



CHAPTER 9

The Point of No Return: From Great Expectations to Great Desperation in New Romanian Cinema

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Preamble

April 2011: a Romanian in his twenties, a poor worker residing in the small Spanish town of Torrejón de Ardez, kills his pregnant, nineteen-year-old Romanian fiancée. The last minutes of the ordeal and the corpse are filmed with a webcam and shown ‘live’ via the Internet to the family of the girl in their country of origin. The criminal is arrested within minutes as the parents reel from the traumatic shock.⁶³

This is neither a snuff movie nor the latest minimalist production of the New Romanian Wave which rose to worldwide fame in the first decade of the twenty-first century for its dark, sombre and depressive hyper-realist dramas. It is the depiction of only one of the many stories revealing some of the sombre results of the exodus of a population coming from a ‘marginal space’ of Europe, a nation that woke up from the communist nightmare confused about its identity, living a permanent ‘frontier situation’ and ‘still in the search of the way ahead’ (Boia 2001: 12–13, 27).

Twenty-five years after the fall of the communism, Romanian villages are depopulated. The locals, once not even allowed to hold a passport, are now leaving the country at an alarming and increasing rate. The often tragic results of this exodus are nevertheless profound, with dramatic long-term consequences. Thousands of children are left without proper supervision or education. The family, once at the centre of patriarchal society, has been destroyed in the desperate rush of parents towards the West. A good number of their children will later become criminals, closing a vicious circle. This is the dramatic resort of *Eu când vreau să fluier, fluier/When I want to whistle, I whistle* (Florin Șerban, 2010, Romania/Sweden/Germany) and the philosophy behind *Periferic/Outbound* (Bogdan George Apetri, 2011, Romania), the film that closes stylistically the first decade of New Romanian Cinema. The young criminal from Torrejón de Ardez, Spain might easily have been





Paul, the protagonist from *Outbound*. The mirage of the West and escapist dreams are common themes for the majority of films of this new generation, starting in the 1990s with *E pericoloso sporgersi/Sundays on Leave* (Nae Caranfil, 1992, Romania/France) or *Asphalt Tango* (Nae Caranfil, 1996, France/Romania), *Telefon în străinătate/Long-distance Call* (Hanno Höfer, 1997), and continuing into the twenty-first century with *Occident* (Cristian Mungiu, 2002), *Italienele/The Italian Girls* (Napoleon Toader, 2004), *Cum mi-am petrecut sfârșitul lumii/The Way I Spent the End of the World* (Cătălin Mitulescu, 2006, Romania/France), *Nesfârșit/California Dreamin'* (Cătălin Nemescu, 2007), *Fața galbenă care râde/The Yellow Smiling Face* (Constantin Popescu, 2008), *Boogie/Summer Holiday* (Radu Muntean, 2008), *Felicia înainte de toate/First of All, Felicia* (Răzvan Rădulescu and Melissa de Raaf, 2009, Romania/France/Croatia/Belgium), *Nunta lui Oli/Oli's Wedding* (Tudor Jurgiu, 2009), *Francesca* (Bobby Păunescu, 2009), *Dacă bobul nu moare/If the Seed Doesn't Die* (Sinișa Dragin, 2010, Serbia/Austria/Romania), *Stopover* (Ioana Uricaru, 2012 Romania/Italy), *Oxigen/Oxygen* (Adina Pintilie, 2011), *Morgen* (Marian Crișan, 2011, Romania/France/Hungary), *Apele tac/Silent River* (Anca Miruna Lăzărescu, 2011, Germany/Romania).⁶⁴ It can be argued that the vast majority of the films included in the corpus of New Romanian Cinema have as a unifying theme, escape – personal, of a group, or of an entire nation – and as a common conclusion, its failure. This essay attempts to analyse the end of Romania's post-communist period of 'Great Expectations' and the failure of the Western myth, both of which have led to a nationwide sense of desperation that is palpable in all New Romanian Cinema productions. While the focus of many sociological studies 'is on the challenge for receiving societies' (Castles and Miller 2009: 16), I am less concerned by the shock to societies receiving immigrants than by the impact on the country of emigration and by the changes witnessed by that sending society to those left behind the border. While, from certain European vantage points, it may be possible that 'hard borders [have lost] some degree of their significance in post-1989 Europe' (Gott 2013a: 51), nevertheless the border remains etched in the collective imaginary of Romania. I also believe in the power of the imaginary, of films being 'representations of national identity' that 'textually reproduce many of the cultural, economic and psychological limitations facing the nation' (Gott 2012: 8) better than any official statistics could. The cinematic output of young Romanian film-makers is realistically portraying the current social status of a desperate nation, at the point of no return, with no open road in front. The essay is founded on the belief that the Romanian society faces an identity crisis profoundly affecting its genes



and future, and that New Romanian Cinema offers a valid representation of this nation's altered state of mind.

