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FIELD OF CINEMATOGRAPHY AND MEDIA

**THE CINEMA OF THE BODY. A COMPARATIVE
ANALYSIS OF THE DIRECTORS LARS VON TRIER,
YORGOS LANTHIMOS AND CORNELIU PORUMBOIU**

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CONTEXT AND RELEVANCE

The subject of the research is situated within contemporary European cinematography, characterised by the exploration of corporeality, aesthetic minimalism and social tensions. The films of Lars von Trier, Yorgos Lanthimos and Corneliu Porumboiu do not merely reflect reality but construct meaning through gesture, space, time and the relations between characters and the collective. Within this framework cinema becomes a laboratory of human experience in which the body and gesture articulate emotions, conflicts and moral dilemmas through the distancing effect.

The relevance of the thesis resides in its elucidation of the manner in which contemporary cinematography employs the body and gesture as vectors of signification, thereby transforming the spectator from a passive recipient into an active participant. The study demonstrates that minimalism, absurdity and critical distancing do not diminish the film's expressivity but rather intensify its capacity to elicit ethical, emotional and aesthetic reflection. This interdisciplinary approach contributes to an understanding of the mechanisms whereby contemporary cinema probes the human condition, the individual-society relation and the limits of freedom and identity.

PURPOSE

The purpose is to investigate the ways in which contemporary cinematography utilises the body, gesture, minimalism and space to construct meaning and engender complex affective and cognitive experiences. Through analysis of the works of Lars von Trier, Yorgos Lanthimos and Corneliu Porumboiu, the research seeks to elucidate the relation between individual and collective, the dynamics of power, moral and psychological tensions and the manner in which these elements shape the spectator's perception and reflection.

Furthermore, the study aims to demonstrate how corporeal and gestural aesthetics, combined with decorative minimalism and spatial usage, render the film an active interpretive space wherein the spectator participates in the construction of meaning and the scrutiny of the social and ethical values presented on screen. In this way, the research contributes to an understanding of contemporary cinema as a medium for exploring the human condition, social relations and the boundaries of affective and moral experience.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES. QUESTIONS AND WORKING HYPOTHESES

The research aims to identify the ways in which minimalism, the absurd and black comedy transform the spectator's experience and construct moral, social and psychological meanings in the films of the directors under analysis. Simultaneously, the study seeks to elucidate the role of the collective and of the passive or active character in the narrative and moral dynamics of the film, as well as the relation between decor, costume and gestuality in the shaping of cinematic meaning.

The research questions address how the body becomes a bearer of significations in contemporary cinema, how minimalism and the absurd influence the spectator's perception, to what extent the interaction between individual and collective reflects social and moral tensions and how gestures, decor and sound are deployed to generate distancing and critical engagement on the part of the audience.

The working hypotheses proceed from the premise that contemporary film does not confine itself to rendering reality but interprets it through corporeality and narrative structure, with the spectator emerging as an active participant in the construction of meaning. It is posited that the directors analysed employ minimalism, gestuality and constrained spaces to explore the fragility of the human condition, moral and psychological tensions and the impact of social norms upon individual and collective behaviour.

The distancing effect, inspired by Brecht's theories, is deployed by Trier, Lanthimos and Porumboiu to compel the spectator to remain conscious of the fiction and to refrain from complete identification with the characters. Trier employs theatrical framing and narrators who comment upon the action, engendering a tension between emotion and reflection. Lanthimos favours neutral dialogue, mechanical gestures and absurd situations that deflect traditional empathy, thereby accentuating existential absurdity. Porumboiu explores distancing through editing, rhythm and framing that isolate body and space, inviting the spectator to observe the social and psychological mechanisms of the characters without emotional absorption.

METHODOLOGY

The research adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach integrating cinematic analysis with film theory, aesthetic philosophy and psychological perspectives.

The methodological objective is to comprehend the ways in which distancing, corporeal language, gestures, decor and narrative structure generate meaning and provoke reflection in contemporary cinema, while interrogating the individual-collective relation and the characters moral dilemmas.

The study rests upon detailed analysis of films, examining framing, spatial composition, actors movement and soundtrack usage. This is supplemented by intertextual comparison of the works of Trier, Lanthimos and Porumboiu with other references from European and international cinematography, as well as literature and visual art, to illuminate aesthetic and symbolic influences. The research further adopts a theoretical and interpretive perspective, drawing upon Deleuze's concepts of image and affect, Brechtian „gestus“, Stanislavskian introspection and the restrained expressivity proposed by Bresson. Through this methodological synthesis both the

visual and corporeal dimensions of film and its psychological and moral impact upon the spectator may be analysed.

The corpus comprises representative films by the three directors: *Dogville*, *Manderlay*, *Melancholia* and *Nymphomaniac* (Trier), *Dogtooth*, *The Lobster*, *The Favourite* and *Poor Things* (Lanthimos) and *Police, Adjective* (Porumboiu). Selection is grounded in their thematic and expressive coherence, as well as their capacity to foreground minimalism, gesturality and complex social relations. Complementary references from European cinematography, comparative literature and visual art enrich the analytical framework.

Through this methodology the study offers a minimal description of the films action while investigating the active relation between body, morality, collective and individual, thereby elucidating the spectator's cognitive, emotional and reflexive involvement in decoding cinematic meanings. Film thus emerges as a laboratory wherein corporeality, aesthetics and symbols interact to construct complex aesthetic and moral experiences.

