

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Daniela Vasiloiu, PhD

NAE CARANFIL (b.1960)

Life

Nae (Nicolae) Caranfil is one of the first directors of the Romanian New Wave that emerged right after the fall of Ceausescu's totalitarian regime in the 1990s. The son of a well-reputed film critic and historian, Caranfil has had a fascination with the cinema world ever since he was a child. In one of his interviews, Caranfil recalls that, when he was about 6-7 years old, his father asked him what he wanted to become when he grew up. He remembers saying that he wanted to be Giuliano Gemma (an Italian actor, best known internationally for his Spaghetti Westerns) because he 'was the best, the strongest and invincible'. His father then asked him, 'Did you know there is someone that does not appear on screen, but who can do whatever he wants with Giuliano Gemma?' Caranfil remembers that was the moment he realized he wanted to become a director. During his youth, he took music lessons and drew comic sketches, talents that he has used for writing the score and the script of most of his films.

In 1984 he graduated at the top of his class from the Theatre and Film Institute in Bucharest. In 1988 he left for Brussels to attend the European Screenwriters Program within FEMI (Flemish European Media Institute). It is during that same year that he wrote the script of *The Rest is Silence*, a movie that he made almost twenty years later. He returned to Romania in December 1989 right after the fall of Ceausescu's regime. Between 1989 and 1991 he wrote scripts for the French movie production company, *Compagnie des Images*. Nae Caranfil was married to Mara Nicolescu (an actress, producer and scriptwriter) between 2001 and 2008.

FILMOGRAPHY

1983 – *Frumos e in septembrie la Venetia* (made during his university years)
1993 – *Sundays on Leave (È pericoloso sporgersi)*
1996 – *Asphalt Tango (Asfalt Tango)*
1998 – *Dolce far niente*
2002 – *Philanthropy (Filantropica)*
2007 – *The Rest is Silence (Restul e tăcere)*
2014 – *Closer to the Moon* (initial title of the script: *Alice in the Land of Comrades*)
2016 – *6.9 on the Richter Scale (6.9 pe Scara Richter)*
2018 – *Saturday Night Years* (TV mini series)

Awards Caranfil's tragic-comedies have gained him not only national but also international recognition.

1993 – The Critics Award at Montpellier Mediterranean Festival for *Sundays on Leave*
1998 – Golden Bayard Award for Best Screenplay at Namur International Festival of French-Speaking Film & Golden Bayard for Best Screenplay for *Dolce far niente*
2002 – Mons International Festivals of Love Films, Young European Jury Award & Paris Film Festival Public Prize for *Philanthropy*
2003 – Würzburg International Film Weekend Audience Award for *Philanthropy*
2007 – Gopo Award (a highly prestigious national award in Romania, similar to the Academy Awards in the US) & Golden Leopard & Warsaw Award Nominations for *The Rest is Silence*
2009 – Gopo Award for *The Rest of Silence*
2015 – Gopo Awards Best Directing & Best Screenplay for *Closer to the Moon*
2018 – Gopo Award Best Original Music Score & Best Directing and Best Screenplay Nominations for *6.9 on the Richter Scale*
2021 – The Excellence Award at TIFF (Transylvania International Film Festival)



(Nae Caranfil with his father, Tudor Caranfil, at the release of his latest movie, *6.9 on the Richter Scale*, 2017)



(Nae Caranfil, center, on set, with the main actors in *Closer to the Moon*)

The Director's Vision Statement

In one of his interviews, Caranfil contests his belonging to the New Wave of Romanian filmmakers, explaining that the cinema is 'an individual enterprise' and that the very attempt of ranking filmmakers into 'movements, generations, waves' is a 'simplifying formula'. With regard to his aesthetic, he thinks it distinguishes itself from the New Wave's 'deliberate naturalism and linearity' through fluid structure, extreme situations, stylized dialogues and the use of music.

Caranfil describes his work style as 'almost musical, with rhymes and phrases... In reality, I work for myself. I am the viewer of the movie, I have no interest in anyone else. I am the ideal viewer – a perfect combination between a cinephile and a hairdresser. The moment I put the finishing touches to a movie, I work like a conductor: the trumpet has to sound ampler, attention to the percussion because it has lost its tempo...I try to place each piece in the right box to obtain a well-balanced whole'. Caranfil views the story as the core of all arts: 'Paintings tell stories, sculptures tell stories, music tells stories, but the movie, above all, is the story *par excellence*'. His way of telling the story is by making comedy out a very serious subject: 'Comedy is the most efficient mode of dissimulating gravity. My type of intelligence or creativity probably builds some gags, some contrasts, antinomies which create a comic effect when they intersect. The difference between essence and appearance. Everything starts here – something that seems something, everybody relates to this appearance and, when they expect it the least, they realize it was something else. And then the laughter hurts.' (*LiterNet*, 2023)

THEMES

1. Freedom

Nae Caranfil's experience as a young director in communist Romania, a time when creative endeavor not in accordance with the times' politics was harshly censured, influenced his choice of themes in the movies he made after Ceausescu's regime fell. Freedom is a recurrent theme especially in his first movies, which either recreate the stifling and gloomy atmosphere in the country before 1989, or right afterwards, when, caught in the general frenzy of the newly acquired freedom, the characters long for or embark on a pursuit of the Western dream.

