

UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ-BOLYAI, CLUJ NAPOCA
FACULTATEA DE TEATRU ȘI FILM

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**Representing the Romanian periphery in contemporary
observational documentary**

- SUMMARY -

COORDONATOR
ȘTIINȚIFIC
Prof. univ. Dr. habil. Doru Pop

DOCTORAND
Mihai-Gavril Dragolea

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Cuprins

| | |
|--|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 2 |
| Realism in art and the evolution of observational documentary..... | 6 |
| 1.1 Ideal Realism..... | 6 |
| 1.2 The beginnings of the observational documentary and the perfection of realism in art..... | 9 |
| 1.3 Direct cinema and the Maysles brothers..... | 14 |
| 1.4 How do we look at reality?..... | 16 |
| 1.5 Conclusions | 21 |
| The evolution of the Romanian documentary | 22 |
| 2.1 Cinematic dissent. Copel Moscu's essay in Ceaușescu's Romania..... | 23 |
| 2.1.1 <i>Seraliștii</i> (1982), experimenting with essay film and the limits of vococentrism..... | 24 |
| 2.1.2 Conclusions | 29 |
| 2.2 Romanian post-December documentary and the representation of the precariat..... | 30 |
| 2.2.1 Looking beyond the margins. Thomas Ciulei and modernist narrative practices | 31 |
| 2.2.2 A changing community | 32 |
| 2.2.3 Conclusions | 39 |
| 2.3 Realist observation and the cinematography of the marginal | 40 |
| 2.3.1 The beginnings of direct observation in post-December documentary and collective trauma | 43 |
| 2.3.2 Alternating directorial perspective and existence in non-space | 49 |
| 2.4 Conclusions | 50 |
| Socio-economic changes, feminism and existentialism in the Romanian observational documentary film | 52 |
| 3.1. Introduction | 52 |
| 3.2. The role and revolt of women in the new Romanian neo-liberal era | 57 |
| 3.2.1 <i>Aici...adică acolo</i> (2012) – the engaged participatory perspective | 59 |
| 3.2.2 <i>Așteptându-l pe august</i> (2014)- the formalist, detached perspective..... | 67 |
| 3.2.3 Participation versus cinematic dissimulation | 73 |
| 3.3 Existentialism and feminism in the observational documentary - <i>Toto și surorile lui</i> (2014) | 76 |
| 3.3.1 Spectator identification and involvement in an existentialist drama..... | 77 |
| 3.3.2 Triggering element | 80 |
| 3.3.3 The complication of the action and the emergence of the self-project (Andreea's) | 82 |
| 3.3.4 Turning point | 85 |
| 3.3.5 The climax and assumption of gender identity..... | 89 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| 3.3.6 Final Confrontation and Resolution | 90 |
| 3.3.7 The masked perspective and the problem of observation..... | 91 |
| 3.3.8 Means of rendering narrative subtext | 94 |
| 3.4 Conclusions | 96 |
| Climate change and the environmental documentary, <i>Acasă</i> (2020)..... | 100 |
| 4.1 Cinematic means of recognizing a crisis..... | 100 |
| 4.2 <i>Acasă, My Home</i> (2020)..... | 104 |
| 4.2.1 Title scene and emotional engagement..... | 105 |
| 4.2.2 Changing perspective – from affective engagement to detached observation | 109 |
| 4.2.3 Meaning of a new beginning – mythical and historical existence..... | 115 |
| 4.2.4 From direct cinema to montage cinema | 116 |
| 4.3 <i>Acasă</i> (My Home) in the Romanian soul – engaging the historical world and leaving the mythical space..... | 123 |
| 4.4 Conclusions | 128 |
| Reconstruction of Observation – <i>Doar o răsuflare</i> (2016) and <i>Roboțelul de Aur</i> (2015)..... | 132 |
| 5.1. Realism versus cinematic “creationism” | 132 |
| 5.2 Observational Reconstruction— <i>Doar o răsuflare</i> (2016)..... | 135 |
| 5.2.1 The reality of the image versus the reality of the world..... | 137 |
| 5.2.2 Montage sequences and the reconstruction of historical reality..... | 140 |
| 5.2.3 The directorial argument versus the ambiguity of existence | 141 |
| 5.2.4 Conclusions - <i>Doar o răsuflare</i> (2016) | 146 |
| 5.3 Interaction and Informal Observation – <i>Roboțelul de aur</i> (2015)..... | 147 |
| 5.3.1 Together with the characters..... | 148 |
| 5.3.2 Filmmaker, protagonists and spectators – shared experiences | 151 |
| 5.3.3 Collaborative direction | 155 |
| 5.4 Conclusions | 161 |
| Personal filmography and the paradox of the observation: <i>Totul pentru Riana</i> (2020), <i>Aurică, viață de câine</i> (2022), <i>După Cioate</i> (to be released) | 164 |
| 6.1 Introduction | 164 |
| 6.2 Assembly theory and the assumption of directorial identity..... | 166 |
| 6.3 <i>Totul pentru Riana</i> (2020) – the impossibility of non-intrusive observation | 169 |
| 6.4 <i>Aurică, viață de câine</i> (2022), the reality of fiction..... | 172 |
| 6.5 <i>După Cioate</i> (to be released), assuming the directorial perspective in observational documentary | 176 |
| 6.6 Conclusions | 179 |
| CONCLUSIONS | 183 |
| Bibliography and filmography..... | 191 |

