

A Cinema Guild Release



# When Evening Falls on Bucharest or Metabolism

A film by Corneliu Porumboiu

89 minutes / 2.35:1 / DCP / Dolby Digital 5.1 / 2013  
In Romanian with English Subtitles

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## **Synopsis**

A director asks his actress whether she's comfortable doing a nude scene. As long as it's justified, she says. Of course, he replies. So begins Corneliu Porumboiu's deliciously witty, dazzling take on love, relationships and filmmaking. Shot inside non-descript hotel lobbies, restaurants and apartments - places that lie on the periphery of a movie set, *When Evening Falls on Bucharest or Metabolism* follows Paul, a director of some renown, who is suffering from an imaginary medical condition and a real crisis of faith. He has two weeks left to shoot his latest opus; but is for some unknown reason plagued with doubt. Perhaps it has to do with his actress, with whom he's having an affair, or the constraints of Chinese cuisine, or Michelangelo Antonioni, or something in between.

## **Awards and Nominations**

New York Film Festival – Official Selection  
Locarno International Film Festival – Official Selection  
Toronto International Film Festival – Official Selection

### **An Interview with director Corneliu Porumboiu**

*What was the starting point of your film?*

At the time I was writing, a bill was proposed that would have changed film financing in Romania: to get a grant I would have had to present a much more detailed screenplay than before. I was against this law, but it reminded me of my training as a filmmaker. I grew up with the limitations of 35mm. The necessity of planning each shot. Thanks to these restrictions, I also developed a taste for rehearsal and long sequence shots. So I wanted to talk about the birth of a film and its constraints.

*Is this film informed by personal experiences?*

Let's say by other people's nightmares. I was inspired by the experience of a filmmaker friend who put all his money into producing his film, which began ten years ago and stopped in the middle of shooting. I was inspired by the idea of a shoot with no end. I especially wanted to turn the camera on the job of director, to show how we work, our methods, how a project is realized; a look behind the scenes.

*What intrigued you most about a filmmaker in crisis?*

Paul, the director, feels unhealthy. He is lugging around this fear - an irrational fear maybe - of a hidden disease. It turns out to be an ulcer, which becomes a real obsession. He stops making contact with others and withdraws inside himself. He absolutely wants to prove his disease is real, so he undergoes a video endoscopy. These inner images become very personal and intimate for him, in contrast with the 'great' political film he is shooting.

*Does the director embody for you the idea of a cinema of realism?*

Yes, because he is obsessed with the desire to be objective in his work, like the mirror Stendhal speaks of in his theory of the realistic novel: "... a mirror carried along a high road. At one moment it reflects to your vision the azure skies, at another the mire of the puddles at your feet." But we understand that something inside this director is broken, maybe his self-confidence, or his sense of conviction.

*What is the importance of doubt? Is this film about indecision?*

Yes, it is the case for this director: he cannot make a decision. I like to work on this timeframe, this hole in time... My movies are not spectacular revelations but I like to show these little moments of life that eventually change a bit. Here I decided to dive right into the middle of a film shoot, as into a microorganism. The film moves forward through details, reflections... The director goes crazy but his actions and doubts say something about the whole: his body, his life and his city all in one.

*Are your films characterized by a refusal of classic narrative, always putting your profession into question?*

I decided to tell a rather abstract story, but I like its tragicomic side too. It somehow shows the absurdity of my profession. When one is driven by high expectations it is important, in the end, to understand the silly side of filming. Cinema is a way of looking at things. Looking behind the scenes and showing the long pauses, the waiting-around,

seemed more important than really telling a story. I think all my films are about this in-between state. In *12:08 East of Bucharest*, the characters are suspended between past and present. In *Police, Adjective*, the protagonist is suspended between his career, the law he is supposed to enforce, and his own beliefs and desires.

*We don't get to know the main character; we learn nothing about his life.*

We follow this character through his body language. I also wanted him to exist only in present time. He is not characterized by his actions but by situations and dialogues. Then we understand that he is constantly torn - between his film and his relationship with the actress, between his cinematic ambitions and his real life, between Eastern and Western cuisine. My film reflects the director's schizophrenia: his diseased body as part of an even bigger body, the world that surrounds him. The character does not aspire to be heroic.

*How do you work out your relationship with reality?*

The long dialogues in my films provide a kind of tension. But I don't like the idea of a movie based on exceptional characters in an exceptional situation. All my films tell stories of people in intermediate situations. My films play with this frustration. In *Police, Adjective*, a certain outcome is expected, as in a thriller, but it ends with a discussion and not with an action scene.

*The crisis is compounded by a real encounter: an affair begins between the director and his actress...*

I'm interested in how the professional and the private mix - right up to the final scene of the film. I describe a particular day, an ambiguous period in the shoot, where the director starts losing his direction. He wants to expand the role of his actress Alina by shooting her in a nude scene, but in the end he changes his mind. I like stretching out these moments of doubt and indecision within one day of shooting.

*Hence the comic side of the rehearsal scenes?*

Yes, I find it fun to have an outside look at these rehearsals that loop forever. Before the shoot, we see the director and actress tirelessly repeating the same motions and gestures until it becomes funny and incongruous.