Sundays on leave Caranfil captures a slice of Romanian society under Ceausescu's dictatorship when freedom was an unspoken concept that people would just long for while secretly tuning in to Radio Free Europe. The provincial town that young people like Cristina want to escape because of its predictable life routine, the compulsory sixteen month-long military service, the army jail for the disobedient soldiers and the inability to leave the country freely—all these are indicative of the severe restrictions at the time upon speech, movement, and even life choices. For example, Cristina is motivated to become an actress because it gives her a chance to travel all over the world through her characters. As for Dino, even though he is aware that he may never be an actor again, he still makes the life-threatening decision to cross the border by swimming the Danube to Yugoslavia in search of his freedom.

Asphalt Tango The early 1990s found Romania free from an authoritarian regime but plunged into a state of chaos and poverty. Caranfil's movie subtly highlights the idea that freedom in the absence of a firm set of laws and well-established values can lead to a society drifting chaotically, with catastrophic consequences for its citizens' lives. This is dramatised, for example, by the young women who sign a contract to work as dancers in Paris and do not suspect that they might end up as prostitutes there, as implied in the conversation between the bus driver and Andrei at the garage. In a frenzy to go abroad, one of the women on the bus even takes the initiative of having all the girls sign up for a union, which she thinks can fight for their rights and against exploitation. Her undertaking is, however, in stark contrast with the lack of reaction at Marion's cold tone when presenting the job requirements. Apart from Felicia, who seems to have learnt some set phrases in French, they can hardly understand the language of the country they are heading to, which implies that they will not be able to find the longed-for freedom there either. All these young women behave as if liberated from their former domestic roles (Dora, from a 'happy' marriage, paradoxically), and now feel empowered to make their own decisions about how they want to live their lives. It is a freedom, however, that lacks reality.

Closer to the Moon Freedom (or rather the absence of freedom because of the harsh restrictions on free movement imposed by the communist regime) is a recurrent theme in this movie. The absence of freedom is represented mainly through the prison, the police and Securitate (the National Secret Services). On Dumitru's birthday party night, Max uses Dumitru's telescope to look around the neighborhood and sees a man being arrested by 'the boys' in his own home. Besides its scientific role, the telescope may stand as a metaphor for the citizens' unspoken sense of inescapability from Secret Services agents' permanent surveillance and immediate repressive action against any subversive activity. The theme is also present in the main characters' discussions and attitudes. The gang's well-informed decision to commit the most serious type of robbery, regardless of the fact that their 'chances of pulling it off are almost zero' and that they could be sentenced to death, points to their freedom of thought and spirit. It could also be viewed as the protagonists' subversive reaction to the communist system's growingly paranoid delusions and inhumane ways of purging the society of 'capitalist evils' and non-conformist intellectual values.

2. Sexuality Sexuality, a taboo subject in Romanian society before 1989 and in the 1990s, is under close scrutiny in Nae Caranfil's films. The rigid and misogynistic societal expectations of women at the time were blatantly discriminatory and had men and women at opposite poles: men were perceived as virile and powerful when manifesting their sexuality (often in a brutish manner) whereas women, if daring to do the same, were frowned upon and labeled as 'whores'.

Sundays on leave The state's propaganda in communist Romania promoted a higher birth-rate and conservative principles such as sex only after marriage, especially for women, and thus, an open discussion or free embrace of one's sexuality was unimaginable at the time. In Caranfil's movie, however, there are several scenes when sexuality is presented in an overt mode through the characters' foul language and obscene gestures. For example, the senior high school male students hide in the bathroom to look at pornographic magazines. When Horatiu pressures Cristina into a sexual act, she rejects him, saying she cannot do that before marriage or at least, an engagement. However, a little later, she gives in to Dino's advances very easily. At the theater, Dino annoys his colleagues by replacing a manifesto poster prop used on the stage with one of a naked woman. In the army, the soldiers pay Rexona, a prostitute who comes to the barracks for sexual favors.

Asphalt Tango This movie gives an insight into a tendency in post-revolutionary Romania for self-delusion among young women who hope to meet a rich foreigner who will marry them, take them to their countries and offer them a great life. Some girls in the group going to France immediately become very friendly when they hear a man speaking a foreign language in their proximity. The grim unspoken reality of the time, however, is that women do not seem to understand that they are treated as mere tradable commodities, who have been chosen, as Marion puts it, only because they are 'cheaper' than those in other countries. Mr. Gigi hardly ever treats them respectfully. On the contrary, he insults them deliberately as a form of intimidation. Similarly, the bus driver's remarks about women are misogynistic and full of sexual innuendos and derogatory generalizations. For instance, he asks Mr. Gigi just before departure whether, besides the financial reward, he can also get any sexual favors from the girls on the way to Paris.

6.9 on the Richter Scale The movie scrutinizes sexuality in its overt form as well as its repressed, inhibited one. One of Tony's nightmares explicitly shows his father and Bambi having sexual intercourse in the flat that collapses because of a high magnitude earthquake. As for the repression of sexual instincts, Tony clearly notices other women's sex appeal, as is the case with Bambi, whom he cannot help staring at even in the presence of his father and his wife. Kitty wishes the romantic passion between her and Tony be rekindled, but, for example, when he tries to take her skirt off one evening, he does it with some difficulty. Instead of letting herself be carried away in the moment, Kitty throws a tantrum blaming herself for being 'ugly' and having 'put on weight', and him for either not finding her attractive enough or 'having someone else'. Judging by Daddy's amoral behavior and his encouraging Tony to follow suit, the movie highlights how a misogynistic view of sexuality is perpetuated from father to son. By contrast, social conventions and expectations inhibit (Kitty) or hold women's extrovert sexual desires (Bambi) in contempt.

