

# Romanian Cinematography and Film Culture during the Communist Regime

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**Abstract** *Cinematography and film culture in Romania were used as instruments for cultural manipulation and political propaganda since the beginning of the communist era, either by imposing certain themes on national productions, or by censoring almost all foreign film productions entering the cinema network. Thus, the movies produced outside Romanian borders often suffered content alteration in order to fit communist ideology, if shown at all. We argue that the evolution of cinematography and film culture matched the controversial existence of Romanian censorship itself and the ever-changing official position towards the Western community. As will be discussed, Romanian people benefited from strictly controlled film entertainment, with only a few exceptions, such as the **Cinematheque** and **Cinema Almanac**, and had no direct and complete access to information on certain movies or directors, since press and cinema were drenched with pro-communist, anti-capitalist messages.*

After more than 20 years since the 1989 Revolution, Romanian communism continues to be a somehow dim subject, both inside and outside Romanian borders, as some of the most important works dealing with private and public life from 1945 to 1989 went almost unnoticed at the national level and were not translated at all into foreign languages. It is no wonder that it was only briefly taken into consideration and referred to in the groundbreaking *Black Book of Communism* (1997) and in Stéphane Courtois' *Dictionary of Communism* (2007), as state authorities themselves have no official agenda in recovering lost memories of a past not yet completely assumed. Only in 2005, 16 years after the Revolution and the collapse of the communist regime, was the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes in Romania (IICCR) founded, followed by the Presidential Official Report Condemning the Communist Regime one year later (Romanian Presidency 2006).

It is already well-known that cinema, along with many other cultural productions, was used as an instrument for manipulation and political propaganda in all communist countries, either by imposing certain themes and dispositions on national productions, or

by censoring (totally or partially) the foreign films entering the national cinema networks. In our paper, we chose to focus our attention on the case of Romanian cinematography and film culture of the respective era, while trying to underline its particularities.

When speaking about the Romanian cinematography and film culture during the Communist regime (1945–1989), historians seem to agree that it follows in the footsteps of the contorted history of Romanian censorship. Chronologically speaking, it can be divided into three distinct periods: from 1945 to 1964 – when the *Declaration of April* was signed, through which the Romanian Workers' Party sanctioned the relative political independence from the Soviet bloc (Șercan 2012, p. 338), from 1965 to 1971 (a brief period of controlled liberalism, when arts generally could flourish again) (Rusan 2012, p. 114) and from 1971 to 1989, years marked by the return to the ideological purity of the cultural mini-revolution sanctioned by Ceaușescu's July *Thesis* (Malița 2012, p. 213).

The 1950s are characterized by extensive and severe control of all screenings, which mostly included Soviet films and a few chosen politically "neutral" western productions.

During the 1960s and 1970s though, cinema entered the “golden age” of the communist period with the foundation of the *Cinematheque* and the expansion of the network of cinema halls. These facilities hosted an increasing number of spectators and going to cinema became a form of leisure for people of all ages and backgrounds, from the countryside to the capital. During this period the Romanian public had access to the most recent Western movies, which were only briefly censored and only lacked the so-called “pornographic” scenes deemed offensive by the communist system of family values.

The period after the second half of the 1970s and until the December Revolution is characterized by Romania’s international declaration of its ideological independence from the Soviet Union, the return to severe totalitarian practices, and by the instauration of the cult of the personality surrounding the presidential family (Troncotă 2006, p. 208). The newly found singularity and the cold diplomatic relations with the former allies also triggered an economic recession. Therefore, the communist regime also decreased its investments in the movie industry. As a result, most of the available representations were films obtained by barter – Romanian movies exchanged for others, most of them produced within the Soviet Union. The Western productions still entered the country, but many of them had a different title and no credits to avoid potential copyright lawsuits. The decline in cinematography was quite obvious, since the same films were screened over and over again, while cinema halls gradually emptied. Daily TV broadcasts were cut to only two hours, which underlines the degree of state control over all existing information channels.

Although Romanian premiers did not always coincide with the international ones, this

did not bother the audiences, as long as they could reach out to the outside world. For instance, a western blockbuster such as “Gone with the Wind” (1939) became a cult movie for Romanians only in 1970 (!), when it was screened here for the first time (Caranfil 2009, vol. 4, p. 298). The December 1966 *Cinema Almanac* edition included the top ten foreign premiers of the year in Bucharest, featuring Teshigahara’s *Woman in the Dunes* (1964), Tony Richardson’s *Tom Jones* (1963) and *A Taste of Honey* (1961), John Ford’s *Stagecoach* (1939!), Stanley Kramer’s *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), Wajda’s *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), Kakogiannis’ *Zorba* (1964), Huston’s *The Night of the Iguana* (1964), *The Shop on Main Street* (1964) and Pierre Étaix’s *Yoyo* (1965) (p. VIII).

