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The Aesthetics of the Non-Cinematic
in Cristian Mungiu's Cinema

Abstract. This paper analyses the non-cinematic manifestations in *Bacalaureat* (2016), Cristian Mungiu's most recent movie, at the narrative and visual levels. The author distinguishes between **extra-cinematic**, **post-cinematic** and **non-cinematic** and uses a couple definitions provided by Jacques Rancière in order to establish how the non-cinematic modes of representation in this movie are part of an **aesthetics of the ineffable**. The main argument is that Mungiu practices a type of **non-cinematic cinema**, one that takes place in the intervals between the cinematic sequences and in the silences of the frames. By comparing *Bacalaureat* (2016) with *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile* (2007), the other masterpiece of the Romanian director, the paper evaluates these movies by re-using Rancière's concept of *écart*, or gap. For the author, the use of the extra-cinematic space and the non-cinematic treatment of scenes are the two main tools used by Mungiu to create a **non-cinematic cinema** takes place in the intervals, in the in-between-ness of the cinematic sequence, scenes and particular shots. Last but not least, the paper concludes that *Bacalaureat* is an expression of a "cinema which is not" , a type of movie-making that is not taking place exclusively on the screen of the theater room, nor in the reality of the film itself, but rather in the viewers mind.

Keywords: post-cinema, non-cinematic, extra-cinematic, Cristian Mungiu, *Bacalaureat,* Rancière, social criticism, aesthetic of the ineffable.

Bacalaureat (*Graduation*, 2016) confirmed once again the reputation and the status held by Cristian Mungiu in the recent Romanian cinema. He is standing as one of the most important directors not only nationally, but also internationally. This production, which got the support of the Romanian National Center for Cinematography, receiving the highest amount of money in the 2015 competition (almost 1,9 million lei), was also supported by Eurimages, Cine+, Wild Bunch, Why Not, Les films du Fleuve, and France 3, making it a widely international co-production. In 2016,

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Mungiu was awarded the "Best director" prize at Cannes, while his movie was nominated for the prestigious Palme d'Or. Soon after, *Bacalaureat* became one of the most distributed movies produced by Romanian film industry, screened almost all over the world, from Japan to Australia, from the United States to most of the European Union countries.

Bacalaureat integrates naturally in the logic of Mungiu's oeuvre and, when taking an outside look at his movies so far, it would seem that each of them is based on controversial topics about important Romanian public institutions. Apparently the director is determined to use social shortcomings as the main driving force of all his narratives. After dealing with the medical system (albeit during Communism) in *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile* (2007), the Orthodox Church in *După dealuri* (2012), it is now the time for him to expose the weakness of the public education system in *Bacalaureat* (2016). More relevantly, this is a larger trend in recent Romanian cinema, placing Mungiu close to another director of this generation, Tudor Giurgiu, who made a film about the problems of the Romanian justice system (*De ce eu?*, 2015). When cinema is transparently taking sides in social politics, and the directors searching for topics that are ideologically charged, Romanian cinema seems to grow more political.

We must underline that these high school graduation exams, or "bacalaureat" tests, have become a subject of extreme actuality in contemporary Romania. With the legislation changing and new policies of zero tolerance against fraud imposed in the educational system, a certain public attention was drawn by these policies. This remains a very delicate issue, since the government, in the effort to eliminate any suspicion in the examining process, has decided to install video cameras in all class rooms and an atmosphere of police control was instated. In some cases entire examining commissions were arrested, some professors who were heading these commissions were condemned to execute jail time, and in many cases students and teachers were prosecuted. Mungiu exploits this controversial subject and deals with a reality in the Romanian educational and medical system. The question is if the social background is central for the movie, or, on the contrary, only a canvas for deeper meanings.

The social criticism as non-cinematic

This is why, before exploring the manifestations of the **non-cinematic** at the narrative and the visual levels, we need to briefly address the problems that emerge from this intricate relationship between cinema and politics. Needless to say that the straightforward social and political dimensions of Mungiu's film were immediately noted by many critics and, regrettably, almost all receptions of this remarkable cinema work were confined to the external significations. Most of the observations were centered around the social criticism content of the film, the critics discussing either the ability or inability of the director to describe accurately a politically charged reality. The social was considered to be more important than the cinematic.