3. Friendship Nae Caranfil portrays friendship as mainly lacking the loyalty and trustworthiness that such social relationship typically involves. Friends are shown as sharing thoughts and feelings but keeping their most intimate ambitions and dreams secret, as their actions, when not around their friends, demonstrate. Friendship thus seems motivated by the 'benefits' the alleged friends may obtain from it and are remorselessly betrayed when their personal interest or the National Secret Service requires it. *Closer to the Moon* is an exception though, due to the fact that the members of the gang are united by shared beliefs and their heroic past.

Sundays on Leave Events connecting the main characters show a different perspective on friendship, which is not based on the usual feelings of care, trust and support, but rather on teasing, pretense and untruthfulness. This is valid for all three parts of the story. In school, Vizante, the nerd of the class, is teased by his friends, who pretend to teach him how to charm Cristina. They cannot stop laughing at him as they watch his awkward attempt to play 'tricks' on her. In the army, Horatiu's colleagues constantly nag him about Cristina and his getting detention 'on purpose' as a way of getting out of doing army jobs. They then pretend to care about him, but dare him to invite Cristina to their farewell party, saying that they will marry them. Since Horatiu fails to do so, they set up a bunk bed as a ceremonial spot to mock-marry him to Rexona, the regiment's prostitute, instead. As for the theatre group, even though they work and spend a lot of time on tours together, the key elements defining their relationship are the bad jokes, mistrust and disrespect for each other when they fight.

The Rest is Silence For Leon, the personal gain and profit in business are more important than friendship. In his view, business cannot thrive if run on sentimentalist principles such as friendship. While Grig and his friends are in Paris for the film editing process, Leon sells the movie to several investors. Hethen sends Grig and his partners a letter stating the contrary and encouraging them to surrender their rights to him in order to avoid losing all the money. As a result, all the movie shareholders, except for Grig, become anxious and fearful of the prospect of failure and bankruptcy, so they take Leon's advice. Grig finds out about Leon's scheme and immediately returns to Bucharest. In solidarity with his friends, Grig hands Leon his own letter stating that he gives his shares to him, too. Leon accepts it with disappointment, telling Grig that he is 'more foolish than he thought' because 'friendship is good only at parties', not in business. Friendship thus appears to be a rare human quality that only an idealistic young man like Grig may still remain loyal to.

Closer to the Moon The friendship connecting the five members of the gang stands in sharp contrast to the generalized sense of mistrust that was deeply ingrained in the Romanian society's collective consciousness at the end of the 1950s. Their close relationship is based on several shared life experiences that have kept them together throughout time: their common anti-bourgeois fight right after the war; respect for one another's intellectual abilities; Alice and Max have a son together; their fall into disgrace as the Party started to dispose of members that did not fit into their socialistic pattern, which they did not because of their Jewish identity. Their decision to rob the bank as a way to undermine the state, and then sticking together during the trial, the robbery reconstruction movie-making and, eventually, facing death by the firing squad, reflects an unbreakable human connection between individuals who risked everything for their beliefs. The conclusion underlying the movie storyline is that friendship is a human value, which was vital during the dehumanizing years of the communist regime.

4. Love In some of Caranfil's movies, the theme of love revolves around loss, namely the boy loses the girl in the end, as the director has stated in one of his interviews. The storyline rather pursues the end rather than the beginning of love when the characters experience a personal crisis and, for various reasons, do not or can no longer share the same feelings as their partners.

Sundays on leave In this movie, love represents a glimmer of hope in the provincial town where Horatiu does his military service. His meetings with Cristina seem to give him the strength to endure his colleagues' bullying and the army's rigid rules and restrictions. Horatiu is madly in love with Cristina. In the scene that shows their first encounter and walk in the park, she appears to be attracted to him also, but too shy to get too close to him. She visits Horatiu at the barracks, thus, giving him the false impression that she shares his feelings and they are in a serious relationship, as he brags in front of his army fellows. Horatiu even leaves the army premises without permission only to be able to meet her.

However, as it turns out, Cristina's interest in him is only in relation to the help he offers her with her math homework. When he insistently pressures her to get intimate with him as 'a natural result of their love', she pushes him away almost instantly. She then keeps him at a distance, especially after she catches the attention of Dino, a well-known actor on whom she has a crush.

Asphalt Tango Caranfil's movie portrays a society cast adrift after the fall of communism, in which only love seems to have remained a beacon of hope. Andrei's stubborn chase of the bus taking his wife abroad stands proof of his abiding love for her. In her goodbye letter to him, Dora tells him that she loves him, too, but that she has to leave everything behind for the unique chance of working in France. As soon as he reads the letter, Andrei starts a mad race to get his wife back. Dora's colleagues gradually come to admire his desperate attempts to talk to his wife and say to her that they wish that they had a man to love them like that. In the tango scene, even Marion admits to having been impressed by his unwavering commitment to his marriage and the powerful impact that such genuine feelings of love may have had on Dora if he had succeeded in talking to her. Although the end of the movie shows Andrei handcuffed by the police while hopelessly watching the bus cross the border, his love for Dora inspires someone else to change her mind. Felicia, the girl who has decided to 'forget' Romania, waves at him from the other side of the road.

