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**Romanian Social Transformations Reflected in Socialist Cinema
(1948-1989)**

- Scientific doctorate in History -

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Argument

The PhD thesis *Romanian Social Transformations Reflected in Socialist Cinema (1948-1989)* analyses how cinema, more specifically feature-length art film, was used to expose those directives of the Romanian Workers' Party, later to become the Romanian Communist Party, which had a direct impact on society, bringing about a series of transformations at the level of the individual, the family, and the community. The paper traces film propaganda from the beginning of the communist period in Romania until the last decade and is structured in chapters dedicated to issues that have been identified as being generously reflected in Romanian films of the period studied. Each chapter is also structured chronologically.

Why film as a source of documentation of social shifts in communism? Film can be used as a genuine historical source, offering numerous reflections of the society that created it and, interpreted in the historical, social, and cultural context specific to the period it shows on screen, stripped of the elements of propaganda that it inevitably carries, it contributes to the reconstruction of a certain discourse about the past. Of course, like any source of this kind, the film is laden with subjectivity, arranged on multiple levels – from the commissioner, in this case the state, to the tone set by the actors who embody the various characters – and, being a work of fiction, it prioritises certain events, characters, stages, it alters or fictionalises others. It is the historian's task to capture these alterations and fictions by constantly superimposing them on the context in which they were produced. My intention was that, starting from a few major social changes implemented in the post-1945 period, which I first sought to situate historically and sociologically, to understand the mechanisms behind them and how they were implemented from top to bottom, I could then capture, through analysis of over 100 topical films, how the party's message was dramatized and brought to the public's attention through film.

Along with all other methods of memory preservation and communication, film as a technique has become an extremely useful source of information, because it can provide factual, objective details about the world. Whether fictional or documentary, film preserves the atmosphere of times gone by, in thousands of details that would be impossible to render by any other source. On the other hand, because of its exciting and moving character, fiction film has become, and very quickly, one of the most important tools of manipulation. In the 130 years since its invention, film has gone from being a fairground entertainment used by

some entrepreneurs for profit to an art form and a propaganda tool that has been used throughout history at state level to influence public opinion.

In this paper, I intend to capture on the one hand the socialist social shifts that have remained imprinted on film in Romanian cinema, but also the way in which the Party used this type of medium to craft propaganda messages.

The present research aims to investigate how the great social transformations that Romania went through in the period 1948-1989 were reflected in the Romanian fiction film created during the socialist period, as well as what model of (new) man Romanian cinema proposes through its characters.

Romanian society as a whole is undergoing a series of transformations that affect the lives of individuals, families, and communities to the highest degree. The film, the primary source of this project, has a double role from the perspective of this work: on the one hand, we exploit it as a witness of these great transformations, a source-document – imperfect, of course – with a particularly strong impact on the masses, and on the other hand, as a propaganda tool, a way of familiarizing, at least, the broad masses with the prototype of the ideal communist society as desired and imagined by the state.

Through this research, we have tried, by analysing the content and message of the dedicated cinema, to create the idealised society that the socialist leaders wanted to build, as well as to highlight the methods, artistic or communicative, through which they strove to impose and inoculate this vision to the masses.

Film, which reached a satisfactory technical and artistic maturity in the middle years of the 20th century, was used as a sophisticated method of persuading people to adopt certain sets of ideas. What is more, the powerful visual nature of film enabled the leaders to actually show the people the victories of socialism throughout the country – whole blocks of flats, boulevards, restaurants, hydroelectric power stations, factories, agricultural cooperatives etc. They were all ready-made and could now also serve as the backdrop for those stories that practically inoculated the audience with a new experience of life.

Cinemas are spreading rapidly in this period, film caravans are travelling through the villages, and where a cinema could not be built, the community centres serve this purpose. With the development of television, these stories are now watched in the privacy of the home and family, in the very heart of society. So, it would not be a mistake to state that the socialist leaders and those of the propaganda apparatus were trying to hold up a mirror to society through the cinema, in the hope of persuading it to recognise itself and imitate the model they saw.

Propagandistic to a greater or lesser extent, film experienced an unprecedented development during the communist period, which it has not yet recovered in the post-revolutionary period, at least in terms of the number of films made.

Sources and methodology

The main source of the present work is the fictional films about society made in Romania in the period 1948-1989, i.e. the so-called topical films. This genre accompanied the Romanian communist cinema from its first moment to its end and was extremely important for the state apparatus and for the structures dealing with propaganda. The topicality film was the main form of film creation expressing the style of socialist realism, imposed on all the arts in the Soviet Union from 1934 and in Romania, from 1949.

This paper is mainly based on the analysis of 110 topical fiction films made between 1949 and 1989 and broadcast on the big screens. Without claiming to have exhausted in this work all the Romanian films of actuality created in the mentioned time interval, I have tried to find the most diverse examples that capture the social transformations that took place in these 45 years, referring in particular to collectivization, industrialization, or systematization, which are treated in a generous number of films. I also sought to see the extent to which other social transformations are also present, such as nationalisation or the situation created after Decree 770 of 1966, which banned abortion, which, although they were processes that had a strong impact on Romanian society, were not reflected in many films.