Making the Invisible Visible: Film as a Research Tool

In *Making Trafficking Visible, Adjusting the Narrative* (2010), Dina Iordanova raises a rhetorical question: 'Why would one avoid referring to films, however?' (113). Iordanova describes the moment when, after one of her talks, someone in the audience questioned the idea of using films as references in sociological research as 'an eye-opening experience, [which] alerted me to the striking absence of cinematic references from the work of social sciences scholars', given that many studies, 'although on contemporary social issues widely represented in cinema, persistently abstained from making any references to films or other texts of popular culture related to these same social issues' (110). Building on this highly pertinent question, I favour the idea that contemporary cinema is more than just a source of information for one interested in understanding social changes; beyond bringing 'to light what is invisible and [making] it visible' (Iordanova 2010: 84), the art of film is, in some cases, far ahead of sciences and research, an invaluable barometer of the climate of a nation, of a region or the entire world that is capable of revealing signs of sociological diseases that sciences have not yet noticed. Moreover this applies most greatly to 'marginal' nations or topics, and Romania is a perfect example in this respect: 'Romanians have always been on the margins and now they stand on the margin of the European Union, as candidates whose chances of being integrated into the European construct remain uncertain' (Boia 2013: 13). In spite of a decade of international success, the themes of the New Romanian Cinema are themselves marginal and have received much less worldwide attention than do war in the Middle East, African immigration, the Arab feminist movements or human trafficking to the West. When the world is preparing for the social shock of absorbing the Syrian war human flooding, would somebody consider the 'borderland of Europe' (Boia 2013) and its emigration as interesting? Taking to the extreme the insight of Dina Iordanova and using the reading lens suggested by Mazierska and Rascaroli, for whom cinema mirrors 'the ever-increasing mobility of the population and have served as a reflection on the many and elusive shifts of borders, identities and cultures that we have been experiencing' (2006: 9), we would argue that films are not simply an excellent reference for scholars but could, in some cases – such as the very special one of a borderland nation – be worthy of research itself, as rigid figures are limited in comparison with the power of

creative understanding. If Mazierska and Rascaroli are interested in how ‘travel films have engaged with the notion of a changing European socio-geographical space, which has in turn produced new forms of national and transnational identity’ (2006: 1), I am interested here in discovering through cinema the truth about the collapse of a nation undergoing twenty years of an unofficial New Europe social experiment.

The Genealogy of New Romanian Cinema

On 25 December 1989 Nicolae Ceaușescu, the last communist dictator, and his wife, Elena, are shot by a firing squad following an improvised court martial. The platoon soldiers are in their mid twenties, all of them born immediately after (or as a consequence of?) the Decree 770 which, in 1966, banned abortion. The tragic consequences can be spotted in the realistic fiction of *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile/4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days/4,3,2* (Cristian Mungiu, 2007, Romania/Belgium; henceforth *4,3,2*), the story of a teenager having an illegitimate abortion in the mid 1980s, while the social consequences are analysed by the documentary *Decreții/Children of the Decree* (Florin Iepan, 2005), describing a generation born at order which later kills its infamous parents. ‘I was a mother for you’ the new Medea, Elena Ceausescu, tells the young soldiers when her hands are tied before the execution. ‘He was my father, he gave me the chance to live, to be myself’, declares to the camera Laurentiu Ștefănescu, a member of the firing squad, speaking as a contemporary Cronus who had cut the testicles of his father Uranus. The godfathers of New Romanian Cinema, Cristi Puiu (born 1967) and Cristian Mungiu (1968) are ‘children of the decree’ themselves. The most awarded Romanian film of all time, Mungiu’s *4,3,2*, in a way owes its existence to the experiment 770 of 1966, making Nicolae Ceaușescu himself the spiritual father of the most important Romanian cultural achievement of the last half of the twentieth century. Many of his children will see the first lights of freedom from behind the iron bars of the bedrooms where they are chained, rocking in their metal orphanage beds. When the red communist velvet unfolds, the Western world discovers the realities of a dysfunctional society pretending to care about its future generations. Thousands of children have been abandoned or have lost their mothers at birth and are kept behind the walls of institutions similar to concentration camps, such as the infamous Siret orphanage, still active more than twenty years after the revolution. Some of those who will manage to escape will be heading for the only salvation: the West. Nevertheless this national trauma cannot disappear without leaving some traces. Romania is still haunted by the ghosts of *omul nou* (the

