

# “Death” and Documentary: Memory and Film Practice in Post-communist Romania

By Adina Bradeanu (U of Westminster, UK)

© Adina Bradeanu, 2007

This book is my homage to the dead. The studio is dead, the filmmakers are dead, and  
Romanian documentary is dead as well.

— Laurentiu Damian, documentary filmmaker [\[1\]](#)

Is Romanian documentary truly “dead” or is it just scattered all over the place following the  
collapse of its former “home,” the Sahia Studio?

— Magda Mihailescu, film critic

“Welcome back to the land of the dead!” would be the joyful greeting from the only film editor left in the Bucharest-based documentary studio Alexandru Sahia, whenever I joined her for yet another interview conducted as part of a research project that started in the early 2000s. At the time of my fieldwork among the remains of the local documentary community, Romanian media customarily employed terms such as “agony,” “collapse,” or “death” to refer to the critical state of domestic documentary practice and of Alexandru Sahia Studio—colloquially known as “Sahia”—the institution that epitomized documentary production in communist Romania.

The two “deaths”—of the practice and the studio—not only referred to an actual economic, managerial, and professional collapse, but were also part of a discourse about collapse that was crucial in the on going struggle of the film community to make sense of its dramatic rupture from the socialist past. As lived by the film community, post-socialism was a puzzling time when imagined futures were directly dependent on remembered pasts, and particularly on the actions taken in response to those pasts.

Ever since its establishment in the 1950s, Sahia functioned as the ideologically correct mascot of the domestic film industry, always paraded whenever proof was needed of the good political behavior of the film community. Although the studio's production included a significant percentage of conventional political propaganda films, it was never limited only to that. Sahia's official public function and the way that function was communicated in the media of the 1970s and 1980s made the studio one of Romania's most strongly articulated “memory sites,” which gradually became inseparable from the national-socialist past (Nora).

The public memory of socialism as constructed in post-socialism had no room for the events/personalities/institutions that were part of the previous official memory. Once 1989 was behind, the memory of Sahia, of its attached community, and, by extension, of documentary practice itself, became negatively charged. Beginning in the early-/mid-1990s, the studio had been cast as an institutional corpse, relegated by the local imagination to Romania's denied or forgotten socialist past. Ultimately, Sahia had to “die” on a discursive and symbolic level in order to allow the film community to separate from the past and to move forward in the hope of a better and an allegedly cleaner (political) identity. Similarly,

the lack of concern shown by film professionals to documentary filmmaking in the 1990s was partially due to the association of the practice with Sahia as an institution and, thus, was linked to larger processes of accountability that occurred in the region at the time.

Like its neighboring countries, the institutional structure inherited by post-communist Romania from its national film industry was a product of decisions taken by the newly established socialist government in the early 1950s. That institutional structure included a fiction film studio (Buftea) comprising five film units, a documentary studio (Sahia), and an animation studio (Animafilm). Sahia's recent history was characterized by its resistance to the new circumstances of post-socialism. All attempts to restructure and, ultimately, to privatize the institution had failed, although no less than eight different managers had been employed since 1990 to bring the studio back to life. Production at Sahia, which had risen to approximately 300 short films per year during the late 1980s, was down to zero in 2003-2004 and had been so since the mid-1990s after several tumultuous years in the wake of December 1989. As the studio's secular godfather in the 1950s had been a local journalist committed to the ideals of socialism and writing under the pen name "Alexandru Sahia," a renaming of the studio had been impatiently expected in the 1990s to "de-commemorate" symbolically the institution's politically connotated baptism. But while the fiction film studio Buftea was privatized in 1998 and re-named MediaPro Studios, the documentary studio failed to mark its separation from the recent past: in 1991, the Alexandru Sahia Studio kept part of its socialist identity and became Sahia Film. Several former managers of Sahia since 1989 have admitted their decision to maintain the name of the studio was in response to its general perception as a powerful (socialist) brandname. In the early 2000s, Sahia only existed on paper, with no output and no filmmaker employed except for a chief executive (Ion Carmazan), who was largely perceived by the film community as a feature, rather than a documentary filmmaker. At the time, Sahia's physical condition justified all references to "death" or "coma" that circulated about it. The studio was a depressing landscape, consisting of dusty offices, crumbling walls, concrete floors, peeling paint, and especially the grey sturdy metallic furniture that recalled socialism for anybody able to identify elements of material culture associated with the recent past.