Perceived as a movie about the corruption in the Romanian society, a socially and politically important piece of reality, exposing the wrongs of "the system", *Bacalaureat* was quickly identified as "a portrait of society", a mirror of post-communism, exposing the disease "eating" our institutions. Medical metaphors were often used, with terms like "surgical" clarity, or the "stethoscope" that is "listening into the Romanian society" (Chèze 2016). Others, like Peter Bradshaw, described the movie as "a bleak picture of a state of national depression in Romania" (Bradshaw 2016), pointing to the culture of compromise in Romania and the actions that lead to the "cronyism" of bureaucracy, nepotism and epidemic moral debasement.

Seen only at this level, the movie might even seem to be a teleplay depicting the so-called "small corruption" (which is a politically charged word in contemporary Romania) in undeveloped democracies. A patient who bribes an honest surgeon in a local hospital, a father who would break his ethics code for the sake of his child, an indolent policeman for whom justice is not important, a politician ready to make compromises, they all come out as if the director is exposing the flaws of the society. Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, one of the most vocal opinion leaders in Romania and supporters of a "clean society" – relevantly enough also the director's sister – used the movie as an ultimate argument in this political debate. Mungiu-Pippidi claimed that, since the movie is about "corruption" , all Romanians have to see the film in order to understand the profound need to "save Romania" from its guilty past and the from the people who prevent the society from changing (Mungiu-Pippidi 2016).

On the other hand, others critics more radical in their refusal of the political role, claimed that the movie is presenting only a "soft" version of the more brutal corruption in Romania, and that the storytelling itself is limited to "didactic and pedagogical fairy tales" (Popescu 2016). As noted by some Romanian critics, this generated a huge wave of antipathy towards Mungiu's approach (Bogdan 2016), with many comments biased by the limited reading of his film as ideologically relevant.

Obviously, at the simplest narrative level this is, as usually with Mungiu, a story that anybody could relate with, with a plot inspired from the immediate reality. In *Bacalaureat* the main plot revolves around a father who is an appreciated doctor working in a local hospital. By an accident he is faced with a moral dilemma, which could ruin his dreams about the future of his daughter, Eliza. Romeo Aldea (played by Adrian Titieni) is just another middle-aged man, who has a difficult relationship with his wife, an uncertain extramarital affair, and has to deal with the consequences of an awful abuse perpetrated against his daughter, while trying to remain honest in a society in which moral corruption is the norm. His daughter was accepted as a student at two British universities and now all she needs to do is to pass her "bacalaureat", yet her high school graduation exams are in danger by the fact that she was assaulted by a stranger and now she is physically unable to properly pass these so-called "maturity exams".

This is the explicit dimension of *Bacalaureat*, one which is by all means present and unavoidable. The various interactions between the characters of the movie are illustrating what one of the most astute critic of Romanian society, Ion Luca Caragiale, satirically identified as "the chain of weak links" (lanțul slăbiciunilor). Romania has a culture of interactions where small unethical gestures lead to other, more noxious immoral consequences. In the movie everybody owes somebody else something, and all the characters are interconnected by this thin web of compromises. The head of the local Police asks Romeo to intervene for the vice-mayor, who intervenes on behalf of the school master's wife, who in turn helps Romeo with his daughter's graduation paper. Even in the everyday life this is a constant reality. Romeo's mistress helps him enter the school during the "bacalaureat", he helps her with the son's speech problems, while the policemen are extremely amiable with the troubled doctor. Romeo, and everybody else, is trapped in the Dantesqeu bolgias of small corruption.

Also, as I pointed out in a previous work, the movie is filled with the tropes of the New Wave Romanian cinema: father-son (or mother-daughter) relationship, the theme of emigration, the rape and social abuse, the moral dilemma of the individual, the generational gap (Pop 2014 passim). And while the political message is also obvious in the film - Eliza, the young daughter of the provincial doctor refuses to take part in the corruption practices of society and shuns her father for trying to help her in an unethical way - Mungiu's intention cannot be limited to this level.

I would argue that this is the most basic level of the **non-cinematic** – or rather the extra-cinematic. It is an unavoidable dimension of any movie-making process, yet the social framework of any cinema production remains, in a strict technical sense, external to the aesthetic build-up. Following this logic, whenever the apparatus of cinema is not involved in the meaning making, we are experiencing a non-cinematic dimension of a movie. More so, if cinema is used only as a "moral art" , one which is supposed to generate "social conscience" , then it almost certainly looses important parts of its aesthetic relevance. Limiting our reading of the movie to the political or social functions is, obviously, limitative.

In the following interpretation it is my intention to use Mungiu's work as an example of how the strategies of non-cinematic are an integral part of this masterpiece and become suggestive for the director's overall philosophy about movie-making. My main argument is that the social drama, that is developing in front of us, is only an apparent canvas for another projection, one that is essentially non-cinematic, and although is generating a profound impact on the spectators, it is not happening on screen.

