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**CRISTIAN MUNGIU:
SOCIAL REALISM IN *BEYOND THE HILLS*
AND *GRADUATION***

ABSTRAKT

Artykuł traktuje o roli Cristiana Mungiu, wybitnego rumuńskiego reżysera, przedstawiciela Nowej Fali w rumuńskim kinie, w jego filmowej debacie na temat ideologicznych i etycznych wartości, którymi kierują się obywatele nowego, post-socjalistycznego rumuńskiego społeczeństwa. Podczas gdy widownia rumuńska w większości wciąż ogląda filmy z okresu socjalizmu, śmieje się w czasie projekcji, jednocześnie identyfikując się z ich wyidealizowaną narodową ikonografią, w filmach reżyserowanych przez Mungiu poddawana jest trudnym obrazom zawierającym wnikliwą analizę codziennych praktyk i poglądów, które pozostaną uciążliwym dziedzictwem dla przyszłych pokoleń. Jak wielu innych przedstawicieli rumuńskiej Nowej Fali, Mungiu jest ogromnie krytyczny w stosunku do przeszłości, ale jednocześnie uważnie obserwuje teraźniejszość, szczegółowo analizując wydarzenia i przekonania ludzi żyjących w niej. Ostrożnie kontekstualizuje przedstawiane sytuacje i przetwarza swoje spostrzeżenia w realistyczne filmowe obrazy. Jego przejmujące filmowe obrazy prześiąknięte są refleksjami na temat teraźniejszości i przeszłości a jego kino stanowi moment kontaktu z kolektywną podświadomością narodu pełną wątpliwości co do powrotu politycznej represji.

Słowa kluczowe: Cristian Mungiu, rumuńska Nowa Fala, religia, kino post-komunistyczne, ideologia post-komunistyczna

ABSTRACT

This article discusses Mungiu's role within the new Romanian wave, as well as his preoccupation with the Romanian society's ideological and ethical values. While a large Romanian public still watches socialist era movies for entertainment and because of identifying with an idealized national imagery, Mungiu's films propose an analysis of present-day practices and beliefs, reflecting on the possible heritage a young, democratic society leaves to future generations. Critical of the past, like all new Romanian wave directors, Mungiu scrutinizes the present, closely analyzes actions and expressions of belief, and carefully contextualizes situations to give the viewers a realistic cinematic experience. Reflecting on the past and/or present, his cinema is the mirror of an encounter with a people's deep subconscious and the nation's dilemma of the return of the repressed.

Keywords: Cristian Mungiu, the new Romanian wave, religion, post-communist cinema, post-communist ideology

THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED

Between 2007 and 2016, Cristian Mungiu realized four internationally prizewinning films: *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (also called *4,3,2*; 2007) and *Tales from the Golden Age* (2009) which deal with Romania's socialist past, and *Beyond the Hills* (2012) and *Graduation* (2016) whose narratives are placed in the post-socialist era. These pre- and post-socialist narratives reflect a tension between past and present, a constant questioning and a search for a solution to the ideological void created by a dictatorship that, in a premeditated and violent manner, destroyed the core values of a traditional and Christian-based Romanian society. Mungiu is not the only new wave director to focus on Romania's post-socialist ups and downs. Corneliu Porumboiu (*12:08 East of Bucharest*, 2006; *Police, Adjective*, 2009); Cristian Nemescu (*California*

Dreamin', 2007); Florin Serban (*If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle*, 2010); Cristi Puiu (*The Death of Mister Lazarescu*, 2005; *Sieranevada*, 2016) and Radu Jude (*I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians*, 2018; *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*, 2021) match Mungiu's depth of analysis, yet Mungiu's style and focus are unique in Romanian cinema.

