

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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WHEN EVENING FALLS ON BUCHAREST, OR METABOLISM CÂND SE LASĂ SEARA PESTE BUCUREȘTI, SAU METABOLISM (2013)

CORNELIU PORUMBOIU

Contents (Overview-Synopsis-Characters-Character Analysis-Themes-Scenes)

OVERVIEW

AUTEUR Corneliu Porumboiu is one of the Romanian New Wave film directors. He was born in Vaslui, Romania, in 1975. He first studied Management at the National Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest between 1994 and 1998. After this, he enrolled in The Theatre and Film Academy (UNATC) Bucharest which he graduated from in 2003. He has won several awards, the most important of which are: Un certain regard at the Cannes Film Festival for *The Treasure* (2015); Un certain regard at the Cannes Film festival for his feature *Police, Adjective* (2009).

FILM The movie is a 2013 drama by Romanian director Corneliu Porumboiu. The second part of its title, Metabolism, alludes firstly, to Paul's faked return of an ulcer – Paul's metabolism is no longer working properly. However, the title could also be interpreted to mean the transformation of something inside, namely Paul's love for Alina. This sentiment is never explicitly stated in the movie, only very subtly hinted at. The parallel between physiology and love is interesting and we could infer that the director sees the state of falling in love as a disease.

BACKGROUND The movie is reminiscent, distantly, of Carlos Saura's adaptation of Bizet's *Carmen*. Indeed, much of the data coincides with Saura's film. We have the same director-actress/dancer relationship where the director watches closely and intimately the actress he is having an affair with. The actress is faithless and betrays the director's trust, and the story does not end well. What Porumboiu does is transpose the story in contemporary terms, laying bare the disenchantment and restraint that characterize young lovers today.

SYNOPSIS

When Evening Falls on Bucharest or Metabolism is both a love drama and a film about the art of filmmaking. It follows the story of love that happens between Paul, a movie director, and Alina, his actress. The two have met while filming Paul's latest movie. Alina is from Târgu Mureș while Paul is from Bucharest. Their professional relationship has turned into a sexual affair. Paul falls in love with Alina. Because of this, he tries to extend her stay in Bucharest as much as he can. First of all, he fakes an ulcer in order to delay filming. Then, he keeps asking Alina to repeat rehearsing her last scene in the movie. The two get along well, have interesting and lengthy conversations about movie-making, media, culture and themselves. However, Alina has a secret. She has a boyfriend back home, whom she telephones every now and then, out of Paul's sight. When Paul gives her to understand that she has become special to him, Alina backs off, saying that she has to go to the hotel room. In their last conversation, which happens in Alina's hotel bar, Alina says she could not receive Paul in her room because it is not allowed to smoke there. The movie ends with scenes of Alina's getting made up in her dressing room in front of a lit mirror in which she sees herself. The movie is about the art of movie making in the sense that it discusses several issues related to film technique that pertain to the director's own art. The film discussions are thus a sort of *mise-en-abyme* of Porumboiu's cinematographic statement. This is a movie about both unrequited love and about the art of filmmaking.

CHARACTERS

Paul – a film director

Alina – an actress

Magda – a manager

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Paul

Paul, the main character in the movie, is a film director. He is creative and determined to obtain what he wants. However, he is insecure, which renders him unhappy.

Creative Paul is a creative director, who tries to extract meaning from each scene he films. He is thorough and attentive to detail, and does not let any imperfection slide by. He is the type of movie director bent on technique and film language. He has created successful movies in the past.

Determined Paul is determined to get what he wants, that is, make Alina stay longer with him. For this, he will even inflict tremendous pain on himself, lie and risk his credibility. In spite of all these determined actions, he does not have the strength or courage to confess his feelings to Alina.

Insecure Paul is insecure especially about Alina's feelings for him. Most of his actions and words bespeak self-assurance and determination, but, when it comes to expressing himself about his feelings for Alina, he is speechless. This insecurity is the cause of his silence during their last meeting.