*How did you find your actor for the role of the director, who somewhat embodies your alter ego?*

I've known Bogdan Dumitrache for 10 years because he tried out for several of my films. I knew he was a cerebral guy. Originally I wrote the script for someone who looked too much like me. Fortunately, Bogdan brought me other things: mobility, fragility and the dissolution between mind and body that very much personifies his character.

*And your Alina?*

Diana Avrămuț comes from theater and dance. She lived in France for two years and corresponded well with the role of an actress who dreams of going to Franceto do theater. This is her first feature film - for her character and in real life - so her way of constantly seeking the approval of Paul, her director, felt just right.

*How did you direct the actors?*

With this film I tried to change my method a little. Previously I've been very precise, in my screenwriting... in the dialogues. This time tried to be freer with the actors. We rehearsed a lot, and I revised the script frequently. I expected a lot from them.

*How do you explain the rather enigmatic title?*

My film is about a vacuum, an absence. The phrase "When Evening Falls on Bucharest or Metabolism" describes for me this feeling of always being "between" things, in an intermediate state, searching. At the same time, I never show a single picture to illustrate that title. This lack of specific reference makes my film more abstract but also more absurd.

*Why shoot only in long takes?*

By making sequence shots, I'm interested in a kind of objectivity, a particular energy between the actors. I want to show relationships between bodies without focusing solely on the dialogue. I don't want the editing to guide the viewer too much, just to show time passing, to get closer to real time. With sequence shots I can step back and work with raw material.

*You focus on the complex relationship between the director and his actress but you never show their moments of privacy. Why do you shut the door on their sex scene?*

Originally I shot the sex scene with the door open, but I found it showed too much. This scene would have shifted the center of gravity of my film. It would have focused too much attention on it. So now we just hear what's happening behind the door.

*The camera never moves, except for the images of the endoscopy. Why do you confront the viewer with this crude footage? Do you like the brutal mood shifts?*

It's digital, it's another point of view, a different and necessary way of imagining... These images are disturbing and they form a contrast with the rest, shot in 35mm. We feel we are going somewhere new. Cinema for me is full of gaps that allow us to reconstruct a character's path.

*When approaching the idea of a film within a film, we think of Truffaut, Fellini, Godard... What are your other references?*

I did not use those films as a starting point, but I've seen a lot of Hong Sang-Soo. I love this cinema, people before a shoot starts, or during the breaks... This inspired me. Of course I saw Fellini's *8-1/2* but my film is different, it's more like *Blow Up*, a zoom in on the microscopic details of a shoot. I was also inspired by Godard's *Contempt*, by the scenes between Bardot and Piccoli in the apartment, and even more so by *Ed Wood*. Tim Burton shows the passion and absurdity of filmmaking so well!

*How do you integrate your cinematic influences?*

Sometimes I like lightness, cruelty and poetry, such as Eric Rohmer's dialogues and direction, or Hong Sang-Soo's universe. These directors form part of my cultural make-

up. As a Romanian I am between East and West. In Romania we still have identity problems: where do we belong?

*In the film, the actress resists the director's indications and searches for meaning. Are you a patient director?*

A director can never tell his actor he can go wherever he or she wants. It's impossible! But here the actress wants to take control, because the director imagines her naked in this scene without giving her clear directions.

*Your director seems to live only for his work. Do you devote your body and soul to projects as a filmmaker?*

Before, I was pretty single-minded. I never laughed during the shooting of my first film. It's a little lighter now. I like to work a lot but I've also come to understand that there are more important things in life than cinema.

*Do you recognize yourself in the character of this director?*

Fortunately, I've never had a day of shooting like his!

Interview: Marcus Rothe

### **About the Filmmaker**

Corneliu Porumboiu was born in 1975, in Vaslui, Romania. He graduated from the National University of Theatre and Cinematography, where he studied Film Directing. His short films, made while he attended the University, won awards at major film festivals including Cannes and Montpellier.

In 2005 Porumboiu entered the residency program Cinéfondation in Cannes. In 2006 he made his first feature - *12:08 East of Bucharest* - which was selected in the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs and won the Camera d'Or for debut and the Label Europe, the film distributors' award. The film received many other prizes at film festivals all over the world.

In 2009, Porumboiu's *Police, Adjective* won the FIPRESCI and jury prizes at the Cannes Film Festival, where it screened in the Un Certain Regard section. The film has been further honored with numerous national and international awards.

### **Feature Filmography**

<i>The Second Game</i>	2014
<i>When Evening Falls on Bucharest or Metabolism</i>	2013
<i>Police, Adjective</i>	2009
<i>12:08 East of Bucharest</i>	2006

**Credits**

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY  
Corneliu Porumboiu

PRODUCERS  
Marcela Ursu  
Sylvie Pialat

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY  
Tudor Mircea

PRODUCTION DESIGNER  
Mihaela Poenaru

COSTUME  
Monica Florescu

SOUND  
Thierry Delor  
Alexandru Dragomir  
Sebastian Zsemlye

EDITOR  
Dana Bunescu

ALINA  
Diana Avrămuț

PAUL  
Bogdan Dumitrache

MAGDA  
Mihaela Sirbu

LAUR  
Alexandru Papadopol

DOCTOR  
Alexandru jitea

MAKE-UP ARTIST  
Gabriela Cretan

RECEPTIONIST  
Lucian Iftime