6.9 *on the Richer Scale* Tony's role as Orpheus in the *Orpheus and Eurydice* musical juxtaposes the two mythological characters' love story with his own. The loss of love, then found and lost again, is the underlying theme of the movie. The story begins with Tony and Kitty in a marital crisis, and his unexpressed wish to split up with her. Kitty, in turn, feels frustrated because Tony does 'not look at her with the passion' she thinks he does when it comes to other women. There follow a few scenes that show a timid attempt by the two protagonists to reconnect but still unable to revive the love and passion that Kitty longs for. In the final scene, Tony passionately sings his musical part from the balcony on the flat down the street where Kitty looks confident, holding her suitcase and on the point of leaving him. Tony smiles apologetically as if asking for another chance. Kitty smiles back, as if saying that his long-awaited gesture has come too late; yet, she neither appears to leave nor return to the flat. The movie has an open ending, with Kitty and Tony's love story left in a state of limbo, perhaps with the aim of showing that, unlike their mythological counterparts, it is not up to a god (Hades) but only to individuals to change the course of their love.

5. Desire The theme of desire is present in most of Caranfil's movies to highlight the gender-differentiated view of the attraction between a man and a woman. Even after the fall of communism in 1989 the Romanian society is still deeply misogynistic. Women are perceived objects of desire and often victims of men's constant harassment, innuendos, groping and lustful gaze. On the other hand, when the female characters express their own desires and choice of a man, they are portrayed as manipulative and of low morals.

Sundays on Leave In quite a few scenes, young men (students, soldiers or actors) look at the opposite sex with lust in their eyes. Cristina and Manzatu hang out together outside school, and yet, he cannot refrain from trying to lift her school dress with a stick during a break. Whenever Vizante sees Cristina, he stares at her, his mouth agape. Cristina is in the centre of attention again when she visits Horatiu one afternoon, and his colleagues watch them in disbelief, jealous that a beautiful woman like her could possibly be his girlfriend. At the theatre, Dino stops in the middle of a line and remains quiet for a few seconds as he notices Cristina's beauty in the audience. Even Dino's wife, Carmen is sexually harassed by Jean the evening they meet at the railway station. On the other hand, Rexona, the prostitute, fully accepts her role as an object of lust while she collects cash for her services from the soldiers who stand in line and stare at her with greedy eyes.

Asphalt Tango Caranfil addresses the theme of desire in relation to men's objectifying women. Most of the scenes in which the young women going to Paris appear show the frequent groping, harassment and innuendos they are subjected to by men. Dora's 'honest question'—'why do we always have to put up with such lame hints?'—in response to Mr. Gigi's lascivious attitude towards her sums it all up: women constantly have to endure men's sexual advances. Right after the bus driver receives a financial incentive

and the transport documents from Mr. Gigi, he asks him about the possibility of being 'rewarded' with some sexual favors from the girls during their journey to Paris. Moreover, during the journey the driver keeps telling dirty jokes in the hope that he will draw the girls' attention to him. The tango scene between Marion and Andrei also hints at the sexual desire and tension that normally exists between the two dancing partners. In the movie, however, the tango is used as a metaphor for the clash between the two different worlds and values that Marion and Andrei represent.

The Rest is Silence Although Grig is too shy to ever admit it to Emilia, he falls for her as soon as he sees her posing nude in Leon's house. When he meets her again in the countryside where the filming crew has gone for the first scenes of the movie, he first gets flustered, but then, hearing that she aims to become an actress, he instantaneously creates a part for her in his movie. In the evening scene showing Emilia swimming and Grig pretending to smoke impassively on the shore of the lake, his body language and tone definitely show that he is infatuated with her. They lose contact for some time, but one evening—after asking around the Conservatory about Emilia—Grig behaves like a jealous and betrayed man upon seeing her enter the restaurant in the company of Mr. Duffin's friend. To everyone's shock, the moment she orders water because it feels too hot in the room, he dips his beer pint in the champagne bucket and then throws the cold water on her (this time without her asking him to do it as happened in the nude-posing scene). Some years later, Grig is shown proudly hanging Emilia's nude painting on the wall of his house, and taking a step back to admire it.

Closer to the Moon The theme of desire is dramatized especially in relation to women. There is a scene when Virgil helps the main cameraman film a group of teenage girls rehearsing for the National Day parade. Instead of packing the filming equipment up as instructed, Virgil encourages one of the on-scene workers to look through the camera lenses. The man zooms in the more intimate parts of some of the girls and makes some offensive comments about them. Virgil himself frequently takes close-ups of Alice when the reconstruction movie begins. Unlike his colleague, Virgil's attraction to Alice is gentle and innocent, as implied by his camera zoom-ins that follow her face, especially smiles. Virgil is clearly infatuated with Alice, and he shows her that by following her with his camera. She observes his special attention, and responds to it with flirting gestures, which flusters him. After spending the night together, Virgil's affection for her turns out to be genuine since he does not betray her confidence by revealing her son's address to Comrade Holban.