Non-cinematic, extra-cinematic and post-cinema

The nature of the "art of cinema" has been thoroughly discussed by many authors, in innumerable works, from multiple perspectives and it was rightly so, since this is one of the most problematic issues when it comes to understanding cinema as a

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"new art form" . As famously asked by André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma*? the question of what cinema is remains a puzzle and a maze, because we need to describe its functions with regards to the other similar arts of which cinema was developed, like painting, theater or photography. Bazin's classical answer was double folded, first that cinema is "objectivity in time" (14), the fact that the cinematic image has duration, and second that cinema is a language in itself. Bazin defined cinema as a specific type of narration, one that is produced by the specialized tools of the cinematic art, that is through montage and camera works (63). Contrasting with this early definition, I would suggest that the **non-cinematic** should include all practices that contradict these elementary material determinations of the film-making as a craft.

Another working definition of the **non-cinematic** should take into consideration the elements that are present in the work of the movie, without being present in the cinematographic visuality, that is without being on-screen. If all the audio-visual ingredients that are physically present in the movie are cinematic, than all the components that are extra-cinematic are, by consequence, non-cinematic. Also, if the constitutive elements are external, that is they are not created through the cinematographic technologies, they also become non-cinematic. Thus we consider that all narratives that unfold on-screen, the characters that are present within the visual field, the camera movements or the editing are all *cinematic*. Meanwhile the all the narrative loopholes, the absent characters or actions and, more relevantly, the absence of sound and images are, by their nature **non-cinematic**. The best example, as many critics have noted, are those instances in which Mungiu is close to Hanecke and his ambiguous treatment of narrative threads.

We also need to consider that the viewers of any movie are always in the extra-cinematic space, thus the only way in which a movie can integrate the spectator is the cinema experience is by generating identification. I would suggest the use of the concept of **non-cinematic** only in those instances that are not classically part of the cinema practices – psychological and cognitive connections do not belong automatically to an innovative way of movie-making.

While at a conceptual level, the **non-cinematic** is easily defined by opposing the preconceived definitions of cinema, another distinction must be made between **post-cinema** and the **non-cinematic**. Often enough even the **non-cinematic** is described as synonymous with post-cinema – that is the transformation of filmmaking practices by the digital media and, more importantly, by the fact that films are no longer "consumed" in theatrical environments which are using the classical projection techniques.

Clearly, the understanding of the **non-cinematic** proposed here is not technical, since it does not refer to things like the distribution of movies using hard drives or the projection of 3D images and not of film strips. The distinction we are putting in place has nothing to do with the war for the "holy of holies" in cinema, the film strip. The non-cinematic does not entail an attack on the "sacred celluloid" , as many film direc-

tors, like Quentin Tarantino or Christopher Nolan, perceived as an attack on the purity of cinema. In fact the definition of the **non-cinematic** comes from the very fact that even under the pressure of the new media, cinema-making as a technique remains intact. If any changes are to be described, we should address the aesthetic dimension and not the practical one. We need to move beyond the simplistic opposition "film versus non-film" , where any movie that is not made on celluloid becomes post-cinematic. It would be an oversimplified explanation to reduce everything to the digital transformation of the medium, and one of the best examples is provided by block-buster movies from *The Hobbit* trilogy of Peter Jackson, which were completely recorded on digital formats. Are these films post-cinematic in their essence, or they are cinematography transferred into another type of support?

As Holly Willis reviewed some of the most important definitions of "post-cinema" , that include the idea that this is the end of the domination of cinema, together with the end of realist narratives, she argues that we should consider the post-cinema as a cultural mutation, one taking movies from the paradigms of control and linearity, to those of de-centered networks (26). Although I concur to this conclusion, I would add another level of understanding, that of the transformations happening in the regimes of representation.

The post-cinema, and more importantly, the non-cinematic requires us to go beyond the celluloid vs. digital war and discuss the changes in the "regime of representation" , as Jacques Rancière has put it, in the aesthetic transformation which gradually brings ambiguity in the center of meaning formation. Rancière keenly observed that we need to deal with relationship between three different regimes of art: the ethical component of representations, the poetic dimension and the aesthetic mode (21-22). For the French philosopher in all art works (and we need to include cinema) the political (or ethical) regime is first to be observed and the first to be configured. Nevertheless, as is the case with all arts, the nature of the cinematic cannot be understood simply in its external manifestations or in its forms or styles. Thus Rancière proposes the concept of the separation of the sensible (*le partage du sensible*), one where the visible is reconciled with the invisible (the non-seen), the audible with the inaudible (that which is not explicitly heard), and the presence is reconnected with non-presence.