#### THE SITUATION OF CINEMA FROM AN OFFICIAL STANDPOINT

As Lenin himself famously remarked, „Cinema, for us, is the most important of the arts”. Therefore films and film distribution were considered to be of great significance in communist Romania, too. Decree no. 303 from the 1948 Constitution sanctioned the nationalization of the entire film industry and regulated the way cinema products were to be commercialized; all cinema halls and film rolls on the market were to become state property, which made cinematography much more easier to control and manipulate (Troncotă 2006, p. 83). In May 1949 the General Direction of the Press and Printing was founded as a natural addition to the General Direction of State Security (1948). It became the institution directly responsible for censorship in all sectors, including the production, acquisition and distribution of films, whose prerogatives only increased in the following years (Cubleșan 212, p. 65).

Ever since the mid-1950s to mid-1970s, it

was officially believed that “the influence cinema had upon the consciousness of the masses is intense and continuous, since cinematography is the art gathering the largest number of spectators” (Vasile 2008, p. 316). According to Ceaușescu himself, “film is one of the most important means for propaganda”, therefore the need to carefully control its content is also of paramount importance (quoted in Palade 2010, p. 7).

The situation of cinema was often discussed during the sessions of the Commission for Ideology of the Romanian Communist Party (1968) and the Secretary Sessions of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (1970). A stenography dating from February 10th, 1970, presided by Nicolae Ceaușescu, documented that “world cinematography is dominated by films about violence, sexual problems, commercial movies, and movies of great ideological value appear quite seldom. Cinematography in the socialist countries also brings about a series of problems, since the quality of films is not even very good there” (quoted in Palade 2010, pp. 6-7).

In consequence, Ceaușescu’s July Thesis (1971) sanctioned that: “measures will be taken to balance the movies presented in our cinema halls, limiting the screening of police and adventure movies, banning those films spreading violence and vulgarity, advocating the bourgeois lifestyle” (quoted in Popescu 2011, p.192). The direct results of these decisions were visible not only in the way foreign movies were censored and often misrepresented, but also in the national film production, marked by the return to the strict rules of regulations defined by Gheorghiu-Dej’s social realism (Popescu 2011, p.189).

Out of the 550 Romanian movies produced during the communist regime, approximately 222 (40%) can be considered as hav-

ing a political and propagandistic scope. The rest of them (60%) belonged to more neutral genres, such as pure entertainment, musical comedies, and children’s films (Popescu 2011, p. 281). With only a few exceptions, the national cinema followed in the footsteps of the official political doctrine, as the most common themes were the anti-capitalist and anti-fascist communist resistance, the finding and neutralizing of western spies, bourgeois decadence and misdeeds promptly stopped by the honest communist representatives etc. Among the most popular film writers and directors, we should mention Liviu Ciulei, who was nominated for the Palme d’Or with *The Forest of the Hanged* (1965), Sergiu Nicolaescu (who was also a very active actor, famous for playing in detective and historical movies), Titus Popovici, Dan Pița, Mircea Danieliuc, Alexandru Tatos etc. Lucian Pintilie, another name important to the history of Romanian cinematography, became *persona non grata* after the making of *Reconstruction* (1968). The film in which he openly criticizes the authorities and the damages brought by communism within society and at the individual level was banned until 1989.

#### THE EVOLUTION OF ROMANIAN CENSORSHIP

Although it previously existed for religious, political or ethnic reasons, Romanian censorship took the shape of an ideological blockade and political isolation after 23 August 1944 with the presence of the Red Army (Troncotă 2006, p. 44). Not surprisingly, its main characteristics, initially borrowed from Soviet Union, were later transformed to suit the needs of the socialist democracy of the 1970s and the 1980s after the breakup with the

Eastern Bloc and the decisive distancing from the western world.

A turning point in the evolution of Romanian censorship is arguably 20 August 1968, when Ceaușescu's decided not to participate in the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact troops. This historical moment underlines the new direction Romania took and the country's decisive split with Soviet-made ideology and Party doctrine. For a short period of liberalization of only a few years, the arts particularly flourished, until the Presidential couple visited China and North Korea (Courtois 2008, p. 690). Afterwards, censorship will become only a means to implementing the Asian-inspired dictatorship: that is, the ideologization of all sectors of public life, the re-writing of (national and international) history and the implementation of the most powerful cult of the President's personality in the Eastern bloc, in press, all printed material and cinema, too.