The reconstruction of the social and political context of the period was done by using a series of primary sources, such as *the Constitutions of the Romanian People's Republic* of 1948, 1952 and the *Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Romania* of 1965, decrees of law, such as the one mentioned above, Decree 770 of 1966, but also relevant historical works about the period studied, among which the books by Marcela Sălăgean¹ and Luminița Dumănescu² proved to be very useful. For the analysis of the film industry, the works on Romanian cinematography were of great help, either those written from the perspective of the history of this field or those of film analysis. I would also mention the books and studies of Mihaela Grancea, a reputed historian who used film as one of her main research sources. The

¹ Marcela Sălăgean, *Introduction to the Contemporary History of Romania*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2013.

² Luminița Dumănescu, *The Romanian Family in Communism*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2012; *"Country, country, we want soldiers!" Despre infanția în comunism*, Cluj-Napoca, Mega, 2015.

magazine intitled *Cinema* has established itself as a particularly rich source of documentation for this research. On its pages, it offered articles popularizing everything that meant the art of cinema, providing information about films, actors, directors, writers, cinematographers, both from our country and from abroad in Eastern Europe, but also from other parts of the world. The content of the magazine offered reading material for the general public and professionals alike. In fact, the magazine edited by Ecaterina Oproiu was often a tool for analysing the state of the industry, through debates organised among professionals, for professionals, but also reaching the readers. Last but not least, the magazine offered the general public the opportunity to have their say on the films they had seen, with space between its pages for letters sent to the editorial office.

Film as an instrument of communication has been one of my major professional interests throughout my studies and career, and approaching it through this research, both from a historical, visual, and sociological perspective, has helped me to deepen my understanding of the political and artistic underpinnings of filmmaking down to its finest aspects. In this way, the work is positioned at the intersection of several disciplines, history, communication, visual studies, and, at times, sociology.

From a historical point of view, we have exposed both landmarks in the field of film history, for a better contextualization of the elements analysed, and the set of circumstances in which a series of films appeared. In this paper, we have also made a relation of the current art feature films analysed to the legislative regulations that existed at the time of the film's production, and an analysis of how these affected the scriptwriting and directorial vision.

From a communication perspective, I conducted an analysis of the propaganda discourse reflected in the film's dialogues in order to show how different categories of characters and situations were characterized and what political message was intended to be conveyed through the film.

In terms of visual analysis, I also used it to show how the propaganda message was supported by what was shown on the screen and how the images captured, from the general view to the smaller details, a reality that existed, but whose form was augmented, in order to induce in the audience a positive reception, not so much of the film, but of everyday existence in socialism.

The sociological perspective was used to pursue the capture on film of phenomena that had an impact on the masses, but also on the individual, such as, to give just one or two examples, the migration from village to town brought about by industrialisation and

collectivisation, or how the placements at the end of university studies were shown to have affected young people.

As the research is placed at the intersection of history and cinematic art, the methodology followed for this work consists of a combination of methods and approaches, with the aim of obtaining a deeper and more balanced understanding of film and the historical context it represents and creates. To begin with, I proceeded to an analysis of the historical context in which the film was produced, in order to better understand how society functions and to be able to deduce the propagandist message. I then turned to ideological analysis, interested in how the state's vision of the new society it was building was reflected in the film. I made extensive use of the narrative method, focusing on story structure and how events and characters were created and presented to deliver the party's message. I used the descriptive method, discourse analysis, film analysis to establish the content, message, and the ways in which it was propagated. Of course, comparative analysis (comparing film messages with other types of historical sources) was necessary in order to assess, on the one hand, the accuracy and proposed interpretation of the film and, on the other hand, to disentangle elements of mystification and propaganda. Analysis of film reviews of the period was also necessary, and the material provided by *Cinema* magazine was a rich source of documentation in this respect.

The case study research method was also suitable for this type of study, so for chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, I have focused on a considerable number of films which I have described and analysed. Last but not least, I was also interested in stylistic analysis, focusing from this point of view on the aesthetic elements of the films, such as frame composition, editing, actual filming, and other technical elements, in order to understand how these contributed to the propagation of a particular type of message.

Structure. The present work is structured in eight chapters, opened by an *Introduction*, followed by a chapter dedicated to the contextualization both from a historical point of view, and from the perspective of the presentation of the film industries in Eastern Europe, which aimed at a better framing of Romanian cinema in the political, technical, and artistic landscape in which it has developed over these 45 years. The main body of the work is made up of four chapters in which I analyse social transformations, and the work ends with a chapter dedicated to conclusions.

Chapter 4 analyses the model of the *new man*, which served as a prototype for the Romanian topical film, as well as the way in which the main characters thus constructed evolved from one decade to the next. Each of the next three chapters (5-7) refers to a

particular fundamental process of socialism that had a major impact on society after 1948, and the films are analysed in chronological order, as I also aimed to capture an evolution over time. Thus chapter 5 is devoted to collectivisation, chapter 6 to industrialisation, and chapter 7 to urban and rural systematisation.