In the watching movies, when following only the external subject of the story this can become misleading and often prevents the spectators to understand the "sensible" effect of cinema as a whole. Also, in the same time, without the political and ethical dimensions the aesthetics cannot be established. It is only through the abolition of the separation between that which is ethically represented and the mode of representation in the aesthetic regime we can arrive to the fundamental understanding of the non-cinematic. While looking only at the indexical level of the movies (the social activities, the movement of actors) is constraining us to discuss only what is factual and clearly represented – that is the *mimetic* dimension of the images – the aesthetic search

for meaning disconnects the viewer from the specific political context. Another option that is based in another regime of representation is needed to explain what happens with the significations that are simultaneously not on the screen, yet make integral part of the movie.

That cinema which is not. From ekphrasis to ekstasis

Paraphrasing the famous Magritte title "Ceci n'est pas une pipe", we can expand the philosophical treatment of the content in any conceptual works of art. Using this title as a metaphor to plunge into the cinematic of Cristian Mungiu, and particularly *Bacalaureat*, we can ascribe this movie a new title: "Ceci n'est pas un film" (This is not a movie).

Obviously this does not mean that Mungiu is creating a surreal film, quite the contrary, his narrative is deeply rooted in the logic of cinematic realism and the social realities represented. Yet in this movie we can see that there isn't only one dimension reality, since it is built with a dual dynamics of representation, it has a double quality, one that is profoundly *ekphrastic* and another that is *ekstatic*. What do I mean by ekphrastic? Anytime cinematic images are used to explain an exterior world that is constructed not by images but by words, it becomes an interpretative tool of the director. We can illustrate this ekphrastic dimension in Mungiu's work with the scenes in which the characters are used as explanatory instruments – Romeo repeatedly tells his daughter about the inability of his generation to change society (" let others try, since we have tried, nothing can be changed here, we have failed"); the characters connected with corruption (the vice-mayor, the school manager, the policeman) also claim that there is nothing to be done with society. Here the mode of representation, to use Rancière's term, is political.

It is only when the characters become muted and the interpretation of reality ceases **to happen** directly, the *ekphrastic* ends, and Mungiu's movie becomes aesthetically relevant. The director is gradually abandoning the social importance and the political message, and when the pictures are **not** about what it appears – the topics of corruption, political hypocrisy or generational conflicts – the "ekstatic cinema", manifested as non-cinematic, is generated.

Once more, in order to better explain the apparently paradoxical idea of the "cinema which is not", I return to a concept put forward by Jacques Rancière in his interpretation of the relationship between cinema and the other arts. My contention is that movie-makers explore the **non-cinematic** through the access provided by movies into the non-represented reality. This process takes place during the **intervals**, in the **in-between-ness** of the cinematic sequences. "The cinema which is not" happens when on the actual screen other actions and representations are present, the non-cinematic only takes place when it happens without being seen directly, without any physical manifestation or explicit description. Also our brain operates within this interval, the dimension between action and our own reaction to what we have seen on the screen.

Although the operation happens in a split second, without our conscious intervention, it is this movement from *ekphrasis* (the explanatory) to the *ekstasis* (the revelatory) that meaning is formed.

The original concept of interval, or *écart*, as Rancière defined it, can be used to explain the external gaps between different media – the space between writing and images, between theatrical and cinematographic. In the highly suggestive analysis of the intervals of cinema the *écart*, or gap as it was translated into English, functions as an "interval" , where the displacement of images takes place (Rancière 2014). The images are receded to a less important role, or they are used to deflect attention, thus creating an *écartement*.

In cinema, when the images on the screen are not integral, they are not fully available to the viewer, the very lack of integrality allows the formation of the meaningful *interval*. The best example is, once again in Mungiu's cinema, the development of the rape scene. The Romanian director has already proved his craft in this approach in *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile*, where the spectators were purposefully refused the visualization of the actual violent act in order to amplify its importance. The technique is used in *Bacalaureat*, in an improved way. The brutal act is not in the visual field, as it was with the raping of Otilia and Găbița, it is placed in the split between two sequences. In this interval, when the intervention of the editing takes place, the **non-cinematic** is also produced. While Romeo (himself living in an inter-space, he never has a place of his own) is making love to his "secret" mistress, who is a former patient, his daughter goes through an ordeal that would change all their lives.