Tense Paul seems to be tense all the time. He almost never smiles or laughs and there is a grimace, as if he were in deep pain, on his face almost all the time. He seems to be preoccupied with several things at once: the ending of his movie, his relationship with Alina and the lies he had to make up in order to convince Magda that he is ill.

Alina

Alina is Paul's lover and an actress in the movie. She becomes the main actress once Paul has fallen in love with her. She is engaged and cooperative.

Engaged Alina is deeply engaged in her conversations with Paul, especially the ones pertaining to the way he is supposed to film and she is supposed to act. She not only gives him feedback, but gives her own opinions and participates actively in the conversation.

Cooperative Alina works well with Paul. Even after he extends her stay in Bucharest, she does not become upset but is available to rehearse the scene as many times as he asks. She communicates well and they have good conversations, where she is conciliatory most of the time.

Secretive However, Alina is secretive. She hides from Paul the fact that she has a boyfriend. We realize she has one from the fact that every time he rings her up, she goes to a different place to talk on the phone. Although no commitment has been made between Alina and Paul, she is supposed to have told Paul that she already is in a relationship.

Magda

Magda is Paul's manager. She is insensitive and uncooperative.

Insensitive Magda is insensitive to Paul's problems. All she needs to know about his illness is that he has documentation available for the insurance. Even when she sees him suffering emotionally in the hotel lobby, she asks him not to give her more problems than she already has.

Uncooperative Magda is also uncooperative. She cares very little about how the film is going and she scolds Paul when she learns he has lied to her. Magda only cares that the movie is finished and that all her money is not wasted.

THEMES

Love In the movie, Paul gradually falls in love with Alina. He does not state it clearly, but we understand this from hints and small gestures. However, Alina does not fall in love with him and leaves him to go back in her hometown and boyfriend. For Paul, what started off as physical attraction and an adventure with one of his actresses, has grown into love. In order to keep her longer with him, he repeats filming the scene in which she appears. He tells her that she has become the central character because the camera pauses a long time on her. When he sees that she talks on the phone, probably with another man, he gets distressed. At the end, we realize the extent of his love for her from the dialogue they have. While he admits that he has not slept with other actresses before, she says that she has slept with other directors, implying that these were just adventures. This disturbs Paul again and he isn't able to say anything more. Paul's love for Alina is the trigger for the conflict and for the development of the action in the movie. At the end, we empathize with him for his capacity for love, which is, however, unrequited.

Attraction There is physical attraction between Alina and Paul and we witness it from the beginning of the movie in the love-making scenes. But there is a subtler, more nuanced attraction of Paul to Alina as he looks at her rehearsing the shower scene. As Alina mimics her way in and out of the shower and dressing up, Paul gazes at her admiringly. She is a beautiful woman and the long scenes of her rehearsing enhance this attraction. Some of the words she uses are also intimate, almost sexual words, which seem to have a certain influence on Paul. As for Alina, we never see her look at Paul the way he looks at her. She is not entranced by him or his words, most of which she does not even understand. She just wants to have a brief affair with him and then return home to her boyfriend. Although she is attracted to Paul, this attraction does not translate into admiration as it does for Paul. He becomes in love with her precisely in those moments when he stares at her intently as she rehearses. We do not see Alina become impressed with or entranced by Paul's meaningful words. On the contrary, she does not seem to understand them.

Relationships Alina and Paul are emblematic of contemporary relationships between young adults. They are afraid to express their feelings, they are aloof and alienated and they communicate with difficulty. Paul never mentions anything on his newfound love for Alina. Alina is equally closed in and she does not confide to Paul anything about her personal life. They only talk about general things and trivialities and intellectual things. Their conversation is mainly saved by Paul, who has some interesting insights on the art of cinema. Paul, however, is alienated from the world and can find a place for himself in it with difficulty. Alina seems more adapted, but she lives in another town, where she has an altogether different life. Therefore, Paul remains apart from Alina in spite of his desperate attempts to spend more time with her. Their communication does not touch on personal or important matters. It is more intellectual and more of the conversation of two people who have just met. These traits are representative of modern day relationships.

