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Towards New Definitions of Eastern and Central European Cinematic Social Realism

Keywords:
social realism;
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socialist realism

Abstract
The article addresses the issue of defining social realism within the context of Eastern and Central European cinema. Although this region's cinema has long been associated with films that combine social issues with the conventions of realism, a definition that encompasses the local specificity of its film traditions, as well as historical, political, and social contexts, has yet to be established. The author provides an overview of how the term 'social realism' is used in English-language books on the cinema of this region by Eastern European scholars and tests the applicability of Western concepts in the context of Eastern Europe. She identifies key features that determine regional distinctiveness, such as the legacy of socialist realism, the tradition of 'double coding' in film, and local cinematic phenomena. The author concludes by advocating for greater collaboration among regional scholars on research projects to develop new, context-specific theories.

Słowa kluczowe:
realizm społeczny;
kino Europy Wschodniej
i Środkowej;
socrealizm

Abstrakt

Ku nowym definicjom realizmu społecznego w kinie Europy Wschodniej i Środkowej

Artykuł dotyczy problemu definiowania realizmu społecznego w kontekście kina Europy Wschodniej i Środkowej. Choć kinematografie tego regionu obfitują w filmy łączące kwestie społeczne z konwencją realistyczną, wciąż nie ma wypracowanych definicji, które odpowiadałyby lokalnej specyfice tradycji filmowej oraz historycznym, politycznym czy społecznym kontekstom. Autorka dokonuje przeglądu wykorzystania kategorii „realizmu społecznego" w anglojęzycznej literaturze na temat kina regionu autorstwa wschodnioeuropejskich badaczy, a także weryfikuje zachodnie koncepcje pod kątem możliwości ich zastosowania w kontekście Europy Wschodniej. Wskazuje również cechy charakterystyczne dla regionalnej odrębności, takie jak dziedzictwo socrealizmu, tradycja „podwójnego kodowania" w filmie oraz lokalne zjawiska kinematograficzne. Jako rozwiązanie na przyszłość autorka wskazuje współpracę badaczy z regionu w ramach projektów badawczych pozwalających na opracowywanie nowych teorii.

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In attempting to grasp the nuances of understanding cinematic social realism as a category within both Western and Eastern European contexts and of applying its definitions to differing social realities, I usually recall two anecdotes. The first concerns misunderstanding, and the other a sense of familiarity. The first anecdote relates to the perception of housing block estates, which carry different connotations in Western and Eastern Europe. At a film conference in England, a British film scholar remarked that, on a symbolic level, within British culture, the housing block estates preclude the creation of any sense of community and function as a metaphor for the opposite mechanism. In contrast, the Eastern European scholars offered a different perspective. In their region, the social fabric of housing estates composed of such blocks has historically been, and often continues to be, diverse, encompassing a range of social classes rather than being narrowed down to one class, the lower strata. Consequently, films set in these environments may be prone to misinterpretation by Western audiences whose readings may incorrectly assess the local social dynamics.[1]

The other anecdote concerns the Polish audience's reception of Romanian New Wave films: many viewers I talked to reported experiencing a distinctive sense of familiarity while watching *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* (*Moartea domnului Lăzărescu*, 2005) or *Sieranevada* (2016) by Cristi Puiu. This familiarity did not stem from the narratives proving particularly relatable; rather, it arose from the spaces depicted in these films – both interiors and urban landscapes – which bore striking resemblance to the places, townscapes, apartments, and public buildings characteristic of all the countries in the former Eastern Bloc. This sense of familiarity has a strong affective aspect: Polish viewers recognised the cramped domestic space of the Bucharest flat almost physically. They knew the smell of such spaces; they could feel the texture of the tiles and paintwork on the hospital walls, and sense the nauseating dim light in hospital corridors. These sensations derived from the decades of shared experiences within European communist and post-communist societies, regardless of the obvious differences between particular countries. Audiences from Eastern and Central Europe can instantly recognise such mutual commonalities and idiosyncrasies. They understand one another's cinematic productions not solely cognitively, but above all, affectively, and intuitively. This understanding proves ingrained in the social consciousness and identity of both older and younger generations, who bear the burden of a kind of post-memory.

Eastern and Central European cinema requires local, or regional, definitions of cinematic social realism. Although film traditions of the former Eastern Bloc seem replete with social realist works, such definitions remain surprisingly scarce. These are precisely the cinemas that should embody definitions of social realism, given that they were subject to the rigorous requirements of political regimes that for decades used film as a means of propaganda to disseminate images of class warfare and the struggle for social justice. Despite their idealisation and romanticisation for ideological purposes, these cinematic visions provided filmmakers with specific codes for portraying social reality, which enabled them to craft realistic portrayals of society.

However, numerous definitions of social realism exist within Western film theory, most of which derive from the British context, where the term is regarded

Next to Nothing, dir. Grzegorz Dębowski (2023)

as central to British cinema. While these definitions purport to be fairly universal, describing mechanisms and characteristics applicable to diverse social contexts, local and regional nuances can nonetheless disrupt or invalidate them.

This article aims to highlight three interrelated concerns: the absence of adequate and comprehensive definitions of cinematic social realism; the inadequacy of the Western understanding of the concept, and its poor generalisability; and the scarcity of critical discussion regarding the term's applicability to the Eastern context. Specifically, I provide an overview of how English-language scholarship on Eastern and Central European cinema employs the term 'social realism'. As the designation 'Eastern and Central Europe' may sound ambiguous, I define this region as comprising the nations that constituted the Eastern Bloc. This encompasses the former communist states under Soviet political control until the transformations of the late 1980s and early 1990s. These include Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, the (former) German Democratic Republic (GDR), the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia), Albania, and the former Yugoslav republics (Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo). I deliberately exclude the Soviet Union and the later Russian Federation, given its hegemonic status and consequent distinction from the other nations listed. While this delineation may seem somewhat reductive, it serves here as a necessary operational framework.

This study also explores new perspectives on how Eastern European cinema portrays social issues. I firmly believe that these approaches are fundamentally grounded in the region's distinctive past. What one describes as social realism in Eastern and Central European films derives from: first, cinematic tradition, especially socialist realism; second, political and industrial circumstances of state-controlled film production; and third, double coding within the cinematic language – a strategic device and subterfuge through which filmmakers conveyed critical content despite state censorship restrictions. This study intends to serve as a point of departure or a point of reference for subsequent, more localised analyses.