The last chapter, dedicated to conclusions, aims to provide a self-contained synthesis of the work, summarizing the essence of the research dedicated to the social prefaces reflected in current socialist film.

2. Film beginnings in Eastern Europe

The chapter is devoted to a brief presentation of the conditions for the emergence of the cinema in France in 1895 and its rapid spread throughout Europe, with a focus on the countries that later became part of the Eastern Bloc. The chapter is opened by a presentation of Soviet cinema, which can be said to have influenced the cinema of the Eastern Bloc as a whole stylistically, technically, and propagandistically. This is not surprising, given the way in which all political, social, economic, cultural elements spread from the USSR to the Eastern satellite states. And film was no exception.

Following the success of the screening at the Grand Café in Paris in December 1895, brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière quickly organised a tour of the world's major capitals to present their new invention. They trained 150 operators³ in Lyon and sent teams with cameras and one-minute film reels to different corners of Europe to show the curious real-life images, family scenes, and people on the street. Thus, the invention of the two became known to audiences in different parts of Europe in relatively similar ways and at roughly the same time.

The first cinema to be approached was Soviet cinema, which later served as a model, both technically, and artistically, but especially politically, for the cinema of other Eastern European countries that came under Moscow's influence. Also, here we have a presentation of *Socialist Realism*, defined following the First Congress of the Union of Writers of the USSR in 1934, where it was decided that all creative production should be subordinated to this style.

³ Tudor Caranfil, *The History of Cinema in Masterpieces, The Ages of Film*, vol. 1, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2009, p. 39.

The chapter presents an incursion into the history of Eastern European cinema, from its beginnings to the 1950s, in an attempt to outline the situation in the region at the time when the Romanian state cinema was created.

3. Context of the emergence of state cinema in Romania

Continuing the line of the previous chapter, in this stage I made a presentation of the conditions of the appearance and development of Romanian cinema, from the projection of the first *films* brought from Paris, then the creation of the Romanian ones, the first local productions, until the moment of the takeover of the country by the communists, when a series of investments and reorganizations took place, which can be said to have represented a new beginning for the Romanian film industry.

On 27 May 1896, exactly five months after the Lumière brothers' first public performance in Paris, the first Romanian screening of the curious *views* that had conquered audiences all over Europe took place at the headquarters of the newspaper *L'Indépendance roumaine* on Calea Victoriei in Bucharest. Very quickly, the programme of *postcards* consisted only or mainly of Romanian films, made in particular by the cameraman Paul Menu, one of the young people trained by Lumière, who between May and June of that year made several films: *The 10th of May parade*, *The Moșilor Fair*, *The Hippodrome and the races at Baneasa*, *The terrace of the Capșa café*, *The floods at Galați*.⁴

The first attempts to create a Romanian film were *Amor fatal* (*Fatal love*), in 1911, featuring actors Lucia Sturdza, Tony Bulandra, and Aurel Barbelian, directed by Grigore Brezeanu, as well as an attempt to combine film and theatre, in the performance of *Înșiră-te mărgăritar*, after Victor Eftimiu's play, staged at the National Theatre. *Amor fatal* was, it seems, the cinematic transposition of a well-known play that was playing at the National Theatre, a sentimental drama whose action takes place in several places in Bucharest, made with the collaboration of some foreign studio, probably French.⁵ Both productions are lost.

The first Romanian film, which has been preserved, is considered *Independence of Romania*, produced in 1912 at the initiative of the very young Grigore Brezeanu, son of the comedian Iancu Brezeanu, who was supported by a group of actors, among whom Aristide Demetriade and Constantin Nottara are the most important and to whom the film historians

⁴ Cristina Corciovescu, Bujor. T. Rîpeanu, *1234 Romanian Filmmakers*, Ed. Științifică, Bucharest, 1996, p. 216.

⁵ Bujor T. Rîpeanu, *Filmed in Romania, A Filmographic Repertory, 1911-1969*, Ed. Fundației Pro, Bucharest, 2004, p. 21.

Ion Cantacuzino and Tudor Caranfil also attribute the writing of the script, as well as a good part of the artistic conception.

In 1934, the “National Film Fund” was established to collect taxes from cinemas, which at that time were mainly showing foreign films, the purpose of the money collected being to set up studios to serve domestic production. The fees were 1 leu (the national currency) per ticket sold and 10 lei per metre of film imported.⁶

In 1937, the Film Service became the Directorate of Cinematography, subordinate to the Ministry of Propaganda. However, the money raised from taxes was used for endowment with equipment and a sound recording studio. In 1938, the Cinematography Department was reorganised and the National Cinematography Office (ONC) was set up. Among its first productions was the documentary *Țara Moșilor* (directed by Paul Călinescu), which won a prize at Venice in 1938.

