

## FILM AS A METHOD OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH: A LABORATORY FOR POST-MODERN PRACTICES

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**ABSTRACT.** This article posits that cinematic language should be reconsidered and validated as a means of research in the scientific world. It should no longer be seen as simply a disseminator of information, but also as a means of investigating reality. The new trends in cinema, specifically fiction-documentaries use various methods to investigate reality. These methods could be useful in a broader sense, namely in cross-disciplinary scientific research. The postmodern approach to the notion of complexity or narrative knowledge creates a favorable framework for a paradigm shift concerning the analytical and quantifying method of scientific research. Cinema as a medium can be used as a tool and an invisible technology capable of shaping our ideas.

**Key words:** *artistic research, cinema, caméra-stylo, complexity, postmodernism*

*Descartes of today would already have shut himself up in his bedroom with a 16mm camera and some film, and would be writing his philosophy on film: for his *Discours de la Méthode* would today be of such a kind that only the cinema could express it satisfactorily.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

Alexandre Astruc, one of the French New Wave directors and theorists, wrote his manifesto *La Caméra-stylo* about 70 years ago. He stands for the fact that cinema has the ability to use abstract concepts with almost rational accuracy. This is not an entirely new theory, as it started with the well-known editing theories of Soviet directors and has since gradually developed in the field of avant-garde films. Astruc's assertion is, however, remarkable due to the analogy he makes between

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandre Astruc, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: *La Caméra-Stylo*", in *The New Wave*, ed. Peter Graham. Translated from *Ecran Français* 144, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1948, p.20.

film and Descartes's work *Discours de la Méthode* ("Discourse on Method"), which is deemed the starting point of rationalism in modern philosophy. From the perspective of positivism, cinema as a part of the art field has the capacity to communicate subjective impressions rather than to postulate objective fundamental truths. However, the connection between Cartesian philosophy and film is not accidental in Astruc's text, and his message refers precisely to the paradox engendered by extending the methods used in the study of the natural sciences on human behavior. In other words, Astruc claims that film is a method for investigating reality through complex language and that it should be used in scientific research.

Film could be more than mere documentation in the sense of filmed evidence or testimony and could do more than just promote the results of scientific research through expository documentaries. With its creative outlook, cinema could become a research tool in itself, a complementary method in the techniques of human research if the pride of scientific positivism only allowed it. At present, the field of film studies is subsumed under art theories and pertains to the general field of ART. Nevertheless, the role of art has always shifted according to the social and cognitive paradigms in which it developed. The aim of this article is not to banish the art of cinema from its territory, but to draw attention to the new trends in the methods directors use in their artistic research. The Postmodern era gives creative practices in the field of audiovisual arts the opportunity to become part of a broader vision, which is cross-disciplinary scientific research.

Why has Astruc's visionary theory not materialized over the past half century? Film is less present in scientific research than it should be. The reason why both scientific and artistic activities are confined to their own borders and do not seek to be cross-disciplinary, can be found in the philosophical conceptions of Modernism.

### **1. Modernism versus Postmodernism: the coexistence of different perspectives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

The term Postmodernism or Postmodernity is used both as a strictly theoretical term in the field of aesthetics and as a vague one, describing the contemporary cultural scene. In this article, the term Postmodernism refers rather to the philosophical field. Therefore, instead of a single, univocal definition, the multiple perspectives of some of its theorists will bring forward the characteristics of this changing, so-called postmodern world. Their arguments will support the thesis that cinematic language should be reconsidered in the scientific world not only as disseminating information but also as a means to investigate reality.