Inside/Outside

The recognition that comprehensive local definitions of social realism remain lacking is both a truism and a revelation. Adding the adjective 'social' to 'realism' requires an appreciation of the specificity of local context – cultural, social, and historical – and considerable precision in discerning its idiosyncrasies. Eastern and Central European cinema that addresses social issues – much like the societies from which it emerged – experienced crises and ruptures both under communist rule, owing to top-down ideological directives, and during the 1989 transformations, which marked a period of widespread social and economic disruption. Filmmakers had to adapt to new industry regulations, economic realities, and viewers' expectations. They had to develop new narrative structures and visual codes in order to depict this social upheaval. Post-1989 cinema in Eastern and Central Europe, which one can loosely refer to as post-communist cinema, became caught between local cinematic traditions and the urge for innovation. This mir-

rors the condition of societies, forced to deal with new realities while having at their disposal only tools useful in a bygone era.

However, while the shift from 'socialist' to 'social' appears natural and inevitable given the transformation from communist to post-communist societies, this progression is not self-evident. It seems that one of key problems is that film scholars inscribe analyses of this cinema within Western critical and theoretical frameworks. Numerous English-language volumes on Eastern and Central European cinema feature substantial regional scholarly contribution, yet – strikingly – these publications are predominantly framed from an explicitly Western perspective or, at minimum, structured for the readability and comprehension of a Western reader.

Two introductions to such publications illustrate this issue. The first one comes from the book *Postcommunist Film: Russia, Eastern Europe and World Culture* edited by Lars Kristensen.[2] To exemplify the transnational and cross-cultural nature of post-communist cinema, Kristensen discusses two short films directed by Cynthia Beatt: *Cycling the Frame* (1988) and *The Invisible Frame* (2009), the latter being the retake of the former.[3] Both films feature Tilda Swinton cycling around Berlin (in the 1988 version, specifically West Berlin). Kristensen interprets Swinton's narration in the 2009 film as a universal meditation on history, post-communist transformation, and the Cold War. Swinton becomes puzzled at the disappearance of the Berlin Wall and reflects on what she has learnt over the past 21 years. Kristensen interprets this puzzlement as follows: *The ability to look inside for answers, or to internalise the postcommunist space, is replaced by questions and a search for new frames to interpret the world*.[4] However, one might argue that such reframing privileges those accustomed to an external perspective over those with lived insider knowledge of the region. In the analysis that follows the author draws on the works of Jean-Luc Godard and Paul Virilio. Post-transformation Eastern Germany is thus mediated through the eyes of a Berlin-based director of Jamaican birth and British education; a British actress, French filmmakers, and a French theorist. They articulate a distinctly Western perspective on the post-communist reality, rendering the East as an object through which Western minds contemplate their own condition, not the Eastern one. Swinton's question – what has she learned over these decades? – seems especially revealing in this regard: it epitomises the objectification of the East under the guise of a desire to understand it.

The second introduction by Christina Stojanova appears in the anthology *The New Romanian Cinema*.[5] The films of this New Cinema, also called the New Wave, which emerged in the mid-2000s, offered fresh, acute, and straightforward analyses of contemporary Romanian society. The films such as Cristi Puiu's *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*, Corneliu Porumboiu's *12:08 East of Bucharest* (*A fost sau n-a fost?*, 2006), or Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (*4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile,* 2007), awarded at numerous festivals, proposed a clear-cut (if occasionally comedic), radical, and sometimes brutal reckoning with Romania's recent past.

These films' engagement with the notion of realism appears evident. The adjective 'social' seems appropriate as well, given that the existential situations, possibilities, motivations, and aspirations of the characters are substantially shaped by social, economic, and political circumstances. While using the category of social determinism might be somewhat excessive, the 'social' component struc-

turing both the plots and characters remains indispensable. Visual and aesthetic dimensions reinforce this reading. The films characteristic of the Romanian New Wave are visually gritty and raw. The spaces and places depicted function as expressions of social constraints and determinants of human existence; this quality extends also to their visual presentation.

Yet, the phrase 'social realism' never appears in the commentaries or analyses of these productions. In the introduction mentioned above, Stojanova proposes 'existential realism' as an alternative term, thereby privileging the individual experience over the collective and social dimension. Addressing the possible political aspect of these films, she writes: *The New Romanian Cinema categorically rejected this politicised legacy and its strong predilection for construing characters as victims of socio-historical circumstance, thus securing their immunity from personal moral responsibility and yet denying them moral agency. By focusing on the crucial importance of personal choices, the NRC has circumvented the traditional role of Eastern European cinema as a form of potentially propagandistic public service and education*.[6] One might assume that it is impossible to reconcile the social dimension with individual agency, since subjection to social or political forces implies victimhood and the loss of the capacity for ethical or other forms of autonomous decision-making.

Another interesting assumption is that, within the context of Eastern European cinema, 'social' functions as an extension or reformulation of 'propagandistic' (or, as one might conclude – 'socialist'). Stojanova argues that this *qualitatively new approach of New Romanian directors, predicated on the existentialist necessity of integrity and individualism, has resulted in a veraciously consistent "group of works" that encodes the existential metaphysics of the ethical experience into the ironic ambiguity of its aesthetic representation*.[7] The vocabulary she employs – 'existentialism', 'individualism', and 'metaphysics' – entirely excludes and stigmatises the use of categories such as 'social', 'collective', or 'rational'.

The problem with such labelling is twofold. Firstly, the films' social or political engagement is apparent; they often address forms of historically imposed collective harm. Their stylistic characteristics evoke what is commonly, even intuitively, perceived as 'social realism'. Secondly, these conceptual categories are allegedly mutually exclusive, as if 'individual' were the opposite of 'collective' rather than the two notions being inevitably associated with each other.