While Puiu's narratives focus on the clash of subjective worlds and Jude exposes historic and individual hypocrisy, Mungiu's declared intention is to remain objective. A "documentarist" pessimistic perspective, present in Puiu, Mungiu and Porumboiu and later in Serban and Jude, relates to the heavy traces left by the country's socialist past. Mungiu's "socialist era" films (*4, 3, 2* & *Tales from the Golden Age*) come through as strongly anti-socialist/totalitarian, while his post-socialist *Beyond the Hills* and *Graduation* point to an ideological void, and indirectly to the dangerous revival of a totalitarian mentality. In the context of the East and Central European states' disappointment with the European Union reforms that contradict eastern conservative values (2020, 2021), and the gradual return to power of conservative governments in former socialist states, as it happened in Poland and Hungary, Mungiu's post-socialist narratives express a fear for the return of a déjà-vu.

Romania became a socialist republic in 1949, executed its dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, in 1989, and thirty years later, after the fall of the dictatorship (1989), the country saw a strong revival of the former socialist practices through left-wing parties, but also the strong emergence of a radical right-wing populist party. While their agendas seem very different, these parties' goal is the polarization of the nation through populist promises and reforms. The country's adherence to the European Union (EU) (2007) marked a centuries-long dream of becoming a European nation (Romania became a nation state in its actual territorial format in 1918–1919), at a time when nationhood started losing terrain to trans-European politics. While Western states experienced their nationhood for several centuries, it was not the case for most Central and

Eastern European states born out of the collapse of the Russian (1921) and Austro-Hungarian (1918) empires, with some becoming again self-governing as recently as the fall of the Soviet Russia (1989–1991).

During instable transitional years, Romania's left- and extremist right-wing parties found political support in the same socialist-era population. The extremist right-wing party embraces traditional Orthodox values, an embellished sanitized history, the relegation of women to traditional roles, a binary-gender society and a return to the "strong" values of the socialist (often totalitarian) era. The right-wing party, the formerly communist party revived under a different name, pursued politics (for the so-called "benefit" of the nation) marked by corrupt practices (e.g., job and function sharing between loyal subjects, self-appointing high salaries, benefits and vacation) that continued to take place at national level with the tacit approval of a population "trained" for decades in recognizing/accepting them.

Fourteen years after the entrance into the EU, Romania's main party is at odds with European trans-national politics (and its own pro-European president) since its most recent ideological experience, Marxist-Leninist socialism, is both rejected and embraced.

Socialism (and implicitly "defensive nationalism," as Parvulescu and Turcus call it, 54) gave the nation a strong feeling of pride, while the politics of re-writing history and reviving patriotic myths via entertainment historic films created a feel-good consciousness. Additionally, discourses of backwardness and failure to adapt to capitalism (Imre in Parvulescu and Turcus 53) not to mention the rapid socio-economic changes that physically altered the surrounding landscape (with all its alienating effects) have impacted Romanians' ideological standing.

Demographically, because Romania had increasingly smaller post-socialist generations (natality dropped significantly after the 1990s), a large immigrating population (over four million) working within the EU states, and many other people who immigrated (longterm or per-

manently) beyond the EU, the majority of the in-country population is former socialist citizens (middle-aged individuals and senior people), and children. As a result, the pressure on bringing Romania, in a short time, to the same European standards as Western states creates rather resistance in a population of a certain age and beliefs. Some of the young generations are already engaged into the trans-national Europe or the global world, but being often the first generations of immigrants, their impact at home is rather indirect, via voting privileges from abroad or through money sent home to families. Few of the educated young return home and contribute directly to changing a society that has difficulties understanding an “alien” global world (or rather West) in which one cannot recognize national aspirations or one’s traditional humanistic values.

While the past, as represented in socialist era entertainment cinema, is understandably much more accessible to the Romanian public, the transitional dilemma as reflected in the new wave film found its spectators mostly in the West. Not only is the new cinema reflecting on the past and present drama of the nation (as reminder of past failures, pain, and humiliation), but it is also critical of a past era still meaningful to a large population. Due to nostalgia, uncertainty, fear or revolt, among others, selective memories transfer evocative and/or positive aspects, living the new, often alien present with a feeling of resistance and, at times, defiance. Reflecting on the past or present, the new Romanian cinema is the mirror of an encounter with a people’s deep subconscious and the nation’s dilemma of the return of the repressed.