Postmodernism, as Matei Călinescu sees it, is a face of modernity, the value of this notion being metaphorical rather than of historical categorization.<sup>2</sup> Even if he is not a clear follower of Postmodernism, his position being quite critical of postmodern concepts, his arguments regarding periodization and the use of the term *postmodern times* are valid, as long as the two concepts (Modernism and Postmodernism) ideologically coexist. Jean-François Lyotard considers that Postmodernism is related to the theory of historical progress and to the conception of a cognitive superpower held by science. For him, Postmodernism is a disbelief in the *grand narratives* put forward by Modernism, an abundance of *micro-narratives* found in a *language-game* between systems in which the relation between them is what generates meaning.<sup>3</sup> Zygmunt Bauman prefers to call these trends *solid modernity* (Modernism) and *liquid modernity* (Postmodernism). In his opinion, the horrors of the crimes of the Second World War are due to the ideology of *solid modernity* in its intention to standardize human nature. The emergence of *liquid modernity* creates the chance to escape the strictness of Modernism and revalues the world.<sup>4</sup> Concerning the significance of things, a complete understanding of the human mind is impossible, says Baudrillard. Human subjects can try to understand non-human objects, because the object can be understood through what it means to man. However, man cannot signify his own self, at the same time subject and object of the signification. Humanity is always in search of a total understanding of the world and yet the meaning remains permanently hidden.

Although Postmodernism was theorized mainly during the 1970s-1990s and generally defined in opposition to Modernism, the coexistence of the two paradigms continues to this day due to the persistence of many ideas that are tributary to modernism. In his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Samuel Kuhn defines scientific progress not as an accumulation of knowledge, as Modernism sees it, but as a continuous paradigm shift. The paradigm to which Kuhn refers is the totality of the notions held by a scientific community at any one point. When a significant number of anomalies appear within a paradigm, which cannot be explained by notions accepted unanimously, the scientific discipline is in a state of crisis and eventually a new paradigm forms. Then a battle takes place between the holders of the old paradigm and the followers of the new paradigm.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Matei Călinescu, *Cinci fețe ale modernității. Modernism, avangardă, decadență, kitch, postmodernism*, trad. Tatiana Pătrulescu, Radu Țurcanu, Polirom, 2005.p. 300.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translation by Geoff Bennington, Brian Massumi, Manchester University Press, UK, 1984, Passim.

<sup>4</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1970, Passim.

Neil Postman, author of the book *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, analyzes the current problems facing the contemporary society from the perspective of the legacy of modernity. What he calls *Technopoly* is a state of modern and contemporary society, which both Modernism and Postmodernism are related to. The emergence of high tech is not an unconditional blessing, he asserts. Science per se is not responsible for this distorted image of Technopoly that dates back to Modernism, nor is it responsible for the apocalyptic vision that Postmodernism has now. The problem lies in the role and the moral authority that have been assigned to science since the modernist period. Scientism contains the germs of three equivocal ideas that have led to the forced expansion of the boundaries of natural science, says Postman. The first is that natural science can also be applied to human behavior. The second is that social science generates principles that can be used to organize society on a rational human basis, and the third one is that science can serve as a belief system that can give meaning to life, a sense of well-being or morality.<sup>6</sup>

In a culture where technology is a metaphor for control, subjectivity becomes profoundly unacceptable, the diversity, complexity and ambiguity of human judgment are the enemies of technology. Technopoly, as Postman says, wants to solve the issue of subjectivity for good through technology, which as a tool of progress, would approach the dilemma of subjectivity by transforming psychology, sociology and anthropology into sciences in which humanity itself becomes an object.<sup>7</sup> Postmodern ideas do not help find a new sense of humanity. They are rather the consciousness of a complex organism, which some say is sick or in a state of crisis; others, who are more optimistic, consider it a new paradigm or a new perspective.

### ***Historical landmarks in postmodern ideology***

In the 1950s, sociological theorists proclaimed the emergence of a post-industrial society in which information and knowledge are the underlying principles.<sup>8</sup> The issue of having control over information and cultural assets, the experience of changing space and time, the political consequences of new communication technologies, all these current and vital things in our social and political life define our time. As long as we are in the middle of the transformation process, a clear description of what is happening is no easy feat, because the whole landscape is undergoing rapid innovation and continuous adaptation. To figure out the perspectives

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<sup>6</sup> Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Vintage Books Edition, New York, 1993, p.147.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 158.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*, Basic Books, New York, 1999, Passim.

philosophers have on Postmodernism, we have to look in hindsight and see what happened during the historical period to which the scholars refer. We cannot draw up a clear periodization of Postmodernism or a temporal distinction between Modernism and Postmodernism. However, during this time society has seen major changes, mainly due to technological progress, which, of course, led to a reframing of the existing notions from a cultural, philosophical and scientific point of view.