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

These are delineated at three complementary levels:

1. Theoretical Contributions

The thesis provides significant clarifications concerning the concept of „cinema of the body” and the function of gesturality in the construction of cinematic meaning. It demonstrates that corporeal minimalism and restrained expressivity are not mere aesthetic choices but instruments of moral and social reflection, enabling the spectator's active engagement in interpretation. The research moreover articulates Deleuze's and Brecht's theories with contemporary directorial practices, furnishing an integrative perspective on the relations among body, space, time and narrative.

2. Methodological Contributions

The proposed methodology combines cinematic analysis with interdisciplinary approaches, philosophy, psychology, corporeal aesthetics and the study of collective behaviour. This integration affords a complex reading of film as a social and psychological laboratory, yielding a systematic framework for interpreting gesture, decor and sound in relation to their impact upon

the spectator. The research further advances a comparative structure between European directors and the *New Romanian Cinema*, evidencing the analytical utility of the body and constrained space in evaluating contemporary cinema.

3. Applied Contributions

The thesis's findings may inform the training of directors, screenwriters and actors, underscoring the significance of control over gestures, corporeal rhythm and spatial usage as narrative vectors. The theoretical framework can guide critical studies of film, contributing to the aesthetic and moral evaluation of contemporary productions. Over the longer term, the conclusions may inspire experimental cinema projects or cinematic pedagogy by highlighting how the body and minimalism amplify effects upon audiences and stimulate critical reflection.

INTRODUCTION

A succinct exposition is offered of the manner in which contemporary cinematic language explores and foregrounds corporeality, through analysis of the films of Lars von Trier, Yorgos Lanthimos and Corneliu Porumboiu, three contemporary directors from distinct European cultural zones. The study proceeds from the premise that film does not merely reflect reality but amplifies and interprets it constructing meaning through corporeality, gesture, space and time in dialogue with Deleuze's theories, Brechtian theatre and psychological perspectives on the collective. Beginning with analysis of the collective character, active or passive, as coercive crowd or audience, the research elucidates how the group amplifies the film's symbolic and dramatic meanings. This encompasses typologies of character, the individual-collective relation and visual and narrative manifestations of social and moral distortions such as egoism, violence and alienation.

The research integrates interdisciplinary approaches, combining cinematic theory, philosophy, psychology and corporeal aesthetics, to illuminate the directorial strategies whereby Trier, Lanthimos and Porumboiu interrogate the human condition and the individual-society relation. Minimalism, the absurd, black comedy and expressive gesturality are foregrounded, together with theatrical influences upon filmic construction, while interrogating the spectator's role and the effect of critical distancing.

In conclusion, the study reaffirms film as an active space of reflection, capable of provoking, destabilising and stimulating perception, emotion and critical thought, while exploring moral ambiguities and the complexity of human experience.

The endeavour aims to contribute to the advancement of theoretical and critical knowledge in contemporary cinematography, offering an analytical framework applicable to both theorists and practitioners.

CHAPTER I – CINEMATIC LANGUAGE

The text analyses cinematic language from the perspective of body, gesture and action, proposing a broad theoretical reading that traverses the history and aesthetics of modern and contemporary film. Cinematography is defined not merely as representation of reality but as a dispositif for producing meaning, capable of generating affective, sensory and reflexive experiences. Film is no longer mere entertainment or mirror of the world but a space of active interpretation wherein the body emerges as a central element of expression.

Drawing upon Gilles Deleuze's distinctions between movement-image and affection-image, the text underscores the shift from narrative cinema, oriented toward action and causality, to a cinema of corporeality, wherein gesture, posture and bodily rhythm become bearers of meaning. This trajectory is linked to Brechtian „gestus” theory, which displaces emphasis from character psychology to the social and symbolic dimension of gesture. In the cinema of the body, performance no longer serves the story exclusively but produces affective and sensory intensities that engage the spectator at a corporeal level.

A central position is occupied by Lars von Trier's cinematography, especially *Dogville*, *Manderlay*, *Melancholia* and *Nymphomaniac*, analysed as exemplars of visual asceticism and deliberate annulment of realist decor. Minimalist spaces, approximating theatrical convention, compel the spectator to focus upon gestures and intercorporeal relations. Pantomime here becomes symptomatic of a fragile, unconfigured world in which characters move instinctively, without consciousness of convention.

The analysis extends to Yorgos Lanthimos and the *Greek Weird Wave*, highlighting post-*Dogma 95* influences and Brechtian distancing strategies whereby actors' bodies serve as

instruments for exposing social mechanisms, violence, oppression and control. Gesture is desacralised, repetitive and strange, unveiling the invisible structures of everyday life.

The endeavour concentrates upon the *New Romanian Cinema*, particularly Corneliu Porumboiu's filmography. His films are read as exercises in corporeal and temporal attention wherein repetition, silence and duration transform the banal into a bearer of meaning. In *Police, Adjective*, the conflict between law and morality is expressed not through action but through the persistence of gestures and the tension between abstract language and lived experience. Thus, the text demonstrates that contemporary cinema increasingly privileges the body as a space of meaning and gesture as a form of knowledge, situating the spectator in a direct, affective and critical relation to filmic reality.

The research advances a comprehensive analysis of contemporary cinema centred upon body, minimalism and gesture, with particular emphasis upon the *New Romanian Wave* and the filmography of European auteurs such as Corneliu Porumboiu, Lucian Pintilie, Adina Pintilie, Lars von Trier and Yorgos Lanthimos. In counterpoint to notions of a homogeneous movement, the *New Romanian Wave* is characterised rather as a community of auteurs bound by a politics of creation and an ethics of the gaze, rather than shared thematics or biographies. Post-2000 Romanian cinema is situated in relation to the memory of communism, post-communist transition and gradual Europeanisation, recuperating and refining the critical spirit inaugurated by Lucian Pintilie in *Reconstruction*.