Key words: observational documentary, participative documentary, perspective, realism, feminism, precariat, transition, climate change, Assembly Theory, collaborative.

Summary

The main purpose of the present doctoral thesis is to follow and analyse the evolution of the means by which Romanian documentarists who are interested in the theme of marginality and in the observational representation of the historical world manage to engage the viewer in the narratives that they create. I developed an interest in the issue of the presentation and delivery of the argumentului regizoral and I also studied the means in which the historical truth resists in front of the cinematographic non-fictional, observational narrative.

In view of this endeavour I chose and analysed long and medium length metraj documentary films produced in Romania, mostly by Romanian directors: *Seraliștii (The Seralists)* (1982), directed by Copel Moscu, *Children Underground* (2001) directed by Edet Belzberg, *Asta e It Is (What It Is)* (2001) in the direction of Thomas Ciulei, *Aici ... adică acolo (Here ... Meaning There)* (2012), directed by Laura Căpățână, *Așteptându-l pe august (Waiting for August)* (2014), in the direction of Teodora Ana Mihai, *Toto și surorile lui (Toto and His Sisters)* (2014), with Alexander Nanau as director, *Acasă (Home)* (2020) directed by Radu Ciorniciuc, *Doar o răsuflare (Just One Breath)* (2016) by director Monică Lăzurean-Gorgan, *Roboțelul de Aur (The Gold Robot)* (2015) directed by myself, Mihai Dragolea, and by Radu Mocanu, *Totul pentru Riana (All for Riana)* (2020), directed by myself and *După Cioate (Beyond the Stumps)* (not launched yet) directed by myself and by Radu Mocanu.

My main focus in the first chapter of the present paper is to analyse the evolution of the realist mode of representation and communication in the visual arts. I compared the vision of American sculptor and critic Wellington F. Ruckstuhl (1917) with the ideas presented by American painter Ben Shahn (1950). For Ruckstuhl, the perspective of the author is more relevant than the reality it represents, whereas Shahn understands the fact that the objects and daily activities of ordinary people can be endowed with a major meaning when they are used as symbols, thus adding the value of truth to the argument expressed through art (5).

As a contemporary of Shahn's, André Bazin (1960) takes the exploitation of realism one step further. The French film critic notes the fact that cinematography is objectivity in time: for the first time, the image of things is the same as the image of their duration (9). By following this line of thought we may infer that nature and the historical world are no longer subordinated to art, finally becoming accessible to the viewers and the artist by means of the latter being positioned in the historical world with the help of the photo or film camera.

We compared the theoretical endeavour described above with the evolution of American direct cinema. Robert Drew is hailed as the pioneer of this means of observing the historical world. He uses photography to capture events from reality, eventually aiming for a rendition of the temporality which characterises the reality of the world. The film *Primary* (1960) represents Robert Drew's first incursion in the new cinematic environment. This documentary is his first production focused on the paradigm of the *showing not telling* principle. The subject in *Primary* is the electoral competition between Hubert Humphrey and John F. Kennedy, both competing for the position of governor in the state of Wisconsin. Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz (2009) mention the fact that what attracted more directors towards Robert Drew's experiment was the feeling of taking part in the action. Furthermore, they were enticed by possibility of filmic expression, which is achieved by strictly cinematographic narrative means, instead of mere vococentric textual argumentation over the image (29).

I continued my analysis by identifying the methods of engaging the subjects from the real world as well as by analysing the montage and camera methods used in the Maysles brothers' *Salesmen* (1969). The observational documentary practised by the two directors and pioneers of the genre does not intend to represent the perspective of a "supervision camera", but to use the filmed historical world in order to build a new reality – that of the film. The Maysles brothers offer a remarkable degree of closeness and accuracy of description with regards to the life of the represented social actors, without necessarily assuming a complete knowledge of the characters' experience and past. For the Maysles brothers, observing the social actors does not mean "hunting down" the characters; the purpose of the observation is not to develop and expose them. What the brothers strive for is building the space that is necessary for the social actors to express themselves as much as they wanted. The truth observed during filming is presented to the viewers as if they inhabited the said reality.

