and the iconography is evacuated of any spiritual significance. However, as I will show later, the use of religious iconography here can be read in a more nuanced way.



Figure 34. Jderescu recounts the myth of Plato's cave, Piscoci and Manescu look on, unimpressed, 12:08 *East of Bucharest*.

Both *12:08 East of Bucharest* and the short film *The Legend of the Chicken Driver* (part of the compendium film *Tales from the Golden Age*) are set around Christian celebrations (in the case of the latter, Easter), which places them in a dialectic space where religious symbolism is a plot device and indicative of wider philosophical possibilities. As stated above, Porumboiu has placed his actors in a holy trinity, a composition which can be read as Jderescu being in the place of God the father. This positioning can also be compared to the position of Ceaușescu himself, whose rhetoric encouraged a cult of personality that transformed him from a “cobbler’s apprentice” to status akin to a religious divinity (Galloway 28; Gilberg 50).

As part of Ceaușescu's myth-making scheme, there were many stories in the official press that make him appear as an exemplar of his age (Galloway 39). Despite some of the stories seeming totally implausible (including that the town of his birth was of special "archaeological significance" (Galloway 38)), Ceaușescu himself was apparently so seduced by his own publicity that he stated, "A man like Me is born to a country only once in a thousand years" (Galloway 39). Ceaușescu and Jderescu's pomposity prevents them from any self-critical analysis that could identify their weaknesses. As the figures on either side of the God-like being in the Trinity, Manescu and Piscoci are both alternative incarnations of God and here could be expected to support Jderescu's contention that Vaslui played an important role in historical events. As such, Manescu places himself in the centre of what later appears to be non-existent protests in the town square, with colleagues that are now either dead or absent, so they can neither support nor deny his version of events. Manescu is therefore taking a cue from Jderescu in allocating for himself a role in history, the facts of which have been obscured by time and the vicissitudes of memory. Regardless of the contestability of the Professor's testimony, his professional status and his appearance as a member of the Holy Trinity confers authority on his story, even if the unsteady camerawork suggests its unreliability. However, the very nature of a myriad of voices (including people who call the television show to refute Manescu's claims) telling conflicting accounts of the same event is a further contribution towards destabilising the truth, staging the impossibility of a singular account of history. The fact that in this case the narrative is left radically open-ended mirrors the ambiguous nature of reality itself and realism as described by Bazin (when speaking about Italian neorealism), where "unity of meaning of the dramatic event" is denied (Bazin *What Is Cinema I* 37).

Completing the un-Holy Trinity is Emanoil Piscoci, whose role initially appears to be that of providing some comic relief. However, eventually he is the only one of the Trinity to

have anything significant or thoughtful to say about the events. Using metaphor, he describes the public's participation in the revolution as being akin to how the lights turn on in the town. He describes the lights radiating away from the centre of the town, eventually lighting up the fringes of the city. The opening and closing scenes of the film feature first the lights turning off in Vaslui and later the lights turning on. The visual rhyme Porumboiu employs here has a stark and satisfying beauty despite the streets of Vaslui being menacingly empty and the houses decrepit or depressingly utilitarian. Pop contends that as Piscoci has been invited on the talk show only because the other planned guest is absent, he is placed in the role of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, which is "a clear connotation to the role of the Holy Spirit plays in the dynamics of Christian theology" (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 148). The ephemerality of the role of Piscoci is countered by his clear recollections of each feature of what is essentially a life without any great or significant happenings. However, the *feeling* that the old man expresses is more poignant than the information obtained regarding what actually happened in the town square at the time of the Revolution. This is because personal memory, rather than a more contested shared cultural memory, is more easily understood by people, who may only be able to relate to their own lives and immediate recollections, rather than those on a historic, national level. As mentioned earlier, facts are meaningless without memory, and Piscoci has created a unique, personal narrative. Additionally, this moment unites form and content, as the film itself challenges the viewer to see history as a collection of memories around seminal events, while respect is assigned to Piscoci's memory of his marriage and his late wife.

While the old man can be seen as the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, he is also the spirit of the people, his countrymen who may not have a clear memory of large significant events but whose memories of their own experiences still "play a central part in mnemonic processes targeting history" (Strausz 149). Even though the *12:08 East of Bucharest* includes religious

iconography, I do not suggest that Porumboiu is positioning himself as a religious ideologue. What I contend is that he is appealing to higher ideals than those on offer in the earthly realm, such as art and religion as alternative sources of morality or the meaning of existence. In common with other New Romanian films, the film does not give answers to the questions it poses, but problematises the narrative, laying it before the audience and asking them to construct meaning through their own personal values and individual memories.

Conclusion

In this chapter it is argued that realism in cinema is limited to the use of cinematic techniques that are committed to a recognisably accurate mimetic relation between reality and the image. The artistic fragments that are directly referenced or subtly implied in New Romanian cinema can be understood “as a symptomatic characteristic of modernity ... having no meaning on [their] own” or as a postmodern gesture where they carry their own meaning “independent of its aesthetic contextualization” (Rosen 15). I suggest that both attitudes exist in New Romanian cinema, where the image provides additional contextual information or it refers to meaning outside the text. Yet, while intermediality as discussed in this chapter creates tensions between the films’ realist aesthetics and inter-art references, it does not disconnect the films from their realist roots. Instead, these films require a modification to how realism in cinema is conceptualised in order to recognise the importance of intermediality. In the case of New Romanian cinema, intermediality and intertextuality are combined with transformation within the political and social status of Romanian society to produce films that activate memory through a complex set of signifiers and create images that have deep local relevance while also being relevant to a global audience.

Firstly, this chapter discussed the use of tableaux vivant within New Romanian cinema. Utilising Kracauer's theory, I have demonstrated that the contrast between movement and stasis activates a heightened perception of materiality, which supports the reality effect. Although *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* is the prime text examined here, stasis and movement is an important feature within other New Romanian films, such as *Stuff and Dough* and *California Dreamin'*. While the slowing of the syuzhet offers time to the "viewer for a critical reflection" (Chiru-Jitaru 212), it is a consistent tactic used in this cinema that mirrors the stop-start functioning of state institutions and their catastrophic failures to take action. Additionally, the tableaux discussed here can imply alternative readings of narrative within New Romanian cinema: just as this cinema is interrogating historical events, it is "simultaneously registering the impossibility of completing such a project" (Strausz 18). These films recognise the impossibility of identifying the immutable truth and are thus adopting a postmodern attitude while maintaining a realist aesthetic.

This chapter also addressed intertextual references in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*. The references I have identified suture the text to that of Dante Alighieri and thereby draw Mr Lăzărescu into the realm of myth. Likewise, the meaning of the Moirai and Remus names draw Romanian myths into the interpretation process. By doing this, the ailing man is no longer a pathetic figure, but is emblematic of Roman myth and humanistic beliefs, adding nuance and inflicting audience response. The expansion made possible by the director's choices here brings questions of national identity and shared cultural memory into play in a complex manner. The directors do not posit a single vision of Romanianness; however, they activate self-reflexive modes to interrogate how identities or historical events are fashioned into a shared cultural memory and ask hard questions about the accuracy of the resulting discourse.

The chapter also analysed the use of religious iconography. The religious iconography imbedded in certain films in the New Romanian canon relies on a shared cultural understanding of religious imagery so that the audience have an opportunity to decode the scenes themselves. The scenes where such imagery is implied challenge not only the film's realism but also the religious beliefs themselves, as the resulting scenes are frequently deeply ironic. For instance, placing a young woman in the place of Jesus could be seen as heretical, as could be the three incompetent men in *12:08 East of Bucharest* being depicted as the Holy Trinity.

The filmmakers of New Romanian cinema utilise religious imagery to draw attention to important moments within the diegesis. While I have contrasted this tactic with that used by Roberto Rossellini, who frequently utilised the close-up for this purpose, I have drawn attention to his use of *Pietà*, and how that artwork has been referenced in New Romanian cinema. I argue that Rossellini's use of *Pietà* imagery has provided the inspiration for New Romanian filmmakers to adopt religious subject matter to imply heroic sacrifice and the death of innocence. In the case of *Beyond the Hills*, the use of the cross suggests extra-diegetic meanings that invites the spectator to see Alina as an innocent victim of bureaucratic and institutional failure.

Where the religious imagery has been emptied of meaning, as in the case of *12:08 East of Bucharest*, I propose that the ironic mode is activated in a postmodern gesture that addresses the impossibility of arriving at an absolute definition of historical events. Both of these uses of religious imagery do not suggest that religion is an alternative to either communism or capitalism, but instead invite the spectator to reflect on their own privilege, and to see the situations for the challenging problems that have yet to be resolved.

CHAPTER 5 – FINDING REALITY IN THE SPOKEN

WORD AND MUSICAL INTERLUDES

Doru Pop suggests that New Romanian cinema consists of “visual narratives” rather than narratives that are driven by dialogue (*An Introduction* 17). In this chapter, I will argue against this assessment, as I contend that the manner in which speech is utilised and, in particular, when its import goes beyond semantics, represents an important contribution to both the realist effect of the films in question and is a vital component of New Romanian films’ cinematic grammar. In this chapter, I interrogate how events are shaped by discourses and the manner in which the meaning words become malleable when society is undergoing the “challenging process of documenting self-discovery” (Florescu 51). This chapter will draw on semiotic theory and Kracauer’s ideas regarding the materiality of words.

Semiotics of cinema is of interest to the study of realist cinema because, as Robert Stam states, “Language [is] not ... a mere adjunct to our grasp of reality but rather formative of it” (Stam *Film Theory* 104). In the films analysed in this chapter, *Police, Adjective, Beyond the Hills* and *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, language does not just describe or explain happenings within the exegesis – it also shapes the events themselves through exposing the relationship between experience and how language is understood and manipulated.

Siegfried Kracauer warns that where dialogue is dominant in film it can become too theatrical and that in the most successful films, dialogue “grow[s] out of the flow of pictorial communications” (106). However, he also briefly speaks of how the materiality of physical experience can sometimes be accessed through the use of dialogue. This is when the meaning of speech lies in its “material qualities” (109). When describing the material qualities of speech, Kracauer uses the example of Eliza Doolittle in *Pygmalion* (Asquith 1938):

Film makers may also turn the spotlight from speech as a means of communication to speech as a manifestation of nature. In *Pygmalion*, for instance, we are enjoined to focus on Eliza's Cockney idiom rather than the content of what she is saying. This shift of emphasis is cinematic because it alienates the words, thereby exposing their material characteristics. (Kracauer 109)

Eliza is a Cockney and enacts her identity partly through her strong accent. Her attempts at impersonating an upper-class lady are sabotaged when she accidentally speaks in her native accent, which immediately exposes her socioeconomic position and place of birth. Thus, the manner of speech reveals what Kracauer refers to as Eliza's "peculiar mode of being," which gives an accurate depiction of her life, and therefore "lie[s] in the same dimension as the visible phenomena" (Kracauer 109). In fact, in this case the visuals and the dialogue are in contrast, as Eliza's physical appearance is that of an upper-class woman, yet her speech is a more accurate "manifestation of nature" (Kracauer 109).