Media Media is discussed in the movie in particular in terms of traditional cinema versus digital cinema. Paul predicts that in the future there will be other forms of cinema that we know of today. He also says that he can only think in terms of traditional cinema because this is the way he was taught in school and this is the way he has been working. Digital cinema allows for fewer cuts whereas, he says, traditional cinema can film one roll only for eleven minutes. He predicts that digital cinema will eventually completely replace traditional cinema because it is more economical. However, there will be a change in perception, mentality and, obviously, movie-making. It is interesting to think of traditional cinema in terms of its montage feature because it means that you cannot film a scene for too long. For instance, Paul said he would have liked to film an argument between two of his characters for at least two hours, but that it is impossible with traditional cinema. With digital cinema, this dream could be achieved. Thus, the new cinematographic media brings innovations as well as challenges to the old way of movie making.

Suffering Suffering is present in the movie through Paul's pain. This pain is on the one hand, visible – his ulcer seems to have returned – and, on the other hand, invisible, the pain of being different, of understanding things differently. The physical pain, his ulcer, appears from the first scenes of the movie. What is interesting is that he adds to this pain the torture of almost stabbing himself to death, a gesture which remains hard to explain until the end. He may have wanted his voice to sound like that of a suffering man when speaking to Magda. This would signify that his ulcer did not really return, especially since he brought a fake echography to the insurance doctor's room (undated and unsigned). The invisible pain comes from his very rarely smiling, from his seeming preoccupation and tension, from the unreciprocated

love for Alina, which he does not dare confess. He is also the type of misunderstood artist, as we can infer from his dialogue with Alina, where she rarely understands him. All of these factors make Paul a suffering man, with no relief for his suffering in sight.

Culture The theme of culture is discussed by Alina and Paul one night as they are having dinner in a Chinese restaurant. All of a sudden, Paul asks Alina how she thinks what the Chinese eat has influenced their way of eating. She does not seem to understand the question and does not answer. He then explains that the Chinese eat the type of food and dishes that can be eaten with sticks and this is why they are able to eat with sticks. Again, what preoccupies Porumboiu here is the idea of how a medium influences perception, as sticks themselves are, in McLuhan's definition of the term, a medium of interconnection with the outer world. Thus, what we eat is determined by what we eat with, and not vice versa. Alina, however, is not very interested in the subject, so she changes the topic. Porumboiu must have wanted to show how our perception of culture(s) is determined by stereotypes and associations. He may have also wanted to point out the misunderstandings among cultures based on different perceptions of the world.

Work Work is probably the most important theme in the movie, namely a director's work. The movie is also about the technique and art of directing a movie. There are several scenes where Alina and Paul discuss the best ways to film certain scenes, gestures and movements. Porumboiu shows it is a painstaking activity, where a director has to think every scene through and through. For instance, in Alina's last scene, which they repeat several times, they consider why she goes from the bathroom into the hallway and they decide eventually on the idea that she is going to get her dress. The idea of verisimilitude is important and every gesture has to be accounted for and be logical. The work of a director implies working and discussing with actors all these details and deciding together on the best way to film them. Porumboiu makes it clear that it is not only a tedious job but also, most of the time, unrecognized by the ones in the immediate vicinity. This applies to Magda, his production manager, who has no time for his suffering and misgivings.