A central concept is the *cinema of the body* characterised by aesthetic minimalism, suspension of explicit psychology and replacement of emotion by gesture. The body becomes the principal bearer of meaning. Gesture is mechanical, recognisable, autonomous, it does not explain in depth but shows. Acting eschews psychological introspection, focusing instead upon presence, rhythm and body-space relation. The spectator is not emotionally guided but invited to observation, decoding and reflection, the film thereby constituting a contemplative and sensory experience.

In Porumboiu's cinema, characters and dialogue are essential, with strict directorial control over the script. Long takes, real time, economy of expressive means and dry humour construct an aesthetics of the banal and everyday absurd through which the individual is ensnared between bureaucratic systems and opaque norms. This trajectory is paralleled with

Pintilie's radical realism and Italian neorealism, as well as contemporary strategies of the *New Wave*.

The analysis extends to Lars von Trier's cinema wherein anxiety, solitude, trauma and human fragility serve as engines of creation. His films explore closed communities, extreme characters and limit-situations, employing a deliberately „sloppy” aesthetics (handheld filming, discontinuity, frame jumps), partially inherited from *Dogma 95* yet abandoned or transformed when expression demands (as in *Melancholia*). In Trier suffering, illness, depression and excess are transmuted into artistic material, with anxiety functioning not merely as obstacle but as creative resource.

The work addresses the relation between art, morality and power, emphasising that authentic art is not moralising and does not submit to authority or uniformity. Historical examples („degenerate” art, dictatorships, censorship) illuminate the opposition between freedom of expression and authoritarian regimes tendency to control form and meaning. Modern art is defined by risk, difference and the capacity to activate imagination, rather than providing answers or comfort.

In conclusion, the analysed cinema, whether Romanian or European, functions as a space of confrontation with reality, the body, fragility and conflict. Minimalism, gesture, solitude and anxiety do not impoverish cinematic expression but intensify it, transforming film into an experience of knowledge, reflection and assumption of the human condition.

The texts assembled in sections 1.3 and 1.4 construct a complex analysis of the relation between Brechtian theory, stage and cinematic practice and mechanisms of value judgement, with central axes being distancing, minimalism, the actor's role and the spectator's involvement in the valorisation process.

Drawing upon *A Small Organon for the Theatre*, Brecht redefines scenic freedom through the abandonment of realist illusion and the use of signs, suggestion and spatial fragmentation. Scenography no longer absorbs the spectator but reveals the mechanisms of representation. This conception is adopted and transposed cinematographically by Lars von Trier in *Dogville* and *Manderlay* where schematic decor and absence of realism shift meaning towards gesture, relations and narrative construction. Unlike Brecht, who pursued a pedagogical and rational distancing, Trier produces an emotional-ethical distancing, generating moral discomfort and

confronting the spectator with their own empathetic limits and the responsibility of their judgement.

The research emphasises that theatre and cinema have no explicit moral obligations but possess a vast potential to activate reflection, sensitivity and critical thinking. The opinions of contemporary creators (Maya Zbib, Sabina Berman, Ion Caramitru) converge on the idea of theatre as a space of presence, community and direct confrontation with the human condition where simplicity of form intensifies expressive force. In this context, the dilemma of the responsibility of the image emerges. Art does not create deviance it reflects it or amplifies it and the relationship between fiction and human behaviour remains a complex one, mediated by the vulnerabilities and values of the viewer.

The analysis of the films of Trier, Lanthimos and Porumboiu illuminates the manner in which value judgements become sources of social action. The community in *Dogville*, the family in *Dogtooth* and the dystopian society in *The Lobster* function as micro-laboratories of morality in which norms, fear and desire generate systems of oppression. Values are not absolute, but contingent upon historical, social and psychological contexts, the decisions of the characters give expression to these very tensions.

In opposition to Brecht-Stanislavski, two paradigms of acting emerge. Brecht rejects total identification and promotes „showing” the character, distancing and social gesture as instruments of knowledge intended to transform theatre into a space of critical reflection. Stanislavski, by contrast, advocates authentic living, emotional involvement and embodiment of the character’s inner life, considering emotion the foundation of artistic value. However, Brechtian critique does not entirely exclude Stanislavski’s method, recognising its contribution to the analysis of human relations and psychic contradictions.

The valorisation process is presented as an active encounter between work and spectator, wherein aesthetic, artistic and cultural value is constituted through interpretation, sensitivity and context. Minimalism and distancing do not reduce the work’s impact but transform the spectator from passive consumer into active participant, obliged to produce meaning. Thus, Brecht’s influence in theatre and contemporary cinema demonstrates that art should not reproduce reality but problematise it, activating critical judgement and the public’s capacity for valorisation.

Sections 1.5, 1.6 and 1.7 develop a broad analysis of active-passive relations, the role of sound and music in cinema and the relation between character, decor and costume, all articulated through the prism of Brechtian distancing and critical realism in modern and contemporary film.

The active-passive theme is approached both from a philosophical and anthropological perspective, as well as an aesthetic one. From Ancient Greek conceptions of passivity as a sign of inferiority, to cinematic and literary examples (Aureliano Buendía, Gabriel García Márquez's character), apparent passivity often proves to be a latent form of control, adaptation, or tension accumulation. The analysed characters function in an ambiguous register where gestures are minimal and the lack of reaction or emotional withdrawal does not indicate absence of action but an interiorisation of conflict. In this context, Stanislavski's reflections on inner movement and Bresson's observations on involuntary expressivity in cinema delineate the difference between theatre of displayed gesture and film of restrained tension. Alexithymia, discussed through the prism of trauma psychology, becomes a key to reading characters maladaptive behaviours, explaining emotional blockages and diffuse violences that manifest in apparently controlled filmic universes.