Another important production in the history of Romanian film, made with the support of ONC between 1941-1942, is the screening of the play *O noapte furtunoasă* (*A Stormy Night*), based on I. L. Caragiale's play of the same name. Jean Georgescu directed and wrote the screenplay, and the Frenchman Gérard Perrin was the cameraman, the production director being the head of the ONC, Ion Cantacuzino. Filming took place in “the only 200-metre of set in the country, acoustically treated, with air conditioning, electrical installations and editing rooms”⁷.

The establishment of the communist regime in Romania in 1948 had a strong impact on cinema, as it did on the whole of society. As in other fields, Soviet directives were followed in the arts, namely in cinema, and this was clearly shown through various channels of information transmission.

In 1949, a decision was made to establish a film studio and its construction was carried out over the next decade. The Buftea film centre was designed for a production capacity of 12 feature films per year, but studios for animated films or technical-scientific and educational films were also planned. The production facilities would gradually come into operation during the 1950s, so that by 1957, the industry had five film sets at Buftea. This was followed by the opening of the sound studio, the film processing studio and the combined filming studio. By 1959, the film production centre near Bucharest had become a

⁶ Ion Cantacuzino *Momente din trecutul filmului românesc*, Bucharest, Meridiane Publishing House, 1965, p. 31.

⁷ Official website of the National Film Centre, https://cnc.gov.ro/?page_id=52349

'citadel' of Romanian film, with modern equipment capable of placing it on a par with medium-sized European studios.⁸

In 1950, the Institute of Cinematographic Art was founded to provide the necessary future specialists, and in 1951, a magazine of speciality – *Probleme de Cinematographie* – was already published, dedicated not so much to the public, as to specialists in the field.

Both technically and artistically, our new cinema was created on the basis of Soviet teachings – with working methods, knowledge, and even coordinators coming from Moscow. In addition, from a technical point of view, the studios were equipped with equipment brought from Russia, gradually replacing the old one, much of which came from Germany.

The Soviet path was also followed from an ideological point of view, the method of Socialist Realism guiding all art, first of all literature, and therefore, also the new Romanian cinema.

The first films made in Romania in the early 1950s almost mathematically pointed out the changes envisaged by the new regime. Nationalisation, industrialisation, collectivisation – all the changes imposed by the socialist government from the very first year it took power in Romania are reflected in these films.

With the coming to power of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the film industry underwent a reorganization. In December 1967, at the National Conference of the Romanian Communist Party, it was proposed that an Ideological Commission be set up within the Central Committee to create a framework for debate on the major theoretical issues of art, culture and science. The Ideological Commission was also intended to ensure “a unitary, principled orientation of all ideological, political, educational, and cultural activity, on the basis of which all fields of creation, the most diverse personalities, and the most varied, interesting, and original modes of expression could flourish.”⁹

After the establishment of the Ideological Commission, the first meeting discussed the situation of cinema, film production and distribution, which shows the importance of this field for the leaders of the PCR. The meeting took place on 23 May 1968, with Nicolae Ceaușescu also taking part, Paul Niculescu-Mizil being present as head of the commission, as well as other party ideologists, directors, scriptwriters, editors.

Established in 1965 through the reorganization of the General Directorate of Cinematography, the National Council of Cinematography was to coordinate the specific

⁸ Călin Căliman, *The History of Romanian Film 1987-2000*, Bucharest, Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 2000, p. 138.

⁹ Pompiliu Macovei, "National Conference of the Romanian Communist Party, Speech by Comrade Pompiliu Macovei", *Scînteia*, 9 December 1967, p. 7.

activity in the field of cinema, namely the three studios “București”, “Alexandru Sahia”, and “Animafilm”, but also had a role of ideological guidance.

Following the process of reorganisation of the sector imposed by the new leadership of the country, film creation is strictly under state control. Film issues are thus decided at the level of the Council of Socialist Culture and Education, which in turn, is directly subordinate to the CC of the PCR.

Film production was predetermined based on thematic plans. The people and structures involved in the management of the film industry wanted to use these plans to control production as much as possible, the thematic plans having as their aim, in the cinema, the establishment of a certain number of films to be made in a year and to ensure the themes. In this way, there was on the one hand a vision of the financial and human resources needed, and on the other, an ideological control.

After Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power, it was decided to increase the number of films produced, reaching a peak of 25 films in 1974. From a thematic point of view, two main directions for film production were emerging: the historical film, evoking important figures of leaders, as well as the struggle for the liberation and construction of the country, the revolutionary struggle and the struggle against the exploiters, and the topical film.¹⁰

4. The man next to us. The reflection of the socialist hero in Romanian cinema

With this chapter, I begin my own contribution to the analysis of Romanian socialist cinema from the perspective of how it captured the various social transformations. From the perspective of subordinating art to the principles of Socialist Realism, the works of art were conceived from the perspective of creating a mirror in which the people could recognize themselves, to correct their “moral behaviour”.¹¹ Thus, the contemporary writer, said Zaharia Stancu, one of the important exponents of Socialist Realism, was obliged to consider the depiction of the present as his most precious task, because every day that passes “adds a touch to the edifice of socialism and to the perfection of the new man”.¹²

¹⁰ "Stenogram of the ideological meeting of the CC of the PCR on 23 May 1968", in ANIC, CC of the PCR - Chancellery, file 88/1968, f. 105-107, apud Bogdan Jitea, *Cinema in the RSR: Conformism and dissidence in the Ceaușescu film industry*, Iași, Polirom, 2021, p. 108-109.