In subsequent passages, Stojanova – drawing on an interview with Cristi Puiu – argues that existentialist realism *was groomed under Eastern as well as Western influence*,[8] recalling cinematic inspirations such as John Cassavetes (in Puiu's case[9]), Andrei Tarkovsky, and Miloš Forman (for Radu Muntean and Cristian Mungiu), as well as the philosophical traditions of Søren Kierkegaard and Jean Paul Sartre. These influences are undoubtedly significant; however, they must be contextualised within local circumstances. Even if Puiu, Mungiu, and their contemporaries deliberately reject the earlier tradition of Romanian cinema – itself inherently shaped by the communist era – this earlier cinema remains their inescapable heritage, whether acknowledged positively, negatively, or not at all. Yet it remains uncommon for commentators of contemporary Romanian cinema to acknowledge these cinematic predecessors. Some scholars and critics, such as Andrei Gorzo, do bring up their names, linking *a realist aesthetic more radical than*

anything that had been done in this vein in Romanian Cinema with *a tradition that would consist of a few sparse movies of the Ceaușescu era, by filmmakers such as Lucian Pintilie, Mircea Daneliuc, Alexandru Tatos, and Iosif Demian*.[10] However, these voices are exceptions. Although Stojanova references several pre-1989 filmmakers, the brevity of her introduction offers no opportunity to expand on the history of Romanian film, not to mention the sociological context of this cinema. Nevertheless, by citing only a few pre-1989 directors, she suggests that the Romanian New Wave has no roots in the decades before the transformation.

The Fear of a Category

The social aspect of realism appears unwelcome, as it brings to the fore cinema's historical entanglement with propaganda. The local (Eastern) tradition is seen as secondary to the more global (Western) one. A general overview of English-language book publications, monographs, and anthologies on contemporary Eastern and Central European cinema from the past twenty-five years confirms this pattern. The targeted search for the phrase 'social realism' yields somewhat surprising results.[11] While most of these publications – particularly those concerning Romanian cinema, the most acclaimed and successful film culture of the region – identify realism as a central category, the term 'social realism' remains almost completely absent. Across all the publications examined, 'social realism' appears only ten times; moreover, it consistently figures as only an auxiliary term or a point of reference against which scholars construct their discourse on realistic modes.

I am aware that individual articles published in academic journals tend to offer slightly broader discussions. Nevertheless, this article deliberately restricts its focus to book publications, with the exceptions of two articles by Andrei Gorzo and Lucian Țion, as their observations are of exceptional value for this analysis. This methodological choice prioritises publications of substantial scope, not only for the sake of a more concise argument; the aim is to focus on those publications that, through their comprehensiveness, aspire to present thorough and multidirectional scholarship. The objective is to identify a certain problem, not to exhaust the subject. It should also be noted that this analysis privileges Romanian cinema and scholarship as its primary examples, since Romanian film culture remains the most readily internationally recognisable and frequently discussed of all the Eastern and Central European countries.

As noted above, the term 'social realism' appears only rarely in the publications examined. However, these sources proliferate with different types of realism in ways both interesting and revealing. Unsurprisingly, socialist realism and neorealism dominate, functioning as the foundational reference points for subsequent iterations of cinematic realism in Eastern European cinema. References to surrealism (particularly in publications on Czech cinema) and even magical realism also figure in these sources. Although the category of social realism remains absent as a concrete paradigm, it is nevertheless present between the lines: scholars often reflect on both the social aspect of the narrative content and the visual style they characterise as distinctly realistic. This distinctiveness lies in the adjectives scholars use to describe these films and add to the noun 'realism'. The list includes:

Sieranevada, dir. Cristi Puiu (2016)

murky, hard-hitting, dark, minimalist, vulgar, sombre, raw, straightforward, critical, genuine, undermining, austere, low-key, acute, and unrelenting. All of these terms refer to the stark portrayal of social problems and the bleak depiction of social groups experiencing various forms of social exclusion, marginalisation, or stigmatisation. A second set of adjectives that scholars use refers to the ethical dimension and the filmmaker's relationship to the depicted reality. These terms include: documentary, mnemonic, perceptual, immediate, testimonial, and descriptive. Together, these two sets constitute – if only intuitively – the recognisable mode of social realism.

As noted, these publications position socialist realism and neorealism as the natural and self-evident foundation for any form of realism in Eastern and Central European cinema, both before and after the transition from communist to post-communist states. This understanding seems justified, since socialist realism functioned as a mandatory convention, or a set of codes imposed on the filmmakers. Neorealism, one of the most influential trends in post-war Europe, both Western and Eastern, was ideologically "safe" for Eastern film cultures; many of its elements can be regarded as archetypal of social realism. However, while it could prove inspirational, it was a rather strictly codified convention and therefore a less universal one. Setting these paradigms aside, I wish to focus on the few mentions of social realism or related modes.

Firstly, social realism is often mistaken for, or confused with, socialist realism. Such conflation might be par for the course among Western scholars unmindful of regional nuances. However, it proves rather surprising when 'local' scholars fall into the same trap. In analysing the experimental practices of Yugoslavian Black Wave filmmakers in the 1960s and 1970s, Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli mentions that they produced hybrid forms combining documentary, underground filmmaking, Hollywood, and the monumental style of social realism, among others.[12] Given the temporal and geographical context, this monumental aesthetic almost certainly refers to socialist, not social, realism. The same conflation occurs in Dino Murtić's work on post-Yugoslav cinema, which associates social 'realism' (sic!) with post-war cinema.[13] Similarly, Dana Duma, writing on Bulgarian animated film, also appears to deploy the term incorrectly when discussing 1970s cinema. Duma recalls the *cliché of the so called Social-Realism* in relation to animation.[14] Maybe this intuition is wrong and the reference here is deliberate and intentional, but it seems rather risky.

A second pattern involves deploying 'social realism' pejoratively, as a reductive or inferior category. Andrei Gorzo, examining the ethical or even ideological aspect of the mode of realism as deployed by Romanian filmmakers like Cristi Puiu, Cristian Mungiu, or Radu Muntean, notes that Muntean *resented being labelled a social realist, a label which he associated with grim films militantly rubbing their viewers' noses in punishingly thorough descriptions of poverty*. Gorzo further notes the unpopularity of this category among these directors *and their prospective audience often using it interchangeably with "miserabilism"* – though some filmmakers chose to depict *harsher social realities and contrasts*.[15] However, fears of exploitation, poverty porn, and miserabilism do not necessarily preclude attempts to create socially engaged cinema. László Strausz, even when admitting that contemporary Romanian

films focus on social issues and that one may categorise them as adhering to *some type of socially conscious realism*, immediately adds that *while this narrative is certainly illuminating … it is only a partial account that poses no questions about the causes leading to these specific stylistic choices of the filmmakers and the distinctive type of realism these films actualize*.[16] The implication is clear: 'social realism' – however vague the notion – is considered too narrow and simplistic for analysing socially engaged cinema.

