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WOMEN ON WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN DOCUMENTARY FILM

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Abstract: Guy Standing (2016) observes how in Eastern Europe, the post-1989 neoliberal order determined the working class to morph into what he names the precariat. This newly formed segment of society has to adapt to forever changing market imperatives in order to survive. Concomitantly, the Romanian state apparatus abruptly mutated from an overwhelming patriarchal structure into an all-out absent one (Bucur and Miroiu 252), thus making it more difficult for women to manage both patriarchally imposed roles and to find a workplace. Women filmmakers like Ana Căpăţână-Juller (*Aici...adică acolo* [Here... meaning there], 2012) and Teodora Mihai (*Waiting for August*, 2014) decide to turn their cameras onto women characters engaged in a struggle for survival. Both filmmakers deal with the same theme, the lives of children who have to raise themselves, as their parents have gone abroad in order to gain better incomes than in Romania. Working with Sybille Krämer's "second person model of witnessing," where testimony is associated with concepts such as social interaction manifested through trust and authority (Krämer 34), I will examine how the two filmmakers particularly engage with their subjects and the differences between two directorial perspectives: one that approaches reality from a top down perspective, while the other is enmeshed with the characters in the historical world.

Keywords: Romanian documentary film, precariat, women filmmakers, migration, Eastern Europe, witness, female gaze.

1. Introduction

As a documentary filmmaker, I have always strived to represent my subjects' stories as closely as possible to the historical reality I aim to convey to the public. I've experimented with various forms of engaging the viewers' attention, from observational and interactive documentaries to hybrid documentary-fiction perspectives. Through the process of filming three feature documentaries, four shorts, and a short doc-fiction project, I realised that placing my camera alongside the characters, sharing their limited knowledge as they navigate the historical world, creates a new and authentic pact with reality. This approach places both the filmmaker and the social actor (character) on the same level, operating under the same existential hazards that govern the historical world. While researching interactivity in non-fictional filmmaking, I encountered Sybille Krämer's writings on modes of witnessing and their effects on the filmmaker-viewer relationship. In her article "Truth in Testimony: Or Can a Documentary Film 'Bear Witness'? Some Reflections on the Difference between Discursive and Existential Truth," Krämer develops a model based on direct and unmasked address. Here, the witness involves and engages the receivers of the testimony in a genuine social relationship of knowledge acquisition. Similar to the interactive mode of filmmaking, Krämer believes that testimony becomes epistemically valid when receivers can verify it through their own epistemic abilities, such as memory, perception, and reasoning (31).

In this article, I intend to use Krämer's model to analyse two Romanian documentaries, Ana Căpățână-Juller's *Aici...adică acolo* [Here... meaning there] (2012) and Teodora Mihai's *Waiting for August* (2014). I chose these two women filmmakers because their films share a similar theme: the lives of children who must raise themselves because their parents have migrated to earn better incomes than in Romania. The main characters are also similar—young women who grapple with their parents' abandonment and an abrupt transition to adulthood. Georgiana, Sanda, and Ani, born during Romania's neoliberal transition period, take care of their siblings independently. While the plots and characters are similar, the styles of these movies differ. One embraces a formalist perspective on reality, while the other is enmeshed within the daily lives of its characters.

A certain understanding develops between characters and filmmakers when they can address each other directly, not pretending the camera is invisible to the social actors. Bill Nichols coined this mode of representation as interactive

documentary, defined as an inclusive and collaborative process that engages communities in designing and carrying out the collection and dissemination of their own story (Nichols 45). Interactive documentary filmmaking differs from the observational one, which stresses the so-called non-intervention of the filmmaker in the reality being filmed (Nichols 38). This way of representation poses various dilemmas regarding the authority of filmmakers who ask characters not to acknowledge their presence within their reality. Does the evidence of the film convey a sense of respect for the lives of others, or have they simply been used as signifiers in someone else's discourse? I will try to answer these questions in the analysis conducted in this article.

In their work *Nașterea cetățenei democratice* [The Birth of the Democratic Female Citizen] (2019), Romanian researchers Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu analyse the roles that women play in post-communist Romanian society. The authors conducted over one hundred interviews with women from Hunedoara County, concluding that during the post-1989 transition period, women were abandoned by the political class altogether. As a result, they now link citizenship with offering support and care to others, rather than to active engagement in active political activities. Bucur and Miroiu's interviewees do not see themselves as holding political power in the near future. The authors also believe that once women become more active in decision-making processes, citizens and communities will greatly benefit. However, to witness such a change, women need to shift from a support status quo to a more active role in decision-making by gaining more civic agency for their communities. Employing Miroiu and Bucur's approach, based on analysing the daily manifestations of women's citizenship in Romania, I view the narratives of Juller's and Mihai's documentary protagonists as manifestations of active political citizenship. The young women do not merely offer support to their families and others; they claim agency over their lives and bodies, managing to act freely against a precarious and normative system.