¹¹ Zaharia Stancu, "The Party is a living, unique and immortal being", *Știința Tineretului*, Central Organ of the Communist Youth Union, 7 May 1966, p. 5.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 5.

Most of the films made in the first years after the establishment of socialism in our country are extremely eloquent for understanding the concept of the new man, but also for understanding the communist ideology. The first productions of the new socialist cinema bring to the screen main characters reflecting the Soviet idea of the new man. They are generally young people with a positive appearance – tall, strong, handsome, tireless fighters against the evil promoted in the world by the bourgeoisie and their cronies, a process which in fact also achieves the much-desired class consciousness that socialist ideology demanded. The heroes of these films are, as Maxim Gorky demanded, optimists par excellence, who succeeded in coalescing the forces of the collective to which they belonged around them and manipulating them, as we would say today, but they said at the time that they were endowed with an unquenchable power of persuasion towards socialist ideals, through the promise of a bright tomorrow, in which people will be equal and welfare will increase one step at a time, every day, as communist society is built.

Mitrea Cocor is the first fully defined new man in Romanian cinema, the film, like Sadoveanu's novel, being created to authenticate a reality that explains the need for the establishment of the socialist regime in Romania. *Mitrea Cocor* is a film dedicated to the birth of the new man – that is, as the press of the time records it, one of the millions of peasants oppressed under the bourgeois regime, who, through his hard work and fighting spirit, not only managed to resist and rise above those who oppressed him, but also to find in the liberation of the country by the Soviet Army, the source of inspiration and the opportunity for his personal liberation, along with others like him.

The concept of the new man has always accompanied the Romanian socialist construction and remained a landmark for cinema until the fall of the communist regime. However, the model of the new man was not immutable. Depending on ideological changes, depending on political interests, its representation also changed. In the 70s, for example, there was a move away from the Soviet model. Many of the main characters in the films of the 1960s, especially the male ones, now reflect a local model of the new man in the form of the young specialist, usually an engineer. The importance that the leaders of Romanian socialism attached to industrialisation resulted in the creation of a large number of films devoted to the presentation of various Romanian technical achievements, both real and fictional. The heroes of these films could only be engineers, usually metallurgists or petroleum workers, because the focus, from the beginning, was on heavy industry, extraction or machine building, both in real life and in the topical film, whose aim was to bring both socialist ideology and the achievements of the new regimes closer to the people.

The New Man returns to Romanian socialist cinema after 1970 in a form that will be dictated by Ceaușescu's so-called cultural mini-revolution, namely The Theses of July 1971. The document set out a series of principles that were applied to all the arts and fields of communication, and therefore also to cinema. The text also evoked a series of directives on the basis of which the life of the people and of each individual should be organised. Thus, especially among young people, voluntary work and the ethical concept of social coexistence will be promoted, but negative elements and phenomena, cosmopolitanism, the bourgeois way of life, unsuitable attitudes to work such as indolence or waste of wealth, superficiality, abuse and dishonesty, as well as disinterest in the requirements of working people will be combated. Thus, the characters of topical Romanian films had to reflect these ideas, regardless of the deeply personal vision that the creators (writers, directors, actors, etc.) tended to manifest. On the one hand, it was important that all filmmaking should relate to the same common denominator represented by the July Theses, and on the other, it was expected that members of the industry would use their creativity to illustrate all these directives in the most realistic and profound way possible, which in effect meant that films would make the propaganda pill easier to swallow.

Of course, one cannot say that the characters of the Romanian cinema of the 70s, and I am referring especially to the main ones, are all the same, but one can say that certain trends can be observed. Usually, the main character of the socialist topical film is young, and in the cinema of the eighth decade, a certain figure of the *heroic saviour* has emerged. The main character that permeates Romanian topical cinema in the 1970s is characterized by a strong anti-system attitude, is a fighter, often even arrogant, and is perceived by his peers as a talented professional. He is also an educated individual specialised in fields with a strong social or economic impact, such as engineer or doctor, but there is no shortage of professions such as aviator or teacher.

In the 1970s, a series of films also illustrates the "adventure of professional integration"¹³ of young people sent, according to the legislation in force at the time, to complete a 2–3-year internship in the specialisation in which they trained. The young characters were usually found in rural areas, an opportunity for the film makers to evoke the problems of the Romanian village in its struggle for development. The film thus became a message to young specialists to return to their native environment as specialists contributing

¹³ Bujor T. Rîpeanu, *Filmed in Romania, a filmographic repertoire 1970-1979*, University Media Collection, Ed. Fundației Pro, Bucharest, 2005, p. 122.

to the growth of their village, or to embrace the idea of working for a while in a less cosmopolitan environment than the capital or a big city in the country.