While Sahia's past entered the present as a site of conflicting memories, its recent state provided an opportunity for a general consensus: virtually everybody in the film community saw today's Sahia as a "dead" institution. Not only was Sahia a "corpse," it was, as one producer remarked, the "hidden corpse" of the post-socialist Romanian film industry. [2] Virtually nobody from the film community seemed to know what was happening in Sahia at the time and nobody showed any degree of interest in giving the studio a second look, which might have resulted in the chance of a second life.

Forensics has always been intrinsically attached to the study of film, as film scholars frequently engage in digging in film archives for long forgotten gems thought "dead" for audiences. However, beyond this particular type of film forensics, academic and journalistic interest in specific traditions of film practice tends to thrive when production itself thrives, while periods of crisis of practice most often attract analytic indifference. Film industries perceived as small or marginal, such as Romania's, would normally call for theoretical attention only following a burst of sudden international visibility—the moment when, as Stringer remarks, minor film traditions are suddenly and enthusiastically discovered by international film festivals abroad and consequently acknowledged by the wider Western world, often irrespective of their domestic history (135).

Romanian documentary filmmaking was moderately discovered at the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) in 2004, when four Romanian films were included in the competition with one receiving a significant award. However, my initial interest in the well-being of the domestic documentary industry was not derived from that burst of visibility, but rather from the puzzling absence of the genre from the public debate that accompanied the remaking of Romanian society in the aftermath of December 1989. My decision in the early 2000s to engage formally in research focusing on the Romanian documentary in transition was initially conceived as a forensic investigation into its alleged “death,” proclaimed by both practitioners and the media, and supported by the minimal impact of Romanian documentaries on the domestic and international market during Romania's first decade of post-communism.

Documentary filmmaking has failed to prove popular at any time after the early 1990s, and the engagement with the realities of post-1989 Romania seems to have been reserved mainly for feature films. The common local perception of Romania's post-1989 documentary landscape is that of a heroic professional moment associated with December 1989 and the political unrest immediately following it, and of a steep decline in subsequent years leading to what was domestically perceived as the “death of documentary.” Since the early 1990s until the early 2000s, Romania produced only a handful of documentary films that have managed to have some degree of impact on the domestic market and a significant international career.

This crisis has been seen by the film community as a natural consequence of the post-socialist status quo of the film industry and was assimilated into the broader issue of the economic adversities encountered by all film industries in Central Eastern Europe after the withdrawal of the state monopoly from film production and distribution. Although frequently referred to by the media, the alleged “death of doc” provoked only insignificant instances of public grieving. That “death” got mixed up with a more general phenomenon—namely, the “mourning for production,” examined by Berdahl in relation to the Östalgia-triggered processes of recuperation of East German “things” and linked to the shift from a production-oriented to a consumption-oriented system (199). Like the other film industries of post-socialist Eastern and Central Europe, Romania of the 1990s has seen a massive public mourning for the dramatic decrease of its domestic film production, a mourning that essentially focused on feature films, with documentary being “presumed dead” almost by default. Common references to the “death of the documentary” assumed a direct link between that “death” and the collapse of the Sahia Studio. In its turn, the “death of Sahia” was informally explained as having been triggered by the cut-off of the socialist system of distribution of documentary films as a support for feature films, and as having been completed by the obscure workings of the various cliques alleged to be either trying to get hold of or actually running the domestic film industry. The path of the studio during the past fifteen years has often been described as a deliberate attempt at bankruptcy, meant to minimize its selling cost, with the task of maintaining the studio's state of collapse in order to serve obscure group interests.

None of the factors conventionally called upon as potential “causes of death” for Sahia was able to offer a satisfactory hypothesis regarding the lack of appeal of the documentary format to most of the local film professionals, irrespective of the place they occupied in the generation-structured film community. “Documentary film is a strange animal, neither fish nor fowl, not needed by today's Romania,” wrote a director who was still willing to call himself a “documentary filmmaker,” a career largely unwelcome by other Romanian professionals (Solomon 130).