2. Socio-economic changes, feminism and existentialism in the Romanian observational documentary film

Romanian cinematography has kept pace with the social, political, and economic changes that have occurred since December 1989, often exploring the phenomena arising from the emergence of the new class of the precariat. After the fall of the communist regime, the population of Romania had to internalise new economic and

social realities. Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu (2019) analyse how Romanian women adapted to the regime change:

Neither men nor women had the experience of a state that functioned as a provider of government services, but the experience of a state as a provider of care services in exchange for the exercise of unconditional paternalism. Liberation from the ubiquitous state is extremely confusing, because this state relieves people of the burden of freedom, as a minor under guardianship. For both women and men, the state was the great, omnipresent, and omnipotent patriarch. Liberation from the state patriarchy is a huge relief but also a very confusing experience. (252)

Adding to the confusion of the post-1989 events is the appearance of neoliberal capitalism in Romania, an ideology advocating for a global labour market that is flexible and sensitive to the trends and needs of the world economy. Flexibility had many dimensions: wages became subject to accelerating adjustments to changes in demand, which went primarily downwards. Employment flexibility meant an easy and inexpensive way to change the level of employment for a job, implying a reduction in job security and protection. Skill flexibility entailed the ability to adjust workers' skills easily—in essence, the flexibility advocated by neoclassical economists made employees and their security vulnerable. Thus, the working class, a segment of the population cherished by the communist regime, was now collapsing as the Romanian economy struggled to keep up with the flexibility of neoliberalism. The state no longer provided jobs, pushing workers into precarious situations and forming what British sociologist Guy Standing calls the new class of the precariat.

This new class transformed with Romanian society, becoming more prevalent as the country adjusted to the market economy and liberal democracy. Guy Standing analyses the main features of this emergent class from a social perspective: the precariat is defined by short-termism, induced by the low probability of personal progress or building a stable career (Standing 21). Society shifts from one consisting of individuals with distinct combinations of knowledge, experience, and learning to one where most people focus on quick gains necessary for day-to-day survival. In addition to the lack of employment stability and insecure social income, those in the precariat do not have an identity based on work. When employed, they occupy passive jobs with no traditions of social memory, intensifying feelings of alienation and instrumentalization derived from precarity, often leading to opportunism (Standing 14).

Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu conduct a series of interviews to understand socio-economic changes through the lens of the vulnerable, bringing us close to the perspective of those forming the precariat. In one interview, a woman notes how “disinterested” relationships are increasingly rare, especially for those with money and high positions. These changes impacted many friendships, making honest relationships rarer, particularly for those who achieved significant wealth and social status: “The relationships between people are dramatically changed in the context of the rush for wealth – for the few, and that for survival – for the many” (Bucur and Miroiu 268). Thus, the rarity of “honest relationships” is a consequence of the alienation of professional identity and community, which benefited employees during the communist regime. The interviews conducted by the two Romanian researchers focus on women, whose perspectives are relevant to the new socio-economic conjuncture. The interviewee's critical analysis of the dissolution of community and family relations in favour of economic gains suggests a claim for a female decision-making role in society. The critique of the new neoliberal order represents a women's revolt against an unsustainable status quo.

In the following sections, I will approach the work of two documentary film directors, Laura Căpățână-Juller and Teodora Ana Mihai, focusing on how they represent the dramatic experiences of women during the transition and within the Romanian diaspora engendered by economic migration. To contextualise the diaspora phenomenon and its effects in Romania, I will present its evolution. On January 1st, 2007, Bulgaria and Romania entered the European Union, a shift which radically changed the structure of Romanian society. After 2007, most Romanian citizens sought security of existence and income in the Western countries of the Union. The number of the Romanian diaspora varied in the post-1989 decades. In the 1990s, Romanians primarily emigrated to Germany, Hungary, Israel, Canada, and the USA, while in the 2000s, Western European countries became the most frequented. In 2007 alone, 560,000 Romanian citizens left for Western Europe. The 2019 OECD report mentions that between 2000/01 and 2015/16, the number of Romanian immigrants increased by 2.3 million. In 2015/16, 17% of Romania's population lived in another country: Italy (over 1 million), Germany (680,000), and Spain (573,000). The Romanian diaspora is dynamic both in numbers and socio-political dynamics.¹

¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). “Romania.” OECD, 2024, <https://www.oecd.org/en/countries/romania.html>.