I was fascinated by the evolution of the Romanian documentary in its various forms according to the dominant political system. Hence, in the second chapter of the present research

entitled *The Evolution of the Romanian Documentary* I analysed the works of directors Copel Moscu, Thomas Ciulei and Edet Belzberg. The three of them manage to engage the historical world in three different manners, with differences in the formal and thematic points of view, as they adapt their cinematographic practice to the spirit of the times in which they were producing the documentaries.

Seraliştii (*The Seralists*) was launched in 1982, in the last decade of the Ceauşescu regime. Lucian Boia (2016) describes the eighties as being a period of cold and darkness (182). For Copel Moscu the only variant of criticising the incongruencies of the Ceauşescu system was represented by the essay. Laura Rascaroli (2017) analyses the visual system of delivering arguments in the form of the filmic essay. She tries to demonstrate the fact that this type of essay represents a dialectic form which thinks not exclusively through verbal commentary, but also by an audio-visual and narrative disjunctive practice. This creates textual gaps which allow for the creation of new significances and meanings (175). Moscu invites us to enter this world where the sense may be grasped just after we (the viewers) create our own associative schemes among the visual, verbal, and musical supports and frames presented.

For example, in the end of the *Seraliştii* film Moscu manages to create what Nora Alter (2018) calls "a complex thinking process which sometimes does not rely on reality" (23). The said documentary ending consists in freezing the last fotograme of the film, where we meet the gaze of the character directly oriented towards the camera objective. Vivian Sobchack (2016) states that "to understand the world, films make sense in a similar manner of perceptive orientation on which the subject is based" (100). Consequently, when the miner gazes into the horizon and then shortly looks us in the eye by directing his gaze towards the camera lens, we perceive their manner of perceiving and seeing the world, we follow its inner mechanisms by using our own perception arsenal.

The Romanian fiction films which appear after 2000 start to use the techniques characterising the type of observational cinematography pioneered by filmmakers such as the Maysles brothers, Fredrick Wiseman, Robert Leacock, and Robert Drew. McElhaney (2009) concludes that American direct observational cinema differs from other forms of documentary by the role assumed by the camera operator in connection with the filmed subject, being integrated in the physical and social space of the described reality (6).

Thomas Ciulei and Edet Belzberg work in the first part of the Romanian transition, both bringing innovations in our country's documentary. The film *It Is What It Is* (2001) represents the provincial universe, placing the action in the frontier town of Sulina. By exposing his

argument, by commenting on it by means of several documentary cinematography practices, Ciulei invites viewers to develop their own rationalization process regarding the argument. As a result, the modernity of Ciulei's practice does not stem only from his contemporary subject – a marginal community found in the midst of full reorganization and change process, transitioning from a Socialist system to a neo-liberal one – but also by the manner of placing in the limelight the cinematographic means through which he builds an argument about the world, allowing the spectators to get involved critically.

In the same year of 2001 Canadian director Edet Belzberg launches the film entitled *Children Underground*. If with Ciulei we can observe more documentary practices, Belzberg is the first to introduce the observational practice of the American direct cinematographic tradition in the Romanian space. *Children Underground* tells the story of some vagrant children who take shelter in the Victoria Underground Station in our capital city, Bucharest. Cristina, Mihai, Macarena, Ana, and Marian are the captives of a universe dominated/ governed by drugs, organising themselves in gangs to survive the ubiquitous violence around them. Director Belzberg manages to place the camera and the perspective of the viewer next to these children, filming the events closely, in the young social actors' lives – scenes of violence, scenes where they consume drugs or scenes of affection.

Copel Moscu's perspective actively guides us through the argument he puts forward, placing us above the spectator who expects their need for a resolution of the narrative to be gratified by the guiding montage. Contrastively, Edet Belzberg opens a new space of filmic communication, one where the spectator enjoys free will regarding the interpretation and construction of the narrative logics. Not having the clear director's guidance towards deciphering the proposed argument, the viewers gratify their need for comprehension by building their own schemes of understanding.