new man), a Frankenstein that Ceaușescu created and that director Lucian Pintilie imagined while in exile in France in his first post-revolution film, *Prea târziu/Trop tard/Too Late* (1996, Romania/France), as a Balkan yeti hiding in the caves of closed mines representing the former glory of industrial communism. It is obviously too late for a nation to escape its destiny, too late indeed, *trop tard*.

Crossing the Border: a National Obsession

After the ‘obsessive decade’ (as the period of Stalinist terror camps of the 1950s is generally referred to) and a period of thaw in the 1960s and 1970s in Ceaușescu-ruled Romania, escape to the West became a national obsession in the 1980s and continues to this day now that the western border has been opened. Any means of escape was used in the past: any possible type of transportation, including sailing on oxygen tubes on the Danube (*Oxygen*), or using other inflatable objects ranging from car tyre inner tubes (*Silent River*) to submarines (*The Way I Spent the End of the World*) and, in the post-communist migration period, modes of conveyance including buses (*Asphalt Tango, Francesca*), cars (*Dacia, dragostea mea/My Beautiful Dacia*, Julio Soto and Ștefan Constantinescu, 2009, Spain/Romania), motorbikes (*Morgen*) or extreme post-modern fictional inventions, such as inflatable sex dolls (*Occident*). Last but not least as a means of escape is marrying a foreigner. The last method is almost omnipresent in the films we are considering and, in some cases, constitutes the key dramatic point of post-1989 films such as *Asphalt Tango, Occident, California Dreamin’, Oli’s wedding* and *First of All, Felicia*. Missing love or confused feelings are fundamental issues for Romanians who are part of the generation facing the question of whether or not they were wanted by parents left without choice by the 1966 Decree. Indeed, given their generational issues, pretending to be in love to get out of a hurting country is not necessarily a bad strategy for a young person who might have a confused definition of affection.

Released in 1992, *Sundays on Leave* was the first feature to revisit the nation’s communist-era border obsession. The action takes place in a small town where Cristina, the teenage girlfriend of a young soldier, falls in love with Dino, an actor planning his escape over the Danube. At the end of the 1980s, the river remained the only chance to get out of a country that had been transformed into an immense gulag. This theme is reprised in the 2011 film *Silent River*, based on the true story of Gregor, a Romanian-German who, together with a friend, Vali and his pregnant wife Ana, tries to escape only to end up on the Serbian shore having to take care of the woman whose husband is arrested. Once on the other



shore of the river, the fugitives had few options, the best of which was to be sent by the Yugoslavian army into a refugee camp – the ultimate desire of Gregor. The communist regime had at the time a special deal with Belgrade: for each Romanian fugitive turned back by the Serbians, the Bucharest officials would pay an entire wagon of salt. The Yugoslavian government issued a law exempting from taxes any Serbian peasants that denounced fleeing Romanians to the authorities. The manhunt on the banks of the Danube reached its peak in 1989 when the action of *Sundays on Leave* takes place.

Oxygen, released in 2012, is symbolically set in 1984, the Orwellian resonance of the title being highlighted by the stylish photography of the deserted factories on the Danube and the neighbouring ghostly cities where the working class hides in grey buildings suggestive of a degraded socialist version of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. The plot is simple, based on a method that had on occasion been successful but, more commonly, resulted in the fugitives being shot or arrested: a man prepares his escape across the Danube using an industrial oxygen tube as a propeller. The characters are unnamed, rendering them as anonymous as the thousands of others who failed to escape. The film lacks dialogue, with the exception of inserts of communist propaganda television programmes, interrupted by the regular power cuts of the 1980s that threw the entire nation into the dark. Two symbolic characters complete this cinematic poem: an alcoholic musician, an Eastern European breed of a Jarmusch-Fellinian sad clown, and a Hemingway-type fisherman who kills his catch by hitting its head repeatedly shown in a slow-motion camera movement combined with the desperate struggles of the fish to breathe. The deeply symbolic scene is similar in its significations to the fish-out-of-water scene that opens the film *Morgen*: no oxygen, no escape.