The analysis of Trier's, Scorsese's and Lanthimos's films highlights how aggression, sexuality and evil are aesthetically integrated without seeking explicit moralisation. Art is understood as a space of confrontation with the obscure areas of human nature and the spectator is challenged to activate their critical judgement. The references to Béla Balázs and to the history of cinematic language underscore the educative role of form. What initially shocks becomes, through habituation, an accepted code of reading. Thus, cinema activates the spectator through discomfort rather than through facile emotional identification.

The section dedicated to music highlights its ambivalent status as an abstract, autonomous element, but capable of structuring rhythm, perception and meaning. The positions of Morricone („an added element, but not decisive”), Porumboiu („I don't use music to accentuate emotions I already have in the image”), Mitulescu („a choice of the author to choose a certain music”), Puiu („music present in the film, in one sequence or another and it's justified by the presence of a radio, in the car or I have no idea what, a TV that's on”), Bresson, or Trier converge on the idea that music should not emotionally manipulate the spectator but function organically, preferably as frame sound. In the *New Romanian Cinema*, the absence or restrictive use of music correlates with a realistic and neorealistic aesthetics, where ambient sound and

dialogue become primary bearers of meaning. Music, when it appears, characterises characters, indicates social transformations and creates symbolic relationships, without annulling the interpretive freedom of the viewer.

In conclusion, the analysis of the character in decor and costume, with emphasis on *Dogville*, *Manderlay* and *Dogtooth*, highlights scenic and corporeal minimalism as a strategy of distancing. Schematic decor, lack of illusionism and inexpressive play place emphasis on attitude, gesture and relationship, not on demonstrative emotion. Discussions about Dogma 95 and the *Greek Weird Wave* show the tension between realism, self-reflexivity and authorship. Through decor, costume and body, the analysed cinema does not reproduce reality but problematises it, transforming the spectator from passive receiver into active participant in constructing meaning and aesthetic value.

CHAPTER II – BESTIARY

The text analyses the tradition of the bestiary as a symbolic form in literature, visual arts and cinematography, where animals become bearers of moral, political and existential meanings. From medieval bestiaries and Dimitrie Cantemir's allegory to the paintings of Chagall, Marc and the political drama in Picasso's *Guernica*, the animal mediates reflection on the human condition. Contemporary cinema continues this line through the humanisation of animals and their metaphorical use, from animation to auteur film (Lanthimos), to explore alienation, power and instinct. The exhibition *Secret Garden*, reinterpreted as *Bestiary in the Garden of Eden*, proposes a dialogue between the vegetal, zoomorphic and objectual. The metal sculptures of Carmen Chițan and the paintings of Carmen Poenaru reconfigure the real into a symbolic bestiary, tensed between matter, movement and meaning.

Section 2.3 analyses the metaphorical function of the animal and the bestiary in modern cinema, with emphasis on Yorgos Lanthimos's work, but also through thematic extensions towards Kafka, Trier, Coppola, Jeunet, or films about surveillance, isolation and emotional contagion. The animal is not treated as a fearsome or exotic element, but as a symbolic figure through which power, control, alienation and the human condition are explored.

In Lanthimos's films (*Dogtooth*, *The Lobster*, *The Favourite*, *Poor Things*) animals and metamorphoses function as political and psychological metaphors. Characters are deprived of emotional exteriorisation, their behaviours shaped by absurd rules and authoritarian structures. As Savina Petkova observes, animals become complex, ironic and rhetorical signifiers, transposing human relations into the register of training, conformity and submission. In *Dogtooth*, the child-dog correspondence transforms parental education into a form of indoctrination and language is manipulated to control reality. In *The Lobster*, the transformation of humans into animals becomes a metaphor for the impossibility of separating human from animal and the pressure of social norms on intimate relations. The absence of animals in *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* accentuates their totemic function, while in *The Favourite*, the queen's seventeen rabbits acquire a negative ethical charge, symbolising loss, guilt and affective substitution.

The theme of isolation and control is related to other cinematic universes: *The Truman Show*, *Running Man*, or recent films about surveillance and digital voyeurism. These describe societies where omnipresent gaze becomes an instrument of power and the individual is reduced to an object of spectacle or social discipline. The spectator is invited to reflect on their own position as observer and on the moral responsibility of the gaze.

The psychological dimension is deepened through comparison between the inner child described by Jung and the children in *Dogtooth*, deprived of access to emotion and affective memory. Play, paradoxically, becomes both a space of instinctual survival and a symptom of alienation. Emotional contagion and behavioural mimetism are analysed through Gustave Le Bon's prism, visible both in the communities of *Dogville* and *Manderlay* and in the family of *Dogtooth*, where violent norms are unconsciously transmitted to children.

Lars von Trier's films extend the bestiary problematic towards morality and violence. Grace in *Dogville* and *Manderlay* illustrates the failure of unilateral grace and the ambiguity of good, transforming altruism into a form of destructive excess. Philosophical interpretations (Chiesa, Derrida) show how gift, freedom and forgiveness become impossible when imposed and the community reacts through collective aggression.

In *Poor Things*, Lanthimos resorts to a grotesque and surrealist aesthetics, close to Kafka and the tragicomic tradition, to discuss the mind-body relation, sexuality and female

emancipation. Bella's metamorphosis recalls both Gregor Samsa and Amélie's playful innocence, proposing a relearning of the world through a gaze unfiltered by conventions.