In the third chapter I analysed the following three observational films created by Romanian directors in the context of contemporary socio-economic changes, shifting my perspective towards the role of the woman in the new reality of the transition. The three Romanian films in question are *Aici ... adică acolo (Here ... Meaning There)* (2012) directed by Laura Căpățână, *Așteptându-l pe august (Waiting for August)* (2014) directed by Teodora Ana Mihai, *Toto și surorile lui (Toto and His Sisters)* (2014) in the direction of Alexander Nanau. The fall of the Communist regime paved the way for radical socio-economic changes. Consequently, some film directors manifest their interest for the exploration of the universe belonging to the newly formed class of the precariat, named as such by British sociologist Guy

Standing (2014). He analyses the main features of this new social category from a social point of view, drawing the following conclusions: the precariat is defined and characterised by the uncertainty of the short term, a characteristic that is induced by the low probability of personal progress and of building a stable career for oneself (21). One might infer that the individuals from the precariat class lack the feeling of belonging to a professional community that would be functioning within a frame of stable practices, ethical codes, and norms of behaviour. This aspect intensifies the feeling of alienation and of instrumentalization in what needs to be done. The actions and attitudes derived from precarity lead to opportunism (14).

The Romanians' relationship with the State changes dramatically and simultaneously with the "precarization" and precariousness of society.

Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu (2019) observe the fact that Romanians have not benefitted from the experience of having a state apparatus that would provide governmental services to them, but they have all experienced "a care service provider in exchange for the exercise of unconditioned paternalism" (252). Bucur and Miroiu launch a series of interviews with the aim of understanding the socio-economic changes through the prism of the vulnerable ones, thus managing to bring us very close to the perspective of the individuals who form the precariat. In one of these interviews a lady interviewee observes that "disinterested, non-vested relationships are increasingly rare, especially for the ones who dispose of wealth and high ranks. These changes have had a significant impact on many friendships, as honest relationships have become increasingly rare, especially for those who have recently accessed the upper echelons. Connections between people are dramatically altered in the context of the wealth rat-race involving the few and the struggle for survival involving the majority" (268).

Laura Căpățână-Juller and Teodora Mihai approach a new, common subject: the drama of the children whose parents left the country to work abroad. The 1st of January 2007 is the date when Bulgaria and Romania were accepted in the European Union, an event which radically changed the structure of Romanian society. After 2007 a significant number of Romanian citizens chose to seek their financial and social security in western countries of the EU. As early as the year of our admission in/ adhesion / adherence to the EU, no less than 560 000 Romanian citizens leave for the West of Europe (<https://www.oecd.org/countries/romania/>).

Although there are similarities in terms of the two documentaries' theme, there are several differences regarding the directors' perspective. Teodora Mihai prefers a more

formalist approach, combining techniques which are specific to the fiction of the documentary, whereas Laura Căpățână assumes a participative and active perspective in the drama she represents. The director of *Waiting for August* prefers to superimpose over reality a script inspired from the actions observed in the reality of its characters. This method of creating documentary film entails that the rapport and connection between the social actors and the creator should be unequal, the director having the power to determine the trajectory of the story. On the other hand, Laura Căpățână prefers a totally different approach, placing herself on the same level with her characters. The director of *Aici ... adică acolo (Here ... Meaning There)* uses the camera as a pretext to place herself on the same level with the social characters she follows. The participative dimension of her endeavour determines the sisters to have a much more open and authentic attitude towards the director, directly interacting with the latter during filming.

The film *Toto și surorile lui (Toto and His Sister)* (2014) is representative for the cinematic exploration of the Romanian transition and for the class of the precariat. The documentary tells the story lived by Totonel, a ten-year-old boy and his sisters, Andreea (fourteen years old) and Ana (aged seventeen). The three siblings wait for their mother to be freed from jail and to return home. Unfortunately, her release date is postponed and as they grow each sibling learns how to survive on their own.

The analysis I carried out led me to the conclusion that the main character of the documentary entitled *Toto și surorile lui (Toto and His Sisters)* is not Toto, but his middle sister, Andreea. We may state that Toto represents the sum of Andreea's actions, the crowning of her efforts and self-development. Her progress metamorphosize her into the role of the eldest sister, of the mother and father. The notion created by Simone de Beauvoir may be used to characterise Andreea and her progress: "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (quoted by Butler 35). The youngster's decision to assume a moral conduct proves to be the salvation she offers her little brother, Toto. She manages to save him from the precarious environment they live in, which represents the success of Andreea's project of defining herself as an individual in the world, acting morally and generating change in her life as well as in the existence of those around them.