While the "ostentatious" cinema-makers are always trying to show the viewers the reality, to make them understand what is going on, the **non-cinematic** director is discretely refusing explanations. Throughout the film we are prevented from accessing the whole story about the assault. When the father takes his daughter to the police station, once again we are refused the story of the assault. As Eliza becomes more confusing about what happened and begins writing her statement, the camera moves away to the discussion between the doctor and his friend, the head of the local Police. This ambiguity is later completed by half-true reactions from the mother, who tells the father that the assailant performed an oral act on his daughter, and then later she lets him know for the first time that Eliza was not a virgin.

This is when Romeo begins to reconstruct what actually happened, and together with him the spectators are going through the same process. What is more important for the argument of this paper is the fact that the main event of the movie, the attack and abuse suffered by Eliza is dealt with in a **non-cinematic** way. Throughout the entire narrative the father is investigating the conditions of the attack and all his reactions stem from what he finds out. Initially Romeo believes that Eliza was not raped, then he realizes that he threatened her with a knife, and that he took her phone, credit cards and house keys. First Romeo is going through the work-site, not knowing what to do, and then we hear that the assailant could be a convict that just escaped from

the local prison. At some point the grieving father is uncertain why his daughter did not protest, as he never elucidates if the rape actually took place. And when he finds out that a public camera was recording in the intersection in front of the school he wants to watch it fully. This allows the director to use the video recording as a narrative tool, one that could be interpreted as a "post-cinema" intervention. Nevertheless, here Mungiu once again practices the non-cinematic approach, since the video camera only displays what we already knew, the things that were narratively described by the characters. In turn, Romeo believes that he spotted in the picture Eliza's boyfriend, so he starts questioning the young man. Initially we follow Romeo in his suspicions towards Marius, and the boyfriend seems somehow guilty. Once again the father tries to reconstruct the assault, when inviting Marius to the work-site, but the two men end up fighting, with the doctor thrown to the ground by the younger man. In one of the final sequences the molestation is once again reproduced during the police line-up, when four men, stereotypically selected, are swearing and yelling over and over towards the girl behind the police screen, threatening to kill her, until one of them snaps. Yet Eliza refuses to recognize any of these men as her assailant and we are left without any explanation about who did the crime.

It is here, in this out-of-the-visible space that the movie in our head takes shape, while we follow about the troubled father. And, after all the strifes of the father, after all the difficult decission were made, they were all for nothing, since Eliza did not accept her father's machinations. The entire movie was just an interlude, an interval apparently with no purpose. In fact the ultimate cinematic experience is fundamentally non-cinematic, it takes place outside the screen, in the *ekstatic* state of mind of the spectator leaving the screening room.

The silence of the frames

Ludwig Wittgenstein, the great philosopher of human language, was famously quoted with the following memorable dictum: "what can be said at all can be said clearly" and "whereof one cannot speak, thereof must be silent" (Wittgenstein 27). In these apparently brief remarks from the Preface of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein actually places silence at the center of the philosophical ineffable. Silence should not be understood simply as a form of laconic thinking, but rather as path to discovering truth and allowing thoughts to be better manifested.

In all his movies, Mungiu has proven to be a master of silences, a true (albeit undisclosed) disciple of Wittgenstein. If we were to return to *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile*, and its remarkable ending scene in which the two young women, after going through their ordeal, sit silently in front of a restaurant window, the movie is concluded with Otilia asking Găbița to "never speak again about this" . After this, the young woman abruptly turns towards the camera, breaking the "fourth wall" , and gazing directly towards the viewer. Her eyes are not simply moving our attention outside the frame, they become instrumental for the ineffable nature of the meaning. The same is true

in *Bacalaureat*, which concludes with a photography shooting at the end of the movie and at the end of the high school. This is, perhaps, one of the most illustrative moments for what we can describe as non-cinematic. While the father takes a snapshot of his daughter surrounded by her colleagues, and the music in the school backyard plays a song from a popular movie about high-school life, made during Communism, in the silent and sad smiles on their faces the non-cinematic meaning is instated.

Just like the spoken language becomes more relevant when silenced, the cinematographic language becomes more profound when it does not depend on the camera anymore, it is not produced by the lenses, but rather by the incapacity of the photographic objective to capture the entire reality. The Real is never disclosed, never spoken fully, and by this it is made more significative. At this level the meaningless becomes an integral part of the meaning-making mechanism. This has been one of the traits of Mungiu's narrative style and a proof of this we find again in his masterpiece *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile.* The entire set-up of the movie and the main story is told by a filmic *mise en abyme* – the viewers are suddenly in the middle of an already existing situation, through a typical *in medias res* device. The two girls have already planned the abortion and there is a tacit understanding that there has been history behind everything, a history that would never be revealed. How did Găbița get pregnant? What is with her relationship with the man that got her pregnant? And, more importantly, what is happening with the father that they expect to come and bring cookies from home? Why does he never show up?