Romanian cinema kept pace with the post-1989 social, political, and economic changes as women filmmakers like Ana Căpățână-Juller (*Aici...adică acolo*, 2012) and Teodora Mihai (*Waiting for August*, 2014) turned their cameras on women characters struggling for survival in this new situation. Both filmmakers explore the lives of children who must raise themselves because their parents have gone abroad to earn better incomes than in Romania.

3. *Aici...adică acolo* (2012): engaged, participatory perspective

Aici...adică acolo tells the story of Ani and Sanda, two sisters from Maramureș county who live with their grandparents. Their parents work in Spain, like many other Romanians from the northern part of the country. When the parents first left, their joint project seemed promising: with the money earned in Spain, they would build a big house where the whole family would live happily. After more than ten years, things had not gone as planned. The big house is far from finished and Ani and Sanda grow up without their parents. Director Laura Căpățână-Juller spent three years with Sanda and Ani's family, she observed the effects generated by the absence of parents on the two sisters during pre-adolescence and adolescence.

The opening sequence of the documentary takes place inside a small traditional rural family home, a house built by the grandparents. The two girls recall important events in the family's history using the toys they received throughout their lives. The director, who also performs the role of the camerawoman, frames the first sequence using a wide focal length. The image and camerawork are fluid as the camera follows the movements of the characters. The director films the girls interacting with the toys lying on a couch through a medium shot. This type of framing allows us to enter the private universe of the two sisters, to observe their body language and their reactions when interacting with the toys. The free movement of the director's device transposes viewers into the space of the two protagonists.

Observational cinematography is approached in a 2009 volume by Ana Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz as an extension of human consciousness, an almost objective correlation of what the filmmaker sees and experiences from the historical reality they explore (Grimshaw and Ravetz 15). Affective identification with the social actors in the film is achieved through unplanned camera movements, re-framing, zooms, and the use of wide focal lengths that give shots the three-dimensionality necessary to place the viewer inside the filmed historical space. It simulates the

curious gaze that each of us would have if we were present in the historical reality of the filmed characters.

In the following sequence, Laura Căpățână cross-cuts the footage she took during the production of the film with archival footage of the family. The sequence is constructed from a multitude of scenes, united by narrative coherence. The first scene shows the two sisters, Ani and Sanda, leaving for church. The operator pans the camera, following the path of the two girls from leaving the yard to walking down the street. The next scene takes place in a churchyard. The director edits two more medium shots of the two sisters, then ends the church scene using images from the family archive. Suddenly, we see Sanda younger and dressed differently, but this time Ani is operating the camera. The parents of the two girls are introduced using archival footage – Ani frames her entire family within a wide shot of them coming towards her. By editing footage from the family archive immediately after the footage she takes during the present production of the film, Laura Căpățână proposes a new way of reading the family archive: the footage seems to be an alternative reality, a desirable reality in which the two sisters feel safe and protected. Unfortunately, this reality only exists in the past moments filmed by Ani and thus is only accessible through memory. During the film, the director films the sisters several times watching the family's video archive, the connection with their parents being composed through these digital video memories. Assembly shot scenes are used throughout the documentary, showcasing the family's house under permanent construction, the yard, and the village street. This montage functions as a curtain that announces the passage of time and transitions from one dramatic act to the next. The house, which is constantly under construction, is the reason why the girls are alone and the parents are away in Spain for work. During the entire film, we do not observe any progress in the construction; the reason for the family's division thus proves to be absurd; Ani and Sanda also observe their parents' inability to finish the construction. The parents are part of the social category that Guy Standing names "circulants," a part of the precariat. These are the migrants who leave their homes in search of better earnings. They intend to return, but the uncertain employment situation causes them to remain in a state of continuous search for a better life abroad (Standing 104-105). The British sociologist observes that the precariat has the feeling of being in a diffuse and unstable international community of people struggling, usually in vain, to give their working life a professional identity (Standing 26).

The scene showing the home arrival of the parents is composed of two parts: waiting for the bus and reuniting with them. Successively edited shots: a wide shot in which we see Sanda sitting on the foundation of an abandoned house, a close-up in which the camerawoman pans the camera from Ani's face to Sanda's face, another wide shot of the girls sitting and waiting by the side of the road for the coach to arrive, all built up expectation. Ani's exclamation, "It's coming!" introduces a medium shot where the camera follows the two sisters walking towards the bus stop. The family reunion is shot using a wide medium framing. Ani and Sanda are in the foreground of the composition, the parents get off the bus, and after a short hug, they rush to get their luggage from the coach hold. The moment of welcoming their parents back home is highly emotional for Ani and Sanda: they burst into tears, while the parents have to remove the multitude of luggage from the hold of the coach as quickly as they can. The girls' need for hugs is disrupted again.