6. Dream One of the most important recurring themes in Caranfil's movies is the dream, especially on an abstract level. The main characters often feel trapped and stifled by the society they live in, so they dream about freedom and a better life, which requires radical actions such as crossing the border illegally, leaving family and safety for the unknown abroad, or even robbing banks as a form of regaining a sense of purpose.

Sundays on leave The movie addresses the dream of the 'West', a dream considered a 'subversive act' in communist Romania, and thus, people could not speak about it freely. They could only get access to this dream via Radio Free Europe, also banned by the communist state. Cristina aspires to become an actress because that will be a way for her to 'live different lives through her characters' and wonders whether things are the same 'abroad'. Dino confirms her thought that life is different there, but he is skeptical about the chances one may have there as a foreigner. He tells her about one of his acting friends who could not follow his profession and became a taxi driver. However, Cristina thinks that even if things may be difficult at first, one should persevere and believe in one's dream. Sharing the same ideal deep inside, Dino illegally swims across the Danube to Yugoslavian pursuit of his own dream of starting a new life, away from a country where 'nobody gives a dime for talent'.

Asphalt Tango The Western dream is what drives the group of young women to embark on a journey towards Paris with people (Mr. Gigi and Marion) they do not know but trust on the basis of a contract, which they signed despite their hardly understanding the language. Dora and her colleagues think they will be able to find their professional and personal fulfillment only away from home, in the West. They dream about a new life in Paris where they will be appreciated and free to live their lives as they wish. Dora's ambition is stronger than her love and her appreciation of her husband's personal qualities, so she leaves everything behind to fulfill her dream, which she says it may be her 'only chance to find happiness'. On

the other hand, the bus driver describes the West as a place where things happen in the same way as in the East, just in a 'more stylish way', and where beautiful women, like the ones he transports to Paris, will become nothing else but 'luxury prostitutes'.

The Rest is Silence One of the most illustrative examples of the theme of dream is Grig's determination and remarkable resilience in pursuing his dream of making movies despite his father's strong disapproval. Grig lacks the capital to make his movie, but he shows no hesitation in approaching Leon for financial support or in standing up for his directorial vision whenever the situation requires it, as is the case, for example, when meeting the king. When the king suggests which actor would be more suitable for playing his younger self in Grig's movie, Leon and the other movie shareholders play along with him in a courteous and flattering manner, whereas Grig stands up for his choices and contradicts the king. A little later, when Leon angrily tells Grig off for having been impertinent to the king and demands that all the changes advised by the king be made, Grig refuses to give in. Not even Leon firing him stops Grig from making his dream come true.

Closer to the Moon Nostalgic about their 'good old days' when they had an ideal to fight for, the five friends are ready to take all risks to contribute to the society one final time by showing the defects of the political system they live in. They choose to do so by robbing the National Bank, a gangster-like action which Max and friends naively imagine will 'humiliate' the system. Their dream of freedom emerges as a result of their feeling stifled and marginalized in a society where the communist propaganda erased all democratic values and individual creativity, independent action and thinking. The year of 1959 finds the protagonists struggling bitterly with the loss of their privileges and high-status positions because the Party started its 'spring cleaning', and disposed of them, also partly because of their Jewish identity. The only thing left is their dream and hope that their action will inspire workers to 'sit up in factories and say 'hang on a minute''.

6.9 on the Richter Scale The theme of dream is addressed in this movie in its basic meaning, namely in relation to Tony's recurrent nightmares about a forthcoming high magnitude earthquake that will cause his flat to collapse. From the very first scene, in which he wakes up because of a light earthquake that nobody else seems to have felt, to the end, Tony's growing fear of a higher magnitude earthquake affects not only his sleep but also his relationship with his wife, Kitty. His bad dream turns into neurosis as soon as he and Kitty move into a new flat in a block red-stamped as unstable. To his wife's despair, he keeps watching TV for the breaking news that may give people a warning about an imminent earthquake, which could buy them some time to go out of buildings and save their lives. The effects of the bad dream are similar to those of an earthquake because they mentally shake and reshape the characters' attitudes and relationships with each other.

7. Confinement Caranfil looks into the characters' struggles and deep yearning for change to show how mental and physical confinement paralyzed entire the entire society during but also in the two decades preceding Ceausescu's dictatorship when Romania experienced harsh political isolation from the West. The state's authorities enforced a ban on free movement of its citizens and various other laws, which were meant to keep people in control through terror and fear of the consequences, should the Secret Services suspect them of subversive actions or thinking.

Sundays on leave In this movie, the physical expression of confinement is brought to the foreground through locations such as Cristina's hometown, the army jail, the uncomfortable bus that the actors have to share when on tour, and the small hotel room and bed that Dino has to share with his colleague. Furthermore, the theme is also explored through the protagonists' personal struggles: the obligatory military service, even for completely unfit young men like Horatiu; Cristina's burning desire to leave her hometown where she feels bored and under the pressure of meeting social expectations and following a predictable life path like everyone else living there; Dino's feeling stuck in an underappreciated profession; and Horatiu's inability to obey the army rules and getting detention time for that.

