

VINTAGE SAHIA – film screening

Friday, Sept 13, 2019, 8.30 PM
Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of History and Philosophy
11, Napoca st., Cluj-Napoca



The Train Station (*Gara*, G. Barta, 1966, 10')

Rough Harmonies (*Romanțe aspre*, Slavomir Popovici, 1965, 15')

Twenty Years After (*După douăzeci de ani*, G. Barta, M. Ilieșiu, 1972, 17')

Today's film programme is screened in partnership with the 'One World Romania' Documentary Festival (Bucharest), whose digitisation and outreach project VINTAGE SAHIA makes heritage audio-visual material accessible to contemporary audiences.

'Alexandru Sahia' was socialist Romania's documentary film studio. From 1950 to 1990, the documentarists from Sahia worked under an ideological mandate. The output of the studio included a wide range of factual genres, more or less intertwined with the political pedagogy of the time: from weekly newsreels to author documentaries, and from tourism promotion to straightforward 'propaganda'. Today, this body of films offers an opportunity to make connections between the history of documentary practice and the history of Romania, and to reflect on the ways in which audio-visual archives shape our relationship with the historical past.

We start our film programme with Gabriel Barta's **The Railway Station** (*Gara*, 1966) – a lively piece of direct cinema, edited to music throughout, which captured the feel of Bucharest's central train station. A joyful exercise in documentary observation, the film belongs to the so-called 'golden age' of the domestic documentary, which coincided with Romania's decade of cultural and political liberalization.

We continue with **Rough Harmonies** (*Romanțe aspre*, 1965) - a documentary essay around Romania's social and political transformations in the 20th century, through an oblique political history of its railway engines. Born in Yugoslavia but relocated to Romania in the early 1950s, out of disappointment with the Yugoslav-Soviet split, film-maker Slavomir Popovici was a distinctive figure at Sahia. While genuinely committed to the revolutionary ideals of the Party during his early years at the studio, he later became a political *disenchantée* and reoriented his work towards the less politically charged ethnographic genre. Popovici directed **Rough Harmonies** following a traumatic censorship experience with his experimental film **The Plant** (*Uzina*, 1963). The film screened today has been itself subjected to heavy re-editing: see the shot about the Diesel engine affixed at the end of the film as one final expression of the mandatory opposition between 'old' (bourgeois) and 'new' (socialist) life and mores.

The third film of the programme – **Twenty Years After** (*După douăzeci de ani*, 1972) – is a lesser known work initiated by Gabriel Barta as a follow-up to his classic documentary **The Railwaymen** (*Ceferiștii*, 1954), filmed twenty years after the railway strikes from the Grivița Workshops in Bucharest. The film was finished by Mirel Ilieșiu, following Barta's death during the filming. The tragic story behind the film's production contributes to the elegiac tone of this surprisingly introspective film that deals with time, aging, and the meaning of life. The revolutionary fervour of the original 1950s film dwindles into a more reflexive tone as the film's protagonist – Gabor Ion, a locomotive driver and the subject of a Proletkult poem in the 1950s (*Cincisutistul*, by Ion Brad), retired by the time of filming – reminisces about the steam trains of yesteryear, now neglected and rusting away.

(Adina Brădeanu)