Censorship in Romania was officially abolished in March 1977 with the elimination of the State Council for Press and Printing, but it did not completely disappear (Cubleșan 2012, p. 68). On the contrary, it took the shape of a monstrous type of self-censorship and revealed the state of mind of an entire population deprived of the right to self-expression, too terrified of the eventual consequences and thus inclined to consider almost anything as potentially inappropriate or anti-"democratic". Censorship was now too deeply entrenched in the Romanian spirit to require a legal framework.

Similarly to many other notions whose interpretation changed in communist Romania depending upon the "temperature" of the relationship with both the East and the West, the very definition of censorship also fluctuated at significant internal events (for instance,

the rise of dissident groups within the Romanian Communist Party itself) etc. For instance, the 1972 Concise Encyclopedic Dictionary defined it in a neutral manner as "the control exercised by state authorities over publications, shows, radio-TV programs, or, under certain circumstances, over correspondence and phone calls". However, a year after censorship was officially abolished in Romania, in 1978, the Dictionary of Neologisms gave a highly politicized explanation: "the control exercised by the capitalist state over publications and prints, in order to stop the dissipation of modern ideas" (Rad 2012, p. 7). The separation from the western world could not be more obvious, as society itself was intoxicated, at the time, with a huge number of anti-capitalist slogans emphasizing the righteousness of the communist ideology.

#### **CINEMATHEQUE AND CINEMA ALMANAC - THE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN**

In order to paint an accurate image of what cinematography "looked like" in those years, we will further discuss two very important elements of the cultural life, which came to function as a whole and underline the fact that entertainment could not exist outside propaganda.

One of them is the foundation of the National Film Archive<sup>1</sup> in July 1957 for the sake of storing film rolls (already state property) and eventually acquiring new ones. This can be seen as an attempt to join the international trend of preserving the most representative cinematic creations since brothers Lumière onwards, while exercising strict control over the

1 The National Film Archive (1957) is sometimes referred to as the Romanian Cinematheque, although its purpose and activity differed from the institution named Cinematheque, founded in 1960.

productions introduced to the general public. The activity of the Archive was then made accessible to the audiences with the foundation of the *Cinematheque* (1960), which only dealt with film screenings and cultivating the public taste accordingly to Party programs (Plăiașu, para. 14).

Over time, the *Cinematheque* became immensely important with its varied and attractive film offer. It also became one of the few communist-born institutions still functioning up to the present days. Thus, the initial two Bucharest screenings per month increased to 60 by 1973, while the number of archived films also grew rapidly (Plăiașu, para. 26). What made it unique was the fact that the movies shown in its hall were not cut (presented as they were or not at all), and that it familiarized the Romanian public with film cycles of the most important directors or actors. Many of them were not accessible in traditional cinematographs, as they were not financially or ideologically fit for screening (Plăiașu, para. 28). Nevertheless, censorship still applied to taboo subjects such as Nazism, loose morals, or to the films openly criticizing the political system in place. Among the drawbacks, we should mention that the *Cinematheque* was a sort of much longed for “delicatessen” among avid cinephiles, since tickets and subscriptions were difficult, if not almost impossible to obtain, given the limited number of places.

It was obvious that cinema could function as a huge propaganda device, for it patched up an existing gap (and popular need) and had a general appeal to the masses. Therefore, the Communist authorities decided that the moving image needed to join forces with the written word. Several years after any publication in the field ceased to exist (Dumitrescu, para. 5) *Cinema Almanac* was subsequently brought to life. It was a monthly magazine dedicated

entirely to cinema productions, which was initially edited by the State Committee for Culture and Art and then controlled by The Council for Socialist Culture and Education. The magazine was printed from 1963 until the events of December 1989. Similarly to all prints, it was the object of heavy censorship and scrutiny, but it also had the huge advantage of introducing to the public the names of western movie productions, filmmakers and actors, along with news regarding art developments in the outside world.