There are scenes in *Police, Adjective, Beyond the Hills* and *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* which live up to Kracauer's imperative while simultaneously expanding it: they are where dialogue is favoured over visuals, yet the words do not interfere "with the photographic reality to which the camera aspires" (Kracauer 104). The first aim of this chapter is to analyse instances where the words spoken and who speaks them give the audience direct access to the material reality of the protagonists, even as they do not necessarily contribute to narrative exegesis.

I then draw on semiotics to analyse dialogue in *Beyond the Hills*, considering how religious prayers are transformed through the recitation of the Priest into the realm of spiritual

power.³⁸ The authority of the Priest is called into question because his religious community is unable to comply with the edicts from the Orthodox religious authorities. Nonetheless, the monastery's inhabitants trust that the Priest is able to imbue religious texts with the power to fight evil. Also, semiotics can go some way to explain how words can be combined with other aspects of the film to connote meaning beyond the immediate signified and signifier connection.

Warren Buckland describes André Martinet's ideas on language's organisation as articulation; that is, expressed as "distinct, basic elements ('signs') that are joined. 'Articulation' therefore refers to the joining together of key elements, or signs, following rules of combination to create new messages" (76). Therefore, through "articulation," words can be "organised into as a hierarchical system" that creates new meaning (Buckland 76). By drawing attention to the way in which dialogue is constructed in this way, New Romanian filmmakers expose the role of language in producing meaning. Semiotics can illuminate these processes as well as offer access to underlying meanings and attend to conflicting messages. Additionally, semiotic analysis is helpful here in order to explain how language can be divorced from meaning by breaking the linkages between its individual elements. Central to this chapter's argument is the claim that New Romanian cinema exposes the mutability of language and the possibilities for manipulation of speech. By utilising language in this way, New Romanian cinema invites the audience to reflect on how their own, personal, meanings are constructed, taking into account how the words are said and who says them. This further contributes to the critical potential of these films and a unique style of critical realism that these films collectively create.

³⁸ Cristian Mungiu mentioned his friend and fellow director Corneliu Porumboiu was a school friend of the real priest of the Tanucu tragedy and discussing him with Porumboiu gave Mungiu some insight into the character of the Priest (Mungiu "On *Beyond the Hills*")

Power dynamics

Power dynamics and the meaning of words are strong themes in *Police, Adjective* and according to David Deamer, the title of *Police, Adjective* is a good “indicator of the centrality that language will have” in the film (42). This is because as “police” in the title has no noun, the adjective has nothing to modify and is therefore meaningless, thus signifying the indeterminacy of language (Deamer 42). The protagonist of *Police, Adjective* is Cristi, a policeman for whom the letter of the law is important both within his vocation as well as his interactions with people on a social and familial level. However, as Uricaru explains, New Romanian cinema eschews the “accessibility and dynamic opposition of good and evil” (“Minimalism and Melodrama” 59). Therefore, Cristi is not presented as a heroic figure, but as a person who is just trying to act within his own ethical framework. Conversely, Pop describes Cristi as an anti-hero, as he “performs according to the imperfection of the world he lives in” (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 98), which means that rather than attempting to change the world for the better, he merely acts within the world’s constraints. However, rather than the cynical character described by Pop (Doru Pop “Grammar” 99), I propose that Cristi does make efforts to change the stringent rules as they are applied by the police force, although, ultimately he is unable to influence anybody. Despite the sparse speech in this film, language is used to convey meaning that exceeds the significance of the plot and the penultimate scene achieves this in a unique manner.

The scene under consideration in *Police, Adjective* represents the confrontation between Cristi and his captain, Anghelache. It is a confrontation between ideologies that can be read on many levels, including a clash of the old communist way of following orders and the law, and the new world, where Romania is forced to adapt to more liberal politics because of her membership of the European Union. But, it also illuminates how the politics of power can be enforced through insisting on owning the meaning of words. The scene’s opening

lines, where Anghelache corrects Cristi's use of the word "grass" with the word "denounce" is the precursor for the complicated wordplay that occurs between the two and, to a lesser extent, Nelu (Ion Stoica), see Figure 35. If everyone present understands the meaning of the word and that word is not offensive in any way, what is the point of correcting Cristi's word choice? The answer is in the power dynamics between the men. Cristi is clearly intimidated by his superior, as can be read through his body language – his hanging head and the wringing of his hands – and Anghelache is enforcing his superiority by banning the use of a word on the pretence that it is only used by criminals. It is the issue of what constitutes a criminal that is the first stumbling block between Anghelache and Cristi.



Figure 35. Penultimate scene of *Police, Adjective*, where Cristi (left) is castigated by the Captain (middle), while Cristi's colleague, Nelu (right) looks on.

Anghelache insists on the young man who is the focus of Cristi's surveillance, Victor (Radu Costin), being branded a criminal for using hashish, whereby Cristi prefers to see the actions as only one link in the large chain of crimes of supplying, distributing and consuming drugs. What is not used in the dialogue between the men here is an adjective that qualifies the

noun of criminal. For instance, Victor, as a user of a drug is a *minor* criminal, anyone who supplies drugs would be a more *serious* criminal. But here, the word criminal is not qualified, so there is not movement from Anghelache on applying that word to a young man who is merely a user of the drug. Therefore, he has no qualms in charging the boy with a crime that could mean seven years in gaol. Furthermore, Anghelache asked Cristi what the word “supplying” means to him, which is absurd given that Victor only shares a joint with his friends. Once again, the captain acknowledges no nuance to his application of that word; that is, that sharing one’s hashish is not comparable with someone who imports drugs or makes their living selling drugs, which is the legal meaning of the word “supplying.”

Semiotics is useful here to understand how the captain uses his words and how, even though he accurately relates the words to what he is describing, he breaks the chain of meaning through denying how words work through articulation. Anghelache is using the words as if there is a direct line between the signified and signifier, which is the first line of articulation; however, more complex use of language requires a greater combination of words, known as second articulation (Buckland 76). The captain relies wholly on language having a single meaning and, furthermore, he claims the authority to decide that meaning. Pop argues that the discussion between Cristi and Anghelache is one of conflicting “issues of soul and belief,” which suggests a religious or spiritual dimension of this scene (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 145). However, although morality is at stake, I suggest semiotic analysis can illuminate the structure and use of language in this scene more powerfully than recourse to religious faith.

The ideological rigidity of the captain in the face of logical interpretation offered by Cristi is indicative of how one may interpret the film on its literal level, while the penultimate scene operates as “cynical literalisation driving to the extreme the mechanisms of distancing, abstraction (or ‘theatricality’) that are already manifest in the visual

construction of the film” (Pethő “Exhibited Space” 72). Cristi is not, however, positioned as an effective interpreter of language himself, as evidenced by a scene with his wife that occurs about halfway through the film.

During the scene where Cristi and his wife Anca (Irina Saulescu) discuss the content of a pop song that plays in the diegesis three times, the couple appear to completely misunderstand the other’s point of view. The song, by the Romanian pop star Mirabela Dauer, activates symbolism to impart a feeling of longing and romantic love, which Anca clearly relates to, while Cristi does not. The pop song’s lyrics ask, “What is the field without the flower?” and “What is the sun without the sea?” which draws a comparison between two disparate natural phenomena and how they can be complementary, and romantic partners. Cristi’s inability to grasp this comparison demonstrates his unromantic attitude towards life and perhaps his jaded attitude towards marriage itself. He is in essence denying the connotative power of language, and is instead insisting on the denotative value (Uricaru “Minimalism and Melodrama” 57), where words have a direct relationship between the signified and signifier. The discussion between the couple is effective in illuminating the differences between them and, more importantly, alerts us to the importance of grasping the meaning of speech that goes beyond literal.

The sea and sun and flowers and fields mentioned in the song refer to spring and summer, so I suggest that the song is pointing to a hopeful and fruitful future, full of natural promise. Cristi however, is in the middle of an ethical crisis where he is unable to see a way out clearly – this is why he has been avoiding confrontation with Anghelache – so any talk of the future and its possibility is lost on him. In a similar vein, despite no longer being under communist rule, Romanian society is still prevented from flourishing fully due to the

remnants of forces still holding onto positions of power in government and politics.³⁹

Although it is possible to interpret this scene as demonstrating how power is enacted within the small family, it is also indicative of how creativity and the will for change within society can be denied through prescriptive interpretations of words and the collective deafness of the hierarchies of power to the nuances of language.

Cristi's attitude of denial stands in place of the remains of an autocratic society that continued to deny individual agency, even as it progressed towards democracy. That Cristi is a policeman is significant here, because he is a part of the governmental machine, enforcing outdated laws that do nothing to make society safer but have the potential to cause great individual harm. Interestingly, Cristi does not wear the clothes of power – that is, a police uniform – and in his own home does not sit at the head of the table to eat (he eats alone), so he does not appear as a person of authority at home or at large. He only acquires authority through his association with his job and his superior, yet he is denied the authority to decide how the law should be applied. Despite his best efforts and his meticulous reporting, he is unable to convince Anghelache that the focus of their investigation is misplaced.

The scene where Cristi and his wife discuss the pop song can also be interpreted as deeply self-reflexive, as I believe it offers an interpretative strategy for reading the film itself. *Police, Adjective* is a slow-moving and uneventful film, with long scenes of surveillance and waiting. If the audience is solely reliant on the narrative to understand the film's meaning, they would likely miss the opportunity to access alternate meanings. However, should the audience interrogate the double-articulation of the various elements in the film, such as the double framing, and the words discussed here, the film can reveal a wider or more universal commentary on post-socialist life in Romania. The nuanced language of implication,

³⁹ According to Stephen Roper, "The post-revolutionary leadership consisted mostly of former Communists," which has led some commentators to refer to the events of 1989 as a coup rather than a revolution, (Roper 59)

suggestion and talking around power dynamics is a throwback to the communist era, where people did not dare to speak what they really thought due to the risk of being heard by malevolent forces. This suggests that New Romanian cinema is deeply informed by history and created out of a desire to understand the concepts of justice, ethics and personal responsibility. The role language plays in this process is an especially important one, which differentiates New Romanian cinema from other realist movements.

Speech and realist integrity

While the setting of the next film under examination here, *Beyond the Hills*, is very different from *Police, Adjective*, it nonetheless also deals with institutional power, ethics and individual agency. *Beyond the Hills* draws attention to the use of words and how they become tools of power and manipulation within the religious institution. Although set in a religious environment, *Beyond the Hills* is not so much a statement for or against religion as it is a critical examination of the social and political context where the tragic events are made possible.

As mentioned previously, *Beyond the Hills* is based on an actual event, the attempted exorcism of Irina Cornici in 1995, and her subsequent death. While being interviewed about *Beyond the Hills* and the incident on which the film is based, Mungiu identifies “the society in which they lived, the poverty, [lack of education] caused by poverty and the 50 years of propaganda” as triggering the tragedy (Jacobson 13). He also casts the guilt widely, by stating that “everybody is guilty to a degree,” implying that the causes are attributable to systemic factors (Jacobson 13). Kalling Heck suggests that the prime theme of the film is “a critique of contemporary Romanian austerity practices and ... [Mungiu] directs this critique at an audience that contributes to the spread of austerity across Europe and into the postcommunist

states” (Heck 151). Furthermore, while the director explores the use of language in society and religion and its associated power dynamics, his use of language in *Beyond the Hills* can also be read as a metaphor for how film texts operate generally and, more specifically, how language operates in a realist film.