This vagueness also pervades in the references to social realism itself, which functions as an undefined backdrop against which other topics are reflected upon. In his writing on Polish New Wave cinema of the 1970s, Michael Goddard uses the term as a kind of negative concept against which one may consider the art cinema of directors such as Walerian Borowczyk, Jerzy Skolimowski, or Andrzej Żuławski. Goddard emphasises the importance of the volume *Polish New Wave/Polska Nowa Fala*,[17] the book that *suggests there is a different prism through which to evaluate the historical accomplishments of Polish cinema, a prism emphasizing artistic experimentation over social realism and formal risk-taking over historical engagement. As such it suggests an overturning of the dominant critical approaches to Polish cinema and the prejudices towards social realism that have distorted the image of Polish cinema and arguably Polish cinema itself from the Communist period right up until the present*.[18] However, in another publication Goddard describes the cinema of Andrzej Munk and Andrzej Wajda from the Polish Film School era as combining artistic and visual explorations with direct social commentary. Goddard refers to it as *a politically engaged "cinema d'auteur"*.[19]

What is evident in all these approaches is their lack of interest in defining the concept of social realism. Scholars treat it as a self-explanatory category, never subjecting it to detailed analysis or grounding it in theoretical foundations. Even when identified as a dominant category, as in Gergara Doncheva's reference to award-winning contemporary Bulgarian productions,[20] it functions as an intuitive catchphrase, or handy shorthand, and its meaning remains unexplored. This omission persists even in publications explicitly engaging with the Western European cinema that forms the basis for social realism. Doru Pop directly invokes the context of the British New Wave, termed *the "kitchen sink" cinema*,[21] interpreting it as the British filmmakers' gesture of rejecting socialist realism in favour of social realism as a new answer or an *alternative to capitalist cinema storytelling*.[22] Pop characterises this new convention as a stylistic turn laden with ideological implications. Its thematic scope links to domesticity and ordinariness, and introduces characters *from controversial social categories*; this kind of cinema presents a *political statement with a pessimistic view of society*.[23] Pop concludes: *This is why the realism in the British cinema … centred around the sad and unhappy life of the working class, defined by poverty, alcoholism and family abuse, provided an inspiration for the Romanian New Wave. Representing social problems and the dire existence of the proletarian was a form of political statement, one which allowed circumventing the ideological traps of socialist realism*.[24] However, Pop abandons these premises in a further passage and moves on to other contexts.

Pop's case exemplifies a broader pattern: many scholars recognise the connection between Eastern and Central European cinema and the characteristics associated with social realism, yet avoid using the term. Their observations permit locating this cinema within that paradigm, even if they – consciously or not – resist such connotation. This pattern emerges most clearly in the passages

where scholars examine the interrelations between realism and the social dimension. This becomes even more evident when they address the question of space as an aspect that not only reflects but also defines or determines the social reality and the limits of character agency. Within Romanian cinema, one can recall Anna Batori's observations on space as a social product and a factor that shapes society. Batori refers to Elena Roxana Popan's notion of 'neo-neorealism'[25] that *prevails over the* [Romanian] *New Wave. This term encompasses films that reveal contemporary social conditions and work with a neorealist narrative form based on documentary style film-making that relies on location shooting, natural lighting, limited plots and the rejection of artificial ending*.[26] Like many other scholars, both Batori and Popan trace relationships between realism and social concerns back to neorealism rather than social realism. This is both revealing and comprehensible; neorealism represents a familiar phenomenon, frequently discussed in the Eastern European context.

Batori also refers to László Strausz, who observes that *after noting that the early films repeatedly focus on social themes, most explanations categorize New Romanian Cinema as some type of socially conscious realism*.[27] Yet, he continues, *it is only a partial account that poses no questions about the causes leading to these specific stylistic choices of the filmmakers and the distinctive type of realism these films actualize*.[28] This perspective assumes that social realism – or socially conscious realism – is insufficiently capacious to encompass new or more complex modes of realism. The category is treated as fixed, incapable of expansion or reformulation. Strausz further argues that socially oriented cinema can coexist with a kind of formalism, particularly when realism is understood as a means not of conveying an accurate image of the world but rather of revealing the mechanisms that determine how it functions: *Realism as a representational goal – the laying bare of society's causal network – can coexist with formalist devices as long as it attempts to reveal something about the social reality it depicts*.[29] Therefore, *the realism as a political attitude begins to displace realism as a stylistic category*.[30] Strausz refrains here from employing the term 'social'; however, taken his approach, one can see it as appropriate.

Peter Hames's book on Czech and Slovak cinema represents a rare exception: it explicitly, responsibly, and unashamedly establishes connections between Eastern and Central European cinema and social realism, acknowledging the mutual influences between the British and Czech New Waves in the 1960s, and the admiration that post-communist film directors have for their predecessors.[31] Hames also attempts to outline the principles of the category of social realism and its more contemporary transformations. He observes that during the post--communist period, Czech and Slovak cinema *began to show interest in realism and social reality,* responding in this way to the *new realities of capitalism and globalisation*.[32]

Perhaps the most accurate and 'emancipatory' observations concerning the relationship between the Romanian New Wave, Western forms of socially concerned cinematic realisms, and the traditions of local cinema during socialist times appear in Lucian Ţion's work.[33] Ţion openly questions the practice of deriving the Romanian New Wave directly from Western phenomena such as British social realism or Italian neorealism. He identifies in pre-transformation Romanian cinema some significant film precedents that emphasise the idea of the movement's 'Eastern roots' – strong enough not to be forgotten, neglected, or omitted. Although

I do not share his view that there is *a tendency in contemporary theories on New Romanian Cinema to irrevocably link the ethos of this movement … with similar cinematic new waves that occurred in Western Europe over the second half of the 20th century*,[34] his call to reclaim and reconsider some of the Romanian films from the communist era as legitimate predecessors of contemporary films proves compelling. Țion also identifies a *recent neoliberal trend in film studies, which is committed to the Europeanization and Westernization of postsocialist Romanian cinema. This trend is traceable to the late socialist-era ideal of creating a new imaginary for Eastern Europe, one that was to sever the East's ties with its Communist past*.[35] Returning to earlier cinema and its social/socialist characteristics appears as a gesture of nonconformism and resistance to the Westernisation (or Europeanisation) of both practice and theory. The films depicting the socialist-era reality do not need to adhere to the rules of socialist realism; there is plenty of cinematic material to form a proper legacy for the local definitions. Finally, Țion poses what may be the most important and apparent question for this analysis*: Why should we look for the origins of the much-celebrated New Romanian Cinema in the distant beginnings of modernist Western filmmaking, when other influences – Eastern, rather than Western European – now erased by the political one-track mind of Western integration, are not only more direct, but clearly more handy and logical?*[36]