This narrative that always remains unspoken, with story threads that are not fully connected and the developing of a world in which absent narratives become more important than the explicit ones, is one of Mungiu's trademarks. Obscured story-lines and incompletely solved plots become an integral part of the narrative non-cinematic in *Bacalaureat*. The movie begins with Romeo having a terrible secret of his own, a secret which may account for the mysterious attacks on his house. Yet we never find out why stones are thrown through the window of his flat and the windscreen of his car. The same is true when it comes to Romeo's estranged relationship with his wife, who calls him "Tică" (a diminutive of father, in Romanian), yet refuses to have any intimate relationship with him. In fact all the relationships in this apparently clear story are ambiguous. Romeo's mistress tells him she has missed her period and this issue is never solved; Magda, his wife, keeps away from her husband the fact that Eliza has begun her sex life; Eliza's boyfriend, Marius, is never justified, we never find too much about him; only late during the story we find out that Romeo sleeps on the living-room couch and we never find out why; apparently nobody knows about his secret relationship, yet when the grandmother gets sick, we find out that Eliza knew all along where the lover of his father lived.

Also in the development of the secondary characters there are always things that remain unspoken, subtextual references are made, we hear innuendos and allusions but we are never told more details. This is the case with Romeo's Hungarian assis-

tant, Csilla, who has no background story, and is always helping the doctor beyond the normal and professional relationship. She takes the doctor's car to the repair shop, she makes calls and arrangements on behalf of the absent surgeon, she appears to be in control of a part of his life. Another strange character is Matei, the young son of Romeo's mistress (who is also puzzling and uncertain). He appears in the middle of the conversation between his mother and the doctor with a wolf mask on his face, and during this brief encounter we realize that the young boy has never met his mother's lover. Then he disappears from the screen only to reappear at the end.

But perhaps the most intensely non-cinematic instrument remains the mystery about the identity of the attacker. This assailant is not simply enigmatic, as it happens in the classical mystery stories. His non-objectified nature becomes an integral part of the complex mechanisms put in place by Mungiu. He becomes part of the incomprehensible nature of the non-cinematic. This is extremely problematic in art representations because, as Adorno has famously put it, in the work of art apparently nothing counts if it is not there, yet this paradoxical nature of meanings as "chimeras" remains its most profound form of interpretation (Adorno 374). It is in this sense that Mungiu constantly explores the need of going beyond the appearances, and in *Bacalaureat* this is where the absent meanings becomes more important than the apparent manifestations and their objectification in reality.

The non-cinematic of the invisible and ineffable

This is why another important **non-cinematic** mechanism that must be discussed here is the refusal of "cinematic beauty". Mungiu often places the actions on darkened screens, either using night shots or elements that are blurring the visual field. These scenes are placed in extremely important moments of the narratives (the end of each day) and their apparent lack of aesthetic clarity allows the formation of the *ineffable*.

In art theory the ineffable is described as this unexplainable quality of the art object, its intrinsic ability to express more than that which is visible or manifested, since the ineffable opens a level of meaning making beyond the direct manifestation. Also the ineffable is defined as the level of artistic expression which is beyond words, in fact a manifestation for which we have "no suitable words" (Kennick 1967). When it comes to cinema, the nature of the ineffable becomes more complex, since meanings are immediately conveyed to the viewer through the perceptual specificity of the moving images. The *cinematic ineffable* cannot be limited to the reaction of the spectators towards what is depicted on-screen. At the perceptual level the viewers participate in the story building effort of the director, as they are directly addressed by the narrative, both visual and dramatical. More or less, all the members of a cinema audience are living the same cinema experience.

Nevertheless, at a more personal level, each of the viewers in an movie theater audience is building his or her own ineffable signification. In this sense, the ineffa-

ble is the ability of the work of art to generate an *impression*, to leave a trace in our consciousness that is untraceable externally. This process happens in a similar way to what Rancière described as *the aesthetic Unconscious (L'Inconscient esthétique)*. The significations are not generated by thinking, but rather by a "thought that does not think" (45), one that is located in the obscure places of the heart (52).