The lack of interest in documentary was visible not just in the choices made by individual filmmakers, who customarily opted for feature films over documentary. It was also exposed by the very few attempts to engage with documentary filmmaking on an institutional level. Fundația Arte Vizuale was one such attempt in the early 1990s, explicitly targeting young filmmakers interested in documentary. After several years of being the only significant producer of small-budget documentaries, the Foundation has gradually moved towards more lucrative sectors of media production in response to the lack of interest shown by both the emerging filmmakers and domestic broadcasters. Another case in point was provided by the state funded Editura Video, which engaged in the production of broadly cultural and arts documentaries. Ever since its inception as an institution, Editura Video customarily provided a temporary workplace for film professionals formerly attached to Sahia. What was striking about most of the production of the studio was its minimal engagement with the issues of the present and its concentration on topics usually attached to a distant past, which frequently extended back to the pre-socialist past. As a result, the films produced by Editura Video were frequently described by younger filmmakers as routine engagements with “dead topics” and the institution came to be identified as the epitome of a type of irrelevant documentary, unable to attend to the pressing social and political issues raised by Romania's present. Managed by a former Sahia filmmaker, engaged in a type of documentary perceived as stylistically old-fashioned and disengaged from the present, and located in a building considered a landmark of Romanian socialism, [3] the only significant film studio other than Sahia that specialized in documentary film was perceived as essentially being a post-communist clone of Sahia.

\*\*\*\*\*

Two parallel processes started in the early 2000s and became apparent towards 2004. The first series of events were in the “memorial” genre, organised by film professionals formerly attached to the Sahia studio and largely conceived as a way of engaging with memories of Sahia and of Sahia-type of documentary films. This type of commitment included a weekly TV program that focused on the internal culture of Sahia and a book of personal recollections of Sahia, both produced by Laurentiu Damian, a former Sahia filmmaker; a program of Sahia films screened at the Bucharest-based Cinematheque; and a ceremony of Lifetime Achievement Awards for documentary filmmaking that involved exclusively former Sahia professionals. “No other Romanian institution has ever had such a degree of nostalgia attached to it as Sahia [...], this Camelot of our film industry...,” remarked a film journalist in the wake of this sudden memorial activity (Mihailescu).

A revealing example of this trend was Damian's book *Something Extra on Documentary Film (Ceva în plus despre documentar)*, 2004). Only one other book had been published on Romanian documentary filmmaking, *A History of Romanian Documentary (Filmul documentar românesc)*, written by Calin Caliman in 1967. Caliman was a film historian, reputed to be the only “outsider” who possessed real, inside knowledge of Sahia. Damian's book covered virtually the same topic with a more extensive time span, but its author was a genuine Sahia insider and one of the iconic figures of the studio in the 1980s. While Caliman's book combined information with criticism in doses permitted by the political context of the 1960s, Damian's was written as a first person recollection, explicitly nostalgic and uneven, with disparate emotional outbursts—a product visibly rooted in a painful personal attempt to come to terms with a challenging individual and peer-group past. The Introduction espoused a painful tension between an unsettled past and an exhaustingly surprising present. The final chapter, although touching on some traumatic memories of the

author's own experience of Sahia, carried the motto “ *Et in Arcadia Ego* ” (235), [4] which posited the studio as a mythic, paradisaal, and evanescent space of happiness and tranquility.

Damian's book shared the angry confessional energy of another book, written in the mid-1990s by Mircea Daneliuc, one of the few Romanian feature filmmakers associated with the label of “resistance” during the 1970s and 1980s. Daneliuc's *The Dismembered Cat* (*Pisica rupta*) was a bitter, funny autobiographical tale conceived as an “ethnography” of the Romanian film community living through puzzling times. The book revealed the ambiguous morale of a guild whose past cohesiveness was allegedly provided only by its political numbness, and touched both on the community's decades-long fine-tuning with the socialist regime and on its complex metamorphosis after 1989. The unprecedented amount of unflattering statements produced about the film community by an insider, however, was counterbalanced by the fact that his personal act of recollection was introduced as a fictional work, in which the names of the real protagonists were replaced by pseudonyms. The book was perceived as a “manual of frustrations” produced by an “unhealed memory with sharp edges,” a “text that contained nothing round, nothing soft, nothing that would allow one to speak of a minimal coming to terms with the recent past” ([D. Mihailescu](#)).

*The Dismembered Cat* was part of a broader and recurring narrative of the “chronicized frustration” of the local film community (Pintilie 370). It belonged to Romania's first decade of post-communism, when moral discourse took hold and moral overtones were attached to most major controversies within the film community. While the 1990s were a time when the public memory of communism still existed in black-and-white, the 2000s marked the gradual entry into the public domain of a number of private memories of socialism that did not coincide with what was, at the time, the accepted, and to some extent, the prescriptive public representation of the socialist experience. Damian's book on Sahia was an integral part of that new type of memory.