In the last decade of the regime, there is a diversification of ages in terms of the main characters, who are usually male. The new man is maturing, characters who are older are appearing, and the professional palette is also diversifying, in the sense of the appearance of leading characters who also represent less titled professions, but who enjoy equal respect, at least on screen.

Although gender equality was a basic principle of socialist society, also enshrined in the 1948 Constitution,¹⁴ the main characters in cinema from 1949-1989 were overwhelmingly male.

However, there are strong female leads in Romanian cinema that also express socialist ideology. From the character of Maria in *Dragoste lungă de-o vară* (*Summer-Long Love*, 1963), the young peasant girl who gives birth to a child out of wedlock, but manages to avoid a failed existence thanks to the opportunities the new socialist society offers her, to the mother character in *Puștiul* (*The Kid*, 1960), who successfully goes through the dramatic ordeal of her child's heart surgery, or Maria Sorescu, the former school principal who becomes the mayor in *Orașul văzut de sus* (*City from Above*, 1975), Romanian cinema offers interesting female figures. There is no shortage of female engineers among them, no less than their male partners or similar male characters in other films. All this is possible, as per the message of all films, only under the conditions offered by socialist society.

Romanian cinema is not lacking in films dedicated to pioneers or high school students, which capture the child and the adolescent, with his joys or problems, especially from the perspective of the schoolboy or the student, that is, from the perspective of his enrolment in a system, which bound the youngest individual of society to the party directives.

5. The struggle to gain trust. Collectivisation

This chapter aims to reflect in film one of the most profound and violent social transformations that took place in Romania, namely that brought about by the process of agricultural collectivisation, which lasted more than a decade, aimed at destroying the large landowners and resulted in a profound reorganisation of rural society. The most powerful propaganda productions on collectivisation were those of the 1950s, which aimed to justify

¹⁴ "Constitution of the Romanian People's Republic", 1948, Art. 21. - Women have equal rights with men in all areas of state, economic, social, cultural, political and private life.

this unjust and violent process. Films such as *În sat la noi*, (*In Our Village*, 1951) and *Desfășurarea* (*The Unfolding*, 1954) were intended to propagate a certain type of message, conveying the Romanian Workers' Party's (Partidul Muncitoresc Român) point of view, i.e. the need for collectivisation, which was one of the main instruments for consolidating power and controlling the Romanian economy in the years immediately following the takeover.

Romanian socialist cinema will periodically return to the theme of collectivization, even after the process is completed. The films aimed to convey the party's message which, depending on political changes, was different. On the one hand, during president Gheorghiu-Dej's time, we have two first films, those mentioned above, which aggressively conveyed the need for collectivisation, until towards the end of the process, we have *Lumină de iulie* (*July Light*, 1963) whose tone is gentle, comic, and conciliatory, trying to emphasise the positive aspects, i.e. the achievements. Later, in the 1970s, after Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power, *Vifornița* (*Blizzard*, 1973) brings a reparatory perspective, i.e. an acknowledgement of the fact that there were abusive attitudes, as well as a message of separation of the current power from the past excesses committed by the previous leaders. Yet the abuse acknowledged is far from reality, and the message is often cosmeticised or puzzled.

6. The everyday heroism of work. Industrialization

From the very first year of taking power, the Communist leaders declared industrialization a priority in the effort they felt they had to make to modernize Romania. To this end, they carried out, following the Soviet model, an economic power takeover, which took place in June 1948, when private enterprises were nationalized, a process that, within two years, brought 90 percent of the country's industrial and mining production capacity into the possession of the Romanian state.¹⁵

Industrialization was the way the communist elites thought they would modernize Romania after World War II, and nationalization provided them with the means of production.

While the process of nationalization is hardly reflected at all in Romanian films – there is a very small reference in *Răsună valea* (*Echo of the valley*, 1949), the first Romanian feature film – industrialization is amply evoked throughout the entire period of the communist regime. For the communist regime, film was an extremely important tool for

¹⁵ Marcela Sălăgean, *Introduction to the Contemporary History of Romania*, Ed. Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2013, p. 118.

supporting propaganda about the regime's great industrial achievements, a way of showing the public what the country's greatest financial and human efforts were aimed at, a way of persuading them to take part in this effort. These films also conveyed concepts and ideas that needed to create fertile ground in people's minds in order to be accepted - voluntary work, the acquisition of a professional consciousness leading to savings in the production process on the one hand, but at the same time going beyond the plan. All films set against the backdrop of industrialisation are shot through like a red thread by the obsession with Romanian innovation – technical processes, machines, machinery, methods, scientific work – to help the economy and industry progress, to lead the whole country towards modernisation. Regardless of which regime's rulers created a film, the obsession with Romanian innovation remains, explained by its leaders' desire to move Romania away from dependence on other economies and to keep production under the best possible control. We can also observe in the series of films analysed an evolution of industrial topics – while in the early films the focus was on raw materials, from the 1970s the emphasis shifted to finished products and in the 1980s to large infrastructure projects.