The first dark scene is at the end of the first day of tribulations – of course there is a symbolism here going through the entire movie, one which links Romeo to the myth of resurrection. It is not by chance that Romeo (and his wife) are always listening Händel, and more importantly the arias from *Messiah*. In first night scene Romeo and his daughter are returning from the police, with Händel's oratorio creating an eerie atmosphere, and the frame is dark and cold, with almost no action and no elements of representation. This monotonous state is broken by sudden appearance, and Romeo hits something with his car. He steps out of and, in the pitch darkness he checks the damage to his front bumper. At the end of the second day, Romeo returns to the same spot. He is now just a shadow, an unclear figure walking through the bushes and suddenly he starts sobbing uncontrollably. The darkened screen does not allow the viewer to see anything, and the camera treatment is accentuating this opaque manifestation of reality. We cannot understand anything that is going on on-screen, yet in a typical **non-cinematic** manner, these incomprehensible and external movements of the doctor are transformed into unconscious realizations.

The more the ambiguity is built and the less we are given clear explanations or perceptual clues, our understanding is enhanced. The final night scene, when Romeo follows the presumed assailant is even more complex, as a long shot following his around a seemingly abandoned urban space. This sensorial dimension of cinema-making is not necessarily innovative, and it was previously explored by Mungiu, with the most brilliant example remaining the sequence from *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile*, in which Otilia is carrying the dead foetus around in a dark Bucharest, provoking an emotional and even kinesthetic reaction that is beyond the direct experience. This experience is enhanced by the participative camera, following the main character who often drops outside the perceptual field. In the darkness of the cinema theater the distress of the powerless father who runs around covered by darkness, Mungiu is establishing something that is no longer obvious. Moving beyond the transparency of the visible, and of the social significations, the director puts his spectators on a path of searching for the ineffable.

Sometimes the ineffable is built up in a dark comedic way. A remarkable illustration is the scene in which the policemen are searching for the presumed escaped prisoners, developed in an amusingly non-cinematic way. Two dozen law enforcement representatives are sitting on top of a hill, in marionette poses, without doing anything. Mache, the police chief is looking pointlessly through his binoculars, and the entire episode is turned into an absurd silent theater. The same is true with the scene in which Romeo is supposed to take care of Matei, and is witnessing a confrontation

in the playground. The over-the-shoulder camera is focused on Romeo's back, while in the unclear foreground a fight between a mother and a father takes place. Mungiu is ironically dealing with the idea of social justice – Matei throws a rock at the boy who does not respect the rules, leaving a bitter sensation about the lawless nature of human beings.

The narrative non-cinematic

A final discussion is necessary when trying to identify how the **non-cinematic** operates at the inner level of Mungiu's work. Although the central storyline of the movie can be easily summarized and everything is following a chronological and linear progression – there is more than meets the eye.

At first glance it would appear that the movie, which begins *in medias res* – we are in the middle of the action – is based on the typical realist cinema narrative enunciation mode. *Bacalaureat* begins in a derelict suburban space, with somebody digging a hole in the ground in front of a block of flats, then the camera moves into an apartment where there are no characters. From the very beginning Mungiu develops a **non-cinematic** narrative mode, elaborating a series of ambiguous loops, which will only grow wider, contradicting the rules of classical cinema narratives.

Simplifying the arguments we must underline the fact that all film narrative conventions are based on the principle that the interactions between characters and the story development must be linked by causal connections. Hollywood storytelling, which is based on the classical paradigm of Aristotle, was developed by many screenwriters who were following the classical canons. As Bordwell has put it, the "Hollywood way" of storytelling is based on a set of principles, a mechanics of screenwriting that follows the rule of the "arrangement of incidents" , with the story elements building up in a continuous enchainment of causalities, using the "three act template" (Bordwell 29). Paul Gulino labeled it as "the sequence approach" (2004) and many "practical storytellers" in contemporary film industry, like Syd Field or Robert McKee, elaborated instructional books teaching how to develop a story "the cinema way". Even the "post-classical" cinema, as Kristin Thompson convincingly argued, continues to follow the "guidelines" of storytelling continuity, connected with the principle of cinematographic continuity. All these screenwriting practices can be considered as specific forms of *cinematic narratives*.

Mungiu's story, which takes place during three and a half days, each day described as a coherent sequence on its own, is seemingly continuous. We have three acts, each opening in the morning and ending the following evening, with the fourth morning bringing everything to a symbolic conclusion. To all appearances, this is a "classical" plot. Yet each scene, and in fact each new sequence, is based on ambiguity, and all of them are connected as broken narratives. Each morning an unexplained incident opens the storyline - as everything begins with an unexplainable breaking of the window of the apartment where Romeo and his family live. The following day

after the assault, Romeo steps out of his apartment only to find that his windshield wipes are lifted up by an unknown person. The third day starts with the cracking of the lateral right windshield of Romeo's car, this time with a direct hit towards the camera (which is placed inside the vehicle). For a couple of minutes we see the reality through this shattered piece of glass, adding to the uncertainty.