Closer to the moon On the physical level, this movie subtly associates the country with a prison: people could leave neither of them at will. The hard communist propaganda created the illusion that the proletariat ruled the country, and thus they were entitled to severely reprimand Western decadence and

the intellectuals suspected to have dabbled with it. On the abstract level, the movie conveys confinement by likening space and opinion restrictions to stifling and rigid socialist ideology, which required people to 'work hard' for the progress of the country and report on anyone whose actions may disturb it. The state keeps vigil by holding its citizens captive to a generalized sense of division, mistrust and mental terror of being reported by anyone in their close proximity. This is the case with Iorgu's neighbor who eavesdrops on one of his phone conversations with a school colleague and then reports him to the police.

8. Marriage In addition to the themes above, marriage is also under scrutiny in Caranfil's movies. According to Romanian social norms, marriage is an 'institution' what enables women in particular the appropriate context for them to have a sexual relationship (e.g., Cristina justifies her rejection of Horatiu's sexual advances on the grounds that they are not married) and children. Interestingly enough, in some of Caranfil's movies, it is the male characters that try to save their marriages rather than the female ones.

Asphalt Tango In a society that experiences serious socio-economic difficulties and a fierce fight for survival during its transition years, marriage appears to have become an obsolete concept. The theme of marriage is mooted in the movie intro through a quote from Groucho Marx: 'Marriage is a wonderful institution, but who on earth would like to live in an institution?'

Andrei is the only character who still believes in this institution and remains faithful to his wedding vows. Andrei's state of helpless confusion at the end of the movie is generated by his desperation of having lost his wife for good and a flashback to his marriage ceremony. For a brief moment, reality and memory merge, and the priest handcuffs Andrei's and Dora's hands together. Back to reality, Andrei realizes that he is the only one who got handcuffed by the police officers while Dora is still on the bus, watching the entire scene with a smile. The handcuffs symbolize Andrei's mental entrapment in his idealistic view of marriage, and his inability to understand that it was his wife's decision to walk out of it.

Closer to the Moon Max has to marry Sonia out of convenience, at the Party's insistence that he 'acquire a marital status worthy of his rank and social position'. At the New Year's party, Sonia's brother, the minister, approaches Max and demands that he stop that 'nonsense about divorce', invite his wife to dance, get back together and 'make him an uncle'. And Max makes an effort to comply with the request. Sonia, however, mocks his attempt at reconciliation, thinking he has done it only because her brother asked him to. Max's filing for divorce soon after the New Year's party comes with his liberation from an unwanted and disastrous relationship, but, at the same time, with negative consequences for his position as his brother-in-law threatened him would happen if he dared leave his sister. Interestingly, apart from Max—the most rebellious of all—none of the other members of the group is married because as young revolutionaries they promised themselves that they would fight for freedom all their lives.

6.9 on the Richter Scale The movie dramatises Tony and Kitty's estrangement from each other after five years of marriage. The light earthquake that Tony feels one morning and the stronger aftershock that he fears may be interpreted as a metaphorical reference to the unresolved tension affecting their life as a couple. Tony hardly makes any effort to be more sympathetic towards his wife's frail mental state caused by her lack of job, purpose and insomnia. He does not even get involved in the purchase of their new flat, which becomes a further source of contention when he discovers that it is located in a block under severe risk of collapsing in the event of a high magnitude earthquake. He reproaches himself for giving her 'the freedom to do what she wanted' and her for not 'inform[ing] herself' before spending all their savings on it. They start arguing until, like in most of the scenes showing them together, Kitty bursts into tears, obsessing about her 'being fat and ugly' and his cheating on her.

In the end, Tony, however, sings his Orpheus part from the balcony with great passion, hoping that he will convince Kitty, who is watching the scene from the street, not to leave him.

CHARACTERS

Nae Caranfil's characters are colorful and memorable, contrasting the grim reality they live in. It is often the male characters that are brought to the foreground whereas the female characters are somehow left in their shadow, perhaps as deliberate reflection of the misogynist attitude in the Romanian society, especially during the communist era. The male characters range from free-spirited dreamers to intelligent individuals and unscrupulous manipulators, whereas the female characters are portrayed at times as dreamers themselves, or, at other times, wily and strong enough to pursue their ambitions.

1. **Idealist** In the world portrayed by Caranfil's movies, idealism represents hope, the inner drive that motivates some of the main protagonists to pursue their dreams. Their idealist view of the world could be also interpreted as a metaphor for a more abstract subversive act especially since the communist terror-led system seems to have infiltrated not only every aspect of society but also individuals' minds.

Cristina In *Sundays on Leave*, Cristina imagines that an acting career will allow her to live multiple lives through her characters. When, for example, Dino warns her about all the hardships that actors encounter 'in a country that does not value talent', she maintains her enthusiasm and replies that she is ready to make all the compromises that are necessary for her to become an actress. As she views it, all beginnings are difficult, but one has to persevere and fight for one's dream. She thinks that the pursuit of a dream is worth any sacrifice, even a low-status job such as the one held by Dino's friend, who managed to leave the country, but had to work as a taxi driver for a living in the West.

Andrei In *Asphalt Tango*, Andrei's unwavering faith in the institution of marriage in spite of his wife's refusal to talk to him shows his idealist side. Andrei remains fully committed to his 'for better or worse' wedding vows and goes through a series of mishaps in his desperate attempt to make his wife see that she has been tricked into signing a dubious contract. When everyone else chases after the Western dream, Andrei seems to have remained the only one holding on to moral values and refused to compromise his life principles for the sake of 'easy' money.