The End of Illusions

In 1989 the communist regime collapsed.

Already from the first moments of the revolution, the Romanians gained a number of freedoms whose taste they had forgotten. Among these were the right to travel abroad without restriction and the liberalization of abortion – the two great obsessions of the Ceaușescu period (Boia 2013: 156).

The first decade of freedom was sunny and naive; anything was possible and few doubted that good things were to come. Romania was full of hope and the road to the West was wide open. An entire nation was striving to advance with the maximum speed possible on what is believed to be a



road to prosperity and, of course, happiness. As a logical result, the first notable films of the young generation in the mid/late 1990s to early 2000s are – even though bitter – comedies, a rarity in New Romanian Cinema: *Sundays on Leave*, *Asphalt Tango*, *Long-distance Call* and *Occident*. Unlike other film-makers from the former Eastern Bloc, such as the Czechs,⁶⁵ Romanians and Romanian directors, are eager to travel in their movies or, more precisely, to run, and this is one of the reasons for which a significant number of film productions are road movies.⁶⁶ In *Asphalt Tango* the story follows the desperate attempt of Andrei to stop his wife Dora, a ballerina, from emigrating to France to become a dancer at a nightclub. Both Sorina and Mihaela, the heroes of two of the three stories forming *Occident*, are dreaming of marrying a foreigner and escaping from a present without a future.

Romanians waited half a century for the American army to come to liberate the country, and the national dream finally comes true in *California Dreamin'* (2007). Yet it is *trop tard* as Pintilie would say, the communist experiment has succeeded in transforming the nation into a population of *om nou*, on behalf of which the neo-capitalist society is operating another test, the transition from the *kolkhoz* (the Soviet collective farms) culture to the supermarket one, the result being hybrids of non-citizens, programmed with a singular focus: to escape the laboratory they don't recognise anymore as a country. The arrival of an American military train convoy on its way to the Serbian front brings immense hope to the inhabitants of the small town of Căpîlnița, to the musical theme of The Mamas and the Papas hit 'California Dreamin''. This is a comprehensive metaphor for the Western dream of a nation relying exclusively on exterior forces, with no trust anymore in its own capabilities. The only way out for Monica (Căpîlnița's young version of Emma Bovary) is having an affair with Captain Jones, commander of the military convoy and the ultimate American cliché. 'There is a dramatic reason for this escapism; the inhabitants of Căpîlnița are living into an existential provisional captivity, this interim status being characteristic of the country itself, blocked in a sombre temporal bubble' (Mitchevici 2011: 193, my translation). The Iron Curtain melts away and is replaced by plastic supermarket bags covering both the dusty landscape and their dreams, easily blown by the wind over the now deserted barracks of the Western frontier. The border has been lifted. Or not?

No Border, No Hope, No Dreams

In August 1968, two years after Decree 770, Nicolae Ceaușescu celebrated the results of the most important achievement of the communist industry,



receiving as a gift the first ever Dacia car, which would become a symbol of industrial national pride and the most important communist brand to survive to the present day. Two decades later, in December 1989 he will be hijacking one (an upgraded version, though, the 1300) in an attempt to escape an angry populace.