BEYOND THE HILLS **AND ITS ALTERNATE MIRROR**

In this context, one can consider the religious community in *Beyond the Hills* a microcosm of the former socialist society, with nuns constantly supervising each other, memorizing the scriptures by heart,

blindly obeying the authority of the priest, and incessantly working towards communitarian goals. The communal censorship ensures the good behavior of its members, their obedience to laws, and especially the immediate correction of deviant actions. Consequently, the presence of an outsider transformed by contact with the capitalistic West provokes anxieties and determines the monastic residents to “achieve purification through the annihilation of the post-89 subject...” (Goss 44). The guest resident is, as a result, killed during the required exorcism ritual. Permeated by a restrictive dogma, the monastic community mirrors the formal socialist society with its self-referential world and its refusal to acknowledge any values other than its own. This physically and spiritually isolated world approves only the obeying, loyal subject, and one worldview; the foreign “other” is either molded into the existing dogma or violently purged out.

Brian Michael Goss considers *Beyond the Hills* an “anti-national national” film not only because of a community surveillance system that changes citizens into guardians of social conformity [ibidem, 37, 42], but also because national unity, to which national systems aspire, are social fantasies. The systematic construction of the socialist/communist or religious subject implies a citizen void of personal views and initiative, obedient to central governing, and fully immersed into a totalitarian dogma after the suppression of all other beliefs. Prior to *Beyond the Hill*, *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* (2005) and *Police, Adjective* (2009), both situated in the post-communist era, bring to the screen the dilemma of a society incapable to understand its deviation from the norms of humane behavior. While Mr. Lazarescu, unknowingly sick with cancer, is carried from hospital to hospital to obtain diagnosis for a certain health condition, he repeatedly endures neglect and undignified verbal aggressions. The same loss of humanity expresses a police officer towards a teenager involved in a petty crime (*Police, Adjective*). The officer’s theoretical methods ignore the reality in favor of cold rules and regulations. *Beyond*

the Hills however, places this act of mistreatment within a community who should offer care, compassion, and understanding.

Instead of the expected sympathy, the monastic community closely reflects the former Romanian totalitarian regime under which official recognition was allowed only if one surrendered to the existing doctrine. In addition, the monastic woman's body is diminished by a double subjection to God and man, a censorship surpassed only by the socialist woman's treatment, whose freedom was limited by marriage regulations, societal restrictions, and country laws (reproductive bodies belonged to the socialist state). While women had to obey strict reproduction laws and to serve the communist party's demographic politics,¹ the monastic feminine body did not and still does not count as a social or political body at all. Monastic residents follow rules established by a priest (patriarch) in conformity with a church doctrine that perceives individuals as superior (men) or inferior (women) bodies in the service of a dogma. Like any former socialist citizen, they know nothing else outside their superiors and following rules, their entire experience being limited to understanding/approaching the world via one worldview.

The public perception of the monastic community, as depicted in *Beyond the Hills*, expresses Mungiu's anxieties regarding the country's ideological direction in light of a general lack of political experience and world knowledge. Although the removal of the former regime could be considered, in historical terms, still recent, few political alternatives were/are available. In the aftermath of the dictatorship's suppression, religious cults took over the country exerting a strong impact on all social categories. The social perception of monastic communities and the

¹ The Decree 770 from 1967 restricted abortion and contraception to increase Romania's population. The result was the highest death rate among pregnant women in Europe, increased child mortality and many abandoned children housed in infamous Romanian orphanages under conditions of misery and degradation. The subject is addressed in Mungiu's *4 months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (2007).

church dogma in general, are reflected in the final scene by the country's road indicators which point the way to similar monasteries. Although Romania managed to rid itself of one of the most oppressive dictatorships, it immediately embraced religious practices and dogmas, some of which were as totalitarian as the former regime. In this context, the new wave, a clearly anti-socialist cinema, emphasizes that lessons from the recent past can be easily and willingly forgotten. While on the one hand, willful forgetfulness in post-socialist nations in Central and Eastern Europe was generated by a wish to take distance from unwanted, traumatic experiences, on the other, many found solace in 'selected' memories. And since belief in something remains central to individuals and communities, the question remains if individuals, communities, or nations can be prevented from making the same mistakes and eventually repeat the past.