Grig In *The Rest is Silence*, Grig stands up for his ideals in the face of authority (his father, Leon, the king) in a dignified and even feisty manner, regardless of the constant teasing about his too big dreams at such a young age. For example, when the king suggests what changes should be made to his film, Grig is not afraid to speak up and firmly remind him that the director is the one who makes such decisions. He also refuses to obey Leon's orders that he should consider the changes, even if that means his dismissal. Grig proudly turns his back on Leon and goes away, thus preferring to stop working on his movie unless given the freedom to proceed on his own terms.

Max Any form of rebellion against the Communist Party's ideology is ruthlessly suppressed and punished by the 'Securitate' (National Secret Service), as happens with Max and his friends in *Closer to the Moon*. Their crime is judged as a political case and thus a grave offence against the state authority and socialist values. While gathered together for Dumitru's fortieth birthday party, the friends also talk about possible ways to fight against the system. Iorgu comes up with idea of robbing the Bank of Romania if they want to commit a 'crime in style'. Max finds the suggestion 'brilliant' because, as he explains, a bank robbery is perceived as 'one of the capitalist evils', which does not and 'must not' happen here'. They dream of reviving a heroic past and waking up the nation's conscience through their radical action.

2. **Clever** The protagonists with an idealist side to their character also stand out through their intelligence. They understand the futility of waiting for change and that it is up to their individual action to work out solutions, find a way out of unpleasant situations, and even turn things to their advantage.

Cristina In *Sundays on Leave*, Vizante and Horatiu try to approach Cristina more closely, but she quickly realizes their hidden intentions and outsmarts their moves. For instance, when Vizante invites her to his house to 'listen to his records', she immediately makes up an excuse about a 'private lesson' she has to attend. Soon afterwards, she meets Horatiu, who is eager to become more intimate with her. She pushes him away firmly on the grounds that they are not married, which makes him suggest that she should go to the army barracks for the farewell party on the night before his release from the military service when his

colleagues said they would marry them. Understanding the danger and indignant at his suggestion, she rushes away, sarcastically asking him whether they also considered 'having her listen to their records'.

Leon In *The Rest is Silence*, Leon embodies an eccentric tycoon with great flair for spotting profitable business opportunities. Although Leon initially dismisses the cinema for being an inferior art to the theater, he changes his mind when he observes the audience's reactions while viewing a movie on Grig's invitation to the cinema. He decides to invest in Grig's movie because he senses that the world is heading towards a new direction and he needs to keep up with the technological changes for his business to keep thriving.

Alice Alice, the female member of the gang in *Closer to the Moon*, is a refined intellectual. She has a degree in Political Sciences gained in Moscow, which is a particularly remarkable fact, given the historic context when women hardly ever got promoted. When, for example, the 'boys' are pondering over how they can rob the National Bank, she impresses them with her quick-witted suggestion that they should 'not attack the bank headquarters, but the van that delivers money to the branches'. She then continues by saying, 'If you want a crowd, you've got to make a show. We all wanted to become movie stars, remember?' The four men nod cheerfully, with Max expressing his admiration for her wit and calling her 'an angel'.

Max In *Closer to the Moon*, Max is the brain of the entire bank robbery operation. He is so frustrated with the system that he is ready to receive the death penalty only to be able to express his freedom of thought and action one last time. When Boris warns him about his prospective replacement within the police department, Max appears only to confirm with his colleague whether he will be the replacement. In a light-hearted tone, Max warns Boris about a lower shelf in his office desk that will not close properly, most likely hinting at the surveillance system installed there to monitor his activity, but of whose existence he has known.

3. Bold Some of the main protagonists show great courage in the face of difficulties, and they ignore the people in their entourage who try to discourage them from 'doing something stupid'. They take all risks to defend their ideals, life principles or family.

Dino Dino's decision to leave the country fraudulently at the end of 'The Actor' section of *Sundays on Leave* definitely points to brave side of him that he has kept hidden from the public eye. Dino's embarking on a risky enterprise like swimming across the Danube, and dismissing the consequences that its failure may bring, stands proof of his courage. Not only does he put his life in danger, but he also heads towards an uncertain future in a new world that he has only heard about either from his fugitive friend who could find only a job as a taxi driver or from Radio Free Europe (underground media at the time).

Horatiu Despite his quite frail look, Horatiu (in *Sundays on Leave*) is fearless when, for example, his superior criticizes him for causing trouble constantly. His superior realizes that the beautiful girl (Cristina) who pays him a visit at the army base one afternoon is the commander's daughter. The superior is concerned about the consequences and the commander's reaction; so he orders Horatiu to stop seeing Cristina. On another occasion, Horatiu is again unafraid to speak up in front of a superior, who threatens to send him to jail for talking during the 'Party newspaper reading time'. Instead of conforming, Horatiu answers back that it is 'not fair' and that he 'will write the corporal's name down in his own notebook for talking, too'.

Andrei Andrei (*Asphalt Tango*) gets involved in a series of adventures on the road, which also test his courage and determination. One of the most illustrative examples of his bravery is during the gas station scene. Two thugs tell him that the station has run out of gas while a third one pulls Felicia into a room and tries to rape her. When Andrei hears her screams for help, he starts fighting with the two men. After several punches, Andrei takes a cigarette lighter out of his pocket and threatens to blow up the gas station unless Felicia is released. Andrei's attitude is so fierce and convincing that they fill up his tank as he requests and tell their friend to free the girl.