*Cybernetics* brought to the fore the notions of complexity, interconnectivity and feedback. In addition, it pushed the boundaries of exploration from galaxies to subatomic components on the verge of infinity. The impact of Actor-Network Theory and Latour's work on the new media lies not only in rejecting the paradigm of objectivist science, but also in the methodology it proposes. For him the interaction between people and machine should be regarded as a chain of causes and effects in which the more a technological project progresses, the smaller the role of technology in relative terms becomes.<sup>9</sup> The *Moravec paradox* is a theory that emerged in the 1980s and derives its name from Hans Peter Moravec. Moravec noticed that artificial intelligence is capable of solving logical operations that transcend human intelligence, but it is extremely difficult for it to do simple operations that even a three-year old could do. That is because many systems seem simple, but are in fact of remarkable complexity. Others seem complex but can be described in simple terms. The brain, natural language, and social systems are all examples of complex things, asserts Paul Chilliers, who has a background in engineering. He explains complexity and the postmodern social network by drawing a parallel between the human brain, computer, and society, all being complex systems that operate based on a language of communication. In his book *Complexity & Postmodernism: Understanding Complex Systems*, he offers an integrative vision echoing Lyotard's idea of interweaving micro-narratives whereby he places the micro-narratives within a complex system of social functioning. He also posits that the analytical method that science has used so far does not work when approaching complex systems.<sup>10</sup>

In a complex system, however, the interaction between the constituents of a system and the interaction between the system and the exterior are such that the system as a whole cannot be fully understood by simply analyzing its components. Moreover, these relationships are not fixed, but they slip and change often as a result of self-organization. Complex systems have a history. Not only do they evolve over time, but their past is co-responsible for their present behavior. Any analysis of a complex system that ignores the temporal dimension is incomplete. The

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Dewdney, Peter Ride, *The New Media Handbook*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 302.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Chilliers, *Complexity & Postmodernism: Understanding Complex Systems*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, pp.VIII-IX.

element within the system is not aware of the behavior of the system as a whole, and it is only responsible for the information that is locally available to it. This is extremely vital and important. If each element knew what was going on with the system as a whole, all the complexity of the system would be present in that element. Complexity is the result of a rich interaction between simple elements. The distinction between complex and simple often becomes a function of our distance from the system.<sup>11</sup>

The obsession to find one essential truth blinds us to the relationary nature of complexity, and especially to the continuous shifting of those relationships. Any acknowledgement of complexity will have to incorporate these shifts and changes, not as epiphenomena, but as constitutive of complex systems.<sup>12</sup>

Given this succinct description of a complex system it would be easy to associate it with the socio-human behavior. Whether we like it or not, we cannot deny that the world we live in is complex and that we must face this complexity if we are to survive, let alone prosper. If Chilliars has enough arguments to show that the contemporary society is a complex system carrying a great deal of unknown and Baudrillard states that it cannot be fully understood, then how do we approach it to understand its meaning?

## **2. The role of cinema in the age of information**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century looks like a huge cross-media network, a service that carries the messages of the social body. It establishes the meaning of life, it creates and promotes links between individuals or between individuals and society. The information we receive is carried by light waves, is airborne, travels through optical cables and satellites. It flows through all kinds of storage media. For Neil Postman, information has become a useless leftover that is not only unable to answer the fundamental questions of human nature, but even struggles with providing coherent guidance for everyday problems. Information targets no one in particular, but is sent out at high speed and in huge volumes, apparently at random, purposelessly and meaninglessly. This is an unlikely world, in which the purpose is not to reduce ignorance, superstition and suffering, but to adjust incessantly to the demands of new technologies.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, pp.2-3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p.112.

<sup>13</sup> Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Vintage Books Edition, New York, 1993, pp. 68-70.