The next sequence takes place inside the family home. The girls' mother distributes gifts, her relationship with Ani and Sanda being based on material goods and gift-giving. The camerawoman captures the entire scene using a wide focal length. The characters seem to get lost in the sea of luggage and boxes, the abundance of gifts being an excuse presented by the parents for their absence. We see Ani's father showing her a construction job he did on a client's house in Spain on his cellphone. The complexity of the work fascinates Ani, and the father's intention to replicate that construction at home makes her point out the costs such work will bring. The next scene takes us inside the unfinished house for the first time. The father makes plans for what he can build while the rest of the family listens. Also, in the second act of the film, we observe details of the family's life. Laura Căpățână-Juller's camera accompanies the family shopping, going out to a McDonald's restaurant, and at home during moments of relaxation. The fluid way in which all these actions are captured invites us to experience the filmic time as the historical/real one. The director creates the cinematic dramaturgy by presenting two different worlds: one of a united family and another where the sisters are left alone again. Thus, the viewers are invited to experience the two realities in turn and draw their own conclusions.

One of the conclusive scenes for the children's relationship with their parents is the one in which Ani, Sanda, and their grandparents are waiting on the side of a road for the gifts sent by their parents by coach from Western Europe. If in the second act Ani and Sanda were impatiently waiting for their parents, now their presence is

materialised only through the gifts they sent. The scene where the sisters unwrap the gifts takes place inside the grandparents' house. The director again uses fluid camerawork; the whole scene is captured through a wide focal length, and the medium shot framing makes it easier for us to observe the characters and their reactions to the gifts they receive. The girls' grandmother does not understand the meaning of the excess of gifts. Sanda takes no action until she notices the webcam she received, a better way she could see her parents. She is not interested in the presents as much as in the possibility of seeing her parents again, hoping to establish a better video connection and a clearer presence of mom and dad with her during the Christmas holidays. In the following scene, Ani has installed the new webcam and tries to show her parents her Christmas tree, but the webcam cable is not long enough to reach the room where the tree is. The technical impossibility of showing her parents the Christmas preparations made at home represents the growing rift between the parents and the two sisters. The family's precarious material situation pushed the parents to seek better-paying jobs in the west, but the opportunism of the ever-increasing earnings destroyed the family unit, leaving the two sisters abandoned in the world their parents had fled.

The climax of the cinematic narrative is represented by the scene in which the parents head back to Spain, having quickly come home to celebrate Ani's eighteenth birthday. The whole scene is captured by a wide shot in which we can see the four members of the family. The director decides not to make any montage cuts during the filmed action, thus allowing the viewer to experience the entire event for its actual historical duration. The repeated departure of the parents can be understood in Aristotelian terms as *hamartia*, the fatal fault they make by abandoning their children for financial gains. The theme of abandonment is present in the entire dramatic construction of the film. In its final sequence, the director Laura Căpăţână returns to the syntactic code of parallel editing. The archive footage of the family is juxtaposed with a scene where we can see Sanda dressed for an important event, probably a prom. This juxtaposition of current and archival footage generates a new message — the time of a united family belongs to the past, the present being one in which Sanda and Ani accept the absence of their parents in their lives. Thus, the alternation of archival footage with that filmed by the director-camerawoman in the present opens up a new space, facilitating what Doru Pop defines as non-cinematic thinking. In *Romanian Cinema: Thinking Outside the Screen*, the author argues that this type of thinking takes place when directors access meaning via the interval

offered by the unrepresented reality in a film (Pop 113). The parallel montage between the archive and the present, as used here by director Căpățână, implies a logical break in the spatio-temporal continuity of the narrative. This unrepresented temporal space and the inability of the director's camera to explore it facilitate the viewer's engagement in a way of thinking that takes place outside the confines of the film screening.

Laura Căpățână thus accesses a new level of understanding the narrative, and her film functions as an interlude. The entire film is actually designed in such a way that it progresses after the screening, in the minds of the viewers. Doru Pop argues that this type of exploration may have some roots in the specifics of the Romanian psyche. He observes how various Romanian thinkers developed common philosophical notions – for example, Vasile Conta's notion of “universal undulation,” which is very close to the theory of “wave space” launched by Lucian Blaga (Pop 208). Moreover, the Romanian geopolitical space has always been on the edge of empires, our nation evolving at the extremes of conflicting ideologies and civilizations. As a whole, Laura Căpățână's film takes place in a space that can always be defined by its in-betweenness: the girls have a digital, precarious, and superficial connection with their parents, the house that the family wants to complete is only half-built, the parents' homecomings are quick and ephemeral, and the sisters' experiences lie between the memories they have with their parents and the present in which they find themselves all alone.