Both books were rooted in a self-victimizing type of memory, focused on infringements of freedom and on histories of ruined professional biographies and personal loss. But while the latter was an indictment of the “others” by someone who rightly refused to include himself among the accused, the former was a nostalgic coming to terms with an ambiguous Sahia, affectionately remembered against the massive pressure represented by the negative public memory of the studio. Both books fictionalised slices of the past; but while Daneliuc aimed to unveil the (alleged) negative past of the film community, Damian's was explicitly meant to produce a positive past for Sahia. On that level, both books mirrored not only individual authorial profiles but also larger negotiations between individual and social memory in post-socialism.

\*\*\*\*\*



LEFT: Film box for *Reconstruction* (*Reconstituirea*; dir. Virgil Calotescu, 1961), a Sahia-classic “deconstructed” by A. Solomon in *The Great Communist Bank Robbery* (2004)

The Sahia “memorial” events coincided with a second series of actions that were largely projective. These actions involved filmmakers who had established themselves after 1989, and were inspired by their growing international mobility and their increased access to the transnational traffic in documentary subjects/approaches/discourses enabled by new European project-development initiatives. A new type of discourse about documentary filmmaking sprang up, initially from two filmmakers, Alexandru Solomon and Florin Iepan, who, in the early 2000s, had been attached to a European training initiative (Discovery Masterschool), which strove to facilitate access to the international market for documentary professionals experienced in smaller national markets. Their films, *The Great Communist Bank Robbery* (*Marele jaf communist*; dir. Solomon, 2004) and *Children of the Decree* (*Decreteii*; dir. Iepan, 2004) were commissioned by major international producers and broadcasters (BBC4, Arte, and Finnish Yle TV for Solomon; Westend, ARTE, WDR-TV Ontario, and Romanian television for Iepan) while they were at the Discovery Masterschool, and were developed in co-production with Romania's National Film Center. Both films engaged with exceptional episodes from Romania's communist past and addressed the tensions between social and individual memory. Both also made use of the Sahia archive in ways that exposed the potential for ideological manipulation carried by the documentary image. Finally, both films were feature-length documentaries, which marked a major rupture from the Sahia tradition of documentary filmmaking, which consisted for the most part of documentary shorts that were ten to twenty minutes in length.

The production history of the two films also signalled a rupture with the past. Initially, both projects were refused funding by the National Film Center. Concerted public action by a group of filmmakers, however, called for a reconsideration of the decision and for the dismantling of the groups of interest that were perceived as controlling the local film industry. In response, the National Film Center was forced to dissolve its advisory body and reversed its original decision, opting to support the two documentary projects. It also accepted further changes to regulations governing contests for film financing and to other film industry regulations. The increasingly vocal presence of a number of emerging and established filmmakers pointed to the need to forge more reliable institutions involved in film production and policy making, and to the urgent need to separate documentary filmmaking from the memory of the socialist Sahia studio, both in the peer-group and the lay audience imagination.



Both *Children of the Decree* and *The Great Communist*

*Bank Robbery* were selected for the IDFA program in 2004, together with two other Romanian documentaries that were largely grounded in an observational approach: *The Curse of the Hedgehog* (*Blestemul ariciului*; dir. Dumitru Budrala, 2003) and *The Bridge* (*Podul peste Tisa*; dir. Ileana Stanculescu, 2004). What the four films had in common was their emergence out of contexts marked by an exposure to documentary environments or cultures other than Romanian. While Solomon's and Iepan were former students of the Discovery Masterschool, Budrala was an ethnographic filmmaker with extensive experience as the organiser of Romania's only international festival for documentary film and visual anthropology (ASTRA Film Sibiu) and Stanculescu completed her film studies outside Romania. Consistent exposure of the four filmmakers to international documentary filmmaking was crucial both for their individual careers and for the changes that they were to gradually effect on the domestic market; the issue at stake was not so much their actual “learning” of something new, but rather their “un-learning” of something old—that is, the minor status and the political ambiguity attached to documentary filmmaking within the domestic film culture.