Andrei Gorzo also uses social realism as a negative backdrop against which to position the realism employed by Romanian New Wave directors. Gorzo views this particular Romanian version of realism characteristic of Cristi Puiu's films as a unique phenomenon. While its observational approach resembles the one found in the other types of realism, it focuses on the ethics (or morality) of the individual rather than society. Gorzo quotes Puiu's assertion that he is not a political filmmaker and consequently refrains from imposing his worldview upon represented reality, pursuing instead universal and eternal matters. However, the relocation of ethical responsibility for the issues depicted in these films – from social mechanisms to individual agency – stands in striking contrast to the foundational principles of social realism. Gorzo acknowledges the unpopularity of the category of social realism among Romanian directors, who often use it interchangeably with miserabilism. Yet, only a few paragraphs later, Gorzo enumerates all the key features of social realism, indicating that the issues of interest to Romanian filmmakers include the determinism of the social system, the influence of global economic and political forces, the lack of individual choice, and the erosion of a sense of community.

This review of the literature on the subject, however limited, reveals that the social dimension of the realism deployed in these films is rarely acknowledged. The term 'social realism' is far less familiar in this context than 'socialist realism' – with which it is sometimes conflated – and 'neorealism'. Notably, scholars do not discuss the relationship between socialist and social realism, despite the evident attempts of filmmakers during the communist era to move beyond the rigid forms of cinematic socialist realism, to experiment and to develop alternative forms of realism with a social dimension. The post-communist period should have brought numerous fresh and daring examples. Yet, the authors of these publications do not employ the less ideologised category of social realism to analyse such cases.

The Death of Mr. Lazarescu, dir. Cristi Puiu (2005)

Moreover, social realism does not appear as a malleable category open to transformation and adjustment. The use of the precise term may not be essential here – perhaps it has been overused or is too closely associated with specific trends in British cinema. However, it is my conviction that social realism can be used as a kind of template or frame, adaptable to local social conditions. This imagined template could function as a tool that does not impose a particular ideological stance on social mechanisms, nor would it be universal. The fundamental 'philosophy' or logic of cinematic social realism – its ethics and function – would remain consistent. This logic stems from the conviction that social mechanisms and forces shape individuals, their actions, motivations, aspirations, and capabilities. The underlying ethics of this philosophy assumes that social and political systems are primarily responsible for social inequalities, which are inherently unjust. Consequently, the belief that individuals can overcome all obstacles imposed by these systems through personal strength and determination is a destructive illusion. Meaningful change requires a transformation of the entire system, not merely the will or power of individuals.

If one considers that cinematic social realism tends to focus on groups or individuals situated on the margins or below the central strata of society – that is, the working class (in its traditional sense) or other underprivileged communities – a useful, adaptable, and workable framework emerges. The aesthetics of social realism, often described as gritty, grim, or raw, may be understood as a derivative of the above notions. As Lindsay Anderson famously observed, it is the attitude that shapes the style. Thus, formalism, self-reflexivity, and various stylistic devices do not necessarily negate the social dimension of social realist film, nor do they diminish its realism.

Towards Local Definitions

In the preceding part of this study I attempted to define the fundamentals of social realism. Distilling existing definitions to their essential basic elements may help to encompass a broad spectrum of socially engaged films from Eastern and Central Europe that experiment with the category of realism. To highlight some of the idiosyncrasies of these local productions, as well as the shared characteristics contributing to the creation of locally appropriate definitions of cinematic social realism, I shall now "test" the existing Western definitions to determine their relevance across different social and political contexts.

The most effective method to conduct this test is to use the definitions developed over decades by British scholars reflecting on the British version of social realism – a staple or trademark of national cinema since the New Wave films of the early 1960s. I shall focus on scholars who not only describe this kind of cinema but, above all, attempt to create useful and coherent definitions of the phenomenon: Raymond Williams (with his renowned article "A Lecture on Realism"), Julia Hallam and Margaret Marshment, as well as Samantha Lay (writing in the early 2000s), and finally David Forrest (with his seminal book on 'new realism' in contemporary British cinema). Some might argue that scholars such as John Hill, Andrew Higson, and Terry Lovell should be included here. However, I have

chosen to focus not on analytical or critical work but on attempts to coin comprehensive definitions. Importantly, these definitions emerge not as postulates but are derived from and grounded in cinematic examples and actual practice.

In "A Lecture on Realism" (published in *Screen* in 1977), Raymond Williams does not explicitly refer to 'social realism' – even though his point of reference is Ken Loach's *The Big Flame* (1969) – but rather to realism in general, drawing on historical examples. Williams conceptualises realism as inextricably connected to social issues, or more specifically, as a movement towards 'social extension'[37]. He identifies four essential factors of realism which comprise both *particular artistic method and particular attitude towards what is called 'reality'*.[38] Films and other artworks created in this vein must engage with contemporary, everyday reality, broaden their social concern ('social extension'), explain the experiences of individuals in strictly social and secular terms, and put an emphasis on the importance of social experience that is *consciously interpretative in relation to a particular political viewpoint*[39] (this 'political viewpoint' being, broadly speaking, a leftist one).

Nearly twenty-five years later – but still a quarter of a century ago – Samantha Lay expands upon this framework by emphasising the production aspect and extends the definition of British social realism in film to encompass subject matter, treating these elements as interrelated. Lay asserts that social realism is a question of practice and politics, style and form, and content. Films adhering to this concept are, production-wise, communal endeavours involving cooperation with local communities. They portray marginalised communities, especially from disadvantaged regions; incorporate local values (such as accents, dialects, and specific social issues); employ observational methods typical of documentaries; and prioritise the description of reality and social conditions over plot development. Lay also emphasises stylistic concerns, noting that such films are typically visually gritty, raw, rough, and lacking any embellishment.[40]

My aim now is to examine the applicability of these definitions, even provisional, to Eastern and Central European cinema addressing social issues. Setting aside the parts of Lay's definition that today appear naïve and reductionist – such as her insistence on style devoid of 'embellishment', given that all images, including (perhaps in particular) the ostensibly gritty or raw, are always aestheticised – it needs to be said that both Lay's and Williams' definitions prove inadequate when applied to films from the region examined in this analysis.

