

ly yet importantly, described in novels and pictured in films. Porumboiu's film concludes a whole epoch of many political films' approach to capturing of social realities in all Balkan countries, with maybe the specific exception of Greece and Turkey.

The film *A fost sau n-a fost?* can be taken as one of the most representative key cases of what was happening in the cinematic minds at a certain point in time in the Balkans, when the results of the so-called transition to democracy were becoming disappointingly obvious. The historical signifier of communism in the Balkans is just only one among other signifiers, such as the Ottoman rule, notion of the nation, (ethnic) identity and diversity – all involving a lot of emotionalised collective memories and conflicting narratives. *A fost sau n-a fost?* transcends the inherent determinations that follow from such signifiers. Although the film does not present any standpoint, concerning Romanian relations to other Balkan countries, it, in a general attitude, inscribes itself in a somewhat programmatic vision of Dina Iordanova, saying: "As soon as 'being Balkan' is no longer a troublesome position but it is recognised instead as a tolerable agenda, the surreptitious reluctant togetherness and the acquiescent ignorance of one's own neighbours may come to an end" (Iordanova, 2006: 9). This could be well understood as an echo of yet another Bulgarian scholar, Maria Todorova's observation: "It is virtually axiomatic that, by and large, a negative self-perception hovers over the Balkans next to a strongly disapproving and disparaging outside perception. I am acutely aware that resorting to a notion like 'the Balkan people' and how they think of themselves smacks distinctly of 'national character,' a category that I oppose passionately on both methodological and moral grounds" (Todorova, 2009: 38).³ Where Todorova sees a moral dimension, we may add an aesthetic dimension as well, which in films works through cultural and social signifiers, which also command the gaze of film authors. This is related to Porumboiu's movie, where there is a strong message that actually the "revolution" functioned as a catalyst for a realisation that "what had seemed to be there actually wasn't there". The film, therefore, throws us in a social and moral void. This is, as far as such kind of a film can go. Its aesthetic gesture (which is composed from above mentioned elements of film narration) points towards a need of a social invention, considering the dystopian world that resulted from the infamous "transition" and towards a search for a new paradigm of the organi-

3 Let me make a note that the first edition of the cited book by Maria Todorova appeared already in 1997.