Although the Marxist doctrine remains the only opposing viable doctrine to capitalism for Western academia, Marxist dogma is fundamentally not different from capitalism. Marxist societies evolved and performed very much like capitalistic ones for as long as they had resources, and much worse as soon as a self-imposed economic and ideological isolation undermined their development.² The utopian constructions at the heart of Marxism did not prove more performant and did not generate, in the end, the much-expected universal happiness. Marxist societies created new social hierarchies, new elites and new social inequalities. The more the elite circle grew, the more social differences became visible and the more oppressive practices developed into standardized or systemic repression. As of 2021, fourteen years after joining the European Union, inhumane practices still exist in state institutions across Romania. This common situation finds an explanation in the fact

² The USSR and China acted like any other capitalistic imperial power, annexed territories, and imposed their language and ideology. The rhetoric made no difference, the end results being as bad as in other colonial empires.

that both capitalism and Marxism largely misunderstand the human subject and its relationship to property.

GRADUATION:
POST-SOCIALIST SOCIAL REALISM
AND SUBJECTIVITY

Mungiu's *Graduation* explores the human subject, and the reasons societies fail. Godfrey Cheshire considers the movie a "... masterpiece which offers proof that Romania's cinematic upsurge remains the most vital and important national film movement of the current century. [...] While that historic turning point [1989] freed Romania from one form of oppression, these films probe the sense that ghosts of the old regime still haunt its successors and that elements of corruption have been internalized to the point that they're not just social but individual as well."³

Much of this critical approach is due to a style that led to categorizing the director an auteur filmmaker. Mungiu's cinematic style, consistent over the years, reflects a specific type of social realism even within the new Romanian cinema. Traditional social realisms (such as the Italian neo-realism, British social realism, some of the European new waves' realism, the Third cinema of the 1960s, or the Brazilian Cinema Nuovo) employ "documentary film aesthetics to frame a politicized working-class experience," to engage "with issues of class conflict and inequality" [James Nwonka, 2014, p. 206], and to focus on political classes power structures, as well as their critique [Hallam and Marshment, 2000, p. 149]. According to the same authors, they try to create a feeling of authenticity that depicts reality in simple, powerful ways, showing "the effects of environmental factors on the development of character through depictions that emphasize the relationship between location

³ <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/graduation-2017> Aprilie 7, 2017. Accessed October 20, 2019.

and identity” [Hallam and Marshment 184]. These can be depictions of the ills of social and political institutions, as well as of individuals’ struggle within flawed political structures and circumstances they cannot control or improve. One could easily see how Mungiu’s personal work (but also the work of most new wave directors) belongs to a certain tradition of social realism, while focusing on another experience, that of alienation. But up to here, we can say that Puiu, Porumboiu, Munteanu, Serban, Mitulescu, and other new wave directors, make the theme of alienation central to their works.