IDFA's inclusion of four Romanian documentaries was unprecedented: post-1989 Romanian documentaries had only been occasionally accepted by major documentary competitions and never previously by IDFA. The event was extensively covered locally, and IDFA, which previously had been unheard-of in Romania, was rapidly mythologized in the local imagination as the “Documentary Oscars” or the “Documentary Mecca.” So strong was the impact of this first concerted international success of four Romanian documentaries that less than two years later, the Cultural Channel of the National Television ran a selection of other documentaries awarded prizes at IDFA over the past decade, with the IDFA label acting as a quality stamp.

In 2004, public references to documentary filmmaking switched from *Sahia-lament* to IDFA-praise. Several days after the close of the festival, an open letter was published in a Romanian weekly by the four filmmakers whose films were screened at IDFA. The filmmakers introduced their letter by stating that they meant to inform Romanian audiences of their success in an attempt to counter-act the overloaded domestic references to the “death of documentary”:

We are writing this letter in hope that the state of Romanian documentary filmmaking can be better seen from Amsterdam than from Bucharest, where, earlier this year, the Ministry of Culture and Denominations organised the commemoration of the Sahia studio and, on that occasion, mourned again the “death of the documentary” in Romania. We have started to wonder whether the indifference to documentary filmmaking within our film community [...] may have roots that go deeper than the frequently invoked financial crisis of the film industry. ([Budrala et al.](#))

\*\*\*\*\*

It had taken more than a decade for the film community to come to terms with its past and to imagine fresh strategies of forging a documentary culture able both to integrate its recent past and to attend to wider global contexts and markets. Romania's agonizing documentary culture, out of sync for so long with the thriving international documentary culture, is currently showing signs of change. Recent documentary work aims to de-familiarize the modes and practices of engagement that have been naturalized by the local documentary community and audiences, and to reinvest documentary filmmaking with a public function and with potential for aesthetic innovation.

The renewed interest in the genre prompted a change of discourse surrounding documentary filmmaking, which affected both the coverage of the present and the memorialisation of the past. While the previously sparse coverage was split between a fixed and allegedly “shameful past” identified with Sahia, and a “bright future” represented by the younger generation of filmmakers, recent discussions often address both sides. The emerging documentary culture seems ready not only to break with the demonized Sahia but also to integrate the Sahia experience as part of its tradition. The studio is still invoked as the epitome of the communist past, but this time it is a past that needs neither be forgotten nor fully disqualified, but rather integrated with the needs of the present ([Sturza and Fulger](#)).

This mildly favorable change of environment also included a change of policy on the part of the National Television TVR, which broadcast Iepan's and Solomon's films as media events, following the screenings with debates in the studio. TVR has also expressed some interest in documentary projects that are independently produced, in contrast to its earlier fixation on an in-house production model.

Today Iepan and Solomon continue to represent a new type of powerful and well-crafted documentary film, one that attends both to the needs of the domestic market and to the new internationalization of audiences. Since 2004, each of them has found his own access to an international documentary market increasingly interested in professionally told “local” stories. Their recently completed works—Iepan's *The One, The Only, The Real Tarzan (Unicul, adevaratul Tarzan*, 2004) and Solomon's *Clara B.* (2006)—have also been internationally co-produced. Their projects in development—Iepan's *The Fallen Vampire* (a portrait of Romanian-born, ethnic Hungarian Bela Lugosi) and Solomon's *Cold Waves* (an investigation into a dramatic incident from the history of Radio Free Europe)—are also backed by international producers. Since the early 2000s, the two seem to have forged not only their own distinct “maps” of international support (mainly Germany and Canada for Iepan, and France and the UK for Solomon), but also their own style and areas of thematic interest.

Following the enthusiastic international reviews that praised the poignancy and the visual flamboyance of his gripping account of birth control in Romania of the 1980s in *Children of*



*the Decree* (Scheib), Iepan has enjoyed his entry into the international documentary mainstream to the full. His engagement with the archive is both entertaining and compelling, and reveals a keen interest for mapping geographies of film that link the regional with the global. Recently, his personal strategy of accessing the international market has involved tapping into the interest for extravagant “local” figures that had an international career. Based in Timisoara (Western Romania), Iepan's two latest films, described by him as “biographies that avoid the chronologic cliché,” chart the making of the “regional” figures Weissmuller and Lugosi into Hollywood icons (Blaga).