Films reflecting Romanian industrialization also share the image of the main character – the communist worker (in the first decade), who turns into an engineer in the 1960s – a principled, smart, educated individual, often a family man in the sense that he is or has been married or agrees to marry, who selflessly carries the burden of innovation and the welfare of the community he leads on his shoulders. He defends all his workers, no matter how small they are, and he takes on the bureaucrats, be they from Bucharest or high up in the party, when it comes to defending the common wealth and the smooth running of the site. This worker/engineer has always benefited from the interpretation of an actor with a deep charisma (George Vraca, Emanoil Petruț, Victor Rebengiuc, Iurie Darie, Ovidiu Iuliu Moldovan, Sergiu Nicolaescu, Gheorghe Cozorici, Emil Hossu), so that no matter how dry the characterization may seem, a credible and pleasant character was projected on the canvas of the cinema.

7. Towards a multilaterally developed society. Systemisation and modernisation.

Socialism brought and imposed on Romanians a strong transformation of space, of the image of towns and villages, of the way they functioned, of the intimate habitat of habitation, which led to a strong change in the way of life of every person who lived in this country, as well as of society as a whole. Extremely large-scale settlement projects were launched during

the socialist period, whole neighbourhoods were demolished, many villages were razed to the ground to make way for new buildings based on new rules, which led to the emergence of a new type of life, a new type of man.

In this chapter we have analysed those films that show this building development during the communist period and the main ideas that the leaders of the party structures wanted to convey in these productions.

If from the films of the first decade of the regime one can extract, due to the documentary character of the film, information about the housing that is more or less incidental, from the early 1960s, the messages conveyed through cinema become coherent and intentional. Basically, the films accompany the country-building effort desired by the communist rulers and show more and more explicitly that housing blocks are being built in the country for the population. One of the earliest such films, *Nu vreau să mă însor (I Don't Want to Get Married, 1960)*, shows the main character, young Rodica, who is being courted by the engineer Preda, living with her parents in an airy neighbourhood of four-storey blocks in an apartment equipped with all the necessities of life. In the years to come, films will show how whole neighbourhoods, even cities, are built where people can live a carefree existence. From this decade onwards, the film reflects the fact that the block of apartments was the centrepiece of the golden age. The block has been both star and setting in so many productions, and the viewer has been introduced to the lives of the builders, the builders, the designers, has been presented with technical problems in great detail, has been part of their failures and their saving ideas. The block was the cornerstone of the new society, the block was the pact that the socialist state made with the common people. From its beautifully presented interior, to its tall facades covering the entire skyline, the block was turned on its head, it was presented both seriously and hilariously, from above and below, day and night. There is no shortage of references to demolition either, but they represent the sacrifice of modernisation.

If during the 60s and 70s, the tone of the propaganda films dedicated to the modernization of the urban space is more avuncular, more pathetic, in the 80s productions a more nostalgic approach begins to take place. The structure of these films is a little more complex, more complicated, perhaps also because the writer-director teams were trying to balance the propaganda message, which was having an increasingly weak echo in cinemas due to the increasing hardships of everyday life.

The same effort was made by the filmmakers, at the direction of the party, to present the countryside as attractively as possible, which is presented as a universe with the

agricultural production cooperative (CAP) at its centre as a source of well-being and modernisation.

The concern for solving investments links like a red thread all these films dedicated to the rural environment, from the 60s until almost '89. It is about investments dedicated to the development of agricultural productivity on the one hand and the modernisation of the village on the other. One can see from these films the concern for the continuous provision of irrigation (of all the investments, concern for irrigation seems to be the greatest obsession), agricultural machinery, the construction of stables, greenhouses, workshops etc.

The scientific approach to farming or animal breeding is again a recurring idea in these films, everything is or should be based on the letter of the book. So, in the 1960s, the characters who are in charge of animal breeding, and later from the 1970s onwards, the specialists who come from universities all preach this scientific approach. Also, the constant increase in cereal productivity is an obsession, and sometimes films become a way of popularising scientific methods, even giving concrete figures on how much wheat or maize should be produced per hectare in a given region.

In *Vară sentimentală* (*Sentimental Summer*, 1986), for example, we learn that the solution to the corn crop, which will lead to a substantial increase in production, requires a furrow 35 centimetres deep, and not 18 as the tractor driver played by Constantin Diplan did. The agronomist (Emil Hossu) scolds the tractor driver and asks him to redo the furrows according to the book, and the tractor driver, in turn, complains to the president of CAP that not only does he have to redo all the work, but the depth of 35 centimetres makes the work much more difficult and consumes more fuel.

Films about the collectivised village are filled with characters who embody the presidents of the CAP. Good or bad, they are always in conflict with the engineers who come to the village. Most of the time the engineer is the main character, and more often than not, the dispute between them is a battle between the generations, with the presidents representing the old – at first, as in *Castelanii* (*Castellans*, 1966), the bourgeois type, and then, after the 1970s, the old communist type who thinks he knows it all. Engineers are always young. Sometimes, mayors or accountants also appear in the films, and the party secretaries are always positive and mediate the conflicts of the CAP president-engineer-agronomist pairing, generally being the ones who unravel the film's action and lead to a good ending.