David Forrest who discusses “the long tradition of social realism in Britain, increasingly associated with and defined by the work of Ken Loach,” remarks that Loach “has been persistently characterized by an approach to realism in which a narrative engagement with environmental conditions lies at the heart of a naturalist aesthetic.” Moreover, his “protagonists [...] are engaged in an emotive, goal-oriented narrative, alongside a more thorough exploration of an institution that exemplifies a political or social injustice that represents the film’s primary thematic concern.” [Forrest, 2010, p. 34] In this respect, Mungiu’s films are characterized by a certain metaphorical dimension that also implies the collective and/or national via individual stories. Reflective of the social realist focus on nation, for instance, *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* (2007) depicts its main characters as victims of the socialist totalitarian state. In *West* (2002) and *Beyond the Hills*, the individuals are victims of a state that offers no alternate ideologies, while in *Graduation* (and to some degree in *Police, Adjective, Morgen* (Marian Crisan, 2010); *Outbound* (Bogdan George Apetri, 2010), *If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle*, *The Unsaved* (Igor Cobileanski, 2013), we assist to the regression into corruption because of a similar lack of alternate options. Although Mungiu avoids an open moralistic or didactic intervention, his films remain “consciously interpretative in relation to a particular political viewpoint” [Raymond Williams, 1977, p. 68 in Nwonka 208]. Mungiu’s difficulty in openly con-

demning the citizens' victimization by the state comes from a position of discomfort since the language of debate belongs to liberal democracy which is often imbued with Marxist terms and philosophy. Using the language of Marxism to criticize and condemn the effects of Marxist ideology would lead to a fundamental contradiction. Empty of or rather full of meaning within the cultural-political space of Romania, Marxist philosophy and language could either become an object of critique or remain a disqualified ideological/theoretical reference. However, in the Romanian ideological context, anything touched by the language of Marxism has been altered and is therefore regarded with suspicion; and so are any national or collective entities. It is consequently normal, from a contemporary Romanian perspective, to find more meaning in the individual and private discourse, since the image of the collective has been discredited by the abusive use of Marxist concepts. As a result of language discreditation, Mungiu's camera follows the characters and observes the events, dialogues are short, and meaning is derived from tightly controlled perspectives.

Mike Wayne affirms that social realist films "are national insofar as they display an acute attunement to the specific social, political and cultural dynamics within the territory of the nation, but they are anti-national insofar as that territory is seen as a conflicted zone of unequal relations of power" [Wayne, 2002, p. 45 in Nwonka, 2014, p. 208]. All Mungiu's films can be placed within such a conflicted zone. In *West*, consistent frustration with economic poverty and systematic social failure push the characters to seek refuge into imaginary material comfort and self-exile. Suspicious of economic migration, Mungiu has always rejected all temptations of officially leaving Romania for a career abroad. *Graduation* could represent, in this respect, the sequel to *West*, as its main character and his wife return from abroad in the hope of changing the system in their home-country. What distinguishes *Graduation* from Mungiu's previous films is the status of victimhood of his characters:

while in *West, 4, 3, 2* and *Beyond the Hills* the characters are powerless when dealing with the system and its institutions, in *Graduation*, the main character decides to willingly join the dark side of power to attain his goal.

The character, a well-respected doctor, Romeo Aldea (Adrian Titieni), earns a legitimate living, but distances himself from his wife, does not live up to his mistress' expectations, and eventually regresses into moral corruption. Disappointed with the slow democratic development of his country, he decides to save his daughter from a similar life of deception. Her chance to study in England depends on her final high school exams, but traumatized by an attempted rape, she obtains a lower grade in her first exam. To "improve" the rest of her grades, the doctor engages in a network of favors, bribery and arrangements with which both his daughter and wife disagree. Unlike previous characters who fall victims to either the system or their own beliefs, Romeo is fully aware of the negative implications of his actions. Michael Sragow observes that "The movie is devastatingly specific about a society that runs on favors exchanged by men of authority—and I do mean men. With hair-raising matter-of-factness, this film opens up a patriarchal, claustrophobic community in which all ethics are transactional" (*Film Comment*, 2017). These abusive practices are linked to the former socialist regime via characters who can "help" Romeo and who stress the "good" done in old times. One character also insists that Romeo accept a gift of money for placing him ahead of others on a list of organ replacement. These patriarchal figures are middle-class privileged individuals who establish an alternate, illegal system of personal profit. Corruption has been a consistent theme in the new wave cinema, from the first acknowledged new wave film, *Stuff and Dough* (2001), to *Philanthropy* (Nae Caranfil, 2002), *Tales from the Golden Age*, *California Dreamin'*, *Police, Adjective, Francesca* (Bobby Paunescu, 2009) or *The Medal of Honor* (Calin Peter Netzer, 2009).