Solomon's engagement with history and memory displays a concern for the unstable and the contradictory, which suggests a certain *auteurist* touch attached to projects that otherwise come close to investigative journalism. While some of his film subjects, such as *The Great Communist Bank Robbery* and *Cold Waves* testify to his interest in reconsidering recent history, his take on these subjects departs from conventional historical investigation, moving towards a problematisation of the production of history and of cinematic visual memory, and of the tensions between national official discourse and individual memory.

An entirely different approach to documentary filmmaking can be traced in the work of Dumitru Budrala— *On The Road* (*La drum*, 1997) and *The Curse of the Hedgehog*; Ileana Stanculescu— *The Bridge* and *The Village of Socks* (*Satul sosetelor*, 2006); and Laurentiu Calciu *The Land is Waiting* (*Mamaliga te asteapta*, 2004). The films of these directors are closely grounded in a participant-observational approach that was largely absent from the Sahia-tradition.



Budrala's *Curse of the Hedgehog* is the most substantial engagement to date by a Romanian filmmaker with the condition of a local Roma community. His sympathetic portrait of a number of Roma subjects, whom he followed for over a year, prioritised personal relationships and allowed room for unscripted performances by individuals routinely victimised by the media. In so doing, the film enabled a completely new kind of visibility of the Roma population to enter into the public domain. Like other films already discussed, *The Curse of the Hedgehog* had a remarkable international career, and was circulated in both mainstream and specialized ethnographic documentary festivals. Also focusing on a Roma community, Laurentiu Calciu's *The Land is Waiting* touched on the issue of the reproduction of ethnic identity by exploring a different context in which marginality was experienced and internalized. His portrait of a young Romani man who temporarily gives up university to look for comfort at home in response to being ostracized was a finely tuned account of the daily shaping of Roma identity at the intersection of “outside” constructions of

the Roma by the ethnic majority and the “ inside” perceptions and performances of that identity in the private sphere.



Stanculescu's career started with a First Appearance Award at IDFA 2004 for *The Bridge* and continued with the understated *Village of Socks*, which was nominated for the Joris Ivens Award at IDFA 2006. Stanculescu's way into the international traffic of marketable documentary subjects seems to be that of a "soft" take on wider issues picked up from regional politics (*The Bridge*) or glo-cal economy (*Village of Socks*). Her first film focused on the absurdist story of an old bridge built across the river Tisa between two small towns in Romania and Ukraine, destroyed and rebuilt with EU money, just to be rendered unusable by the second round of EU expansion, which included Romania but not Ukraine. Her second film was an intimate view on the daily niceties attached to a “sock project”—a sock-knitting local business with international appeal, which brings new freedoms to the women living in a small Transylvanian village. Although initially perceived as somehow alien to the local film community due to her foreign training in Germany, Stanculescu is gradually gaining credit on the domestic market following her success in the international festival circuit.



The last director who needs to be included in this brief overview of “new Romanian documentary” is Thomas Ciulei, a filmmaker who has managed to produce two outstanding films set against the deserted domestic landscape of the mid-1990s and early 2000s. His first significant work, *Gratian* (1995), a portrait of a would-be werewolf from a Romanian village, showcased Ciulei's abilities to combine formal innovation with a keen sensitivity for the particular rhythms of the field. In *That's It* (*Asta e*, 2001), his second significant film, which also was released before the current revival of

domestic documentary filmmaking, Ciulei employed fictionalizing strategies to approach the harsh reality of a small village from the Danube Delta. *That's It* is deliberately built as a “version of reality,” an inevitably partial representation based on extensive dramatisation and performance from subjects “manipulated” into characters. The film also departs from the “prettifying aesthetics” that was compulsorily applied to rural Romania by the Sahia type of documentary (Winston 39). *That's It* is neither comforting nor comfortable; it deals with a world that displays a deficit of humanity and is plagued by poverty, violence, and alcoholism. The end-product, which was visibly “constructed” rather than conventionally “captured,” brought Ciulei some local criticism for having allegedly “damaged Romania's image abroad” ([Wagner](#)).