In sum, the chapter demonstrates that the contemporary cinematic bestiary is not about animals per se, but about humanity revealed in limit-situations. The animal, monster, or hybrid being become mirrors of society, critical instruments for analysing power, education, desire and collective evil, placing the spectator in an active position of ethical and aesthetic reflection.

The work analyses multiple cinematic and literary works, highlighting how characters reflect tensions between good and evil, psychic shadows and community influence on the individual.

Grace in *Dogville* is the archetypal hero who discovers their potential for violence through relations with the group and mentor, exploring inner shadows. Correspondences can be identified with *Manderlay*, *The Nameless Star*, *Dogtooth* which investigates parental control, individual freedom and maturation through harsh experiences. Trier's and Lanthimos's films, like *Homunculus* or *10 Cloverfield Lane*, explore trauma, distortion of reality and effects of violence on the psyche. The analysis includes references to visual art (Rembrandt, Modigliani) and literature (Pessoa, Goethe, Sena), emphasising art's power to provoke and transform the spectator.

The central theme is confrontation with inner and collective evil, as well as the effects of social, familial and cultural oppression on human behaviour. Art and film become instruments for exploring the psyche, freedom and morality, stimulating reflection on the human condition.

Trier's and Lanthimos's films address a mature audience, exploring forms of mutilation, psychic in Lanthimos, physical in Trier, as well as the risks of imitating violence.

The corporeal transformation of actors becomes a narrative instrument, reflecting characters psychic, emotional and social states. Lanthimos employs dodecaphonic structures to construct atonal human relationships, fractured identities and a universe in which goodness and love prove inherently unstable. Trier, by contrast, deploys extreme violence and mutilation to probe the psyche, anxiety and power relations, thereby provoking the spectator while exposing mechanisms of control and suffering. The films under examination interrogate social, familial and sexual trauma, corporeal art and radical theatre (as exemplified by Holzinger) serve to reflect the boundaries and liberties of artistic expression. Repetition, obsession and musical structures (dodecaphonism) become instruments for scrutinising the interplay between role, destiny and

identity. Both audience and actors are implicated in a game of lucidity and alienation, cinema functions as a laboratory of psychic, moral and aesthetic experience.

The extreme endings characteristic of the films of Trier and Lanthimos, most notably *Dogville* and *Poor Things*, lay bare the exercise of control and violence over body and liberty, revealing an enduring preoccupation with internal conflict and the Strindbergian-Bergmanian legacy. Lanthimos investigates human degradation and the loss of identity through absurd social rituals, in a manner analogous to therian phenomena and fandom culture, where identity is reduced to costume and role. By analogy, *The Circle* illustrates how technology can impose total surveillance, eroding intimacy and autonomy. Across all these universes, the individual is constrained, manipulable and compelled to conform to external rules, thereby underscoring the fragility of the human condition. Contemporary cinematography thus destabilises the perception of reality and interrogates the limits of freedom and identity.

Lanthimos's *The Lobster* depicts an absurd society in which solitary individuals are compelled to form couples, failure to comply results in transformation into animals under strict regulations and severe punishments. This framework highlights hierarchies, control and individual vulnerability. Parallels with other films and literary works, such as *Dogtooth*, *Au hasard Balthazar*, or *The Most Dangerous Game*, reveal the dynamics between hunter and hunted, dominant and submissive, as well as the absurdity of social norms. The lobster itself functions as a symbol of longevity, potency and fidelity, reflecting concerns related to survival, sexuality and biological hierarchies, in resonance with Peterson's ideas concerning territory and evolution. These films construct dystopian universes in which power, biopolitics and absurd norms shape behaviour, the spectator is thereby invited to reflect upon the human condition and its relation to the environment. Across these fragile worlds, the precariousness of liberty and the persistence of empathy remain constant, while the absurdity of imposed rules stands in stark contrast to the individual's inevitable desire for autonomy and survival.

Contemporary films explore the female body, sexuality and liberty through a deliberately provocative aesthetic, laying bare the paradoxes between apparent emancipation and the reproduction of misogynistic stereotypes. Directors such as Lanthimos, Trier, Almodóvar and Casanova employ colour, corporeal deformation and decor as narrative and psychological language, compelling the spectator towards moral and social introspection. Cinematography thereby becomes a reflexive space in which characters actions, corporeal suffering and pleasure

serve to analyse power relations, marginality and cultural norms. The history of art and film reveals a continuity in the exploration of corporeality, extending from Courbet to Manzoni and into modern cinema, where aesthetic provocation and moral questioning intersect. Ultimately, the act of viewing becomes an exercise in awareness of one's own judgements and of prevailing social conventions, art shocks, educates and reflects upon the human condition.

Female sexuality has historically been circumscribed by social norms and taboos, with the female body frequently perceived as an object rather than an expression of selfhood. Simone de Beauvoir, Eve Ensler and artists such as Trier examine the tension between desire, liberty and cultural constraint, transforming body and sexuality into a terrain of reflection and affirmation. Contemporary films and performances demonstrate that the body can function simultaneously as a site of suffering and trauma and as an instrument of liberation and self-knowledge. Artistic and corporeal nonconformism thus emerges as a mode of social and moral critique, exposing the limitations imposed upon the individual. In the final analysis, the body (cinematic, theatrical or sculptural) becomes a territory of liberty, introspection and dialogue concerning identity and power.