It was a detailed, profound analysis of the director's practice and technique of building the scenes, of placing the camera and of assembling the narrative that brought me to this conclusion. For instance, the last sequence of the film brings Toto and Andreea opposite their mother, Siminica Petre. The entire sequence starts with the filming of Toto and Andreea walking together in the snow towards the Târgșor penitentiary, where their mother has been

detained for the last seven years. The close relationship of the siblings is captured by the director in a lateral medium shot where we see them playing together. Nanau uses a temporal ellipsis and an antithetical comparison by the alternation in montage of a shot where we see Toto throwing a snowball with a frame in which he is presented lying on some train seats. The director chose not to show the scene where Andreea and Toto see their mother for the first time that year. The director passes straight to filming the development of the relationship and dynamic among the three of them. We can see Toto with his back turned towards his mother, while Andreea is filmed using a close up shot and the mother is seated opposite the two children. The position of the characters is very suggestive of/ for the divide rupt that now separates them.

Toto literally cannot look at his mother directly and no longer acknowledges her as being a major part of his life. When Siminica asks Toto "Do you still love me?", the boy clearly answers "No".

The director decides to finish the film with this sequence, the last plan representing the children's mother in a medium frame, alone, sighing with the rays of the sun at twilight on her face. Using this plan, Nanau clearly points out the fact that neither Andreea, nor Toto gave in; they will never go back to the deplorable reality in which we found them at the beginning of the narrative, their mother representing the world they have just escaped from.

In *Aici...adică acolo (Here ... Meaning There)*, Laura Căpățână prefers a different manner than Nanau's about engaging the characters in the narrative. This director operates in the participative mode, named thus by Bill Nichols (1991). The camera is not masked underneath a false anonymity, but directly engages the characters in the action and dialogue. Laura Căpățână tries to stand by her characters throughout their progress along the events of the historical world. The director manages to deliver a meta-commentary on the effects of the transition and of the abandon caused by the economic precarity. The engaged director's perspective, situated near the protagonist, Sanda, can represent an act of rebellion against this *status quo*. The director is deeply involved in Sanda's feelings, becoming the young girl's confidante. The relationship between the documentary director and the character contributes to Sanda's upcoming revelation.

Throughout the film, Laura Căpățână creates an alternative montage of amateur images from the family's archive with what she catches on camera. The act of regarding comparatively thus becomes a critical mode of evaluating the present. Putting together the footage from the present with the images from the archive generate a new message: the time of the united family belongs to the past, whereas the present is one where Sanda and Ani now accept and come to

terms with the lack of their parents in their lives. Alternating archive footage with those surprised by the operator-director open a new space, facilitating what Doru Pop (2021) defines as non-cinematographic thinking. In *Romanian Cinema: Thinking Outside the Screen*, the author supports the hypothesis that this type of thinking takes place only when the directors explore the cinema by accessing the sense from the interval provided by the reality which is not represented (113). The parallel montage of the archive and the present used by director Căpățână presupposes a logical rupture in the temporal and space dimension of the narrative. This non-represented temporal space and the incapacity of the director's camera to explore it facilitates the engagement of the viewer in a mindset that takes place outside the limits of the film. Each viewer will do their own completion with the information that we do not see, and the sense of these blank spaces can be materialised outside the cinematic experience of watching and viewing.

In the fourth chapter, entitled "Climate Changes and the Ecological Documentary, Home (2020)" I analysed the way in which director Radu Ciorniciuc tries to transmit emotions that can change the behaviour and the viewers' paradigmatic scripts regarding the dilemmas generated by the threat of climate change. By making use of the research carried out by Alexa Weik von Mosser, John Duvall and David Ingram, I attempt to identify the modalities employed by Radu Ciorniciuc to represent themes pertaining to environmental problems, consumerism issues and the way in which contemporary people relate themselves to nature. Ingram (2014) states that the importance of transmitting the ecological message pertains to the fact that human beings might not be genetically programmed to respond to threats that encompass a longer time span, in comparison to the attention they would grant to an immediate threat such as a lion in the bushes, lying in wait and preparing to launch an attack (36).

Alexa Weik von Mosser (2004) observes that the emotional power of the documentary relies on the viewers' trust and even belief in its non-fictional nature, respectively in the understanding resulted that what is seen on screen is a consequence of the dramatic action taking place in reality (41). The documentary functions in the interior of this rationale, the viewer being encouraged to develop active, actual, and powerful feelings towards the story that the documentarist is presenting. In *Home*, the narrative oscillates between these two worlds, the natural and the artificial, man-made one. The director intends to facilitate the evaluation of the complexity of each lifestyle by the experience that we are living next to the characters. Radu Ciorniciuc does not offer a simple solution at the end, opting to offer us some food for thought instead. The climatic crisis faced by humanity in the twenty-first century cannot be

solved by a simple solution as yet, so that Ciorniciuc's film will not provide a clear verdict either.