After Alina arrives at the monastery where Voichita lives, she makes it clear to her friend that she would like to resume their close friendship and take Voichita back with her to live in Germany. After Voichita rejects her suggestions, Alina experiences a mental collapse. In the immediate aftermath, an inherent conflict between the medical and spiritual health of the young woman emerges. Both the hospital and the religious order fail to effectively champion her welfare, which creates ethical aporia that are irreconcilable as good or evil, right or wrong. The medical establishment discharges Alina back into the care of the monastery, which is ill-equipped to look after her. Her former foster family rejects her returning to them and has spent the money she entrusted to them. The monastery imposes restrictions on her that she finds impossible to adhere to and, finally, after abandoning her to the vicissitudes of an ambivalent society, her former orphanage offers no future familial assistance. While each of those people and institutions could be cast as evil in their failure to act for Alina, Mungiu states that the fate of the two friends is an expression of a society that has been poor for generations and is therefore devoid of any spare resources to assist the most vulnerable (Mungiu “On *Beyond the Hills*”).

From the beginning, *Beyond the Hills* is deeply embedded in a very particular time and place. The place is rural Moldavia and, according to Liza Béar’s interview with Cristian Mungiu, the director took great pains to cast lead actors who can be closely identified with a specific geographical location. Most of the film’s actors were from the town of Iași, Mungiu’s own home town (Béar 52). He was particularly voluble when describing the vocal peculiarities of the language from the area of mid-east Romania:

It's the melody of the language, the way of structuring the way you talk. And my choice is part rational, part irrational. It feels natural, especially for this film. The dialogue is spoken with an accent of my hometown, though more of a Moldovian accent. It is not easy for Romanians to understand. You wouldn't notice it in translation, but it's a way of speaking fast, by dropping letters from words and running syllables together. As quoted in (Béar 52)

That Mungiu would expend such energy ensuring the speech patterns of the actors aligned closely with the location of the action (especially when the actual dialogue is so sparse), suggests that accent and speech are important elements of the overall impression he wishes to convey. Mungiu mentions that the look of the actor was also an important component of the casting process; that the characters both needed to be able to represent people who have been denied an education, but also look like they came from Moldovia (Filimon and Mungiu 23). By choosing actors from a particular regional area, Mungiu follows Italian directors who frequently employed people who originated from the geographical area in which they filmed, thus ensuring that "dialogue and language [are] ... natural ... even to the point of keeping the regional accents" (Hayward 220).

When discussing the use of regional dialect in Luchino Visconti's *La Terra Trema* (*The Earth Trembles* 1948), Tijana Mamula describes this form of "mimeticism" as revealing the difficulty in inter-dialectal migration (Mamula 87).⁴⁰ Such "inter-dialectal migration" further restricts the limited choices of the main characters in *Beyond the Hills*. Trapped by the circumstances of their birth, poverty, lack of social support and remote location, Alina and Voichita are also disadvantaged by the localised use of language, which both sets them apart

⁴⁰ *La Terra Trema* is set in a Sicilian fishing village and features non-professional actors chosen from villages close to the film's location who speak a regional dialect.

from other Romanians and makes the possibility of inter-Romanian and inter-European migration more problematic.

The question I am interested in is whether Mungiu's choice of actors can provide an illustration of Kracauer's theory of the materiality of speech and, if so, what can be gleaned from utilising his writings. As discussed previously, Kracauer proposes that the most cinematic films are those where dialogue "flow[s] out of pictorial communications instead of determining their course" (106). Kracauer insists that "the spoken word is most cinematic if the message it conveys elude our grasp; if all that actually can be grasped is the sight of the speakers" (107). This statement can be useful here, as it assumes that even if we cannot understand what is being said, how the accent of the speaker relates to a geographical location is still important as it reflects actuality. Speech is here a "manifestation of nature" (Kracauer 109), as when it allows the audience to recognise and focus on the accent of Eliza Doolittle in *Pygmalion* (Kracauer 109).



Figure 36. Voichița (left) and Alina (right), travel from the train station to the monastery at the beginning of *Beyond the Hills*.

Even though Mungiu admits that the accents of his lead actors may be difficult for Romanians to understand, he insisted on preserving and stressing connection between the locality and the actors' appearance and accent (Béar 52). By creating a linkage between character, actor and location, Mungiu is making a commitment to verisimilitude, even as it would be invisible or inaccessible to some audiences. It is important to the film's realism, that the women *are* real Moldovians, not because they are recognisably so by large swathes of the audience. The commitment to preserving the accent contributes to constructing a fictional world that is deeply embedded in the real world of Moldovia and thereby gives authority to the voice of the protagonists, to speak on behalf of the region.

The commitment of the director to the appearance and linguistic relationships between the actors and the locality can be understood through Nagib's analysis of fictional narratives filmed in specific locations. This commitment, according to Nagib, moves the "crews and casts [to] feel not only enabled, but morally obliged to express the truth, not any truth, but the truth about the land and the people the film is focusing on through a fictional plot" (Nagib *Ethics* 32). While Nagib is referring to the filming of native peoples in formerly colonised lands, it is pertinent to Romania, a country that experienced a communist ideology imposed from a foreign land. Nagib speaks of the embeddedness of characters within their native lands as providing a "proto-indexical value," which can be also applied here to explain the gravitas that real accents bring to the film's authenticity (*Ethics* 29). As much of the film concerns linguistic authority, the natural voice of the region gives added authenticity to the language of power.

This truthfulness of Mungiu's representation of space embeds the narrative in its location, thus depicting the isolation of the inhabitants from greater society while still creating what Nagib refers to as a "cosmic integrity" (Nagib *Ethics* 33). Mungiu thus makes a solid claim for the fidelity of the "physical and economic realities of the local community,"

even though he admits that the screenplay itself was “quite fictional” (Béar 51, 57). The film, while based on real events, reflects Mungiu’s concerns, and there are some similarities and continuity here with *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, which will be discussed in the following section.

Linguistic and institutional control

In both *Beyond the Hills* and *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, the main protagonists are young women who are experiencing extreme crises, but there is one key difference between the two films: the nature of the women’s relationship. While in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, the audience is left to ponder why Otilia risks everything for her friend, in *Beyond the Hills*, there is a pre-existing relationship between Alina and Voichita that appears to have been profound for them both. The nature of the relationship between them is never explicitly defined; however, a high degree of intimacy is suggested going back to their time together in the orphanage where they grew up (Gorzo “Ambiguity” 6). While Mungiu has mentioned the importance of love in the script, he has stated that the key theme is “moral values, first of all” (Béar 56). How values are expressed through language and where they are countered through the use of the language of power are of prime interest in this section.

There are several institutions that control, manipulate and have an impact on the lives of the protagonists in *Beyond the Hills*. They are religion, the police, the hospital and the orphanage (Béar 51). Each of these institutional actors rely on words to express their control over individuals and to explain their function and sphere of influence. Kalling Heck contends that the film addresses a foreign audience; in order for countries that have interfered with Romanian politics to interrogate their own complicity in such social tragedies (Heck 159). However, I believe the film also asks the audience to look at complicity at the micro level.

While Mungiu insists that his film does not make judgements or come to a conclusion, in the film, he does implicate a society that is unable or unwilling to help people in need (Mungiu “On *Beyond the Hills*”).

The seminal moment in the film occurs after the Priest finally agrees to perform the rite of exorcism on Alina, despite it being a service that is usually performed by two clergymen. While the moment represents the narrative climax, it also draws together the themes of the film in one violent episode. By enacting the exorcism, the Priest is adopting absolute control over good and evil and over the spiritual and medical health of Alina.⁴¹ Up until this moment, most, if not all, of the actions of the Priest appear to be reasonable when seen in the context of a well-meaning individual trying to do their best under extreme circumstances. However, this moment confronts that perspective, and instead exposes the Priest as having a delusional faith in his own capacities, due to his religious zealotry and without the regulatory oversight of a wider religious organisation.⁴² Alina has become violent and uncontrollable and, in a desperate act to protect themselves and Alina herself, the nuns tie her to a makeshift cross of wood they fashioned themselves (Figure 37). After carrying the hysterical girl into church in a procession which appears to reverse the tradition of carrying a coffin from a church after a funeral service (Figure 38), thus foreshadowing her imminent death, the Priest begins to recite St Basil’s prayers, which are said to expel demons (Béar 50).

Twice in the film the Priest is described as having a “great gift,” which suggests that he has miraculous healing powers (Figure 39 and Figure 40). He also is said to possess a religious icon that he keeps behind the altar of the church, utilising its inaccessibility to denote some mysterious energy available only to him. But Mungiu also demonstrates that the

⁴¹ In the Tanacu case (the true story that inspired the film), the Priest eschews his own responsibility for the fatal outcome of the exorcism, stating, “Only God knows why he took her, I think that’s how God wanted her to be saved” (Smith)

⁴² The massive building of monasteries in Romania since the Revolution has seen the number of monks in the country quadrupled with associated problems with oversight and qualification, (Smith)

Priest's real power within the monastic community resides in his words and the way he invokes spiritual ideology. More specifically, the Priest's power lies in his ability to transform the words he reads into spiritual force that convinces those listening that he channels the power of God. While the Priest's words suggest self-effacement, Mungiu demonstrates the deliberate, constructed character of the Priest's words and actions that seek to maintain complete control over the nuns in the monastery.



Figure 37. The nuns build a cross on which to tie (and chain) Alina, to keep her from hurting them or herself, *Beyond the Hills*.



Figure 38. The nuns carry Alina into the church for the exorcism rites, *Beyond the Hills*



Figure 39. After the orphanage headmistress talks of her husband's terminal illness, a parishioner exhorts her to speak to the Priest because of his "great gift," *Beyond the Hills*.



Figure 40. Mother Superior counsels Voichita to ask the Priest to perform the exorcism because of his "great gift," *Beyond the Hills*.

For example, in the scene depicting the exorcism rite, in order to believe that the words the Priest utters in the exorcism rite are curative, one must accept the Priest's insistence that his words come directly from God. When the Priest speaks the "word of God," he is pretending that he is actually channelling the Almighty; rather than being a deliverer of religious dogma, he, in effect, mirrors God's will for the sake of healing Alina. His human intervention is obscured through his assertion that the words are directly from God. Therefore, he is removing himself as mediator or interpreter of the words and standing as a manifestation of God who has direct access to the healing truth.

Similarly, Alina is seen by the religious community not as a person pronouncing the words that might have come from the Devil, but instead is a direct manifestation of the Devil, therefore her words and actions are not considered her own but instead that of the "evil one" who has possessed her. This explains how the Priest and the nuns can be so cruel to her physical body yet appear to be deeply concerned and empathic to her emotional plight. This is evidenced when Voichita expresses concern for Alina's lack of nourishment, and Mother Superior's response is that to feed Alina is to "give power to the evil one." Alina as a person is therefore effaced and is considered as an embodiment of evil. The "othering" of Alina puts her outside the acceptability of the monastery and therefore permits the inhabitants to treat her welfare as expendable and commit degrading acts on her body.