While Romeo dreams of a democratic society, his regression into moral corruption brings into question the makeup of the Romanian society and its process of democratization. One cannot miss the obvious conclusions that Romeo's wish to see more rapid changes are impeded by his own actions and the actions of people like him. He follows in the steps of the people he condemns and becomes one of them: his estrangement from his wife and daughter, his difficult relationships with his mistress and mother, and the hostility that comes from an anonymous person who breaks his apartment window with a rock, are possible signifiers of his social alienation. In fact, none of Romeo enterprises succeed: his searches for the anonymous window breaker and for the attacker of his daughter remain unsuccessful, his wife asks him to leave the apartment, his daughter refuses to cheat or leave the country, and the detectives catch up with his illegal interventions. Unlike previous characters entangled in corruption, Romeo is fully aware of the gravity of his actions and the failure of his moral values. His all-consuming ambition comes in contrast to his daughter's belief in her future in the country in which she lives. The only positive aspect is this utopian perspective that comes from Mungiu's hopes in the young generations. The camera focus on the daughter among hundreds of other high-school students creates an image of collective unity and uniformity, all students being of the same age and waiting patiently for the results of their exams. The only person out of place is Romeo, an isolated old, sad figure among young radiating faces. His dishonest thoughts and intentions come in contrast with the overall atmosphere of hope and with the meaning carried by the assembly of students who have worked hard for their achievements.

Compared to the energy coming from the young crowd, Romeo's enterprise appears doomed from the beginning. The corrupt fathers meet secretly in the darkness of night or behind walls, try to erase the traces of their encounters and live in isolation. There is, however, a very different approach to the theme of corruption between *Stuff and*

Dough (2001) and *Graduation* (2016). The young character from *Stuff and Dough*, caught in a trafficking business without realizing it, has no choice but to accept future exploitation by the local mafia man. His future fate is sealed in a life of crime in which his own persona is in danger. Similarly, the young men in *Loverboy* (Catalin Mitulescu, 2011) or the child in *Outbound* (2010) prefer criminality over an honest future. Unknowingly, *Graduation* served as a prelude to real Romania, whose 2017 left-wing government elected on populist promises, overtly carried on with corrupt actions alienating itself from the nation. Despite Romania's realities, Mungiu's strong trust in the future is reflected in the image of young, vibrant men and women, an energetic generation not afraid to take on the world on its own terms to make it better.

IN PLACE OF CONCLUSIONS

Mungiu also turned out to be a social prophet. In *Beyond the Hills*, he described the strong public influence the Romanian Orthodox Church had and continues to have on the Romanian society. In October 2018, at the intervention of the church, the Romanian government held an expensive national referendum that intended to redefine or rather to reiterate the concept of marriage and the constitution of family. The goal was to impede the possible legalization of gay marriage. The referendum failed to attract the necessary support, but provoked one of the most intense national debates creating or rather revealing a huge split between generations, social classes and ideological beliefs. It also revealed the extensive collaboration between state and church, the politicization of religion and the degeneration of the Romanian secular state under the influence of regressive religious ideologies. The same people who elected a left-wing party in 2017 largely voted for rejecting the 2018 referendum, revealing that no real differences existed between the left and the right; the mechanisms central to social practices rested on the

same fundamental reasoning. This lack of difference between political sides repeated itself in 2021 when the moderate right-wing governing party joined forces with the left-wing party (of 2017) that had lost power the previous year. The political crisis of the nation gained attention in international media, revealing on a larger scale its ideological drift thirty-two years after the fall of the Soviet bloc and fourteen years after joining the European Union. Engaged in recovery and financially funded by the European Union, Romania rebuilt its infrastructure, changed the face of its cities, and joined the world of trade through global malls and companies, yet it could not solve its ideological standing.