Deceit The theme of deceit appears in the movie through both Alina's and Paul's actions. Although it is a casual affair and, in principle, she does not have any obligation to Paul, Alina hides the fact that she has a boyfriend back home. However, Paul learns about this when he hears her speak on the phone in the other room and is affected by it. Paul learns about this much in the same way the character played by Alina overhears the couple's conversation in the scene they had been rehearsing. But Paul is also deceitful. He lies to Magda that he has had an echography and about his ulcer pains. He has done this probably to extend Alina's stay in Bucharest on account of his being ill and not being able to film the scene. We cannot speak of disloyalty in a no-strings-attached affair, but Alina is untruthful by not telling Paul about her boyfriend. Not speaking out your feelings creates tension in the movie and the interior conflict in Paul. He is deceitful because he is unable to express his feelings to Alina. Alina is deceitful because she feels that Paul has fallen in love with her and she does not want to hurt his feelings by telling him about her boyfriend.

SCENES

ALINA AND PAUL HAVE A CONVERSATION Alina, an actress, and Paul, a movie director, have a conversation in a car. Paul explains to Alina details about his cinematographic art. Alina listens intently. We infer she is an actress in the movie he is now making.

TALKING ABOUT CINEMA Paul says that, in a hundred years, movies will look very differently than they do now. He then explains to Alina some technicalities about cinema and why he thinks movies will change.

PAUL IN HIS KITCHEN Paul is alone in his apartment, sitting on a chair in the kitchen. He looks sad. He is drinking coffee and smoking.



PAUL'S ULCER CRISIS All of a sudden, Paul gets up and takes a knife. He places the knife towards his stomach and cringes in pain. He is in great suffering.



PAUL MAKES A PHONE CALL Then Paul gives a phone call to his manager to tell her he has had an ulcer or maybe gastritis. He says he will not be able to film that day because he will have to go to the doctor.

REHEARSING

ALINA AND PAUL REHEARSE Later on in Paul's apartment, Alina and Paul meet in order to rehearse. He does not appear to be in pain or to have any medical problem. They discuss at long length the way the scenes should be filmed and interpreted.



ALINA MIMES THE SCENE After the discussions, Alina rehearses on and mimes the whole scene while Paul watches her. She is attractive and Paul is completely engrossed in her acting.



ALINA AND PAUL TALK ABOUT THE MOVIE Alina cooperates well with Paul and gives him her own ideas about how he should film. She asks intelligent questions and Paul explains his choice.

PAUL AND ALINA MAKE LOVE The first time that Paul and Alina make love in the movie is behind the semi-closed bedroom door. We just hear their gasps.

PAUL AND ALINA HAVE DINNER IN A CHINESE RESTAURANT After making love, Alina and Paul go to a Chinese restaurant and have dinner. While Paul gulps, Alina eats in a very well-mannered way. Paul is asking all the questions, while Alina merely responds, without asking him anything back.



ALINA AND PAUL TALK ABOUT OTHER CULTURES Alina tells Paul about her experience when she lived abroad, in France. Paul, in his turn, tells Alina about customs in other cultures. Paul's main point is that those customs influence one's way of thinking.



THE FIRST PHONE CALL While driving in Paul's car and having a conversation, Alina's phone suddenly rings. She does not answer it and asks Paul to stop so she can go somewhere to talk on the phone.



MAGDA

PAUL MEETS MAGDA In Alina's hotel lobby, Paul meets Magda, his manager. She asks him about his health and he says he has been to the doctor and that it is a mere gastritis.



MAGDA'S PROBLEMS Magda is distressed because one of the actors got drunk the previous night and broke everything in the hotel room. Magda had to pay the damages.