The broken windows are, in fact, metaphorical representations of the overall broken narratives. Each episode of the story is based on an accumulation of absences and multiple indeterminate relationships between the characters. The entire plot is punctured by small secrets which amount to an overarching series of equivocal situations. Unlike the experimental narration forms, where digression or fragmentation are used in order to generated signification, in the **non-cinematic** the story amounts to a coherently un-articulated narrative, with the chain of explanations repeatedly broken, yet apparently kept intact. Just as in *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile* many things are left unspoken and untold in *Bacalaureat*. From small reactions such as wife telling Romeo "This has not been your home for a long time" , to the fact that his Romeo honks each time when passing by a certain spot on the road, or the mother keeping away from her husband the fact that Eliza already began her sex life, or that the father does not tell his daughter about her grandmother's fatal illness, or when Eliza does not know that her mother is aware of her husband's infidelity, everything grows up into a large narrative that is never told by the director. From the very beginning we realize that a background story has been in place before, as Romeo later tells his daughter that he remained with his wife in order to give the impression of normality and so that she could lead a balanced life.

I would point out three scenes that are extremely relevant for this **non-cinematic** narrative approach, albeit the entire movie functions in a similar way. In one of the most remarkable and ambiguous scenes of the movie, Magda finally breaks up with Romeo, and the husband asks: "Why do we hate each other so much, do you remember?". Immediately after Magda enters into a self defensive posture, and with both characters sitting with their backs to the camera, in the narrow corridor between the rows of books in the library, we wait for an answer that never comes.   The spectators are left without any determinate solutions, which allows their own *ekstatic* understanding to take shape.

This uncertainty is mechanism a key mechanism of the **non-cinematic** in Mungiu's work. Once more *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile* comes as an illustration. When the two women are raped and, in a **non-cinematic** mode the brutal act is never depicted directly, Găbița steps out barefoot and, while we know that her friend is sexually abused, the camera follows her breathing heavily, only to see her asking a stranger for a cigarette. Then she smokes in the lobby while the atrocity develops behind the closed door of their hotel room. Next she is replaced by Otilia, who we see washing her genitals, while her friend is raped in turn. All this takes place during long minutes of silence. More importantly, at the narrative level the fact that Mr. Bebe rapes

them both has a profound uncertain motivation, since his behavior is clearly non-sexual. On one hand the rape is perpetrated as a form of protection for Mr. Bebe's illegal interaction with the girls, in the case he will be charged or prosecuted for performing the illegal abortion, and as an extra-cinematic tool. Mungiu never explains what is the nature of the relationship between the two young women and why Otilia goes through this ordeal.

In *Bacalaureat* the abuse that Eliza goes through is built in a similar manner, with a continuing accumulation of unexplainable acts. Again, a powerful scene illustrates the mechanism. Romeo comes to the Police station and, as he enters the room, we overhear the head of the Police talking to Eliza, trying to convince her of something, persuading her to make a decision. When the father enters the frame he sees Make and Eliza discussing and asks them what is going on. His "friend" tell him that they were "just talking", while Eliza clearly looks scared, fixating her father with a reproachful gaze. Once more, the absent and suggested narrative becomes a source of meaning in a non-cinematic way, in the sense that it is not represented and the meaning-making tools of cinema are diverted in another direction.

Last but not least it is the final scene in which Romeo is alone, riding the bus in the night. He sits silently, and then he spots one of the men from the police line-up. Getting off the bus Romeo follows this man through the dark streets of Victoria (the industrial city where the movie was shot), and just like the darkness takes over the visual field, uncertainty fills the meaningful space of narration. We will never know who was breaking the windows of Romeo's apartment and the windscreen of his car, and we will never find out who was the attacker who raped his daughter. Romeo, the provincial doctor filled with moral dilemmas, is actually the one person who never passes the "maturity exam", whose existence proves to be a series of accumulated failures. And his story continues extra-cinematically, in the lives of real people in Romania.

We can conclude that *Bacalaureat* is an illustration of a "cinema which is not", a type of movie-making that is not taking place exclusively on the screen of the theater room, nor in the reality of the film itself, or outside in the social and political, but rather in the viewers mind. Through accumulated silences and non-cinematic representations, using indeterminate storytelling techniques and exploring the extra-cinematic space, the director places his viewers in an interval where meanings are formed without the intervention of the camera or the editing. In this sense Mungiu is definitely a **non-cinematic cinema-maker**.

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