If we define ideology as the sum of assumptions – albeit only halfway acknowledged – that direct our efforts to bestow meaning and coherence on the world, then the most powerful ideological instrument is language itself. Language is pure ideology.<sup>14</sup> Postman both finds the cause of this state of affairs and looks for a solution in the language issue. It structurally changes our way of thinking. However, rejecting innovation, scientific breakthroughs, and technology is not a solution. Every technological invention is a blessing and a burden at the same time.<sup>15</sup>

When Alexandre Astruc announced his thesis, the cinematic language was still in the hands of a small elite of professionals. When audiovisual technologies allow for the widespread use of film writing and the diversification of its own language, all the possibilities of using it blossom. In a culture that is increasingly based on the moving-image information, cinema as ART has not been relegated to the corners of the traditional genres practiced before. While audiences need to be taught by using the classical grammar of editing, artists explore both new technology and new forms of film practice that lead to the articulation of their ideas. In one of his writings, published about the same time as Astruc's essay, *Challenge and Collapse: The Nemesis of Creativity*, Marshal McLuhan talks about the wreckage of contemporary society due to new media technologies and about the role of art in restoring balance.

The new media and Technologies by which we amplify and extend ourselves constitute huge collective surgery carried out on the social body with complete disregard for antiseptics...No society has ever known enough about its actions to have developed immunity to its new extensions or technologies. Today we have begun to sense that art may be able to provide such immunity.<sup>16</sup>

He also talks about the role of artists who, irrespective of the field, whether scientific or humanistic, are able to understand the involvement of their actions and of new knowledge. He deems them people of integral consciousness. Artists have noticed sideslips in cinematography ever since the era of silent films and made theoretical observations about them in the *Futurist Cinematography Manifesto* and the writings of Vladimir Mayakovski in *Kino-Fot* magazine, among others.

ONE MUST FREE THE CINEMA AS AN EXPRESSIVE MEDIUM in order to make it the ideal instrument of a new art, immensely vaster and lighter than all the existing arts.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 123.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p.4.

<sup>16</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The extension of Man*, Ginko Press, Corte Madera, CA, 2003, p.95.

<sup>17</sup> F.T. Marinetti, Bruno Corra, Emilio Settimelli, Arnaldo Ginna, Giacomo Balla, Remo Chiti, "The Futurist Cinema" (1916), translation by R. W. Flint [online] [http://soma.sbccc.edu/users/DaVega/FILMST\\_113/Filmst113\\_ExFilm\\_Movements/Futurism/F](http://soma.sbccc.edu/users/DaVega/FILMST_113/Filmst113_ExFilm_Movements/Futurism/F), last accessed on 09.07.2011.

... money by stirring the heart with whining little tales. We must put end to this.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the history of cinema, there have been artistic trends that constantly opposed the mainstream cinema, which speculates archetypal stories dictated by the market. Avant-garde films, Underground Film, The New American Cinema, almost all of them, with few exceptions, moved away from the notion of narratives, abstracting cinematic language to a fault (in the period of abstract avant-garde and Dada films), but also going towards the poetic or essayistic genre. Moving away from storytelling, cinema is pushing the boundaries of fine arts and is taking to the art galleries. This shift from *black box* to *white cube* mainly targets a narrower, well-informed, art-consuming audience. Non-narrative films, although enjoying an audience of their own, have crossed paths with narrative films particularly in the documentary area. While the cinematic language has developed by experiencing different forms of expression, the film audience has developed expectations that are more diverse when it comes to the narrative. The concept of author cinema, which came with the French New Wave, is preferable to a story built on pre-established film recipes. Therefore, the *method* used in approaching a theme takes precedence over the theme itself. Thus, the shift from a cinema of speculation to a cinema of truth, which futurists have been waiting for, can occur without avoiding or ignoring the narrative. The next pages will analyze some successful examples of Romanian cinema that have opened new research directions concerning the narrative film.

### **2.1 Artistic research in the New Romanian Cinema**

There is an interesting aspect about the films that have been successful at European festivals lately, namely the fact that they value the expansion of film language practices, of the genres and methods used in approaching a topic. Technological and social changes have also left a mark on cinema. Interconnectivity and the virtual world have recently become integral parts of festivals, whereas the boundaries of traditional genres are disappearing. The distinction between documentary and fiction is now unnecessary since it has been shown that documentary films have no absolute objectivity, while fiction films seek to reflect reality.