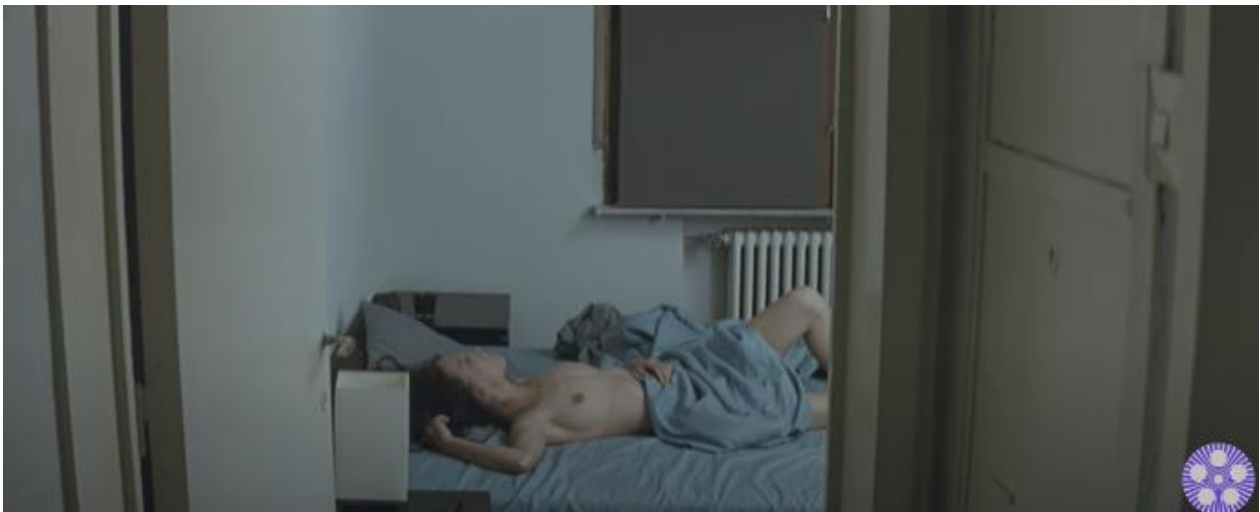
PAUL WATCHES ALINA AGAIN Back in Paul's apartment, Alina and Paul rehearse Alina's scene all over again. Paul is still not content with it and keeps asking Alina to repeat her miming the scene. Alina complies while Paul watches her transfixed. Paul asks Alina to rehearse the shower scene over and over again. She does so, repeating every move.



THE EXPLANATION Paul explains to Alina how she should act the shower scene. She listens intently but has her own opinions, too.



ALINA AND PAUL MAKE LOVE AGAIN After this, Alina and Paul go to Paul's bedroom and make love. Alina is lying naked on the bed after the love-making.



PAUL HEARS ALINA TALK ON THE PHONE After this, he goes to take a shower and Alina goes to the living room to talk on the phone. When he gets out of the shower, Paul hears Alina talk on the phone with her boyfriend.



ALINA'S PHONE Paul goes to check on Alina's phone to see who she has been talking to. All this time, Alina is in the bathroom to wash herself.



PAUL'S FRIEND Paul and Alina are again at a restaurant. Alina eats very carefully, while Paul is smoking a cigarette and drinking. A friend of Paul's approaches and sits at the table.



THE FRIENDLY CONVERSATION They all have a conversation. Paul becomes jealous thinking Alina has flirted with his friend.



AT ALINA'S HOTEL Paul meets Alina at the bar of the hotel Alina is staying in. They both look a bit tense and distant.



THE FIRST REFUSAL Paul suggests that they go to Alina's room but Alina refuses, saying that they are not allowed to smoke in there.



THE BREAK UP After dinner, Paul asks Alina to go back to his apartment, but she refuses to go, saying she needs to prepare for next day's work. Paul says he has never slept with one of his actresses before. But Alina says that she did sleep with previous directors she had.



THE ECHOGRAPHY For a few minutes, we see displayed on the screen Paul's fake echography (dated the previous year), which goes from the esophagus to the stomach. The doctor concludes that it is gastritis.



MAGDA'S QUESTIONING Magda watches the echography closely and asks the doctor some essential questions. Magda realizes that Paul has lied to her. When she remains alone with Paul, she tells him off.



THE MAKE-UP In the last scenes of the movie, we see Alina on a chair in her dressing room, with make-up being applied by a cosmetician. She looks at her own face in the front-facing mirror.