While the evil is allegedly expelled from Alina during the exorcism (albeit fatally), another transformation takes place, and that is in her friend Voichita. While the Priest's voice recites the holy words, the suffering Alina writhes in agony and the nuns try to hold her still and comfort her. Voichita, meanwhile, takes a step back away from the scrum and stares at the Priest as he says the prayers (Figure 41). Unlike in previous scenes when she is in the Priest's presence, Voichita no longer bends her head in pious humility (Figure 42); instead, she stares at him in a manner that suggests she sees him clearly for the first time. While he is

attempting to break the spell that keeps Alina in its grasp, somehow the spell that has kept Voichita in the Priest's thrall is broken. After watching the service for a minute, she flees to the hill overlooking the monastery, which serves as a relief from the torturous event for both Voichita and the audience. The escape from the monastery is enacted by Voichita several times during the film, heightening the contrast between being effectively imprisoned within walls and the freedom of the surrounding countryside. Voichita's doubts about the veracity of the power of both the Priest and the St Basil's rites is noticed by the Priest and Mother Superior (see Figure 43). Subsequently, Voichita is warned, in a manner that suggests that questioning the authority of the Priest or the church could place her in mortal, if not existential, danger.



Figure 41. Voichita has her own revelation during Alina's exorcism, *Beyond the Hills*.



Figure 42. Earlier in the film, when Voichita speaks to the Priest, her eyes are downcast, *Beyond the Hills*.

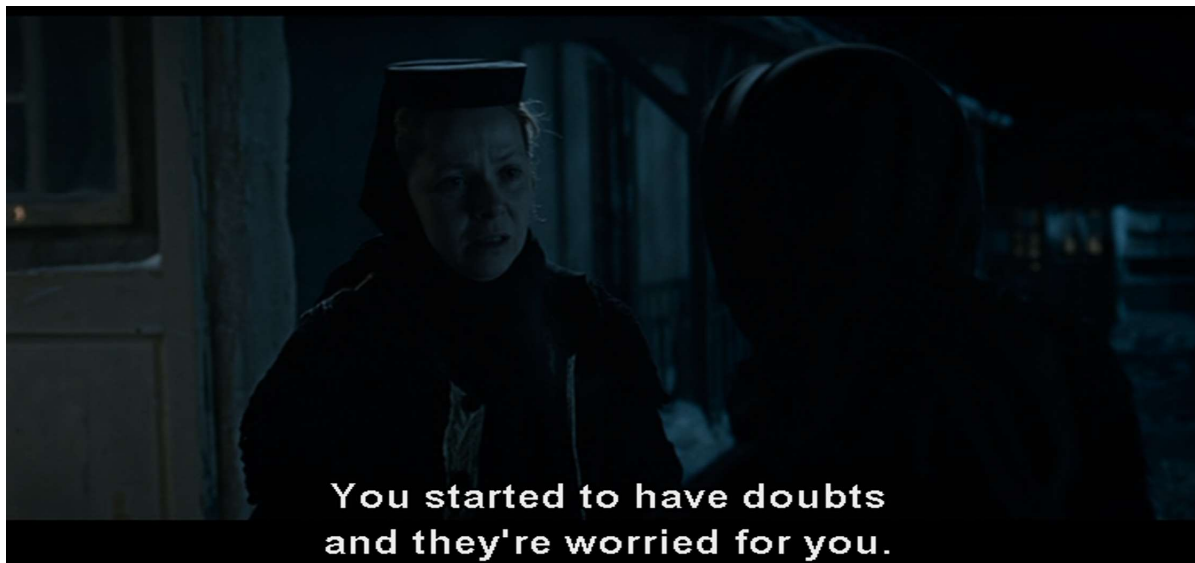


Figure 43. Voichita is warned that the Priest and Mother Superior suspect she has begun to have doubts, *Beyond the Hills*.



Figure 44. The first time Alina enters the monastery, we see the sign that states that access to the compound is “forbidden to anybody of a different religion,” *Beyond the Hills*.

Doubt is a dangerous commodity in the closed religious order, which functions on certitude and clear dichotomies that are constantly referred to and reinforced. From the first time Alina enters the monastery, the audience is aware that only those who believe in the Orthodox religion are welcome, which sets the stage for the many and varied rules to which the nuns must adhere (see Figure 44). Confession is obligatory in this religious community, and Voichita is exhorted to comply in order to be given access to “peace.” For those in the monastery there is no grey area between good and evil or between sin and innocence. Instead, there are rules to follow, and to do otherwise is to invite evil into your very being. This creates an atmosphere of fear and guilt that the Priest uses to wield power over women who have been divested of their worldly goods and alienated from families and, therefore, are extremely vulnerable. According to Duma, in post-communist societies, women’s access to social services and employment were eroded, which gave rise to a “rebirth of the patriarchal model” (Duma 168). The religious community featured in *Beyond the Hills* is a clear example of this.

The Priest positions himself as is an omnipotent leader, instructing the women on every aspect on their lives, from allocating their work each day to insisting that wearing pants is “forbidden,” despite the demanding physical work they perform and the frigid conditions of the region during wintertime. But for Voichita, being alone and without shelter is a worse situation than living in the monastery and being controlled by a man for whom life is a series of simple transactions with God: do not sin and you will go to heaven; believe like us or do not come to the monastery; follow the rules or be banished; and, perhaps most distressing for Voichita, if you leave you can never come back. This creates an intractable situation for the young nun, as she needs to weigh up her commitment to the church against her loyalty to her lifelong friend.

The nature of Voichita’s choice is made starker when considered in the context of her relationship with the other nuns. When Alina asks who her friends are within the community, Voichita replies that “I don’t have close friends here, we help each other, that’s all.” The ties to the community, even though there is little love there for Alina, are set in opposition to the love and history of psychological and physical support between the two women. However, even though Voichita asks the Mother Superior what she is to do, the monastery appears to have no resources to help the women other than try to bend Alina to their will. Here the director lays out the choices of the women and the actions of the Priest and Mother Superior as irresolvable. However, Voichita has solved the puzzle herself by suggesting she go with Alina to Germany for a while, where Alina has found work for them both on a cruise ship. Voichita explains to the Priest that if she is able to accompany Alina and help her get settled in Germany, she could return to the monastery afterwards. However, according to the Priest, the whole of the “West has lost the true faith,” and is therefore too dangerous, and he tells Voichita that if she leaves, she can never return. This is evidence that the Priest, while positioning himself as a leader, is manipulating the nuns into staying inside his sphere of

influence even as it may not be in their best interests. He believes that to be outside the monastery is to be exposed to non-believers; however, his knowledge and understanding of anywhere outside of Romania is limited, given he admits he has travelled nowhere else in his lifetime. The Priest has taken it upon himself to label the West as “lost” and thus a dangerous place, providing an interpretation motivated by his personal interests and superstition rather than anchored in reality.

There is no room in the Priest’s dogma for the acknowledgement of a middle ground or of alternative interpretations of religious teachings. Outside of the monastery, the other authorities – the police, the hospital, and the orphanage – are also bound by inflexible rules that appear to be unable to recognise nuance or compromise for the sake of compassion. In hospital, Alina improves significantly after being prescribed a course of drugs and the doctor discharges her into the care of the nuns; however, there is no diagnosis or follow-up plans except his advice to “get her to read the Scriptures, it’ll help” (Figure 45). While this could be seen as evidence that the doctor believes that there is some power in the spiritual world, it could also be used as a means to wipe his hands of responsibility for the young woman. Behind his head, the doctor has three images on the wall: the Madonna and Child, the Mona Lisa and a picture of a scantily-clad woman on a beach. This suggests that he straddles the three realms of religion, art and carnal desire and of how people comprise competing and contradictory values. However, Mungiu states that the doctor’s office as described in the accounts of the Tanacu incident had such pictures on the wall, so Mungiu mirrored that in the films set as a reminder that people should know their own competencies and stay within those limits (Filimon and Mungiu 22). The doctor, however, strays beyond his skills, recommending his patient be subject to unproven and superstitious practices.



Figure 45. The discussion with the doctor regarding Alina's discharge, *Beyond the Hills*.

The authority figures in *Beyond the Hills* can be compared to the authority figures in other New Romanian films such as *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* and *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* in the way in which whoever is “invested with formal authority is devoid of authority” (Popa 118). The Priest has become disassociated with the formal hierarchy of the Orthodox church (the monastery was formally separated from Orthodox religion because of past actions of the Priest), and therefore his authority over both religious matters and the nuns in the monastery can be called into question.⁴³ Similarly, the doctor has authority over the physical health of Alina, yet assigns her welfare to the monastery, thus washing his hands of his medical responsibility. Likewise, when Alina visits the police station to have her passport renewed, she is questioned by a police officer about a suspected German paedophile who was active within the orphanage, but he fails to follow up, blaming the victims of the paedophile for his own lack of action. What Paul Arthur calls in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* the “arrogant, uncaring or casually cruel” behaviour of the medical personnel towards the ailing man (Arthur 123) can also be applied to all the authority figures in *Beyond the Hills*, each of

⁴³ According to Craig Smith, Father Corogeanu, the real priest from the Tanacu case, “clashed with the diocese, where the leaders were disturbed by his unconventional style,” (Smith)

whom aurally assert their authority while their actions reject responsibility. In *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, the authority figures, such as the receptionists at the hotel desks, and the security guards who check the passports of those staying at the hotels, discharge their duty with marked disdain coupled with ineptitude, rather than any compassion with their fellow humans.

While Mungiu refuses to lay the blame for the eventual death of Alina at the feet of the Priest and the nuns, stating, “Their moral principles simply push them into action and they do what they think is best” (Filimon and Mungiu 22), the film also exposes the troubling aspects of the corporeal control exerted over the monastic community by the Priest. Thought control is enacted by insisting that all the nuns avoid the 464 sins that are listed in a book (which the Priest seems to have compiled himself) or confess them to the Priest. This mind control is coupled with hard physical labour and compulsory penance that enslaves the women in a corporeal as well as psychological prison of dependence and fear. It is through constant recitation of religious texts, insistence on literal interpretation of teachings and by being referred to the Priest as “Father” that the world of the monastery is run. With the arrival of Alina, all that is challenged as she is not only emotionally dependent on Voichita (Strausz 199), she also represents an alternative path away from societal insecurity that disturbs the certitude of religious life offered by the religious community.

The Priest’s authority over the religious community and the interpretation of God’s teachings is brought into question because he is unable to bend Alina to his will or convince her to break her bond with Voichita. Despite forfeiting her worldly goods and all her savings, Alina refuses to meekly follow the Priest’s directives, because even though she appears to be suffering mental anguish, her spirit remains strong. Her hardy physical shape and resolute determination to maintain personal corporeal agency prevents her from bending her will to absolute authority or unfair treatment. Perhaps her experiences of standing up to bullies at the

orphanage or managing to survive as an immigrant in Germany prevents her from giving away all the vital aspects of her soul. Thus, Alina remains suspicious of the Priest's motives, believing that the nuns are being exploited for their labour and their financial means. Alina's ability to see the Priest as a human who interprets the word of God in a manner that serves to maintain his authority is seen as the ravings of a mad woman by the residents in the monastery, however, the audience is left to make their own assessments of the Priest's motives.