\*\*\*\*\*

Disputes continue between documentary filmmakers and various institutions of the domestic film industry. The disagreements are indicative of larger tensions between new models and mechanisms of film production and management, on the one hand, and old habits derived from the socialist system of production and inherited cultural logic, on the other. But things seem to be improving, with 2007 bringing a number of initiatives meant to improve the situation on the domestic documentary scene. These initiatives range from a Romania-UK mobility grant (STEPdoc) meant to support the development of a Romanian documentary project with international potential, sponsored by a London-based private foundation, [5] to a significant addition to the local scene—the establishment of the first professional association of Romanian documentary filmmakers, Documentor, whose inaugural event will be a Discovery Masterschool Workshop for training documentary filmmakers in Romania in autumn 2007. [6]

Adding to the general revival is the surprising recent re-birth of SahiaFilm itself, now under new management. The studio was mildly re-launched through the announcement of a number of projects that included both raids on more lucrative businesses (such as musical recording) and a planned involvement in documentary production drawing on the studio's massive visual archive of communist Romania. A new life is now being imagined for Sahia, although it is still difficult to assess at this stage whether this life is just well-managed PR or real business strategy tailored to the new production and distribution context. A metaphor frequently invoked in recent coverage of Sahia refers to the studio as being refashioned from “corpse” to “cake” ([Rosetti](#)). It remains to be seen who is going to eat that cake and what the benefit will be for domestic documentary culture.

Adina Bradeanu, University of Westminster, UK

---

### Works Cited

Berdahl, Daphne. “(N)ostalgie for the Present: Memory, Longing, and East German Things.” *Ethnos* 64 (1999): 192-211.

Blaga, Iulia. “Contele Dracula a fost în tinerete lider comunist.” *Romania libera* (12 April 2007).

Budrala, Dumitru, Florin Iepan, Alexandru Solomon, and Ileana Stanculescu. "Scrisoare dupa IDFA." [\*Observator Cultural\*](#) 251 (14-20 December 2004).

Caliman, Calin. *Filmul documentar românesc*. Bucuresti: Editura Meridiane, 1967.

Damian, Laurentiu. *Despre documentar... încă ceva în plus*. Bucuresti: Editura Tehnica, 2003.

Daneliuc, Mircea. *Pisica rupta*. Bucuresti: Univers, 1997.

Mihailescu, Dan C. "[Pisicile lui Daneliuc: definirea prin negatie](#)".

Mihailescu, Magda. "Talentul este creator de libertate." [\*Adevarul\*](#) (1 May 2004).

Nora, Pierre and Lawrence D. Kritzman, eds. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*. Vol. 1: *Conflicts and Divisions*. NY and Chichester: Columbia UP, 1996.

Pintilie, Lucian. *Bricabrac*. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2003.

Rosetti, Roxana. "Ambitii: Sahia doreste relansarea productiei de film documentar." [\*Jurnalul National\*](#) (10 December 2006).

Scheib, Ronnie. "Children of the Decree." [\*Variety\*](#) (30 November 2005).

Solomon, Alexandru. "What is Documentary Film?" *MOVEAST 8: Contemporary Romanian Cinema*. Budapest: Hungarian National Film Archive, 2002.

Stringer, Mark. "Global Cities and the International Film Festival Economy." In *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*. Ed. Mark Shiel and Tony

Fitzmaurice. *Studies in Urban and Social Change*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2001. 134-144.

Sturza, Catalin and Mihai Fulger. [\*Documentarul românesc: între Sahia si Discovery\*](#).

Wagner, Richard. "Europolis, un film de Thomas Ciulei." [\*Observator Cultural\*](#) 107 (12-18 martie 2002).

Winston, Brian. *Claiming The Real: The documentary film revisited*. London: BFI, 1995.

---

### Notes

The text draws on nine months of fieldwork as part of a Ph.D. in progress, conducted in 2003-2004 in Bucharest, focusing on the documentary studio Alexandru Sahia Studio

1] Personal communication, February 2004.

2] Adriana Solomon, personal communication, December 2003.

3] The Casa Scânteii (House of Sparkle) was built in the 1950s on the model of the Moscow State University named for Lomonosov.

4] Latin phrase coined by Virgil and made famous by Nicolas Poussin's painting *The Arcadian Shepherds* or *Et in Arcadia Ego*. The interpretation of the phrase is still controversial, but the meaning attached to its use as a motto to Damian's book is that of nostalgia for a lost paradise—that is, “I have also been in Arcadia.”

5] The [Ratiu Family Foundation](#) announced the initiative on the occasion of the 4th Romanian Festival organized by the Foundation and the [Romanian Cultural Centre](#) in London in April 2007.

6] [Docu-mentor](#) (under construction).

Updated: 29 May 07

Source: [www.kinokultura.com](http://www.kinokultura.com)