The name of the car comes from the Roman province of Dacia (which included a part of modern Romania), an 'outpost' in the 'barbarian world'; it was the only Roman province situated north of the Danube and was surrounded by territories not controlled by the Romans. Dacia was also a place worshipped in communist propaganda, which created 'the myth of pure Dacianism, a sort of nationalist religion for which Dacia represented the centre of the world' (Boia 2013: 43). The name was therefore sacrosanct; the national(ist) Dacia brand would, however, later be sold to the French Renault car maker in the mid 1990s, becoming a symbol of neo-capitalism. *My Beautiful Dacia*, by Soto and Constantinescu, is a 2009 documentary staged on the road, using the Dacia car as a metaphor for fifty years of history, a long travelling shot describing moments, places and parts of the nation which the urban-oriented New Romanian Cinema (with the exception of Marian Crişan's *Morgen*) has neglected. The film is a puzzle of situations and characters, all having in common love for the old car; the central story is the attempt of the Bujor brothers, Mircea and Marian, to travel with a Dacia to Spain where members of their family and village neighbours are agricultural workers. The goal of the trip is finding a temporary job in order to save money to return back home and build a new house in the village, the ultimate dream of most of seasonal agricultural workers. Mircea and Marian are now driving their old Dacia 1300 heading for Spain, the birthplace of the first non-Roman-born emperor, Trajan, conqueror of Dacia, where his descendants are today called *căpşunari* (strawberry pickers, a primary source of seasonal employment). It is an appellation the protagonists of *Italian Girls* are trying to hide from, pretending that, instead of strawberries in Spain, they had picked grapes in Italy, presumably a more glamorous undertaking. Jeni and Lenuţa (*The Italian Girls*), Marian and Mircea (*My Beautiful Dacia*) and the mother of Silviu from *When I Want to Whistle, I Whistle* each documents examples of the current transnational migration that is transforming a quarter of the Romanian workforce into a permanently shifting population in constant motion between East and West. Their endless movement has a purely economic justification and represents their only compass on the road, giving them a financial 'home orientation, a key component of transnationalism' (Sandu 2013: 32). Romania has always been a site of emigration located 'at the crossroad of civilizations, an open space *par excellence*, characterized



by a permanent instability and a ceaseless movement of people and values' (Boia 2013: 14). The regional situation has changed and 'since the 1980's [sic] Southern European states like Greece, Italy and Spain, which for a long time were zones of emigration, have become immigration areas' (Castles and Miller 2009: 8), with the Romanians now heading en masse to Italy and Spain.⁶⁷ Their native language is derived from Latin so, within a very short time, the eponymous protagonist of *Francesca*, the cousins of Paul from *Outbound* and Silviu from *When I Want to Whistle* are all able to attain fluency in the language of their adopted countries which are no longer cold, rigid Saxon countries (such as West Germany, the preferred immigration destination of the 1980s) but a place where they can feel more easily at home. In the 2011 national census, over 700,000 Romanians were declared to be living temporarily (more than a year) abroad but the results were considered incomplete as there are only a few members of each family left at home to respond the questionnaires.⁶⁸ Unofficially, the number of Romanians living in Spain and Italy alone is close to two million, meaning that 10 per cent of Romania's population and almost a quarter of its workforce have left the country, living more or less continuously abroad, as 'migration has become a life strategy' (Sandu 2000).

Those, such as the Bujor brothers in *My Beautiful Dacia*, are suspended between two countries, though in a fashion that has nothing to do with what Baudrillard would call a 'sidereal journey' (2008). The Bujors are not travellers but neither do they consider themselves immigrants. Their dialogue in the car heading for the West is centred on Romania, the country left behind, which mentally they never left. Distinctions between 'travellers' and 'tourists', categories too sophisticated for a poor country, are not present in the cinematic journeys of New Romanian Cinema. Instead, Romanian films are populated with pseudo-travellers scouting abroad for a better future, demonstrating the observation that 'the barrier between migration and tourism is becoming blurred . . . [and] many migrants become settlers' (Castles and Miller, 2009: 4).

The Bujors are non-citizens (suspended between spaces that lost their national identities in favour of an abstract Brussels-ruled entity) and non-tourists, as their primary goal for travelling is solely economic. They do not fit any of the four models of voyagers proposed by Zygmunt Bauman: pilgrims, strollers, vagabonds or tourists. Their closest prototype might be the vagabond, as they are out of the centre of the social world, 'the advanced troops of guerrilla units of the post-traditional chaos' (Bauman 1996: 28). They are humble citizens of an ever-changing continent, far away from their base camp-nation, while travel itself is a way of life, rather than a journey, for the Bujors and other tens of thousands of *căpșunari* or

stranieri,⁶⁹ permanently on a road leading to nowhere. The dialogues on the road show a different perception of the West, as ‘allowed to a direct contact Romanians have a different perception on foreignness than before 1989’ (Boia 2013: 192–3) but this contact reveals a deep frustration of a nation that was cut from the West and now finds it impossible to get over the clichés of education received for half a century. As Boia puts it, ‘the West continues both to attract and to repel. There is still a long way to go before the Romanians will be able to regard Westerners with the same detachment (or indifference) with which the Westerners regard them’ (2013: 193). Leaving the country, even for a short time, ‘has as a consequence the dismantling of the couples and the dissolution of the family, being a perpetual source of distress for the ones left home’ (Corciovescu 2011: 51). Paradoxically, the dissolution of the border and the mobility to the promising West have led to a national desperation; no more chains, yet no more hope.