That the Priest is unable to cure Alina is deeply tragic but also represents the possibility of relinquishing the power he exercises over the nuns, as his claim to authority is destroyed. He fails on a spectacular scale when he kills rather than cures Alina, thus exposing his claimed relation to God as false. The promised meaning that arises from the articulation of words, the authority of the person saying the words, and the presence of the Divine in the church do not combine to summon the miracle of exorcism, thus completely dismantling the Priest's claims to his "gift." That the powerless girl from an orphanage is capable of resistance and of exposing the Priest as a fraud who does not possess the "gift" others have claimed he does, proves that his personal power is based on a false premise. He is no longer able to assert authority by claiming he alone knows the combination of signs that need to be connected in order to connote the divine. Breaking this link between the Priest and the divine proves fatal for Alina, but also destroys the hold he has over Voichita (see Figure 46).

Although never explicitly stated, the film strongly implies that Voichita will no longer follow the orders of the Priest or adhere to the strict rules that govern the community. When Alina briefly wakes, prior to her final collapse, she asks her friend, "Shall we go?" (Figure 44). These three words are hopeful yet ambiguous, because where are the girls to go? Alina does indeed leave; however, her escape is death. Voichita begins breaking the ties that bind her to the religious life by discarding her habit, which denotes a life of piety and obedience,

and donning Alina's clothes (see Figure 47). In an act that is reminiscent of the sacrifice made by Jesus for all mankind, the death of Alina releases Voichita from the blind faith in the Priest, thus freeing her to decide on her future path through life.



Figure 46. After the exorcism, Alina has a brief moment of lucidity before she collapses, *Beyond the Hills*.



Figure 47. After Alina's death, Voichita abandons her nun's habit and dons Alina's jumper, *Beyond the Hills*.

The trust in the Priest's ability to mediate God's will is disrupted by the failure to save Alina or effectively liaise with God on Alina's behalf. But, it also disrupts the power relations within the community. There is a social contract between the Priest and the nuns that if the latter adhere to the Priest's strict rules, he will protect them from physical and spiritual harm. Once the trust in the Priest's omnipotence is broken, the deprivations and sacrifices they are making seem only to support the delusions and authoritarian pretensions of a flawed man. The semiotic links between the word, the man and the actions are blown apart by the abject failure on the most basic of corporeal experience, with death the ultimate fatal result. Just as the police commander in *Police, Adjective* is unable to recognise the nuances of meaning in language, in *Beyond the Hills*, the Priest fails to recognise the limits of his word's influence. Where it may have been possible that he could have championed Alina's cause more strongly in the hospital or elsewhere, his reluctance to expose his community to scrutiny has dire consequences. But it is surely the failure of meaning, that is, his failure to transform his words into curative actions, that the Priest's words greatest failure here.

The Priest's mediation of reality erases any possibilities outside the convent that could offer a satisfying alternative to monastic life. For example, if peace is only possible after the speaking of sins in confession, he then upholds his right to judge whether what is uttered is acceptable to God. Therefore, within his influence, actions are filtered through his personal religious understanding towards punishment or forgiveness. When speaking of Porumboiu's *When Evening Falls on Bucharest or Metabolism* (*Când se lasă seara peste Bucuresti sau metabolism* 2013), Alice Barden explains that discussing a film within a film results in a reality that is "a *refracted* version of reality as seen through the main characters' eyes, and, crucially, through the language they use to describe what they see" ("Cinema as Digest"

116).⁴⁴ In a similar manner, in *Beyond the Hills*, the word of God is refracted through the Priest's subject position, to be uttered as dogma that contains its own prejudices and subjectivities, and what is of no use to this project is suppressed. While asserting his unique access to the truth, the Priest denies the existence of alternate truths or that there is in fact "no simple truth" (Trocan 40).

I argue that one of the primary projects of New Romanian cinema is to challenge accepted truths and assert that this is an ethical imperative of realist cinema. *Beyond the Hills* both challenges the accepted truth of language of religious and other authorities, while considering the implications of the mediation of God and faith within a deeply religious yet still superstitious modern country. While Mungiu stated that in his film "nothing signifies anything" (Filimon and Mungiu 22), I propose that effectively the film demonstrates that each of us is responsible for their own truth and critical engagement with that reality.

The spoken word and corporeal materiality

The Death of Mr Lăzărescu cemented Cristi Puiu as an important figure in the New Romanian film canon. Incorporating what Pop refers to as "logic of documentary time and space" (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 63). Puiu's objective style of filming treats his subjects as if they are the focus of anthropological study rather characters in a fictional film (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 64). *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* has been described by Paul Arthur as part of "a largely unacknowledged meta-genre, Corporeal Cinema" (46).⁴⁵ Diana Popa describes "the dialogues in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* [as] ... detailed and lengthy" (120). It is the aim of

⁴⁴ *Metabolism* follows a film director as he negotiates with his leading lady about filming a nude scene, while dealing with various complications with the production. Crucially, the audience is never privy to the resulting scene.

⁴⁵ Corporeal cinema is concerned with the facticity of the body, its physiology and its exertion.

this section to reconcile the denseness of the dialogue in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, to understandings of realism in film. By using Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, I will argue that Mr Lăzărescu gives direct access to the eponymous character's corporeal reality through the repetition of his name, which changes over the course of time in relation to the character's progressive physical deterioration.

While this section is concerned primarily with dialogue and how it is activated in this film, it is also worth mentioning that *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* is considered by many scholars as a template for the grammar of New Romanian cinema. Strausz states that this film "is the first work to use consciously the realist-modernist language around which the various other artists' work coheres" (Strausz 185). Gorzo argues that it is in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* that Puiu transforms Bazin's "ambiguity of the real" into "the obscurity of the real" (Gorzo "Ambiguity" 4), which I propose, heralds a new form of realism that is only possible in a postmodern media environment.

The world presented by Puiu in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* is unrelentingly depressing. From the cramped and cluttered apartment where the protagonist suffers alone while waiting for the ambulance to the starkly lit institutional space of each hospital, the diegetic world makes for uncomfortable viewing in its "unbearable reality of pain and suffering" (Teodorescu and Munteanu 62). The mise-en-scène is realised in a similar fashion to the miserabilist British cinema of the 1990s, or the more recent film *Ray & Liz* (2018), an autobiographical film by famed British photographer Richard Billingham. Billingham's film lingers on grotesque aspects of his early life, forcing the spectator to consider the everyday experiences of unemployment and poverty during the Thatcher era. According to J. M. Tyree, the latter film avoids "wallowing in pessimism for its own sake" partly due to its status as autobiographical (34) as well as moments of dark humour. Similarly, in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, despite the film "putting the viewer in a state of strange and intense anguish," the

director provides occasional relief to the viewer by adding a smattering of “sardonic and morbid situational and verbal humour” (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 61). Thus, Puiu installs a humorous safety valve that allows the audience to release some of the accumulated tension. Both films rely on meticulous attention to aesthetics in fashioning their fictive worlds, while the narratives themselves are stripped of everything except key facts. Interestingly, the aesthetic sensibilities in both *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* and *Ray & Liz* can be attributed to both directors’ artistic backgrounds, with Puiu having briefly studied painting in Geneva (Filimon *Puiu* 1) and Billingham also studying painting before committing himself to photography as his main means of artistic expression.⁴⁶ The narrative structure of *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* is, however, more suggestive of the Dardenne brothers’ film *Two Days, One Night* (*Deux jours, une nuit*, 2014).

The Dardenne brothers’ cinema deals with similar concerns as New Romanian cinema, as it is preoccupied “with the lives of working-class individuals struggling to survive with a measure of dignity in the new world order that for them is mainly one of poverty, unemployment, social disintegration and environmental ruin” (Mosley 1). Additionally, similar cinematographic techniques are employed by both the Dardennes’ and Puiu’s work that results in what Paul Arthur describes as “a painterly regard for composition in depth” (45). Similarly to films in the New Romanian canon, the main character in *Two Days, One Night* is confronting a life-changing event, as if a “death sentence hangs over her” (78), which allows a parallel with the limit-case confronting Mr Lăzărescu. Sandra Bya (Marion Cotillard) is threatened with unemployment when trying to return to work after a period on sick leave due to mental ill-health. In order to retain her job, she needs to convince her colleagues to vote against the manager’s proposal that they each take a €1000 bonus for agreeing to her redundancy. What follows is a series of frantic calls to each colleague in turn

⁴⁶ The author met Prof Richard Billingham at the Transylvania International Film Festival, 2019.

over the course of a weekend, in a narrative that is both circular and episodic. In a similar mode to the narrative in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, Sandra is confronted with a range of sympathetic and hostile individuals, each of whom has their own reasons for denying her request. In both films, the tension is built through the urgency of the protagonist gaining the attention of others within a certain time frame. For Mr Lăzărescu, he needs to be diagnosed and operated on before he dies or becomes completely incapacitated, and for Sandra, she must gain enough support before the vote on Monday morning.

Both *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* and *Two Days, One Night* can be seen adopting the road trope, as the characters must travel between different locations in order to fulfil their goals. Yet, the goals of these journeys are problematic as their achievement might not be in the best interests of the protagonists and, as such, these films undermine the road trope. Mr Lăzărescu's journey begins when he rings the emergency number to request an ambulance. Yet, the title of the film suggests that the journey will lead to his death, and we are reminded of this by the radiologist saying that Mr Lăzărescu needs an operation on his brain so he can die at home of his incurable liver cancer. Therefore, the audience is left wondering if having the operation is the best outcome for the sick man. For Sandra, the job she is fighting to save is being threatened by a manager who persuades her colleagues to agree to her redundancy because he does not want a person with mental illness under his supervision. Therefore, the audience becomes aware that retaining a job where the supervisor is not sympathetic to her illness would not be ideal for Sandra, which creates an ambivalent atmosphere. Secondly, to retain her job, Sandra is denying a bonus to her colleagues who are, like herself, living precarious lives on the edge of poverty. Thus to succeed in her goal, would mean turning away from the ethical imperative of worker solidarity (Girgus 74). Both of these films can therefore be seen as what Christopher Morris describes as reflexive road films, because "the road journey repudiates the idea of arrival as something worthwhile; redundant endings

retroactively vitiate beginnings” (27). Both films are deeply indebted to Italian neorealism for their aesthetic and temporal characteristics, while also recognised for the postmodern turn towards “ethically attuned cinema” (Girgus 79).

As already discussed, Kracauer argues that the image in cinema should always be privileged over speech because dialogue can distract the viewer’s attention, “thereby compromising the image’s capacity to be seen” (Mamula 135). According to Tijana Mamula, Kracauer here is supporting a situation where the sound and image are neatly conjoined, supplementing each other in a symbiotic relationship, while objecting to the disjointed or linguistic displacement which can result in a compromised image (Mamula 135). Mamula does not agree with Kracauer’s contention that disparity between word and image necessarily results in a negative experience that draws the spectator away from the reality of the visuals. Instead, she posits that purposely abstracting the relationship between word and image “radically problematises the representational value of a visuality severed from any linguistic mediation” (Mamula 137). Thus, breaking the relationship between words and objects allows for greater attention to be given to the structural qualities of the objects and the tension between their literal and symbolic identification (Mamula 137). This approach suggests that language acts as a mediator for the image and, by removing the sutures binding the cultural and linguistic association between image and word, greater access is granted to actuality.