The films of Lars von Trier and Yorgos Lanthimos transfigure traumatic experience and human desire into aesthetic spaces in which absurdity, sacrifice and the straining of moral boundaries reveal the complexity of being. Female characters, from Grace to Selma and Bella, oscillate between victimhood and agency, confronting oppression, trauma and social limits. Lanthimos utilises constrained spaces and formal mechanics to underscore control, autonomy and the absurdity of relations, while Trier combines melodrama, music and box-theatre aesthetics to intensify emotion and moral tension. Collectively, these films reflect the intersection of power, sexuality and morality, placing the spectator before profound ethical and psychological dilemmas.

The research examines humanity's enduring fascination with hybrid beings and apocalyptic worlds, extending from mythological and fantastical engravings to modern cinema. The films of Trier and Lanthimos, such as *Melancholia*, *Dogville* and *Manderlay*, combine austerity of decor with potent symbols (circle, triangle, horse) to reflect alienation, death and the fragility of the human condition. Cinema emerges as a medium for exploring the psyche, manipulation and the impact of technology, as seen in *Inception* or *The Matrix*, suggesting the possibility of simulated realities. Connections with Duchamp's conceptual art and German

Expressionism underscore the primacy of idea over form. The post-apocalyptic is presented both as planetary destruction and as personal crisis, wherein the individual confronts mortality and the meaning of existence. The tension between reason and fantasy generates imaginary monsters, yet also artworks that reveal human truths. Ultimately, visual symbols and narratives become instruments of introspection, reflecting humanity's relation to self, others and cosmos.

Artificial intelligence redefines creativity, enabling artists and filmmakers to explore imaginary worlds, hybrid characters and narratives that are increasingly difficult to distinguish from reality, while simultaneously raising ethical and social questions concerning the discernment between fiction and reality. The minimalist-documentary films of Porumboiu and the introspective cinema of Trier and Lanthimos illustrate how inner „beasts” or social forces shape human behaviour, whether through external constraint or psychic trauma. Characters such as Cristi in *Police, Adjective* or House in *House M.D.* become case studies in morality, balancing logic and emotion, discipline and empathy, while confronting ethical dilemmas and institutional authority. Technology, artificial intelligence and transmedia become tools for exploring corporeality, relationships and human limits, reflecting both the potential and the risks of augmenting cognitive and emotional capacities. In conclusion, this chapter elucidates how contemporary film and art serve as mirrors of human complexity wherein power, morality and technology interact in a fragile equilibrium between liberty, control and responsibility.

CHAPTER III – SPACE, TIME, IMAGE

Film provokes cognitive dissonance through contrasts between reality and fiction, stimulating the spectator's imagination and introspection. Trier, Lanthimos and other filmmakers explore sexuality and traumas to create intense emotional and visual experiences. Visceral cinema engages the spectator actively, generating psychological and physical reactions that amplify understanding and reflection on human nature.

Film suits not being like life, it transforms space and time into malleable materials, constructing myths and symbols in place of realist order. Trier, Porumboiu, or Lanthimos show that decor, minimal or absent, activates the spectator's imagination, making them co-creator of the diegetic universe. Open endings, as in *Rambo* or *Dogville*, suspend meaning and allow

characters to become ideas, not ordinary people. Filmic space reflects psychology and social structure and visual details, light and shadows outline character identity. Thus, cinema becomes a laboratory of the real and the imaginary, testing the limits of perception and human experience.

The films of Lanthimos, Trier, Porumboiu, or Gaztelu-Urrutia explore constrained spaces as psychological instruments, transforming physical isolation into mental claustrophobia and reflecting power structures and social norms. Characters live under absurd pressures or arbitrary rules, their freedom suspended, generating docility, alienation and introspection. Cinematic time is no longer chronological but subjective, shaped by the rhythm of actions, inner states and editing, transforming the spectator's perception into an active experience. Films become conceptual laboratories where the grotesque, absurd and minimalism decorate the exploration of the human condition, morality and survival. In all these constructions, cinema becomes a mirror of society and individual limits, inviting critical reflection and empathy.

CHAPTER IV – BEAUTY AND UGLINESS

Beauty in film is subjective and context-dependent, whereas ugliness has a provocative permanence, highlighting human limits. Modern cinema, especially that of Trier and Lanthimos, uses ugliness, the grotesque and violence to create discomfort and reflection, not aesthetic harmony. Films can reshape perceptions of morality, body and existence, challenging the spectator cognitively and affectively. A film's value does not depend on beauty, but on its capacity to transform and activate imagination. Trier stakes on visceral impact, Lanthimos on social absurdity and Porumboiu on austerity and subtle analysis of the real. Ugliness can be moral and instructive, superficial beauty ineffective. Catharsis is achieved through shock and confrontation with limits, not through linear identification with characters. The crude representation of reality, as in Caravaggio or Italian neorealists, opens new aesthetic and moral perspectives. Morality and aesthetics intersect, ugliness can be good, beauty evil. The true value of film depends on the author's intention, capacity to extract from the real and effect on the spectator.

Cinema explores truth, poetry and realism differently in the three analysed directors. Trier presents a brutal and psychological truth, Lanthimos creates surrealist and poetic universes and

Porumboiu captures everyday realism with subtlety and irony. Films reflect memory, traumas and characters inner development and the spectator becomes an active part of the affective experience. Body and affect are mobilised differently. Trier provokes somatic reactions, Lanthimos creates tension through rigidity and artificiality, Porumboiu reflection through minimalism and slow rhythm. Sexuality and violence are used as narrative instruments, not just visual stimulation, each director reinterpreting conventions of corporeal and melodramatic genres. In ensemble, modern cinema combines visual, affect and narrative structure to provoke reflection, empathy and reflexive involvement of the spectator.