On this fertile ground, Romanian films made after the 1990s have found international recognition among the most important European trends. Under the aegis of the Romanian New Wave, a number of Romanian directors received international acclaim despite the harsh conditions of having to survive on a low

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<sup>18</sup> *THE FILM FACTORY. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited By Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, Routledge, London and New York, 1988, p. 75.



budget. What is surprising is the fact that the Romanian film is still “on a roll” and is now reaching beyond the themes and aesthetics of the Romanian New Wave (long plans, unity of time and space, minimalist realistic style).

Is there a distinguishable common element that has managed to pique the interest of the critical apparatus in the field? Certainly, there is no magic bullet when it comes to success. However, we might look into the following three aspects: firstly, a combination between fiction and documentary film; secondly, the authorial expression, and thirdly, the variety of methods used to build the story. These are the three ideas that we will analyze next, drawing on films that use methods of research that go beyond the purely artistic field.

### 2.1.1 *The Romanian New Wave* - an expression of the Romanian reality during the transition period. Case study: Cristi Puiu, *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu*

We could say that the Romanian New Wave has already exhausted its debates, as numerous film critics have analyzed it over the past decade or so. After the fall of Communism, when reality had to be transformed and reinterpreted according to its ideological parameters, the desire to express and reflect the reality was so strong that the fictional screenplay seemed, as they rightly say, “a slice of real life”. The films depict fragments of social aspects from the transition period, sometimes ironically and critically. During these historical times, there was no market for entertainment cinema, so this kind of mass cultural background did not exist. Of all the names associated with this type of cinema, the director Cristi Puiu is “considered the great revelation of the 2000s and the terrible child of the Romanian post-revolutionary film”.<sup>19</sup> His debut feature film, “*Marfa și banii*” (*Stuff and Dough*), was selected at Cannes in 2001 and the short film “*Un cartuș de Kent și un pachet de cafea*” (*Cigarettes and Coffee*) won best short film prize at the 2004 Berlin International Film Festival. His second full length feature film, “*Moartea domnului Lăzărescu*” (*The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu*) won the prize “Un Certain Regard” at the Cannes Film Festival (2006) and represents the emblem of the Romanian New Wave. Based on a real story, the script written by Cristi Puiu together with Răzvan Rădulescu is filmed in the manner of documentary films, an image that rather captures a reality and does not show a staging. The camera follows the characters as if it didn’t know beforehand what is going to happen next. Sometimes the action continues out of the frame only to be reframed later with the purpose of suggesting real-time camerawork.<sup>20</sup> Cristi Puiu affirms and

<sup>19</sup> Laurențiu Bratan, „Copilul teribil al filmului românesc”, apud Mihai Fulger, „Noul val” în cinematografia românească, Grup editorial Art, București, 2006, p.60.

<sup>20</sup> A documentary made by Andreea Păduraru and published in 2009 under the title “The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu - Making-of” shows how Cristi Puiu guides his Director of Photography, Oleg Mutu, in order to achieve the feel of a documentary film.

takes on his close connection to the documentary film. He claims that as a director, he draws on largely on documentary films and that as far as he is concerned, there is no border between fiction and documentary, and that cinema is larger than the story, it is the vision of an author about the world.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.1.2 New aesthetics, new research methods. Case study: Radu Jude, *I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarian*