Virgil In *Closer to the Moon*, Virgil's boldness is most evident in the scene in which the filming is stopped and the five convicts are taken back to prison on the minister's orders. Just before the minister's arrival, Virgil does not give in to comrade Holban's threats and claims he has no clue about the address of Alice's son. Then, as the van drives away, Virgil slowly points to Alice's letter in his pocket to reassure her that he will fulfill her wishes.

Max *Max (Closer to the Moon)* is very outspoken and shows no sign of fear. When Max's former brother-in-law, the minister, turns up on the movie set and tells him that the movie idea was his because he wanted the future generations to see what a criminal and traitor he was, Max remains unperturbed by the totally unequal position of authority between the two of them. He makes the suggestion that the entire group be put on a space rocket for the use of science, which infuriates the minister. Consequently, the minister orders that the prisoners be taken back to their cells and the movie shooting be ended right away.

4. Unscrupulous Caranfil's movies depict a dehumanized society like the one the communist system created and left behind; even the transition period in Romania brought about a lot of socio-economic instability, unrest and loss of values. Some characters show no shame in taking advantage of other characters' desperate struggle to change their lives for the better. They flatter someone in authority to help them advance their career, and, in some cases, they go so far to exploit their friends and family.

Marion In *Asphalt Tango*, Marion's shrewd character becomes most evident when she manipulates Dora's colleagues into going into Andrei's hotel room and putting him in a compromising position. Marion's wicked plan succeeds, and when confronted by Andrei, she faces him coldly. In tango steps, she tells him that she could not have allowed his 'innocence' to 'change people's minds'.

Mr. Gigi *Mr. Gigi (Asphalt Tango)* recruits young Romanian women to work in the entertainment industry abroad. When, for instance, Marion holds him accountable for the girls' very poor knowledge of French, he immediately replies that it is not his fault that they pretended to speak the language by 'reciting from Baudelaire'. This implicitly points to the fact that he had the girls sign the contract blindly, deliberately omitting to give them a realistic picture of their job requirements.

Leon In *The Rest is Silence*, Leon shows no scruples when he sends his partners a letter in Paris with the aim of manipulating them into believing that the movie sale failed and that they should transfer their movie shares to him to avoid ruin. When confronted about his scheme, Leon is rather disappointed by Grig's 'stupid' gesture of writing a letter stating that he gives him his shares and also by Grig's lack of understanding that there is no such thing as friendship in business.

Emilia *Emilia (The Rest is Silence)* deliberately lies to Grig on several occasions, playing the card of a hard-working woman who has to pose nude and baby-sit in order to save money for her acting school fees. When, upon her invitation, Grig goes looking for her at the Conservatory of Dramatic Arts, where she said she was enrolled in the first year, he cannot find her name on the list of female actresses admitted to the program. He shows a sketch of her around the Conservatory, but nobody seems to have met her.

Daddy In *6.9 on the Richter Scale*, Daddy is the epitome of an unscrupulous individual. He skillfully influences Tony to do exactly what he wants, without caring that his requests may add further pressure on his son's troubled marriage. Tony eventually becomes aware of his father's lies and threatens not to help him anymore, but Daddy always finds the right words to lighten the conversation and his son's mood and get his support in spite of his grumblings.

5. Womanizer Some supporting male characters in Nae Caranfil's films display a macho attitude, which reinforces a reality of Romanian society, especially during the communist era and the early years of democracy in the 1990s. Gender inequality was neither identified nor addressed as a serious issue. Consequently, women had to endure constant harassment from men as well as harsh criticism if they dared explore their own sexuality outside marriage.

Dino The only pleasure that Dino (*Sundays on Leave*) still finds in the acting profession is the fact that he gets to meet beautiful women, as he confesses to Cristina. On arriving in the provincial town, Dino immediately takes notice of Cristina and Anemarie sitting by the window of a restaurant, and tells Jean that he already enjoys the town because they can find 'fresh meat'. In spite of his being married, Dino has no hesitation in approaching Cristina once his attention is drawn to her beauty while she is intensely watching him perform on stage. Right after the show, Dino stops Cristina in the street and invites her out.

Mr. Gigi Asphalt Tango has several scenes showing how the young women going to Paris have to deal with frequent groping, harassment and innuendos from men. Dora's frustration with Mr. Gigi's lascivious attitude towards is evident in her question to him. As he is trying to convince her to be 'nicer to him' in exchange for his 'looking after her', she asks him: 'Why do we always have to put up with such lame hints?' Her question definitely sums it all up: women are subjected to men's 'pathetic sexual advances' as they are viewed as mere sexual objects rather than equal partners.

Daddy In spite of the fact that he is married, Daddy (*6.9 on the Richer Scale*) seizes every chance to flirt with young women and to have brief 'stopovers' with those accepting his advances. He is so proud of his most recent conquest that he presents Bambi to his son to convince him to help him 'not to miss such a beauty'. Women to him, a retired pilot, are just 'stopovers', a term which highlights his superficial and treatment of women as fleeting encounters. He even expresses his surprise at Tony's lack of initiative, given the fact that he is an actor and is surrounded by so many women.