Morgen: There’s no Tomorrow

As Romania is no longer an Eastern communist country, it has become a land of promise for others from even further East, using it as a passage in



Figure 9.1 Nelu crosses the border in *Morgen*.

their search for a better life. 'The experience of working abroad became a modernizing factor for Romanian society' (Sandu 2010: 272) and the West gave this Eastern, emerging capitalist country the gift of one of its most important inventions: the supermarket. This is the place where Nelu of *Morgen* works as a guardian of a consumerist society symbol built up in the middle of the former 'no-man's land' of the border that once seemed to be the last frontier.

Nelu is a silent hero who fights daily with the sadness of a life without horizons. From the supermarket where he spends most of his time as a security guard, he travels back to his isolated house in the middle of nowhere and sometimes goes fishing on the Hungarian border. *Morgen* is a perfect depiction of the atomic bomb kind of social effect of the transition from an absurd politically imposed society to another that is totally alien, hardly understood by a historically traumatised local population. Nelu did not make a decision to stay, he hasn't even thought about leaving, being suspended in a time bubble broken only by third-degree encounters, such as the one with Behran, the Turkish alien heading unrealistically for a dream-like Germany. *Morgen's* Romania is almost deserted, a marginal place of Europe, a transitional zone used as an antechamber of the West, an extreme version of a 'non-place' (Augé 2009) on the verge of becoming a non-nation, as the members of its scarce populace look like guinea pigs used as subjects for testing the artificial foods of the fourth worlds of tomorrow. The brain drain is complete: since 2007 (the year when *Mr Lăzărescu* dies on the way to an illusory hospital) more than eight thousand doctors have left the country in just four years (Roman 2011) and the nation has lost not only its health but is still constantly losing its children who hate being deprived of love as in the case of the teenage criminal from *When I Want to Whistle I Whistle*. Silviu, a Romanian version of Rocco Parondi from Luchino Visconti's 1960 film, is desperately trying to compensate for the lack of maternal love and to protect his brother from suffering the same deception as himself when abandoned by a mother emigrating to work in Italy. For Silviu and his many brothers, '*morgen*' no longer means tomorrow. Twenty years after the revolution, Romanian society shows itself to be incapable of building a future for its next generations.

Conclusion

Romania is a frontier nation at the crossroads of East and West, a European outpost at the gates of the orient with a unique, contradictory mixture of two cultures within the same body and spirit. For centuries the Romanians have looked towards the West with the hope of a better

future while struggling with the local, Eastern-dominated realities. The two powerful neighbours, the Ottoman and Russian empires, have always closely watched and brutally censored the local random heretical tendencies for freedom, because the West always meant freedom for Romanians, as it was once for the heroes of westerns, even though in a different way.

Years after World War II, in spite of the Stalinist-imposed regime which put one of Europe's most flourishing young nations in house arrest, the Romanians still hoped for the Western liberation. 'When are the Americans coming?' was a frequent question in the 1950s and even the 1960s asked by the peasants from remote villages, awaiting a never-coming miracle. Some of them even continued an absurd fight, as the heroes from *Portretul luptătorului la tinerete / The Portrait of the Fighter as a Young Man* (Constantin Popescu, 2010, Romania), the tragic story of an improvised group of partisans who hold out, in the mountains, against the pro-Russian communists in the aftermath of World War II.

The 1989 revolution was an explosion of liberating young energy, a moment of national epiphany when everything seemed possible. The fall of the Wall, the disappearance of frontiers, the absence of any limit, in both physical and spiritual ways, were challenges for these people, desperate to win freedom but not necessarily prepared to deal with that freedom. A long period of social, political and, last but not least, axiological confusion followed: the new capitalist way of life; the stampede for acquiring social and material status; the lust for possessions of an emerging new society; a nation of eternal commuters willing to gain the material values that their Western cousins have long enjoyed – the Romanians wanted it all and they wanted it now, no matter what the cost.

The productions of New Romanian Cinema reflect in their neo-realist style the social and moral changes of the post-communist era to a greater extent than scientific research could. Contemporary Romanian cinema is nurtured by a major disillusion in the wake of the collapse of the dreams of the generation of the 1989 revolution: the films of these young auteurs portray the drama of a nation that lost its compass on the way towards the West.