CHAPTER V – THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CROWD

The psychological crowd in Trier's and Lanthimos's cinema highlights collective behaviours and Jungian archetypes where individuals yield to instincts under group influence (*Dogville* and *Nymphomaniac*). Films explore power dynamics, obedience and morality with leaders manipulating through control and information (*Dogtooth* and *Police, Adjective*). Cinema reflects society's and individual's evolution, from tribal conformity to personal expression. Different psychological environments, from urban spaces to „repulsive societies”, films show how stress, fear and survival shape collective behaviours (*Squid Game* and *The Platform*). Solidarity and sacrifice become essential values in hostile environments. Films function as laboratories of human experience, highlighting both primitive instincts and moral and ethical tensions. In conclusion, the spectator is invited to reflect on the human condition, power and individual responsibility.

CHAPTER VI – PSYCHOSIS AND PERVERSION

The chapter explores the objectification and objectivisation of women in Trier's and Lanthimos's films, emphasising the difference between psychological abuse and sexual self-objectification. Woman is presented caught between wild instinct and social pressures, exemplified by Bella and Joe, whose sexual experiences reflect hypersexuality and deviance.

Trier's, Lanthimos's and Porumboiu's films reveal the body as a terrain of conflict between norms, power and individual freedom. Erotology and sexuality become aesthetic instruments for exploring character psychology. Absence or presence of the body influences perception of suffering, visible in *Her* versus *Nymphomaniac*. Perversity and psychosis are analysed through extreme characters like Dexter, Brian and Jack where violence becomes expression of obsession and control. Vigilantism and moral deviation are explored in function of social norms, instincts and traumas. The chapter highlights that extreme cinema challenges the spectator to confront limits of ethics, corporeality and identity. In conclusion, films become spaces of reflection on human fragility, sexuality and the individual's relation with society.

CHAPTER VII – TECHNIQUES AND TECHNOLOGIES

The chapter analyses how contemporary directors use technology to shape cinematic experience, from austerity of production means in Trier's or *New Romanian Wave* films, to sophistication of digital effects, animatronics and special films. Visual style and camera mobility become instruments to highlight actor performance, character alienation, or narrative impact, as seen in Lanthimos and Vinterberg. Influences of Kubrick, Brecht and Méliès on framing, camera movement and spectator-film relation are explored, as well as the reflexive and performative experiment of the camera. Digital technologies, Ektachrome films and high-speed cameras allow manipulation of time and colours for intensifying emotions and perception. Post-production and synchronised music become essential for constructing atmosphere, as Trier and Lanthimos demonstrate and realism and hyperrealism coexist in diverse aesthetics. Technology allows creation of fantastic worlds and complex details, but emphasis remains on subject and actor performance, reflecting a dialectical relation between technological means and artistic expression. Diversity of technology and aesthetics offers directors multiple possibility to stimulate spectator perception and explore identity, emotion and social politics in a complex cinematic framework.

CONCLUSIONS

The present work has pursued a critical analysis of the interdependence between aesthetics, theory and film criticism, concentrating on corporeality as a vector of signification in filmic representation. The study has addressed the work of directors Lars von Trier, Yorgos Lanthimos and Corneliu Porumboiu, interpreting their styles as manifestations of a paradigmatic evolution in contemporary cinematic language.

The analysis has highlighted that corporeal aesthetics does not function merely as a narrative instrument but becomes a medium through which affective, social and psychological tensions are explored. The concept of „body as battlefield”, paraphrased from Matei Vişniec, has provided a methodological framework for investigating corporeality as a space of expression and conflict, emphasising the interaction between gesture, minimalist decor and soundtrack.

The approach has demonstrated that Trier, Lanthimos and Porumboiu, although operating in distinct cultural contexts, share a concern for minimalism and for how the body becomes a bearer of meaning. Trier explores a visceral and intense realism, mobilising body and emotion to provoke the spectator into confronting uncomfortable and tensed realities. Lanthimos develops a surrealist cinematic poetry, in which corporeality is a vector of power relations and existential tensions and the spectator is engaged in an intellectual exercise of decoding meanings. Porumboiu constructs a Balkan realism, based on authenticity of places and gestures, in which humour and subtle irony outline a critical reflection on the everyday and social changes.

The study has emphasised the role of the city in the narrative and aesthetic construction of the films, highlighting the manner in which setting may be minimal, symbolic, or authentic, depending on the director. Trier transforms the city into a minimalist, quasi-theatrical space in which characters and their relationships become exposed and vulnerable. Lanthimos constructs paroxysmal, stylised urban environments in which alienation and social tension are visually amplified. Porumboiu employs the real city as an organic framework for the unfolding of action, thereby enhancing the authenticity and verisimilitude of the cinematic representation.

Comparatively, the analysis has highlighted how directors like Wes Anderson or Yarrow Cheney explore the city and space through geometry, symmetry and total visibility, creating Brechtian distancing effects or ritualised communities, offering aesthetic and narrative counterpoint to the approaches of Trier, Lanthimos and Porumboiu. This underlines cinema's

role in exploring the relation between individual, community and space, as well as how aesthetics can produce critical reflection and emotion.

In conclusion, the research proposes a theoretical and methodological framework that can be extended and applied in complementary analyses, including diverse artistic fields and exploring other dimensions of cinematic space, such as the city or natural environment. The work encourages continuation of reflection on the aesthetic, philosophical and sociocultural function of body and space in contemporary cinema, offering a solid starting point for future research.