The Romanian film has stayed in the limelight due to numerous other awards received by various authors who, more or less, kept the stylistic boundaries of the New Wave. Ten years on, the aesthetics are changing and so is the Romanian cinema, as new authorial voices emerge. One of the new directors with an impressive track record is Radu Jude. He puts forward a different methodological and stylistic perspective, but his films inhabit the same border between documentary and fiction. Fascinated by history and archives, Radu Jude creatively looks at history, always relying on rigorous documentation on the topics addressed. He often challenges historical events and raises questions about their interpretation, thus seeking to unveil the truth from various sources. His latest production, the movie "*Imi este indiferent dacă vom intra în istorie ca barbari*" (*I Do Not Care if We Go Down In History as Barbarians*) received the Grand Prize, the Crystal Globe, at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 2018. The film presents the story of a historical reconstruction of a street show based on the massacre of the Jewish population in Odessa by the Romanian troops during the Second World War. Under the pretext of a story within the story, the author chooses a clever way of inserting quotations from historical and philosophical writings on the topic at hand. Moreover, he makes an X-ray of the reactions coming from the contemporary Romanian society on the topic, while placing himself in an admirably objective position. He depicts with cynicism both sides: opinions echoing anti-Semitism, as well as positions trying to hide these unwanted facts, thus managing to reveal a historical truth that we do not want to acknowledge.

Radu Jude makes a creative synthesis between these three perspectives: historical, social and philosophical when it comes to the Odessa pogrom. The story thread is woven around the documentation process behind the show that is about to be staged in the film, which, instead of rehashing the clichés of a politically distorted history, tries to unearth the truth from the archives. The three perspectives mentioned above are narratively related to the young director Mariana Marin played by Ioana Iacob, the author's spokesperson in the film. Through the film's protagonist, Radu Jude creatively and uniquely reveals the sources that really document the October 1941

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<sup>21</sup> Mihai Fulger, „*Noul val*” în *cinematografia românească*, pp. 51-59.

event. These include war journalists like Isaac Babel, Günter Gaus, Mihail Sebastian, along with historians and political scientists like Raul Hilberg or Hannah Ardennt who, with the help of video and photo archives, strengthen the scientific clout of the message. An objective perspective of the event comes from the scientific approach provided by the indisputable testimonies included. Metaphorical and artistic methods further enhance the objective evidence provided by loading the message with emotion. Mixed feelings about the fear of confrontation with guilt are reinforced by the scene where the protagonist decides to have an abortion.

### 2.1.3 New aesthetics, new research methods. Case study: Adina Pintilie, the project "Touch Me Not - Body policies"

Adina Pintilie, a young voice in the Romanian cinema, sees her film *Touch me not* as research on intimacy. In 2018, the film received the Golden Bear award for best debut film at the Berlin Film Festival, and the Discovery Award at the European Film Awards. The film was distributed in over 39 countries and screened by prestigious institutions around the world. Although it has a controversial subject, which pushes viewers out of their comfort zone, Adina Pintilie's film has received wide acclaim: "Both clinical and radically humane, inscrutable and beautifully straightforward, scripted and unimpeachably real" (*Indiewire*)<sup>22</sup>, "Intimate, profound, not just a movie, but a journey of self-knowledge" (*Kino Zeit*)<sup>23</sup>, or "a revolutionary approach to the true nature of sexuality" (*La Vanguardia*).<sup>24</sup>

The project is a European co-produced docu-fiction based on preliminary research that took almost five years. Drawing on the practices of documentary films, the author creates a set of circumstances rather than a script in which she along with the protagonists – two actors and four real characters –, talk about vulnerabilities, anxiety and sexuality. In fact, it is an in-depth investigation of feelings carried out in a confessional manner, similar to the therapeutic methods used in psychology. The authenticity of the dialogues achieved through this method demolishes the border between documentary and fiction. The film thus becomes an immersive experience in which the camera connects the story to the audience, and that accounts for a remarkable aesthetic feature meant to do away with the idea of fiction. "Propelled by intuition, emotion and philosophical inquiry rather than by plot, Pintilie's debut feature is a semi-documentary essay exploring what it means – how it feels, why it matters – to dwell inside a body." (*New York Times*).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.indiewire.com/2018/03/touch-me-not-review-adina-pintilie-berlin-international-film-festival-2018-1201939766/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.kino-zeit.de/film-kritiken-trailer/touch-me-not-2018>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20180222/44985908041/touch-me-not-berlinale.html>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/09/movies/touch-me-not-review.html>

Breaking the boundaries of human intimacy, *Touch me not* is of unquestionable cultural achievement due primarily to its aesthetic; it exhibits the qualities of a work of art, capable of producing meaning. At the same time, it marks a turning point in the reevaluation of the idea of cinema. Adina Pintilie's film is just the tip of the iceberg, a small but most significant part of the entire process: dozens of hours spent doing video journals, field research, gathering information on the topic, finding the right characters, and of course, finding the backbone of the film, which is her unique method of investigation.