First of all, when applied to pre-transformation cinema, these definitions lack a relationship with the specific political circumstances. They assume that filmmakers possess a certain degree of freedom of expression and can work independently from state-controlled production systems. However, in the countries of the Eastern Bloc, filmmaking outside official channels proved virtually impossible: the state owned and controlled all means of production. Therefore, communal practice remained possible only if it was approved by the state and aligned with the official discourse. What kind of freedom was there, under such conditions, for expressing individual perspectives on contentious social issues? Moreover, what constitutes a 'leftist stance' within a state that declares itself officially socialist? The countries of the Eastern Bloc may now seem, as they did then, totalitarian, at least to some extent. Nevertheless, these states were constitutionally and nom-

inally socialist, and therefore, ideologically left-wing. It goes without saying that socialist realist films were eagerly supported by the state as propaganda vehicles. Yet, the productions that managed to evade the socialist realism formula, forming what might be recognised as a more critical social realism, likewise required authorisation, financing, and ultimate approval of the official political powers. This makes taking the independent creative – and therefore political – stance considerably more difficult though not entirely impossible. As I will demonstrate later, it required sufficient inventiveness from the filmmakers to encrypt their attitude within the film language itself.

David Forrest's definition of new realism in British cinema – which still can be described as social realism – proves less strict and more flexible. Forrest shifts the emphasis toward the specific interrelation between individual and social, presentation and reception, with 'engagement' as the key concept. Forrest does not reject earlier frameworks but rather expands upon them by adding a new dimension in line with the development of the film practice itself. For Forrest these films *undertake a concerted examination of the relationship between environment and identity evolving beyond merely a deterministic account of social, economic and cultural forces – giving shape to the trajectories of the films' protagonists so that this dynamic is also felt at the experiential level, where multiple visual and aural registers of place, space and landscape are accented to invite spectatorial contemplation and empathetic participation. They are bound too by a meticulous, rhythmic poeticism, inculcated through recurring motifs of quotidian sound and imagery, constructing a mode of realism which we might understand as both image-led and attendant to the aural and to other forms of sensory engagement*.[41] What seems most important here is the tension, or rather interrelation between the gritty and raw yet poetic image and the spectacle – understood here in terms of spectatorial contemplation leading to engagement. This contemplation connects directly to spatial visualisation: in this cinema, place, space, and landscape function to communicate the social conditions and circumstances of the characters.

Forrest's proposition evokes an earlier concept by Julia Hallam and Margaret Marshment, who similarly emphasise the cruciality of the relationship between location and identity, particularly regarding the social identity. Hallam and Marshment define *social realism* as *a discursive term used … to describe films that aim to show the effects of environmental factors on the development of character through depictions that emphasise the relationship between location and identity* and the consequences of the lack of *enlightened social policies or structural change in society*.[42] The emphasis on space and its social meaning constitutes the crucial insight that could help transfer the notion of social realism to Eastern and Central European cinema. In films from this region, images of spaces and places frequently serve as hallmarks or shorthand, evoking the layers of meaning that shape and are shaped by local realities. Such images encapsulate diverse codes – immediately recognisable and relatable to the local audience – which foster direct communication between filmmakers and viewers. Therefore, the visualisation of social space can provide a foundational factor for locally specific definitions of social realism.

Some Eastern European scholars recognise the importance of cinematic space – Anna Batori's book on space in Romanian and Hungarian cinema serves

as a good example. Batori sees the relationship between 'social' and 'spatial' in Romanian New Wave as follows: *Beyond a doubt, the main characteristic of the "New Wave" films lies in the realist treatment of social space and the preoccupation with the (post-)socialist urban suburb that is portrayed as an abandoned, grey and tumbledown trajectory where the characters are locked in. The endless labyrinths of prefabricated blocks of flats and their monochrome context represent the inconvenient heritage of the previous regime that prevails over the capitalist space of the cities and mirrors a burden inherited up to the very present. The protagonists of the films … live in the space of the past. The characters reside in small, narrow boxes built in the Ceaușescu era, which they attempt to refit according to the contemporary, modern style. However, they remain enclosed in the claustrophobic constellation of the (post-)socialist space.*[43] This passage corresponds with the definitions of social realism formulated by Hallam and Marshment, and Forrest. Batori demonstrates that space represents one of the most visible and recognisable indicators of regional social realism; spatial representation directly indicates which social problems the film addresses and what interpretive stance it adopts toward them.

The landscape of housing block estates functions as such a significant space – indeed, as a kind of a litmus test revealing how audiences perceive the social aspect of the space. Batori connects what is visualised to how it is visualised and interprets the characters through the landscapes they inhabit. Eastern European audiences instantly recognise when the 'labyrinths of prefabricated blocks' function as grim traps symbolising hated regimes, and when they alternatively serve as a safe, familiar communal spaces. Such architecture may be portrayed as a potential threat to the traditional (or more humane) way of life, as a brutal example of social engineering, but rarely as symbols of social exclusion or ghettoization – the primary association for the Western critics and audiences. Such imagery emerged after 1989 and this change can be seen as a sign of the harmful consequences of the political shift towards capitalism. Significantly – from the Polish perspective – the social fabric of these housing block estates was remarkably diverse. The concept of class in the case of pre-transformation 'Eastern bloc' societies proves quite problematic; nonetheless, housing block estates were inhabited by representatives of all social strata. The association of housing block estates with lower-class identity has emerged only over the last thirty years, yet Eastern European contexts still differ fundamentally from Western representations of such spaces as social ghettos, exemplified, e.g., in French banlieue cinema. It should be emphasised that the Polish context lacks (as for now) the multicultural dimension and the post-colonial legacy crucial to French or British cinema traditions. Nevertheless, the class question remains of great importance here.