Its issues were characterized by the low-quality paper, the scruffy black and white appearance, the use (and abuse) of wooden language, the abundance of messages directed towards the Presidential couple and the numerous articles focused on the evolution of Romanian cinema in the context of the various political events governing cultural life. Titles such as: *The Moral and Philosophical Responsibility of Romanian Cinema* (no. 7/79, 1969), *The Offensive of Political Cinema. Film and Contemporary Society* (no. 6/114, 1972), *The Communists, the Heroes of Our Movies* (no. 11/321, 1989) etc. are highly exemplary of the general content and tone of the texts. Moreover, since the beginning of the 1970s, its articles poignantly show, once more, that, from the strict socialist perspective, cinema was not a product of talent and imagination, but a mere device meant for glorifying the working class, for revealing the unpardonable flaws of the capitalist societies and for educating the masses (Dumitrescu, para. 6).

Nevertheless, *Cinema Almanac* remained highly popular and was read by a large number of individuals, due both to its singularity and to the few articles which passed censorship and would bring news from the outside world. This provided insights on directors, actors and lifestyles which were otherwise

impossible to grasp. It included foreign film reviews, information on ongoing international film festivals, articles focusing on the life and work of certain actors and directors, interviews, and correspondences with authors residing abroad (usually within the Soviet Union), which were aware of productions screened in Moscow, Sofia, etc. Together with the movies shown within the *Cinematheque*, the Almanac was the only way Romanian people could witness some of the changes happening in the western world.

#### WESTERN CINEMA AND THE (NEGATIVE) UTOPIA

Leaving aside the films presented at the *Cinematheque* which were only available to a reduced number of spectators – as tickets and subscriptions were difficult to acquire –, films were also screened in traditional cinema halls. These were not dependent on the public request or taste, but on the (ever changing) criteria of the socialist ideology at the time. Films were not entertainment, but instruments for educating the masses, and their original meaning and message were twisted and turned to suit the official ideology. A rather interesting example is the official attitude towards Godard's movies. He was considered to be "one of the most representative contemporaneous filmmakers", often and highly recommended by *Cinema Almanac* since his productions were characterized by "harsh critique of western society" (December 1966, p. 2).

Widely popular foreign productions (which also received good official reviews) were Bud Spencer's spaghetti westerns - *Piedone a Hong Kong* (1975), *Piedone l'africano* (1978), *Piedone d'Egitto* (1980) etc. -, George Lucas' *Star Wars* movies (1977, 1980, 1983), Chinese karate flics, Hindi family musicals, such as *Ek Phool Do Mali* (1969) and *Haathi Mere*

*Saathi* (1971), which presented no ideological threat and quickly became blockbusters due to their neutral content and the frequency of their screenings.

Western movies were less present in Romanian cinema houses than those produced within the limits of the Soviet Union and were usually viewed as negative examples, since film critics and activists actively looked for social and moral implications to exemplify the huge gap between the "evil" West and "democratic" East. Moreover, American cinema itself was often presented as the negative counterpart of the European and Asian productions, as it tends to completely blank the author's personality, who is supposed to finalize pretty much one and the same product over and over again (Rădulescu 2011, para.19).

Among the most popular movies produced within the confines of the Soviet sphere of influence were Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *Ivan the Terrible* (1944, 1958), Dobjenko's *Earth* (1930) and Tarkovsky's *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), *Andrei Rublev* (1966) and *Solaris* (1972). From Poland, we should mention Andrzej Wajda's *A Generation* (1955), *Kanal* (1957), *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958) and *The Wedding* (1973). These films were also subject to censorship, as all dialogues even slightly referring to China and Russia were removed (Popescu 2011, p. 186). Another noteworthy film was Jan Rybkowski's *Yesterday in Fact* (1963) etc. The most notorious Czechoslovak productions were Ján Kádár and Elmar Klos's *The Shop on Main Street* (1965), Jiří Menzel's *Closely Observed Trains* (1966), and Miloš Forman's *Audition* (1963), *Black Peter* (1964) and *Loves of a Blonde* (1965). Despite being produced in communist countries, the movies from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary etc. were often subject to censorship as well, merely because they presented imag-

es or situations unfit for the pure communist “eye”.

In order to prove the alleged openness of Ceaușescu’s “liberal” regime, a series of cultural agreements were signed with western countries at the beginning of the 1980s. His refusal to participate to the occupation of Czechoslovakia on 21 August 1968 was only a peak moment of a period characterized by a flourishing in Romania’s diplomatic relationships with the West. A year before, in 1968, the French President Charles de Gaulle visited Romania as part of his European tour, followed in 1969 by Richard Nixon himself. This was the first time that an American President visited Romania or a socialist country after World War II. Moreover, in 1975 Romania was awarded the “most favored nation status” by the United States. In this particular cultural and political environment, a large number of movies including ideas opposed to the communist ideology were introduced to Romanian audiences. However they were meticulously “operated” on by censors beforehand to the extent that ideas envisioned by the directors themselves were modified (Popescu 2011, p. 289).