While Mamula’s approach is productive when approaching modernist texts that purposely disengage sight and sound, in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, the disengagement between the two senses is an act of mediation by the film’s characters. In this section, I propose that attention to the relationship between the image and speech in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* highlights the necessity to attend to both the senses of sight and hearing, *especially* when they are in conflict. This is because in this film, speech is utilised in a manner that is the only means of accessing Mr Lăzărescu’s lived experience at the bodily level, when

outward appearances tell a different story. There is a temporal dimension to the spoken word and Mr Lăzărescu's experience that is not recognised by the doctors examining the sick protagonist. Indeed, the relationship between word and corporeal reality needs to be seen over time in order to be aware of its significance. Drawing on Kracauer's work on speech, this section will investigate what meanings are imparted through the use of dialogue and how such analysis can aid in understanding the deeper themes implied by Puiu's second feature.

Rather than drawing the viewer's attention away from the visuals, Puiu's choice of filming techniques "activates the viewer's emotional and rational faculties in complete synchronization with the script and the *mise-en-scène*" (Teodorescu and Munteanu 59). Synchronisation does not, however, imply that the visual and aural experiences combine to infer complementary meanings, because in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, they form a "multifaceted, mysterious record of juxtaposed realities" that challenge the viewer to recognise competing meanings interwoven within the same reality (Teodorescu and Munteanu 60). In the director's own words, the film expresses the "extraordinary multiplicity of the monstrous" in its contemplation of Mr Lăzărescu's death, while also investigating the human cost of institutional failure, and the redemption possible through human solidarity (Teodorescu and Munteanu 61, 63).

Despite his appearance as a lonely, dishevelled man of few resources and little familial support, Mr Lăzărescu's explanation of his condition in his first phone call to the emergency operator belies his appearance. Mr Lăzărescu is articulate, polite and succinct in stating his address and, most importantly for this study, reciting his name: "Lăzărescu Dante Remus." The speech here serves two important purposes: firstly, it identifies the main protagonist and the expectation that by the end of the film he will be dead (because his name

associates him with the title of the film);⁴⁷ and, in addition to this his words serve as the “control” sample against which all other instances in the diegesis where he states his name will be compared. “Lăzărescu Dante Remus” acts as Mr Lăzărescu’s bellwether that gives direct access to his corporeal status through the phrase’s repeated recitation. Although Lăzărescu is articulate, he complains of a severe stomach-ache and headache, both of which have persisted for several days. We also learn that he is a regular drinker and that there are several underlying health concerns, such as a previous problem with a stomach ulcer and unhealed ulcerated legs. Despite being only 63, Mr Lăzărescu appears to be socially isolated (except for his beloved cats), retired, living apart from his relatives, and suffering from what soon becomes apparent is a terminal illness.⁴⁸

The link between corporeality and politics in New Romanian cinema is discussed elsewhere in this thesis, but in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, Strausz identifies the trend of Eastern European cinema to activate a “strategy of using the human body as a screen onto which social relations are projected” (Strausz 183). Yet, Puiu’s films do not just include characters who are merely projections of social relations, they are depicted as humans who are “observed confronting death and, more significantly, what exists beyond the ephemeral artefacts that conjure one’s historical and social identity” (Filimon “Beyond” 31). Puiu himself is reluctant to link his films with any overriding political activist project, but insists they have a more universal meaning (Gorzo “Ambiguity” 6). According to Teodorescu and Munteanu, this meaning could be related to the biblical command to “Love thy neighbour as thyself” (52). However, I argue that the film also draws the viewer into the position of complicity. By viewing the trials of Mr Lăzărescu in an intimate yet detached manner, Puiu

⁴⁷ As Monica Filimon states: “The title gives away the plot even before audiences get into the theatre. One knows what will happen and to whom.” (Filimon Puiu 60).

⁴⁸ In an unfortunate coincidence, Ioan Fiscuteanu who plays Mr Lăzărescu, died from cancer a few short years after making *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*.

places the audience into a relationship that implies complicity in his plight: have we too made assumptions about the humanity of the protagonist without recognising him as a complex and valuable member of society? I suggest that while the social realism in the film has an important political resonance, the quotidian aspects of Mr Lăzărescu's experience is of greater significance throughout the film, as his life is pieced together "slowly and gradually" as the plot progresses (Strausz 185). This "fragmentation of information" is achieved in several ways, reaching the viewer as concrete exposition and in direct, haptic elements of the detailed mise-en-scène (Filimon *Puiu* 66).

Mr Lăzărescu's experience speaks to the corruptibility of institutions tasked with the care and responsibility of vulnerable people and, in this way, the film has a strong connection with *Police, Adjective*. The "processes of assigning meaning" are of deep concern for both films (Strausz 184); while in *Police, Adjective* ethical dilemmas are caused by the struggle over the meaning of the words in the dictionary, in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, terminal illness is misrecognised as the rantings of a drunkard because the doctors fail to recognise the relationship between their patient's words and his body. Despite repeatedly questioning Mr Lăzărescu, none of the doctors recognise his deteriorating condition or the urgency of providing effective treatment until they have a concrete diagnosis acquired through medical tests.

This misrecognition is foreshadowed early in the film when Dante approaches his neighbours for help after he has called for an ambulance. Mr Lăzărescu's neighbours, Sandu (Doru Ana) and Mihaela (Dana Dogaru), treat the ailing Dante with scepticism and a kind of judgemental disdain (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 159). Like the previous films in this study, such as *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* and *Beyond the Hills*, the characters within this film are confronted by a limit case. Filimon describes *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* as a study of an individual who has been disadvantaged by his own past choices and "present

circumstances over which ... [he has] little control” (Filimon *Puiu* 60). However, I would argue that it is the reactions of fellow humans to Mr Lăzărescu’s extreme suffering that are of equal concern to Puiu. Andrei Gorzo interprets *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* as a contemplation of the loneliness of death and the preoccupation of people with their own lives, when confronted with others’ mortality (Gorzo “Ambiguity” 9). Although both Sandu and Mihaela are disrespectful to their neighbour, they do keep him company while he waits for the ambulance (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 159); however, they are critical of his drinking and infantilise and demean him (Strausz 185). Their attitude to the ill man foreshadows the attitude of successive people who are compelled, professionally and ethically, to help him, but instead adopt a superior or condescending attitude that hinders swift diagnosis or effective treatment.

While Mr Lazaresu waits for Sandu and Mihaela to fetch him some medicine for his nausea, Puiu activates a repetitive motif that both forewarns the spectator to be aware of such occurrences and gives an ambiguous clue to the upcoming narrative form. While Dante lowers himself to the stairs in front of his neighbours’ apartment, the automatic landing light switches off, leaving him in darkness until he can activate it again. In the rest of the scene, the light needs to be turned back on again and again. Just like the light, Mr Lăzărescu’s health is flickering, threatening to stop if not in continuous motion or without constant attention, which he struggles to obtain. The eerie cuts to blackness of the shots are almost a threat as to what can happen when you are not attentive and offer a rhyme with the closing scene after Lăzărescu’s last appearance, which is a black screen. Diana Popa states that at the beginning of the film Dante is already “dead as a human being” (Popa 120), and I propose that the intermittent blackness in early this scene is indicative of the character’s parlous medical state, mere hours away from collapse. But, it also points to the importance of the time signature that “pervades the film” from this point forward (Popa 121), because the passing of filmic time is

identical to real time, when the light switches off automatically. Likewise, the film feels like it follows the protagonist in real time, even though the action takes place over a period of approximately six hours.⁴⁹

Once the ambulance arrives at Mr Lăzărescu's apartment, the paramedic Mioara (Luminița Gheorghiu) asks her patient his name, and she repeats it back. This is important, because although the audience has already heard him reciting his name clearly when he called the ambulance, this is the first time that Mioara hears him say it. Because Mr Lăzărescu is not accompanied by a family member, Mioara becomes his champion through the medical system, and is therefore the only person who can recognise Mr Lăzărescu's deterioration through the course of the night. Importantly for the narrative progression and the recognition/misrecognition of Mr Lăzărescu's condition is that Mioara dismisses the significance of the headache that he complains of and instead makes a preliminary diagnosis of colon cancer. In fact, Mr Lăzărescu has a serious brain injury, which is discovered at the end of a long and frustrating night. The misdiagnosis occurs because of the alcohol obvious on the breath of Mr Lăzărescu, which is associated by all characters throughout the night with his being drunk. Monica Filimon describes the investigation of the "spatial closeness and yet psychological distance from the moribund of all those whose lives are not in danger" as a persistent theme of Puiu's work (*Puiu* 60). I propose that the Mr Lăzărescu's abuse of alcohol is an excuse for the psychological distancing of those who come into close contact with him, which allows people to see him as responsible for his own illness and also an unreliable witness to his own symptoms.

At the first hospital, St Spiridon's, Mr Lăzărescu is not called upon to recite his name, but he is told to stop drinking if he wants to cure his headache. The doctor at this hospital is

⁴⁹ Lights turning off and on is also a notable feature of *12:08 East of Bucharest*, see chapter 3.

extremely insulting to Mr Lăzărescu, accusing him of domestic violence due to alcoholism. In allocating an arbitrary criminality to his patient, the doctor dismisses life-threatening symptoms and abrogates his professional responsibility to him. His refusal to ask Mr Lăzărescu's name is just one example of the "casually cruel medical personnel" encountered during the search for medical assistance and indicative of the system which appears to exist for its own sake instead of for the service of those in need (Arthur 45; Teodorescu and Munteanu 56). The procedure for examining and interacting with Mr Lăzărescu is repeated at each of the four hospitals where treatment is sought, but with little urgency displayed by the medical personnel, even as Mr Lăzărescu is becoming more infirm. Suspense is created by the audience's accumulated knowledge about the patient's deterioration, juxtaposed by a lack of urgency displayed by the medical staff in the respective hospitals (Filimon *Puiu* 61).

At St Spiridon, a decoupling occurs between the symptoms of the ailing body of Mr Lăzărescu and the recognition of him as a complete human being whose value is not merely contained in his body. I propose here that the first doctor to see Mr Lăzărescu is able to dismiss him so cruelly because he does not speak his name, for Mr Lăzărescu's name not only identifies him as a person, it also associates him with the founding myth of Rome (Remus) and with the biblical story of resurrection through the name Lăzărescu, which is discussed in chapter 4. Both of these names write the patient into the country's narrative, making him difficult to ignore once his name is spoken. However, as explained by Filimon, the state abandoned many workers who were part of the intelligentsia in the former communist state, and Mr Lăzărescu's status as a pensioner informs his treatment by the medical professionals throughout the narrative, especially as he seems to be abandoned by his own family (*Puiu* 61). Despite the outrageously unprofessional treatment at the hands of the doctor at St Spiridon, an order for a scan is prescribed and the paramedics transport Mr Lăzărescu to University Hospital.