Significantly, not only the urban space represents a potential territory for social criticism; many regional cinema traditions also offer plenty of examples of rural representations. Films such as *Wild Roses* (*Dzikie róże*, dir. Anna Jadowska, 2017) or *Next to Nothing* (*Tyle co nic*, dir. Grzegorz Dębowski, 2023) treat the rural space as significant, defining the characters and determining their social environment. *Next to Nothing* exemplifies this approach. The film tells a story of a farmer investigating his friend's death, probably linked to financial problems. The film presents the countryside as a network of complex social dependencies; the spa-

tial solitude of the character refers directly to the erosion of social solidarity. The camera maintains constant proximity to the protagonist, situating him within the context of the space. Many shots remain narratively empty. Though visually dynamic – the protagonist is constantly on the move – meaning emerges not from plot succession but from the imagery of the village's collapse: ruined, muddy, soggy, in disarray. The film takes place in an indeterminate time between winter and spring, and nature appears dead. Yet, this incessant movement of the protagonist points to his determination and causality to counterbalance social, economic, and political determinism. In *Next to Nothing*, dynamic movement appears to replace dynamic action, for actions result not from the succession of events, but from the need to establish social justice. The protagonist's moral backbone becomes the backbone of the film itself.

Ways Out

Although it may appear self-evident, it is worth reiterating: local definitions of social realism remain necessary, given that 'social' necessarily invokes divergent political, economic, and cultural circumstances, different film production policies (and politics), and cinematic traditions, different narratives and images that function as immediately recognisable cultural codes for local audiences, requiring no further explanation. Methodological challenges nonetheless persist. The film cultures of Eastern and Central Europe before and after the political transformations were markedly different, and each country's unique cultural and political circumstances shaped both the formal and ideological aspects of its films. Generational context proves also significant: the perspectives of scholars and critics writing from within the socialist period often diverge considerably from those of their twenty-first-century successors. These viewpoints are never static or uniform – a fact which, in my view, presents a great advantage, as it helps add nuance to any discussion of local definitions.

As previously noted, any attempt to define versions of social realism emerging from post-communist Eastern and Central Europe must grapple with key questions: how can filmmakers be both leftist and anti-establishment in a country officially aligned with leftist ideology? How to differentiate social realism from the state-imposed socialist realism? How to remain independent if the state controls film production entirely? Potential answers may be found in vernacular cinematic traditions and their often complex legacies.

Socialist realism constitutes the foundational pillar of these legacies – in terms of aesthetic, subject matter, and production system. As Dina Iordanova aptly observes in a synthesis aimed at familiarising the Western readers with this phenomenon: *Socialist Realism made several demands: the suppression of "formalism" and all experimentation with the art form and commitment to "realist" content; an outspoken commitment to the cause of building socialism and communism; the presence of a strong hero, a member of the working class, who promotes the party line; and a plot developing in the canon of "historical optimism" … namely one that keeps in view the ultimate triumph of the socialist idea – no matter what tremendous difficulties the hero may encounter in the course of his struggle to build the bright socialist future, this future should*

The Death of Mr. Lazarescu, dir. Cristi Puiu (2005)

never disappear from sight, thus determining all outcomes in a historically optimist framework.[44] Socialist realism corresponds to some extent with social realism, yet two contradictions emerge in their comparison. The optimism of socialist realism is compulsory, whereas social realism rests on a social critique that is pessimistic, at least at the outset. Consequently, social realism cannot uncritically promote a dominant party line, as its foundation lies in opposing the hegemonic systems.

Nevertheless, these two phenomena remain interconnected; defining Eastern European social realism necessitates acknowledging socialist realism's impact and legacy. The tropes of socialist realism persist in many later countercultural films – Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Marble* (*Człowiek z marmuru*, 1977) remains the best example from the Polish perspective – and also in the British social realist classics. For instance, the Free Cinema documentaries bear striking aesthetic and ideological affinities to the so-called Black Series of Polish documentaries from the 1950s.[45] These tropes are sometimes referred to as a legacy, contested, or challenged, yet their presence cannot be overlooked.

The cinematic traditions of particular Eastern European countries constitute another important factor. These local particularities do not eliminate some common traces, the most important being the practice of 'double encoding' – an endless game with tight censorship. This practice entailed operating within the film language and visual signs in such way that viewers could read between the lines and decode the 'real' message. Beneath the official discourse, unofficial communication channels conveyed the filmmakers' intended messages. The cinema of the Polish Film School represents the most obvious example of this practice: its whole aesthetic was used to express what the official discourse forbade, while on the surface the films seemed to represent the official ideology. Such double encoding remains incomprehensible to foreign audiences, which significantly reduces the intended ambiguity in the interpretation of these films. These films can be read on a superficial level, but their sophisticated, coded social criticism becomes lost.

The distinctive characteristics of particular Eastern European film cultures reflect not only the specific historical and political trajectories of individual countries, but also the varied cinematic traditions within those regions. Polish cinema of the late 1970s, for instance, witnessed the emergence of the 'cinema of moral anxiety' which gathered films that explored moral dilemmas arising from the conflict between individual conscience and a corrupting political system. Although the emphasis fell upon questions of personal moral responsibility, this cinema may be understood as a variant of social realism, given its gritty visual language and deliberately austere, documentary-influenced aesthetic. Given the consistency of this trend, it invites comparison with the Romanian New Wave of thirty years later, in which interest in social issues found expression through a very similarly coherent aesthetic and style.

One might reasonably ask why local definitions of social realism are necessary when the term itself directs us towards Western phenomena, from which, as I contend, Eastern and Central Europe should maintain a critical distance. Perhaps it would suffice to acknowledge the semantic scope of the concept and to proceed instead with locally specific theoretical frameworks. While this approach holds merit, it is a point of arrival rather than of departure. Social realism remains,

ultimately, a term – one that is fluid and subject to reconfiguration. What matters most is mapping the terrain comprehensively; the terminology is merely a tool. Moreover, debates concerning existing terminology can catalyse discussion, offer opportunities to address broader questions, and generate new areas of insight.

Eastern and Central European cinema requires not only new definitions of its socially engaged realist forms, but also a comprehensive reassessment of the films themselves. Only through the establishment of an international, yet regional, film canon can we move beyond formulating definitions or identifying trends to examine commonalities across the film cultures and cinematic traditions of different countries. Such collaborative work fundamentally requires scholarly cooperation and, most crucially, the cross-border circulation of literature on the subject from different countries. English-language publications necessarily entail simplification and omission, and are thus insufficient. Engagement with local scholarship – published in local languages within local journals and academic publications – proves indispensable. Fortunately, contemporary digital tools facilitate overcoming linguistic barriers. Collaborative conferences and research meetings are vital, yet their effectiveness depends upon participants' familiarity with relevant literature. The ideal outcome of such joint regional research would be to develop contextually appropriate concepts and definitions, and perhaps, more importantly, to achieve a degree of intellectual independence from Western-centred knowledge production and its hegemony. While English serves as our *lingua franca*, a deliberate shift towards engagement with local languages – and thus with vernacular cultures – would represent a significant step forward. Our shared historical experience, even if it differed in parts between the countries, can bring us many benefits once we begin to rely on our collective memories, shared images, and ways of thinking.