Among them, we should mention Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest* (1959), Fellini’s *La dolce vita* (1960), *Two for the Seesaw* (1962), which became 30 minutes shorter at the end of the censoring process. Other examples are Antonioni’s *Blowup* (1966), *Barefoot in the Park* (1967), Claude Lelouch’s *Live for Life* (1967) in which 19 lines and a shot of Mao Zedong portrait were cut out. *The Valley of the Dolls* (1967) was screened without the love scene featuring Sharon Tate, while in *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), *Anne of the Thousand Days* (1969), *Hello, Dolly!* (1969), *The Legend of Nigger Charley* (1972) all fighting scenes are shortened or eliminated, etc. (Popescu 2011, pp. 180-189).

Nevertheless, many official reviews catalogued western movies as poor cinema. For example, *The French Connection* (1971) was reduced to being a film about drugs and the damage they cause on an individual and social level, while *The Godfather* (1972, 1974) was nothing more than a story about violence (MNIR/CNSAS 2013, para. 5). An anonymous film review dealing with Kubrick’s *Clockwork Orange* (1971) considered it “at the same time, a masterpiece, and a polluting film about a polluted world; an aggressive and violent movie about disorder and ugliness, about the filth and the noise characteristic to a world where vice roams freely; a universe of terror, where light and oxygen cannot enter” (quoted in Rădulescu 2011, para.13).

The James Bond movies (*Casino Royale* (1967), *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971), *Live and Let Die* (1973), *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), *Moonraker* (1979) etc.) also make an interesting case, since, according to Romanian film critics of the respective era, they were the epitome of the “triumphant imperialist ideology”, expressing the supremacy of the white Anglo-Saxon hero, who undertakes without hesitation the difficult task of saving the world; in the process of defeating the villain (seldom Asian), 007 meets numerous women, whom he treats as objects of pleasure. In addition, this type of production was deemed to be rather boring, even for the “ignorant” American audience, while the cultivated East preferred enjoying European art or historical movies (MNIR/CNSAS 2013, para. 8).

The anti-capitalist discourse intoxicated all written and spoken words, and it was often attributed to famous representatives of the West, who allegedly despised and resented the societies they lived in. One example was the British actor and producer David Hemmings, who was famous to the Romanian pub-

lic for *Blowup* (1966) and for having – from the strict communist perspective – a meritorious professional background. Similarly to young communist generations, he strived to achieve his goals from an early age. In an interview given to *Cinema Almanac* in 1977, – he allegedly said that the British audiences (and implicitly the English-speaking world) lacked the opportunity to see quality movies abundant with social and political content, esthetically relevant or convincing historical points, and that it was intoxicated with mediocre productions (Rădulescu 2011, para. 20).

Not surprisingly, a list of the top-ten films of all times (1895-1973) published by *Cinema Almanac* (and taken from *Kino*, a Polish publication which consulted 60 of the most important socialist film critics and researchers) only included titles such as Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941), Chaplin's *Gold Rush* (1925) and Griffith's *Intolerance: Love's Struggle Throughout the Ages* (1916). Thus it ignored the most recent (and controversial) masterpieces of the Western cinema (Rădulescu 2011, para. 17). Obviously, the presence of those specific films was not accidental, as they discuss, more or less directly, notions dear to socialist ideology, such as tolerance, social equality and the way money has the power to affect destinies. The classification included no Romanian productions and introduced titles such as Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) – deemed to be the best movie so far, Fellini's *8 ½* (1963), Andrzej Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), Kurosawa's *Rashômon* (1950), Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1950), Aleksandr Dovzhenko's *La Terre* (1921) and Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945). With only a few exceptions, the movies were not chosen based on their high esthetic value, rather for the strong social message conveyed, as they gathered new voices to justify the rightfulness of the Communist cause.

#### SUMMARY

The 1985 summer edition of *Cinema Almanac* features an article entitled *Nine Decades of Cinema*, which was quite symbolic of the way western film productions were acknowledged and commented within the Soviet area of influence. In it the 1945-1955 decade is characterized by the author Cristina Corciovescu as “the return to realism” (Corciovescu 1985, p. 62), as it featuring groundbreaking directors such as the Italian neorealists Roberto Rossellini, De Sica, Visconti etc. and the French directors René Clement and Jules Dassin, who broke with American cinema and successfully reversed its stereotypes. The few English-speaking productions of the period taken into consideration in the article are Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1954) – described as the movie denouncing New York corruption – and Laurence Olivier and Orson Wells' Shakespeare (neutral) adaptations.