8. Conclusions

The choice of film as a documentary source for highlighting the social prefects of communist Romania proved to be a generous source of information in that it offers, one could say, a multidimensional image – through the ideas discussed, through the detailed images, through the emotions conveyed, through the attitudes portrayed, through the general atmosphere portrayed.

Most striking in these productions is the political message, which forces the transmission of the image of an idealized reality, which was intended to be, but which was nevertheless created from factual elements that existed. The new constructions of socialism, whether made of concrete or ideas, were as factual as possible and could be shown/heard in detail, in various stages of completion – just begun, in full swing or already operational. The film has thus become a faithful witness to these transformations during the period of Romanian communism, giving us today a chronicle that has gathered over four decades of well-defined details that perhaps could not have been conveyed by other means. Pleasant or not, these constructions were part of our lives and affected our development, and are now part of our history, personal or common.

If film functioned as a propaganda tool in an important period of our past, it would not be inappropriate to think that we can decipher what was wrong, bad, false in those times with its help. Because the film preserves unaltered the message of that time and shows it to us even today when, with the help of demystification, liberty and comparison with other sources we can see what was wrong, how it was wrong, why it was wrong. And perhaps, why not, we might have some less unpleasant surprises.

The topical film was one of the obsessions of socialist cinema in our country, being the genre most clamoured for in the circle of the nomenclature that coordinated the destiny of this field. The message reached the general public directly through the specialized articles in the pages of Romanian newspapers, weeklies and magazines, which constantly raised the issue of creating films inspired by everyday reality that would better, more deeply, more comprehensively capture the life of the individual in the new society that was being built around him every day.

The material base of Romanian cinema was poor at the time of the takeover by the communist authorities, who began to build a proper infrastructure for the use of film as a real propaganda weapon.

The first Soviet-inspired feature film was *Răsună Valea*, which illustrated the involvement of young people from all over the country, workers, peasants, students in the construction of the Bumbăști-Livezeni railway line, but which also focused on the beginnings

of nationalisation, class struggle, and the beginning of the country's industrialisation effort. The second important film of the new Romanian cinema, *În sat la noi*, reflected the second important political issue of the period – collectivisation. The first Romanian communist productions were indebted to socialist realism, but with Stalin's death and the move away from Moscow's influence a change was also felt in Romanian films – there was less and less talk about Russia and the Soviet model, and topical films also took the form of comedies, even with notes of self-irony. The reflection of industrialisation and collectivisation, of the construction of the new society, all brought about by the new man, remain very strong in topical films, but with the onset of *the thaw* during Gheorghiu-Dej's time, the conditions were created for productions in the second half of the 1960s in which references to Western culture appeared more and more often, relaxed characters who led, whatever their condition, a life with a worldly accent – young people who drank, smoked, laughed, danced, and sang. The period reaches a peak with the creation of *Un film cu o fată fermecătoare* (*A Film with a Charming Girl*) and *Meandre* which upset the authorities and are banned.

During this period, cinema came to the attention of Nicolae Ceaușescu, who in 1968 started a reorganization of the field, setting up new structures, as well as the Ideological Commission, to which he would subordinate the entire art of film, along with the other performing arts. The aim of the restructuring was, on the one hand, to control film creation as effectively as possible and subordinate it to ideology, this time Ceaușescu's, but it also aimed to increase the number of films to 25 a year, i.e. practically double the production that existed at the time. This figure was reached in 1974. Also, at the end of the 1960s, film production entered the stage of thematic plans. Although they had been talked about since the 1950s, the practice having been taken over from the Soviets, they began to be used consistently after 1968. The thematic and perspective plans set out the directions of film development, annually and over longer periods, following industry conferences, the first of which were attended by Ceaușescu. At that time, it was decided that the most important genres for Romanian cinema were the historical film and the topical film. The first genre was to reconfirm the “official theses of the historical discourse”¹⁶, namely the origins and continuity of the Romanian people on these territories, its sovereignty, the struggle for liberation from any kind of domination throughout the centuries, evoking figures of national heroes and rulers concerned with the project of non-attachment. On the other hand, the topical film was to show the

¹⁶ Bogdan Jitea, *op. cit.* p. 401.

various ways in which socialist society was continually being built, and to bring to the screen the achievements of the Party and the efforts of workers, engineers, and peasants in all this.

From this moment on, reinforced by the July 1971 Theses, in which Ceaușescu drew precise directives regarding the entire Romanian culture and even the behaviour of society, Romanian film entered a path that it would maintain, with some rebellions such as *Reconstituirea* (*Reconstitution*) or *Faleză de nisip* (*Sand Cliffs*), until the events of December 1989. In the last years of the regime, while the cinema of the surrounding countries was influenced by the changes in Moscow brought about by Gorbachev's government, in Romania, film, like the whole of society, was still under the pressure of limitations, censorship, and deprivation triggered by Ceaușescu's foreign debt repayment and megalomaniac projects.

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