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[1] The British example may be complemented by the French one, as in *cinema de banlieue* housing block estates are associated with ghettoisation and the inevitability of social crises.

[2] *Postcommunist Film – Russia, Eastern Europe and World Culture: Moving Images of Postcommunism*, ed. L. Kristensen, Routledge, New York 2012.

[3] Ibidem, p. 1.

[4] Ibidem, p. 2.

[5] C. Stojanova, "Introduction", in: *The New Romanian Cinema*, ed. C. Stojanova, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2019, pp. 1-20.

[6] Ibidem, p. 8.

[7] Ibidem.

[8] Ibidem, p. 9.

[9] Puiu studied in Switzerland; therefore, the prevalence of foreign cinematic fascinations seems obvious in his case.

[10] A. Gorzo, "Realism and Ideology in Post-2000 Romanian Cinema", Andrei Gorzo Blog, https://andreigorzoblog.wordpress.com/2016/07/25/realism-and-ideology-in-post-2000-romanian-cinema/(accessed 23.08.2025). Gorzo also dedicated an entire article to the subject of local realism's heritage: A. Gorzo, "Concerning the Local Precursors of the New Romanian Realism", *Close Up* 2013, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 4-11.

[11] These books are: D. Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2001; *The Cinema of Central Europe*, ed. P. Hames, Wallflower Press, London 2004; *The Cinema of The Balkans*, ed. D. Iordanova, Wallflower Press, London 2006; P. Hames, *Czech and Slovak Cinema: Theme and Tradition*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2010; *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, ed. A. Imre, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester 2012; *Postcommunist Film – Russia, Eastern Europe and World Culture…*, op. cit.; D. Nasta, *Contemporary Romanian Cinema: The*

History of an Unexpected Miracle, Wallflower Press, London – New York 2013; *Postcolonial Approaches to Eastern European Cinema: Portraying Neighbours on Screen*, eds. E. Mazierska, L. Kristensen, E. Näripea, I. B. Tauris, London – New York 2014; D. Pop, *Romanian New Wave Cinema: An Introduction*, McFarland and Company, Jefferson 2014; D. Murtic, *Post-Yugoslav Cinema: Towards a Cosmopolitan Imagining*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2015; M. Filimon, *Cristi Puiu*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana – Chicago – Springfield 2017; L. Strausz, *Hesitant Histories on the Romanian Screen*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2017; A. Batori, *Space in Romanian and Hungarian Cinema*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2018; *Romanian Cinema Inside Out: Insights on Film Culture, Industry and Politics 1912--2019*, ed. I. Trocan, Romanian Cultural Institute, Bucharest 2019; *Contemporary Balkan Cinema: Transnational Exchanges and Global Circuits*, eds. L. Papadimitriou, A. Grgić, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2020; D. Pop, *Romanian Cinema: Thinking Outside the Screen*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York – London – Dublin 2022; *Experimental Cinemas in State-Socialist Eastern Europe*, eds. K. Gurshtein, S. Simonyi, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2022; *Patterns of Miscommunication: Contemporary East-Central European Cinema*, eds. D.-A. Oprea, L.-A. Chapelan, Editura Comunicare.ro, Bucharest 2024.

[12] K. Ravetto-Biagioli, "Laughing into the Abyss: Cinema and Balkanization", in: *A Companion to Eastern…* op. cit., p. 91.

[13] D. Murtic, op. cit., p. 102.

[14] D. Duma, "Romanian Animation: Digital Renaissance", in: *Romanian Cinema Inside Out…* op. cit., p. 162.

[15] A. Gorzo, "Realism and Ideology…" op. cit.

[16] L. Strausz, op. cit., p. 13.

[17] *Polish New Wave/Polska Nowa Fala*, ed. B. Piwowarska, Ł. Ronduda, Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej, Warszawa 2008.

[18] M. Goddard, "The Impossible Polish New Wave and its Accursed Émigré Auteurs: Borowczyk, Polański, Skolimowski, Żuławski", in: *A Companion to Eastern…* op. cit., p. 292.

[19] M. Goddard, "Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie / The Saragossa Manuscript", in: *The Cinema of Central Europe*, op. cit., p. 88.

[20] G. Doncheva, "Bulgaria: Reframing Contemporary Arthouse and Mainstream Cinema", in: *Contemporary Balkan Cinema…* op. cit., p. 52.

[21] D. Pop, *Romanian New Wave…* op. cit., p. 56.

[22] Ibidem.

[23] Ibidem.

[24] Ibidem, p. 57.

[25] E. R. Popan, "Recent Romanian Cinema: Is it a Real New Wave or Just a Splash in the Water?", *The Communication Review* 2014, no. 17, pp. 217-232, cited in: A. Batori, op. cit., p. 66.

[26] A. Batori, op. cit., p. 66.

[27] L. Strausz, op. cit., p. 13.

[28] Ibidem.

[29] Ibidem, p. 14.

[30] Ibidem, p. 17.

[31] P. Hames, *Czech and Slovak Cinema…* op. cit., p. 74. The direct reference to British social realism as the inspirational source for the Romanian New Wave is also present in the writings of Doru Pop.

[32] Ibidem.

[33] L. Ţion, "Socialist Sink: The Eastern Roots of the Romanian New Wave", *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 2020, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 51-73.

[34] Ibidem, p. 51.

[35] Ibidem.

[36] Ibidem, p. 55.

[37] R. Williams, "A Lecture on Realism", *Screen* 1977, vol. 18, no. 1, p. 63.

[38] Ibidem, p. 61.

[39] Ibidem, p. 68.

[40] S. Lay, *British Social Realism: From Documentary to Brit Grit*, Wallflower, London – New York 2002, pp. 9-10.

[41] D. Forrest, *New Realism: Contemporary British Cinema*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2020, p. 16.

[42] J. Hallam, M. Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2000, p. 184.

[43] A. Batori, op. cit., p. 74.

[44] D. Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film*, Wallflower Press, London 2003, p. 37.

[45] I wrote about this more broadly in: K. Kosińska, "Style and Attitude: Social(ist) Realism in the Polish Black Series and British Free Cinema", *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 2011, no. 2, pp. 193-209.

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