

DOCTORATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THEATRE AND FILM ARTS

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Memory in Contemporary Romanian Film

The Ceaușescu Era and the 1989 Revolution in Post-communist Romanian Films

Theses of Doctoral Dissertation



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My short film *The Execution* is set in 1990 and tells the story of three children who repeatedly enact the execution of the Ceaușescus.

The film can be watched at the link below:

<https://vimeo.com/95861116>

code: execution2014

While making the film, I was confronted with the challenge of portraying this historical moment authentically, a process that sparked my interest in contemporary Romanian films that depict the socialist past and the revolution. In my Doctor of Liberal Arts degree I examine the ways in which post-1989 Romanian films approach this period. I start from the assumption that in the depiction of a historical period the story, the nature of the conflicts depicted, the characterisation and the style and tone of the depiction are particularly important. I examine a corpus of films from these points of view. Collectively, I term them the approach to the past. **I reached the conclusion - this is the first thesis of my dissertation - that Romanian New Wave Cinema has developed a new approach to the past that can be distinguished from classicist and allegorical approaches to the past and which is characterised by a directness in its depiction, and that, furthermore, it depicts the past regime through the medium of microstories.** While studying the characters in Romanian historical films, I noticed that patriarchal figures have a particular importance in them, and that a very special approach to the past can be identified in the way these characters are depicted. **The second thesis of my dissertation is that the uncertainty of the relationship to the past is reflected in the uncertainty surrounding the patriarchal figures.**

After examining these contemporary Romanian films, I outline the decisions I took while making my own film, and I seek an answer to the question of what affects the various traditions had on *The Execution*. **My third thesis is that the impact of new Romanian films is demonstrably present in *The Execution*.** My dissertation is not a work of film history, but a subjective selection: it examines several approaches whose influence can be identified in my thesis film. It does not attempt to examine every historical short film made since the regime change.

This dissertation is structured as follows:

The thesis is divided along the lines of the various approaches examined.

My opening chapter addresses Pintilie's work *The Oak* (1992). In this chapter I attempt briefly to summarise certain characteristic elements of the stylisation used in Pintilie's film. Using these elements, I argue that the film uses an allegorical model for addressing the past: an approach that indirectly, using metaphors and especially allegories discusses the previous regime, highlighting the stylisation of the story and the characters.

Other films in this corpus are some that take a classicising approach to the past, using the rules of classical narrative and the conventions of realism to evoke the previous regime, thereby depicting openly and indirectly the conflict between the individual and the past. This type of film is examined in the second chapter, which looks at Andrei Gruzniczki's work *Quod erat* (2013). I argue that Gruzniczki's work differs significantly and decisively in its approach to the past from Pintilie's film and its allegorical approach, and also from the minimalistic directness of Romanian New Wave films. Gruzniczki's film is also unique because it was made after the Romanian New Wave films, in 2013, and is not in any kind of dialogue with that school.

The third chapter looks at the films referred to as Romanian New wave films, and which in my analysis depict the past regime using microdramas, individuals and their conflicts, avoiding tropes and indirection, taking a realistic and minimalist approach. I examine these films in two chapters: I distinguish the films about the period of state socialism from films about the revolution. With regard to the film *The Revolutionaries*, I discuss works on the theory of memory, because this film thematically addresses communicative memory and its difficulties while evoking memories.

After looking at long films, I examine a particular genre in the evocation of the past: re-enactment. Re-enactment is not without precedent in Romanian films: Pintilie's 1969 *Reconstruction* is a re-enactment for example. The fourth chapter seeks an answer to the question of what tools re-enactment can use to evoke the past and how it can be imagined in the framework of a work of fiction. This question interested me because my film is also a re-enactment, told through the medium of a family drama. I used two films to examine re-enactments: Milo Rau's *Last Days of the Ceausescus* and Ileana Botea's *Auditions for a Revolution*. Re-enactment is a particularly exciting form of remembering because it gives a shape to the past, and since it is a self-reflective genre, authors as well as actors, which is to say the reenactors' relationship to the past is presented. While the reenactor attempts to reenact perfectly, this never works fully because nothing can be the same twice, meaning the attempt is doomed to fail: there will always be a discrepancy between the two levels - past and present - out of which something new emerges.

One of the important claims of my thesis is that the films in question clearly show in their relationship to the past and the figure of Ceaușescu a kind of depiction centred on father figures who represent a kind of patriarchal authority. By *patriarchal figure* I mean figures with authority. Power can emerge from social hierarchies or microstructures like families. These figures appear in most of the period's films, but, on the one hand smaller distinctions are decisive in distinguishing the different from approaches to each other, and on the other in the films of the Romanian New Wave Cinema, they are given a very particular significance. I was inspired by Doru Pop's claim that patriarchal figures are deprived of their authority. Pop sees this process as a grammatical element of contemporary Romanian cinema.¹ I did not address Freudian or Lacanian analysis of the symbolic father in my thesis, but in summary form it can be stated that most patriarchal figures in Romanian films are prohibitive, forbidding fathers. In one instance I used the term "anal father", introduced by Žižek: in contrast to the Freudian prohibitive father, the anal father ordains pleasure, making him oppressive or even dangerous. This type can only be identified in *Tales from the Golden Age*. I devote a separate section, the fifth chapter, to this topic, in which I argue that the myth of Ceaușescu and the father figure he represents make such patriarchal figures especially important in representations of the previous regime. In order to do this, I attempt to describe Ceaușescu's symbolic father figure and the continuation of the patriarchal regime. I also explain how these patriarchal figures appear in the films.

In the sixth chapter, I explain my own authorial decisions, and attempt thereby to show the impacts of the period, of the narratives and stylistic approaches of the Romanian New Wave Cinema, on occasional contrasting them.

Work relating to the theme: *The Execution*

Previous work relating to the theme: 2009 dissertation for the scriptwriting MA at the SZFE University.

¹ Pop: *The Grammar of the New Romanian Cinema*, 11.o.