The progress of the Enache family is similar with the trajectory of mankind, moving away from an existence based on a certain accordance to the rhythms of nature and towards the contemporary, consume-driven, and ultra-technological one. If the Anthropocene represents a new geological era when humans determine the fate of Terra, the big challenge lies in determining *homo sapiens* to perceive its own immensity, especially the fact that it has become a geological force (Chakrabarty 2012 12). Alexa Weik von Mosser supports the view according to which this expansion of the collective imaginary can be achieved by the power of stories, as art has the capacity to help us mentally experience the impact of the geo-physical force that humans now are (84). The documentary film *Home* explores this path, its main theme being the battle between the mythical and the historical time. As we witness the Enache family drama experienced in the short time of the development of the film narrative, a parallel is built with the entire history of the Anthropocene, the latter being mirrored in the family's life. Radu Ciorniciuc does not aim at the development of an eco-critical argument, as he is primarily interested in the personal drama of his characters. This method proves to be beneficial for the engagement in environmental issues. The characters' drama is synonymous with the individual's contemporary problems in the Anthropocene era. It is much easier for the viewers to interact with other individuals than with specialised information and data presented in a mediatic, journalistic approach or in scientific tropes.

The fifth chapter in my thesis proposes a comparative analysis of the interaction methods among social actors, of the construction methods characterising the narrative arch and the role of intimacy established between the directors and the characters in two documentaries: *Doar o răsuflare (Just One Breath)* (2016), by Monica Lăzurean-Gorgan and *Roboțelul de Aur (The Gold Robot)* (2015), by myself and Radu Mocanu.

The approach of Monica Lăzurean-Gorgan, the director who created *Doar o răsuflare (Just One Breath)*, entails the reconstruction of reality in a formalist manner, through an expressive and descriptive montage. The viewer is guided throughout the seven years in the life of the characters (the Sicrea family) in a direct manner. Monica Lăzurean-Gorgan masters the family's universe, while the viewer is presented with the ideas that she has developed about the reality of the filmed narrative during the seven years of production. In *Roboțelul de Aur (The Gold Robot)*, the technique of the sequence-plan gives the space its integrity back, rendering it whole again. The spectators are the ones who must actively navigate through the

sequence-plan, respectively through the characters' world. The fluid movement employed by the operator who frames the image so that is similar to the human sight. The viewer is directly transposed in the film by means of these natural observation techniques. The presence of directors Mihai Gavril Dragolea and Radu Constantin Mocanu in the film is a hallmark of documentary authenticity.

I incorporated Bernadette Wegenstein's perspective on Bazin's realism in art (2017), where she refers to *pseudo-realism* and *true realism*. The first category is perceived as being caught in ideological traps and in formal, meaningless articulations. True realism does not fight against this opposition – it merely tries to accommodate it by means of sincerity and honesty (36). Monica Lăzurean-Gorgan subscribes to the Pseudo-realist trend on basis of her film. She uses formal cinematographic techniques (reconstruction, fixed and closed compositions, mannerist and expository montage) through which she deforms the documentary reality of the historic world. *The Golden Robot* puts forward an invitation to see and experiment an alternative reality of the screen together with the character. We accomplished this mode of expression through a series of camera and perspective techniques. Our positioning as directors towards the protagonist is one of equality and authentic curiosity. This endeavour was gradually adopted by Steluța Duță herself (the main character of the film). As a result, she initiated actions and dialogues that appear in the film. The creation process of *The Golden Robot* documentary was one based on collaboration, where the directing and argument are somewhere in the middle of the relationship established among the directors and social actors. This way of filmmaking supposes the use of the long shots, employing depth and thus allowing the action can take place on a multi-planar level.

In my deep analysis of the cinematographic mechanisms present in the given films I realised that they can be surprised to some general rules. For example, I managed to identify elements of dramaturgie and narrative as they are presented by Robert McKee in his book entitled *Story* (2010). He tackles elements such as triggering incident, climax, conscious and subconscious desires, subtext in each of the mentioned narratives. My studies in this area led me to the conclusion that these elements pertaining to dramaturgy are present in these documentary films due to the subscription of the filmed events from the historic world to the montage process – a process through which enables each director to super-impose their own concepts over the historical reality. The directors choose and order the chain of events of the historical world in accordance with some preestablished narrative schemes. Another instance

is connected to the discussed directorial perspectives: although they differ from one case to another, they are superimposed to the daily reality of the filmed characters.