The fact that the outcome of the entire endeavor is not just the movie makes it difficult to classify a research project that goes beyond the artistic field. The author proposes a wide range of debates around the film, which are hosted by cultural centers throughout Romania as well as abroad. The public debates entitled "*Touch me not: the body's policies*" are meant to open a space for dialogue on personal freedom, gender fluidity and non-normative beauty. It is addressed not only to the general public, but above all to the academia. Some of the partners to the project are Palais des Beaux Arts Brussels, Harvard University, Columbia University New York, York University in Toronto, and Stockholm University of the Arts, as well as six university centers in Romania. The aim of this impressive tour of public debates, which started in the fall of 2019, is to step out of the cinema hall and the cultural entertainment sphere it evokes and take to the *Aula Magna* of universities or the *Agora* of postmodern cities. The author is aware of the fact that she is reporting an acute problem of our society. In the context of a global culture where information travels fast, intolerance exhibited towards what is different or misunderstood, can become a source of extremist manifestations. Adina Pintilie considers that the source of aggression, fear and intolerance are the imbalances and conflicts stemming from intimacy.

By going inside, you can change things not only in yourself, but implicitly in the relationship with the Other and at the community level. Intimacy, the body becoming implicitly political. (Adina Pintilie)

Her project brings together various human typologies, as well as cases from various fields that have a common interest: to explore their own intimacy in-depth and cross the boundaries imposed by society, as well as the self-imposed ones. Laura Benson, a French-British actress and acting professor, has specialized in personal development workshops. Tomas Lemarquis, actor of Icelandic-French origin explores shamanic practices and alternative therapies combining spiritual research with artistic experimentation. Hanna Hofmann, a transgender activist from Germany, at the age of 50, decides to work as an escort besides her regular job. Seani Love, a specialist in Urban Tantra Counseling has supported many people in body awareness work, self-love and sexual expression. Cristian Bayerlein and Grit Uhlemann are life

partners, vocal advocates for the rights of people with disabilities and their integration into the broader community; their work focuses mainly on the relationship between bullying and disability. During the debates, both the protagonists of the film and the production team enter a dialogue with the audience and share their own experience. The purpose of these meetings hosted by prestigious institutions is not to enter the scientific community with an art film that combines psychology with spiritual practices. The project invites the academic community to contribute to an orchestrated action to change prejudice and to optimize social and personal relationships. Adina Pintilie's project is not the only one of its kind. Approaching a particular phenomenon through several languages, means or methods is typical of postmodern thinking.

### 3. Conclusion

To claim that cinema can serve as scientific research is far-fetched for the time being due to the high degree of subjectivism involved, the possibility of multiple interpretations and the irregular methods it uses. However, if we consider a widely used Chinese saying, namely that an image is worth a thousand words, it may be plausible to validate the use of cinematography as a complementary and auxiliary method in certain types of research.

For example, Adina Pintilie's film reaches its goal through method, not story. Prior research and the technique used when working with the actors (professionals and non-professionals) made it possible for the spiritual and transformative dimension of *Touch Me Not* to become a means capable of bringing about change. Radu Jude's film is a *synthesis* of three fields (history, philosophy, sociology) describing the collective trauma caused by the events in Odessa. The analytical method of scientific research would have been unable to do this without using a stubborn horizontal development. Although they do not claim that their work is scientific research, the purpose is the same: to find the *truth*. The emotional load achieved by the authors through cinematic means can be a tool that paves the way to understanding a particular topic.

Both authors pursue the deconstruction of the idea of fiction in the sense of suspending disbelief. In the opening of *I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians* Ioana Iacob introduces herself in front of the camera as an actress who is going to play the role of the director and she also mentions her fellow actors. Even if during the film there are no glimpses into what is going on behind the camera, this debut raises awareness to the fact that the audience is witnessing a journalistic creation / research process and not simply watching a story and sympathizing with the main character's drama.