Once at this second hospital, the female doctor misreads her patient's name, referring to him as Mr Remus. Despite managing the care of multiple patients at the same time, she listens carefully to his symptoms and gives him a short neurological test that indicates a problem with brain function. The doctor calls a neurosurgeon, who apparently only comes on the promise of some sexual favour promised by the female doctor. The neurosurgeon asks Mr Lăzărescu to recite his name twice, and both times the audience is made aware that he is not responding as well as he did at the beginning of the film. The patient then starts to ramble, telling an almost incomprehensible story about obtaining a refund after being given the wrong seeds at the local market. The story is not important to the narrative but the garbled manner in which he speaks is. While the impatience of the doctors with their patient's waffle is evident, attention to *how* Mr Lăzărescu is speaking would give access to the deterioration of his mental faculties. Even though the doctor at St Spiridon was dismissive, we now know that there is some urgency to the patient's plight. The manner of speech, the timbre of his voice and the way that the sentences are constructed (or deconstructed in this case), gives access to the scrambling of the electrical signals in Mr Lăzărescu's brain. Strausz describes New Romanian cinema as working to "subtly display the cracks that fracture the transparency of their diegetic worlds" (184). Similarly, the disjointedness of Mr Lăzărescu's speech in this scene opens a crack through which access can be given to the workings of his body. The doctors are merely trying to comprehend his words, while it is the manner of speaking that gives them access to the breakages in his neurological connections.

While the doctors attempt to make connections between the words Lăzărescu is saying and their meanings, they dismiss the ontological nature of his speech. His words are garbled and therefore their symbolic meanings cannot be ascertained; however, it is the connection between the corporeal and the manner of speaking that demands attention. The speech of Mr Lăzărescu in the University Hospital scene does not, as Mamula states,

compromise “the image’s capacity to be seen” (Mamula 135). It does, however, call attention to the visuals. As mentioned previously, Mr Lăzărescu is dismissed as an alcoholic (Strausz 184) and since he presented to hospital unaccompanied, he is assumed to be responsible for his own illness. However, his speech draws attention to his body as accommodating more complex processes and layered meanings beyond superficial judgements. Throughout the film, the doctors show a tendency to objectify Mr Lăzărescu’s without paying careful enough attention to what he says or the manner in which he says it. By treating the patient as just a “patient” and not a whole human being, they are able to remove themselves from empathy for him, and only wish him out of their sight (Strausz 187).

Once examined by the neurologist, it is clear that Mr Lăzărescu has serious deficiencies in mental function. The neurologist asks him to say his name and then the doctor asks him to repeat it. The doctor comments that the name is important, again highlighting the thematic relevance of the recital of his name, while also reminding the audience of the possibility that the main character is “metonymically replacing an entire past” and thus is emblematic of “Romanian society as a whole” (Doru Pop *An Introduction* 106). The neurologist not only shows a level of unearned familiarity with his patient (he calls him uncle), he also recognises the terminal nature of both Mr Lăzărescu’s brain injury and the cancer invading his liver. It is when the radiologist examines the scans that the urgency of the situation is finally known to the medical profession and action is taken to treat him. However, despite the specialist personally interceding on Mr Lăzărescu’s behalf, no operating room is available for the life-saving operation. Thus, Mioara is again tasked with transporting her patient to another hospital.

At Filaret Hospital, the penultimate destination for the now delirious Mr Lăzărescu, the most inhumane treatment of all is enacted on the dying man. Mr Lăzărescu can no longer recite his name and this, along with his being unaccompanied by a relative, means the doctors

refuse all treatment. Described by Nasta as “deliberately inefficient” (Nasta *Contemporary Romanian Cinema* 161), the doctors at this hospital refuse treatment because he is unable to *sign* his name on the consent forms, which is essentially a materialisation of his spoken name. The threatening, demeaning treatment is horrifying in its casually cruel logic, but it is an interesting demonstration of how easy it is to be erased as a human being when you cannot self-identify.⁵⁰ Liviu Lutas states that Mr Lăzărescu’s plight “could symbolise the disappearance of a more humane past ... and the transition to a dehumanised form of capitalism, which harbours no place for the old” (115). There is nothing more dehumanising than denying treatment for a patient who is too ill to sign his own name. The link between Mr Lăzărescu’s capacity for speech and his body is perfect when he can no longer utter his name, as his life is slipping away.

The doctors at Filaret refuse to accept Mr Lăzărescu as a patient because his name and his body are no longer joined through his spoken word. This can be understood through Kracauer’s theory as the characters being too invested in the dialogue to attend properly to the image of the broken man in front of them. However, the audience is left with no such delusion. We know the state of Mr Lăzărescu as we have seen and heard his deterioration throughout the narrative but, as his speech becomes less clear, we attend more to the visible aspects of his symptoms. As Kracauer states, “The spoken word is most cinematic if the messages it conveys elude our grasp” (107). The audience is viewing his deterioration because what Mr Lăzărescu *says* now eludes our grasp. Words now escape his lips in a disjointed stream of consciousness, revealing how he now occupies a liminal space between consciousness and unconsciousness.

⁵⁰ It could be inferred that without an accompanying relative, bribes are not offered to the doctors, which may explain his appalling treatment at Filaret.

As discussed previously, Kracauer positions the image at the centre of the cinema experience while allocating a complementary role to speech. However, Mr Lăzărescu's speech is indicative of his mental and physical deterioration, not by what he says, but by how he says the words. The words themselves are eventually jumbled and incomprehensible, but that makes them all the more significant, in that we know he is now on the cusp of physical collapse.

Another aspect of Kracauer's theory is cinema's potential to capture an image and "render it strange" (Hansen *Cinema and Experience* 266). As mentioned earlier, doctors see Mr Lăzărescu and believe they can determine his illness just by observing him for a short time in the emergency room. Although appearing dishevelled, he speaks as an educated and cultured man. The doctors do not recognise the conflicting evidence between his speech and his appearance and they therefore fail to act with enough urgency to save his life. Their patient's context is important as it is poignant, as Strausz proposes that the real illness suffered by Mr Lăzărescu is "a total lack of social integration" (Strausz 187). While the medical staff are happy to take the view that he is drinking himself to death, they fail to recognise the possible causes of his drinking lie at the institutional or societal level.

Finally, at the heart of Kracauer's theory is cinema's potential to depict the "flow of life" (Hansen *Cinema and Experience* 271), so it feels pertinent that *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, a film about the journey from life to death, is analysed using Kracauer's work. Hansen describes Kracauer's "flow of life" as evoking "not only the multiplicity, mobility, and mutability of things but also a degree of indifference to sense and legibility" (Hansen *Cinema and Experience* 271). If this is so, then the illegibility of Mr Lăzărescu's speech allows the audience not only to recognise his condition but also to recognise all the frustrations, injustices and conflicting social and personal perspectives that the protagonist simultaneously embodies. The doctors attempt to filter out all but the medical in their patient,

but that results in misrecognition. Puiu, however, allows his audience to see and recognise the diegetic universe in all its “morbid density” (Arthur 46). Hansen interprets Kracauer’s theory as valourising film’s potential to “register material phenomena in their otherness” by breaking open life’s complexity and laying it bare on the screen (*Cinema and Experience* 271). By presenting images in this way, Hansen argues, film redeems physical reality (Hansen *Cinema and Experience* 271).

This chapter argues that physical reality can be redeemed also through speech, as in the case of Mr Lăzărescu. In *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, the audience, as well as the characters within the diegesis, are required to reassemble the “shards and fragments” of his speech into a whole that represents his bodily and mental status (Hansen *Cinema and Experience* 277). The context in which the words are uttered by the dying man is an example of what Buckland describes as “meaning emerges out of non-meaning” (Buckland 77). As the patient’s words lose their semantics, they start functioning as indexical signs in relation to the physical status of the speaker. They change their meaning from denoting the objects in the outside world to perfectly mirroring the internal functioning of Mr Lăzărescu as he quietly loosens his bond to outside reality.

Framing music

Ioana Uricaru posits that the commitment to “purposeful minimalism” adopted by filmmakers of New Romanian cinema leads to the spare use of music within these films in order to protect “diegetic integrity” (Uricaru “Minimalism and Melodrama” 52). However, Uricaru explains that in the industrial context of applying for funds through the Romanian Film Centre (CNC), it is desirable to include a substantial amount for the composition of original music, as this is seen as an essential component of the total production from a funding point

of view (Uricaru “Minimalism and Melodrama” 53). As the CNC’s funding only covers up to 50 per cent of the total budget, producers look to government programs in Europe to supply the rest of the needed funds, and post-production is one area where co-production funds can be easily allocated (Uricaru “Minimalism and Melodrama” 54). Therefore, including music in films made in Romania is very desirable in the context of complying with funding models. As noted by Uricaru, Porumboiu is notable as a director who uses diegetic music that is narratively justified, which is apparent in *Police, Adjective, Beyond the Hills*, and *12:08 East of Bucharest* (Uricaru “Minimalism and Melodrama” 55). In *Police, Adjective*, a pop song is an essential component to a key scene between the main protagonist and his wife, and in *Beyond the Hills* a song is sung by the two key characters in an act of intimate connection. In *12:08 East of Bucharest*, music is featured in the television studio where Latin American music is played by a Romanian brass band in a surprisingly energetic manner.

When Jdesrescu eventually makes his way to the television studio where he will film his talk show, his young cameraman is filming a musical performance, see Figure 48. Crammed into a tiny studio, a group of enthusiastic young men, one young woman, two very small boys and one bigger boy assert that “Latino music is my life.” The vigour, enthusiasm and lively rhythm expressed by these people is only available to us through the glass of a window and its wooden frame, with the latter also in shot. Chris Robé asserts that this scene demonstrates the younger generation’s “utopian expectations” that they can “throw off the shackles of the past,” but also how cultural expression is still inhibited through the exercise of the “rigid authority” of the older generation, as Jderescu demands they instead play Romanian tunes (Robé 11). The scene also critiques the identity of older Romanians: holding on to the past, while being reluctant to recognise the value of cultural inclusivity. Perhaps Porumboiu is encouraging the audience to ask how a country reluctant to accept cultural diversity (represented by the foreign music) can easily participate in the European Union?

The energetic rendition of Latin American music (albeit sung in the Romanian language), demonstrates the willingness of the younger generation to assimilate alternative cultural practices into their constructed national identity. This ties the meanings ascribed to the revolution to the identity of Romanian society, thus bringing the film into the realm of a meditation on identity and national cultural construction.



Figure 48. The cameraman films the band performing in the television studio. Note the reflection from the glass on the top of the shot, *12:08 East of Bucharest*.

Conclusion

The three films dealing with language examined in this chapter address institutional failures that ultimately lead to adverse outcomes. However, they are not grouped together here to interrogate the thematic concerns, but instead to tease out the use of language through semiotics and Kracauer's theory. I argue that examining the use of dialogue in this film heralds a new method of giving access to materiality in film, which can be understood through Kracauer's work. In her investigation of language displacement in film, Mamula

asserts that when filmmakers deliberately seek the “breakdown of the bind between word and thing” they “question the cinema’s presumed ability to suture the gap between word and thing” (Mamula 136). However, I take this argument in a different direction, suggesting that the films under discussion demonstrate how important it is to recognise the relationship between the spoken word and the image for communication to be effective.

In *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, the doctors believe that they have everything they need to make a diagnosis by looking at Mr Lăzărescu’s appearance; however, they fail to recognise the importance of the repetition of his name. The linguistic motif of Mr Lăzărescu repeating his name throughout the film gives the audience access to the materiality of the patient, which only the audience and Moirar are privy to. While Kracauer was concerned about words interfering with the audience’s capacity to attend to the visual aspects of film, in this film, the audience must attend to sound and visuals to have access to Mr Lăzărescu’s corporeal state. Therefore, this film gives a strong example of where the material qualities of speech are emphasised rather than the content of the words spoken. Therefore, Mr Lăzărescu’s speech redeems film language by claiming his name as a vital conduit for physical reality. The use of Kracauer in this chapter is a key intervention in this thesis and stands as a productive method of analysing the films in the New Romanian cinematic canon.