David Bordwell (1985) identifies the anticipative tendencies of perception, where the spectator tends to create certain scenarios based on their own experience and sensitivity before the actual development of the narrative. Experience and knowledge guide the anticipation process, therefore creating certain interpretation / interpretative schemes (41). I infer the fact that the directors go through the same process over the production of a non-fiction film, even multiple times. They use the anticipative tendencies of perception when they film, building scripts and scenarios based on their own experiences and knowledge. Hence, the observational documentary film suffers from a logical impossibility of the construction mechanism. Once an artistic enterprise pretends, even hypothetically, to have access to the historical world and promises to deliver arguments that come from this world (via director towards the spectator), then the elements of unmediated observation as well as the elements of photographic formalism and the montage structure are incompatible with the initial hypothesis.

I concluded that there is a clear evolution characterising the documentary genre, a progress which is closely connected to the deontology of the documentary practice and to the authenticity of supporting an argument. Another observation I made was that Copel Moscu's experimental non-fiction films were aimed at creating a critical argument about the Communist system by the manipulation of the filmed material. This directorial objective is achieved through spatial and narrative re-composition as well as by means of the recomposing of dialogues in montage. Similar techniques are found in the work invested by director Monica Lăzurean-Gorgan in the film *Doar o răsuflare Just One Breath* (2016). We are given the impression of a unitary space, the causal relationships among characters are respected, but these are all staged, subordinated to the observative work invested by Lăzurean-Gorgan before the filming process *per se*.

In both cases, the reality of the social actors is subordinated to the esthetical formalism employed by the directors. Even in the case of director Alexander Nanau (a documentarist who prefers the observational form to other means of expression) we can state that one has to do with a manner of delivering arguments that subordinates Toto and Andreea's reality towards the director. The montage method in *Toto și surorile lui (Toto and His Sisters)* (2014) is one which betrays the assemblage of the reality in post-production. The most realistic scenes in this production are those filmed by Andreea with the amateur video camera, these sequence-plans oftentimes being inserted among the constructions proposed by the director. Nanau wanted to

build a narrative arch in order to sensitise the public with regard to his characters' drama and by means of this process he subordinated their reality to his imperatives.

Taking note of these similarities, we looked for a theory that could explain the phenomenon in non-fictional observational cinematography. The American theoretician, physician, and astrobiologist Sara I. Walker (2013) puts forward a concept that is grounded on the idea that each event is based on the structures which occurred before permitting the assemblage of the specific molecule or event, excluding the growing combinatorial space of all the other assemblage possibilities (2).

By applying Sarah Walker's Assembly/ Assemblage Theory to my field of study I reached the conclusion that observational documentary films are created from the sum of interactions experienced by the director, from filmed figments of the historical world and from the viewers' interpretive schemes. Thus, we cannot state that an observational or participative documentary film director can deliver an argument about the historical world from the direction of the historical world, according to Bill Nichols (1991). Rather, the enunciator tests and probes their own argument by using the complexity of the historical world as a limit.

Cormac McCarthy, one of my favourite writers, intuitively uses the bases of the Assemblage Theory in his book entitled *Blood Meridian* (2015). It is in the epilogue that the author presents a series of action which, once interpreted, describe the modernisation of the Wild West by introducing the transport and telecommunications infrastructure. Until the time described in the book the American West was the scene of ultra-violence inflicted by the Glanton gang upon the indigenous, with the blessing of the authorities. But then change takes place: it is time for modern civilization to take control of these lands that were soaked with the natives' blood. The United States of America could not have developed in the way they did, had it not been for this chapter of change in history. The actual presence of the USA is the sum of all the past experiences.

I tested this theory by using three films that I created during my doctoral research: *Totul pentru Riana* (*All for Riana*) (2020), *Aurică, viață de câine* (*Aurică, a Dog's Life*) (2022) and *După Cioate* (*Beyond the Stumps*) (unfinished). In the documentary entitled *Totul pentru Riana* (*All for Riana*) I manipulated historical reality in order to serve some imperatives pertaining to the cinematographic narrative (the effect being the distortion of the supervised characters' reality). On the other hand, in the hybrid short film

However, in *Aurică, viață de câine* (*Aurică, a Dog's Life*) I decided to complete a similar artistic trajectory, but backwards. I no longer tried to model and shape the historical

reality according to my own concepts, but instead I extracted a real story from the said world, story which I interpreted, reconstructed, and modified according to my personal experiences and sensitivity. The result was a beneficial one. Once I stopped using historical reality in order to produce and deliver an argument based on it, I was able to freely operate with my own concepts, without being detrimental to the reality of those involved in the produced narrative.