The fictional professor Trismund von Lanthemaar aus Vaslow, making direct reference to the three analysed directors, traverses the universes of Trier, Lanthimos and Porumboiu with irony and academic rigour, commenting on the metaphorical deer as observer of guilt, absurdity and human relations. Trier's deer symbolises inevitable sacrifice, while Lanthimos's geometrisises the absurdity of social norms. Whistling on La Gomera becomes an ironic code and banal gestures acquire moral weight. Trier's women and Lanthimos's betrayals are analysed with subtle humour by the professor, as lessons in obedience and moral chaos. Long waits and the tent of sacrifices become instruments of reflexive satire. The meta-dialogue with the reporter highlights the symbolic function of horns and cultural absurdity. Thus, the metaprofessor links critical analysis to ludic play, creating an ironic, reflexive and memorable tone.

APPENDIX 1 – IN ANY WORK THERE IS A SELF (interview with visual artist Dan Perjovschi)

Dan Perjovschi considers that in any work there is a self and his art is a form of communication and social existence, rather than a representation of the body or emotions. He explores political, social and cultural concepts through drawing, text and performative act, emphasising thinking and intellectual reflection. Freedom, gender equality and stimulation of the intellect are his artistic priorities, not nudity or corporeal spectacle.

APPENDIX 2 – THE ENTIRE THINKING, EQUIVALENT TO THE CONCEPT OF CONSCIOUSNESS, WILL BE REPLICABLE BY AI (interview with university professor doctor Rodica Mocan)

Rodica Mocan develops the idea that the human mind can distort reality and AI has the potential to replicate human thinking and consciousness, but we do not yet fully understand this process. In cinematography, AI will increasingly influence post-production, special effects and creation of virtual characters, raising ethical issues related to image rights and creative authenticity. Digital technologies allow very realistic fictional worlds and characters, but the public must be able to distinguish fiction from reality. Complex characters often involve psychological consultancy and virtual realism will evolve gradually. Rodica Mocan emphasises the importance of preserving authenticity and ethics in cinema, even in the context of commercial pressure and advanced technologies. Romanian cinema should adapt, maintaining authentic expressivity without sacrificing the humanity of the story. In conclusion, metafiction and digital realism raise questions about perception limits and artistic responsibility.

APPENDIX 3 – MANDERLAY. BUNGALOW IN CORNWALL

In Cornwall, English houses are often named and their names reflect the history, personality and values of owners, creating a link between dwelling and identity. *Manderlay*, whether the real bungalow in Gwithian (England) or the fictional plantation in Lars von Trier's film, becomes a symbol of memory and social structures. In the novel *Rebecca*, the *Manderley* manor functions as a collective organism, preserving memories and judgements of the past. The dwelling is perceived as an extension of the spirit and every object, corner, or shadow transmits information about temperament, desires and traumas. Cinema explores this analogy between body and house, capturing gestures, movements and expressions as signs of human experience. Body and house thus become complementary instruments for reading emotions and memory. The visual experience of film and realised photographs allow a subtle connection between space, time and human condition. In conclusion, both house and body transform everyday reality into a sensitive and expressive universe, bearer of multiple meanings.

I identified the house named *Manderlay* in the Cornwall region in 2025. The discovery was not the result of an investigation oriented towards identifying this toponym, but occurred incidentally, in the context of a private trip, as a result of a simple field observation. The coincidence between one of the aspects of the researched theme and the appearance of this name in real space raises the problem of the role of chance in the research process and how direct experience can interfere with theoretical reflection.

This unplanned encounter functions as a contextual element that contributes to extending the interpretive framework of the research. *Manderlay* thus becomes a symbolic reference situated at the intersection between cinematic fictional space and real space, highlighting how certain theoretical concepts can be reactivated or recontextualised through contingent experiences, supporting the methodological rigour of the analysis.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

These refer both to the empirical and theoretical dimensions of the study. First, the analysis was concentrated on a restricted number of films and directors, which limits the possibility of generalising conclusions for the entire contemporary cinematography or for other cultural contexts. Also, the interdisciplinary approach, although valuable for interpretive depth, implies subjectivity in selecting and correlating concepts from philosophy, psychology and aesthetics, which may influence the interpretation of results. Another limitation concerns access to sources. Some documentary materials or interviews with directors and actors were not available, which restricted the contextual analysis of the creative process. In addition, the focus on corporeal minimalism and gesturality does not fully cover other aesthetic or technical dimensions of film, such as editing, sound, or visual effects, which can contribute significantly to constructing cinematic meaning. Despite these limitations, the research offers a solid base for future studies, which could extend the sample, diversify analysis methods and integrate supplementary perspectives for a more complete understanding of contemporary cinema.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Starting from the thesis conclusions, cinematic research can be extended in several directions to deepen relations between character, space and spectator. One important direction is analysis of the city and built environment, exploring how urban space has been used by the three studied directors. Future research could examine how urban decors influence character behaviour and gestures, social tensions and narrative symbolism, as well as differences in approach between directors. Comparing urban spaces in their films can evidence distinct styles, aesthetic priorities and different cultural interpretations of the city.

Another direction is in-depth analysis of character introduction and development with emphasis on how directors manage the relation between individual and collective, psychological typologies and gesturality specific to each character. This can be combined with interdisciplinary perspectives, including psychology, social studies and performativity theory, to understand more completely identity construction in film.

Based on conclusions emphasising the importance of reflexive observation, future research could introduce a fictional professor or narrative observer to analyse films as laboratories, facilitating comparisons of gestures, power relations and moral or aesthetic meanings.

Other directions include study of digital technologies impact on contemporary cinema, investigation of corporeality and sexuality in different cultural contexts, as well as analysis of the relation between minimalism, absurd and critical distancing in experimental films. In ensemble, these directions outline an interdisciplinary space combining aesthetics, psychology, philosophy and technology to understand more deeply cinematic expression and the human condition.