When discussing the 1955-1965 decade, Corciovescu also mentions the American-inspired French New Wave, comprising names such as Chabrol, Truffaut, Godard, Malle, Rohmer, and Rivette. It was conceived of as the exact opposite of Italian neorealism and as having no stylistic or esthetic coherence. Moreover, its representatives were “a conglomerate of talents brought together due to economic, social and historical circumstances” (Corciovescu 1985, p. 64). Again, the American cinema of the moment is reduced to only a few directors, chosen for their explicit opposition to Hollywood trends – this time, Andy Warhol, Stan Brakhage, Paul Morrissey and Jonas Mekas, who were cited as the pioneers of the American underground cinema because they were “suffocated by the Hollywood conformism and outraged by the compromises of commercial cinema” (Corciovescu 1985, p. 65).

The period lasting from 1965 to 1975 is

characterized as the revival of the political movie and the birth of science fiction cinema. Therefore, the only American directors mentioned here are Francis Ford Coppola, Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese and George Lucas. The box-office success of Arthur Hiller's *Love Story* (1970) was also discussed in the context of the public's reaction to the invasion of violence and eroticism currently on the wide screen. For the first time, Swiss cinema is mentioned. It is praised for escaping the French influence and for "presenting the realities and the people as they are, with their weaknesses and their cowardice, since they are the victims of the system they find themselves stuck in, which oppresses them" (Corciovescu 1985, pp. 65-66).

Needless to say, those particular decades also featured many other exquisite western films, which the author chose to ignore for their progressive content or their moral inappropriateness. Still, film critique and the general public took an interest in the works of innovative European directors such as Alain Resnais (*Last Year at Marienbad* - 1961; *Je t'aime je t'aime* - 1968), Fellini (*8 ½* - 1963, *Juliet of the Spirits* - 1965), Antonioni (*Blowup* - 1966), Buñuel (*Un chien andalou* - 1929, *L'âge d'or* - 1930, *Simon of the Desert* - 1965), Ingmar Bergman (*The Virgin Spring* - 1960), Bo Widerberg (*Elvira Madigan* - 1967, *Joe Hill* - 1971) etc. and in the Japanese Kurosawa (*Rashômon* - 1950, *Seven Samurai* - 1954) and many others.

#### CONCLUSION

Despite the increasing number of volumes dedicated to Securitate (the secret police agency of Communist Romania), its informants and to the various files open to the public eye after December 1989, little is known about private life in communist Romania, es-

pecially about leisure and the way it interfered with the official ideology.

Romanian cinematography and film culture followed the contorted relationship with the western world and the Soviet Union, as both national and foreign movies were subject to the same limitations and taboos imposed and implemented by censorship. Nevertheless, if the local productions, after overcoming the long and difficult process of meeting censorship exigencies, turned out to be acceptable wholes (from both the official and the artistic point of view), the foreign productions often suffered incommensurable damages. Entire scenes and lines were cut for contradicting the official discourse; their entire message and artistic value were altered, as the auctorial intention was replaced by the cold eye of the censor, a person who, quite often, had nothing to do with arts and cinematography at all.

Among many other things, cinema brought its share of (mis)information and was an important propaganda device, which was used and abused to fit the ever-changing version of history. Similarly to the movies created in Romania and in the Soviet bloc, which needed to follow the political evolution of the Communist Party, western movies were also subject to partial or total censorship and affected by a sustained campaign of misinformation and misinterpretation, aimed at distracting public attention from those issues which contravened communist ideology and at convincingly highlighting its many blessings

Despite harsh censorship and the strict control of all media, the greater public could still become familiar with the great productions and producers of the seventh art in both the public cinema halls and during the exclusive screenings within the *Cinematheque*,

while reading about their favorite films, actors and directors in the monthly issues of *Cinema Almanac*. Although less accessible, the large-scale foreign cinema walked shoulder to shoulder with the many propagandistic national productions, and with the hugely popular creations which did not interfere in any way with the official doctrine (such as Indian movies, the western productions, easy slapstick comedies etc.). In a period in which entertainment was considered by authorities to be less important than the creation of the new man and the new state, people needed some sort of escape (even if only fictional) the pressure of day-to-day living through laughter or tears. This also explains the spreading of cinema halls all over Romania.

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