Taking a different approach with *Police, Adjective*, I have heavily relied on the work of Gorzo as well as semiotic theory to understand how language is utilised in the film and how a film with such sparse dialogue can still be so deeply concerned with linguistic meaning. When the captain insists on owning the meaning of words, he is mediating language in a similar manner to film mediating images. This is a postmodern gesture that suggests that reality, as well as language, is a permeable concept, at the whim of subjective interpretation. However, the captain himself shows no recognition in the abstract nature of reality or linguistic interpretation, thus preventing any further negotiation with Cristi or Nelu. I propose

that *Police, Adjective*, while being a film with little dialogue, stands against Pop's proposal that New Romanian cinema relies on visual narratives, because in this film it is only by attending to the nuances of speech that meaning can be construed. This film is observational, as attested by Gorzo, because Cristi spends most of the film observing, however, the audience must attend to the dialogue to grasp the institutional and social constraints that allow injustice to perpetuate, which is a major theme in the film.

One of the realist aspects of *Beyond the Hills*, as examined in this chapter, is the embeddedness of the actors in the geographical location of the film. This discussion here extends the work of Lúcia Nagib, who states that by casting people who are from the film's geographical location, a proto-indexical value contributes to a film's authenticity. Mungiu's commitment to casting actors from a specific region aligns with what Nagib refers to as "a belief in the reality of the material world, which goes in hand with a belief in cinema's unlimited power to convey reality" (*Ethics* 32). Given the complicated history of shifting borders and outside conquest in Romania, maintaining the cosmic integrity of the link between actor and the land speaks of a "moral stance" where authenticity is an ethical imperative whether or not it is recognisable to the audience.

Beyond the Hills is also analysed here using the work of Kalling Heck, who contends that New Romanian cinema is addressing European audiences outside Romania, drawing them into complicity in the government programs that caused suffering during communism and after. Here, I expand Heck's argument to propose that that blame is also cast at micro level, towards the small actors for whom apathy and studied ignorance prevents them from recognising how they are complicit in societal failure.

Additionally, *Beyond the Hills* is an interesting case that allows the application of semiotic theory to understanding how the Priest uses his mastery of religious texts to exert

power and influence on his small flock. He constantly denies his own mediation of words, but his self-effacement is ultimately exposed as disingenuous. Likewise, the religious order also seeks to efface Alina by seeing her as possessed by evil, thus rationalising the debasing punishment enacted on the mentally ill young woman. While Dana Duma proposes that the Priest's actions are a metaphor for the return of patriarchy after the fall of communism, this chapter goes further to identify how words are activated to abrogate responsibility in the hospital and in the monastery. It is not just the patriarchy that insists Alina should comply or perish, but institutions whose inflexible rules deny her and Voichita any agency over their impoverished lives.

In this chapter, I drew on Kracauer's theory to understand how dialogue is used in *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* to give access to his corporeal materiality. Puiu uses Mr Lăzărescu's name as a motif throughout the diegesis to draw attention to the worsening medical condition of the eponymous protagonist. In contrast to the other films discussed in this chapter, Mr Lăzărescu is a wordy film. My analysis focused on how the words give access to his material existence, not by how the words evoke the thing they signify, but how the manner in which Mr Lăzărescu utters the words indicate his physical deterioration. As a new application of Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, I contend that the dialogue redeems physical reality in this film through how the words uttered exactly match Mr Lăzărescu's physical state. The use of a filmic motif is similar to a musical motif, where each instance of the motif is slightly different until the final repetition plays it to a satisfying resolution. Unfortunately for Mr Lăzărescu, there is no satisfying or heroic resolution but instead a lonely end in a sterile hospital room.

Finally, the use of diegetic music in *12:08 East of Bucharest* is analysed to ascertain how it interacts with that film's realism. I have demonstrated that despite the theatrical presentation of the musical event, it serves as a metaphor for Romania's integration into the

wider European community and the resulting clash of cultures and generations that it prompts.

CONCLUSION

Despite sustained attention from film festivals and critics, New Romanian cinema has remained an under-researched topic for the scholarly community. This thesis sought to address this lack as well as resolve the dichotomous relationship between the realist aspects of this cinema and its more constructed elements. The prime aim of this research was to compare a select number of New Romanian films with realist theory in order to refute or support claims that this cinematic canon can be definitively described as realist. In order to do this, the work of Siegfried Kracauer, André Bazin and Lúcia Nagib was mobilised. In addition to this, intermediality and theories of modernism and postmodernism were used. This research was divided into four main subject areas: narrative, the cinematic apparatus and the mediated technology, intermediality and the materiality of the spoken word. These four areas provided a framework through which I could examine the specific characteristics of New Romanian cinema. The thesis acknowledges the power of the themes expressed in New Romanian cinema as well as the richness of the cinematic mode of address and filming techniques.

In Chapter 2, *Stuff and Dough* and *California Dreamin'* were examined to identify the narrative structures of these films, where it was determined that they adhere the road film genre. However, in both films, audience expectations of the road film genre are continually built and then thwarted. By doing this, these films deliver their own unique take on realism, suggesting the serendipitous nature of the real world. This also indicates that New Romanian cinema mobilises the road trope in a way that differentiates it from its common use in mainstream Hollywood staple film. I have drawn on Christopher Morris' work on the modernist reflexivity of the road film to inform my analysis of the selected films. While Lucian Georgescu has given some attention the road movies of New Romanian cinema, it is Morris' work which is the platform on which Chapter 2 builds the argument that the road film

genre is a good fit for the themes expressed in New Romanian cinema. This thesis' contribution to narrative in New Romanian film stems from the integration of the work of Morris and Georgescu to argue that when New Romanian film adopts genre, it is inflected with a modernist or postmodernist attitude that is appropriate for the cultural specificity of Romania and for the current social and political era. Further examination of how film genres are mobilised in other New Romanian films would be useful to test this premise.

In Chapter 3, the manner in which New Romanian filmmakers mediate the filmic image and how this impacts realism was addressed. The findings demonstrate that although realist films often assume a mimetic relationship between the image and the real world, New Romanian cinema is both highly constructed *and* noticeably realist. I argued that by making obvious the constructedness of the film image, New Romanian cinema is reflecting the constructed nature of Romanian's prescribed cultural memory. This chapter extends the work of Alice Baran and also relies heavily on *Videogrammes of a Revolution* in the comparison between the fictional representation of historical events and truth. The findings identify the paradoxical nature of the relationship between realism and mediated technology in New Romanian films, arguing that it resists resolution. The audience is therefore required to participate in the meaning-making process, as vital information is deliberately elided. It was proposed that the consistent use of televisions in the mise-en-scène of New Romanian films draws attention to the manipulation of events through the televisual medium during communism and the 1989 Revolution. In doing this, the filmmakers are uniting subject and apparatus in a process of self-reflexive modernity that pulls against cinematic realism but never completely breaks the bonds with the realist effect. Furthermore, New Romanian cinema gestures towards the postmodern indeterminacy of historical truth without being drawn into nihilism. Therefore, I conclude that although modernism and postmodernism inflect the films discussed, New Romanian cinema remains realist. This is achieved through

maintaining stylistic and narrative affinities with realism and refusing to be overwhelmed with pessimism.

In Chapter 4, I argued that New Romanian cinema tests the limits of realism in an attempt to fill the gaps in cinema's inherent insufficiency as a medium. This chapter proposes that although fundamentally realist, New Romanian cinema also mobilises strategies of intertextuality and intermediality. As a result, New Romanian cinema represents a highly mediated filmic canon that is politically attuned and deeply embedded in the European artistic traditions. Relying heavily on the scholarship of Pethö and Nagib, I argue that rather than drawing the films away from realism, intermediality and intertextuality enforce realism, creating alternative routes towards the real by tapping into cultural and historical context and activating memory. Ultimately, this chapter makes a case that New Romanian cinema represents a development that warrants a modification of how realism in cinema is conceptualised in the twenty-first century – away from the emphasis on mimetic, representational characteristics and towards the greater inclusion of tactics and devices that demonstrate the constructed nature of film images.

Although it has been described as a fundamentally visual film form, several New Romanian films foreground the use of speech. In Chapter 5, I adopt a little used aspect of Kracauer's theory to demonstrate how dialogue can enhance the realist effect. The use of Kracauer in this chapter offers a new avenue for examining the relationship between the spoken word and concrete reality. Further study could interrogate other contemporary realist films to explore whether using speech to access materiality is more widely activated.

Chapter 5 also draws on Nagib's scholarship on the ethics of realism to explain the close adherence between location, actors' appearance and accent in *Beyond the Hills*. While Nagib's scholarship is mainly concerned with First Nations people, my extension of her work

to Eastern European cinema signals further possibilities of applying embeddedness as a broader imperative for realist filmmakers.

Finally, I have utilised semiotic theory in Chapter 5 to explain the manner in which characters in *Police*, *Adjective* and *Beyond the Hills* manipulate language to assert their control over others. I argued that by controlling the literal and symbolic meaning of words, those in power assert their authority, raising the meaning of words and the potential power they generate in public and private spaces. This chapter thus opens up a few possible avenues for analysing the use of speech by other realist films and filmmakers.

Besides mapping out the possibilities of extending the work outlined here, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Being from a country far removed from Romania, and not speaking the Romanian language has presented challenges, both in availability of the full range of Romanian films, as well as access to the many scholarly works in Romanian. The selection of films in this thesis has been limited to eight key works, however, incorporating more films could have given more evidence for the theories presented, although may have prevented the detailed analysis presented here.

Overall, this thesis has explored a number of selected films in New Romanian cinema, marking the inception and coming into maturity of this canon. Since the peak of New Romanian cinema, some directors have developed their thematic concerns away from marginalised people struggling to come to terms with the post-Revolutionary Romania. However, others such as Radu Jude in his film *Uppercase Print* and in his latest work *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* demonstrate continuity with the realist aesthetics of the New Romanian filmmakers. Just as New Romanian cinema and Italian neorealism were born from trauma and political transformation, I suspect the language that has evolved in these transformative cinemas will be adopted by other future marginal cinemas that seek to

question history, identity and political dogma. Applying the research conducted in this thesis to other national cinemas experiencing political or societal transformation could expand our understanding of cinematic realism for the new millennium.

In conclusion, New Romanian cinema, while adopting a diverse collection of tactics not normally associated with realist cinema, represents a new approach to cinematic realism. While this thesis affirms the centrality of André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer in the theory of realism in cinema, it identifies New Romanian cinema as the site for a profound evolution of realist film. I affirm that this cinema should be considered as employing a “critical realism” that adopts many of realism’s traits but expands its vocabulary beyond mimetic devices into the realm of modernist and postmodernist attitudes without ever breaking its bonds with fundamental realist aesthetics. In the context of post-1989 Romania, the Revolution that “has been televised” stands as a singular event, and New Romanian cinema reconceptualises realist cinema accordingly to create a unique form of realism that is both definitively Romanian while also speaking to the conditions of the twenty-first century.

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