The father figure of the new wave, Cristi Puiu also expressed the idea that common faith could bring people together. Unlike Mungiu who remains a commercial director, Puiu developed rather a Godardian intellectual style that qualifies it as art cinema. In *Sieranevada*, a masterpiece that came out the same year as *Graduation*, he also exposes, among others, the themes of corruption and faith. Many visitors sharing the space of an apartment, are divided by opinions, language, relationships to each other, and reactions to various revelations. Their spread around the apartment and their differences, both signifiers of social and individual divisions, are replaced by group togetherness in the presence of a priest performing a family ritual. Asked by a man if Christ possibly came but people did not recognize him, the priest replies that he chooses to believe the Christ is yet to come. Despite all odds, through a religious metaphor, Puiu stresses his belief in the future, or salvation, of the Romanian society. Both Mungiu and Puiu come a long way in their cinematic message from *West and Stuff* and *Dough* to *Graduation* and *Sieranevada*.

Additionally, although *Graduation* focuses on the mechanisms of corruption and its consequences, the social regression and moral corruption appear isolated to a small elite of individuals. They act from the shadows, corruption being endemic, like a disease that permeates consciousness and takes over the character. Corrupt individuals have their

own ideology and defend their actions as humanitarian “help.” Here we have to make the difference between a cinema focused on the individual and individualism. Individualism is defined as the selfish pursuit of one’s personal profit without regard for the collective. Totalitarian Marxism promoted and tolerated the collective, but only when fully subordinated to the will of privileged elite. Mungiu’s depiction of the “new” collective as a homogenous young group, all looking honestly to their future, could be perceived as wishful and utopian, as is the father’s final acceptance to answer to justice. To this utopian vision of a promising future corresponds an opposite dark, pessimistic reality. Disillusioned citizens leave their country and loved ones (*If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle*), making Romania one of the countries with the largest populations of children left behind; other lose their life (*Beyond the Hills*), and in the case of *Graduation*, the main character goes under investigation, risking to destroy his career, after losing his wife and alienating his daughter.

However, the most important lesson in this choice of cinematic narrative is the filmmaker’s standing in depicting the historic events of the present. In *I Don’t Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians* (2018), Radu Jude brings to attention the mythicizing of history under socialism and the post-1989 persistence of those false narratives. As Parvulescu and Turcus observe (51), in the 1960s and 1970s, the retelling of history materialized in several cinematic grand national epics. They survived political transitions and continue to find viewers due to the transfer between screen representation and spectator identity. Like most Romanian new wave directors, Mungiu’s depiction of the (post) socialist individual is overt and critical. His films promote a vision of truthfulness and analytic honesty, facing history in a manner that may account for a position of responsibility for future generations. This may explain his trust in younger generations: his films address future adults who, like the post-socialist spectator identifying himself with an image from the past, will see themselves and the trust invested in them, their

abilities and the willingness to build a new society. They may understand and appreciate at a different level the films of Mungiu and all the other new wave directors.

Mungiu's social realism, rather personal and original within the new Romanian cinema, proposes with every film another gripping exploration of life. An isolated voice, Brody expresses a fatigue with Mungiu's personal narrative and camera style. However, this willing choice for a minimalistic style and ideologically charged representation manages to avoid the depleted language of Marxism, mediocre dramatization, and deceptive narratives. Multifaceted meaning that involves a dialog around issues of governance, democracy, and the status of citizenship in the modern state adds, for the informed spectator, depth and dimensions that expand beyond Mungiu's ambitions of intellectual neutrality.

Galen Wilson inquires if, in the case of social realist films, "such realist representations can be a productive force for social change, a concern central to the history of cinematic modes of realism." (59) The answer is that becoming consciously aware can serve social change and within the new Romanian cinema, Mungiu established himself as a major auteur with a social mission.

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