Bill Nichols (2001) underlines the fact that the documentary does not present the truth, but one truth (or to be more accurate, a vision or a means of perceiving and visualising), even if the proof they obtain bears the authentic trace of the historical world itself (118). The theoretician also emphasises that the documentary uses realism as a style of representation, not as a means of validating an idea. The purpose is to persuasively present an argument about the historical world. Realism becomes the support of a common epistemic vision in the case of non-fiction, where a rational perspective seems to subordinate and to mobilise itself (167). By appealing to my personal experience, I cannot establish any difference between the use of the Realist current in fiction, respectively in non-fiction film. As long as the documentary represents the director's personal truth, mobilised by different techniques which build a persuasive fictitious argument from the historical world, the non-fiction of the documentary cannot be considered entirely non-fiction.

In the last part of this summary, I shall refer to the documentary film entitled *După Cioate (Beyond the Stumps)* which I am currently co-directing with Radu Mocanu, a production yet unfinished. Together with director Radu Mocanu I am working at a participative documentary narrative. Tiberiu, the main character, has an expansive, narcissistic personality. During the production it was often he that decided what to film and how to look in front of the camera. There is yet another negotiation between the reality of the directors and that of the filmed person. As creators of the film, we are interested about the mechanisms which lie behind certain actions and about the hidden or unconscious motivations we have when we venture into an activity. Once we discovered Tiberiu's narcissistic inner motor we tried to film him from this perspective. His narcissism determined him to take us to a forest where he knew for sure that there was a high degree of danger, as he had had previous altercations with the woodcutters from the area, not a long time before filming. Tiberiu wanted to show the illegal woodcutters that he has the *media* on his side. The only issue was that Radu and I were not the representatives of any *mass-media* structure: we have been working on this documentary independently, alongside producer Monica Lăzurean-Gorgan.

We were attacked by twelve men who were armed with axes, bats and other blunt contendent objects. We thought that we would die that day. The beating we received represents a catalyst for Radu and me, we entered directly into the narrative of the film from the position of active social actors. The traumatic event of the attack in the forest radically changed our directorial perspective. Up to that point we were following our own interests associated with Tiberiu's personality, sometimes fictionalising his truth in order to satisfy our directorial concepts, but once we were violently introduced in the narrative, we were able to occupy space inside the film. We started filming the actions we were doing ourselves in the domain of the environment. We explored the interior motivations for these actions, being aware that what we say and what we do would eventually appear in the film. Radu Mocanu was filming me, and I was filming him. The camera therefore became an active character, brought to life by the person operating it. By filming each other we found a coherent justification for the presence of a camera in someone's private space.

Finally, by associating the analyses of the directorial perspectives hereby described and by applying Sarah Walker's Assemblage Theory I reached the stage of meditating upon the position of the witness (meaning the film director) in the context of the acquisition of images, of production and post-production and especially in the distribution of the witness narrative towards the viewer.

Sybille Krämer (2016) identifies the methods by which a testimony is put forward from the witness's point of view. He or she can assume the stance of an authority which validates their testimony. Believing can represent a mode of validating a testimonial by suspending the receptors' epistemic experience. Alternatively, the testimonial can be built by means of an active relationship based on trust between the witness and the receptors. Alternatively, the testimonial can be built by means of an active trust relationship established between them, a relationship based on reciprocal evidencing of the testimonial. Krämer considers that the testimonial becomes epistemically valid when it can be tested through compelling evidence by the receptors through their own epistemic abilities such as memory, perception, and reasoning (31-33). The author identifies a model of assuming knowledge by testimony which does not suppose an up towards down type of relationship, but a balanced – *The Second Person Model of Witnessing (Modelul celui de-al doilea martor)* (35).

Being a subject of my own film myself, I am here referring to *După Cioate Beyond the Stumps*, where I probed/ testes the role of protagonist-director, my testimonial becomes epistemically valid, given the fact that I became a subject that was directly subordinated to the hazard of the historical world where I am active and I film at once. As a result, the pretention

of the authority of the argument about the historical world is subordinated to the hazard of historical reality. The directorial perspective is no longer imposed, but it results from the historical world which we are experimenting first-hand, on a personal level. Being steeped in history, this perspective is in accordance with the Theory of Assemblage and the directorial personal decisions are assumed by the director as being derived from their own experience. Now these decisions become visible to the ones who will view the cinematic production in question.

The director's testimony towards the spectator who represents the second witness represents an assurance through which the emitter guarantees the statement proposed to the receptors, thus building knowledge based on interaction. Marion Froger (2014) opines that in the case of some documentary films the informational value of the image is subordinated to the function of the film of building community connexions between the filmed person, the creator, and the audience (76). The present, assumed directorial perspective within the text of the film can deliver such knowledge by placing the voice of the author on the same level with the persons filmed in the historical world and with the spectators.

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