*Touch Me Not*, on the other hand, invites the audience to take part in a foray into human intimacy as seen by the author, but not by identifying with the leading character. The image of the assembling and disassembling of the camera at the beginning and at the end of the film is symbolic. A sophisticated aesthetic machine, assembled routinely in a white space, like a medical device, it mirrors the portrait of the director. This hybrid android will be the interface of the dialogue between director and spectator, director and characters, characters and spectator. In the end, with the same meticulous gestures, this embodied android will disappear as it taken apart piece by piece. This original way of engaging the audience with the film is also the research method used to approach the actors psychologically. Whether professional or amateurs, the actors are the focus of a confessional dialogue that is as close to reality as possible. Pictures that capture the moments behind the cameras are inserted into the narrative with the aim of reminding us that the process of staging the film is actually a means of investigating reality. The presence of the director in the film as a mediator between realities, as well as in front of the camera, changing the places with the main character, transforms the film into a fictional reality that gives meaning to the message conveyed. Adina Pintilie deliberately undergoes the same scrutiny that as all the other characters, in order to emphasize the feeling of being judged. *What would it be like if you were in my shoes?* is the question she wants to underline. As a spectator, one is under the impression that the lens could turn towards them at any one point.

Based on Rudolf Arnheim's claim that film, like music, literature and dance, is a medium of expression and does not necessarily have to produce art forms<sup>26</sup>, a clear distinction should be made between the types of films that might be invoked as examples and those which are excluded from the beginning. Besides the idea that cinema is a medium of entertainment based on a story stemming from the artist's imagination, we have now seen in the examples above that there are authors whose creative method consists in using concrete sources, scientific theories, sociological or psychological observations, historical documents, etc. in a personal, unique way, to give them meaning or understanding.

Upon a closer look at documentary film or hybrid derivatives between these genres that use storytelling in a process of investigating the real, we might ask the question: Do they have the right to place themselves in the paradoxical position of being both art and scientific research?

The use of several methods in acquiring knowledge and finding out the truth was part of the global philosophical understanding held by the ancient Greeks. There are different questions that require different answers that science is incapable of giving. For example: What is death and suffering? What is the soul? How should we

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<sup>26</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1957 (1997), p.8.

think? In all these, the analytical and quantifying method of natural science fails. Metaphor, imaginative literature and art, along with social knowledge, all give us examples of human archetypes. We need stories to create behavioral landmarks. They represent our awareness of who we are.

The exacerbation of the scientific method specific to the modern era turns philosophy into a weak voice, which accepts the guardianship of rational science. The technology of science, like the rest of the world we live in, changes the relationship between science and philosophy in a radical way. All rules and regulations are made with the intention to remove the uncomfortable feeling of uncertainty caused by the unknown and to try to reduce all the chaotic aspects of human nature to a table. In scientific analysis, if something is too complex to be understood as a whole, it is broken down into smaller units that can be analyzed and then reassembled. A complex system, on the other hand, consists not only of a sum of components, but also of the complex and intricate relationships between these parts. In the process of partitioning or disassembling the system, the analytical method destroys precisely what needs to be understood, namely the relationships between components.<sup>27</sup>

The situation facing *Postmodernism* has its roots in the conceptions of *Modernism* and is directly linked to the unilateral scientific approach to the fundamental problems of human existence. Scientific knowledge comes into contrast with a more general type of understanding, the one that Lyotard calls *narrative knowledge*.

Indeed, there are many questions, so far unanswered, regarding the development of artificial intelligence and its spread in a complex form that penetrates all human manifestations. What consequences will this have on human behavior? What is our communication language now? These are questions that require a complete understanding of the complexity of language and the management of a huge amount of information. In this era of information, the audiovisual dominates the communication systems and even the learning systems. For this reason, McLuhan's famous sentence, "The medium is the message" can be used to open the path for understanding the importance of this "invisible technology" that we use in shaping our ideas.

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Chilliers, *Complexity & Postmodernism: Understanding Complex Systems*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, pp.1-2.

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