4. *Waiting for August* (2014): the formalist, detached perspective

Waiting for August (2014) is the feature documentary debut of director Teodora Ana Mihai. The film tells the story of Georgiana, a fifteen-year-old girl who lives with her six brothers in an apartment on the margins of Romanian city Bacău. Their mother Liliana, an economic migrant in Turin, will not return home until the summer. In the absence of her mother, Georgiana is trapped in the role of head of the family. Phone conversations with her mother are the only indications Georgiana receives to keep the household running. Caught between puberty and responsibilities, Georgiana tries to fulfil both the role of a mother for her younger siblings and live out her own personal story.

The documentary starts with a title sequence composed of a wide outdoor shot, filmed using a dolly-in motion shot showing the snowy roads of Bacău County. The entire title sequence places us in a distant space, a space where the blizzard makes

access difficult. Connotatively speaking, we can say that the whole title sequence functions as a metaphor for the distance established between mother and children. The next sequence takes place inside the family's apartment. We observe two young brothers playing in a medium shot, while the next cut introduces the main character, Georgiana, who is filmed using a medium close-up as she prepares food. The director decides to introduce the main character alone into the frame, invested in the action of cooking. Thus we are immediately shown Georgiana's role in the family: the one who takes care of the rest of the younger siblings. The entire conversation between Georgiana and her mother is captured by a medium shot in which we observe Georgiana's sister holding the phone to her ear while she continues to cook. Georgiana cannot afford to take a break from the work she is doing to have a conversation with her mother. In the following shots, the mother talks by phone with each of her children. The director edits the whole scene using a series of editing jump cuts through which the interlocutors on the phone change, all while Georgiana continues to cook in the background.

If the mother's presence is mediated by the phone (and thus only verbal), Georgiana's presence is physical and engaged in an action that ensures the survival of the family (specifically, cooking). Her mother's conversation boils down to generic questions like — What are you doing? All is well? — and a material assurance of the children's affection accomplished by promises to buy presents for each of the sisters and brothers. As we have noticed in the previous examples, family and human relations are reduced to material transactions, as the mother cannot give her children the necessary affection or care, filling this void by promises of material gifts. Through this opening sequence, the director introduces us to the argument of the entire film: the absence of the mother is not enough for the family, and the eldest sister, Georgiana, is thus forced to fulfil the domestic and emotional needs of her brothers and sisters, being denied experiences specific to the age of adolescence. The opening incident of the documentary occurs in the scene where the mother tells the children that she will not be able to get home until August. Robert McKee defines the triggering incident as “an event that causes a positive or negative imbalance in a character's life, awakening a conscious and/or unconscious desire to obtain what he/she believes will restore balance, launching him/her into a mission against antagonistic forces (inner, personal, extra-personal) to obtain the object of desire” (McKee 152). Georgiana's path is directly influenced by this disruption caused by her mother's announcement, wanting to take care of her siblings to the best of her

abilities (conscious desire) and to enjoy teenage life (unconscious desire). The two desires (conscious and unconscious) often come into conflict during the narrative arc of the documentary: Georgiana unconsciously wants to be free from domestic difficulties, difficulties that her mother would have had to solve had she lived with her children. One of the central themes of the documentary is Georgiana's adolescence: throughout the film, we observe her watching soap operas on TV while she cooks, we see her with friends who brush her hair, and we witness her as she falls in love. To each of the moments mentioned above, the director adds a scene in which Georgiana has to take care of her younger siblings. Georgiana oscillates between the world of a teenager and that of a young mother.

Director Teodora Mihai uses the mechanisms of observational documentary film for many of the scenes in the film, such as the one that takes place in the bathroom, where Georgiana and her middle sister are having fun, splashing and joking with each other. The operator films the entire scene using a long focal length, the camera being placed in another room, with the entire action captured through a door frame. Knowing that the presence of the camera is far away, Georgiana and her sister allow themselves to speak directly, joke, and behave almost as they would if a documentary was not being filmed about their lives. The girls' dialogue is much more direct and lively than other conversations held so far in the film. In this scene, Georgiana becomes a teenager once again, the relationship with her sister being fraternal, not parental.

To film the interior of the apartment, Teodora Ana Mihai uses a nominal aspect ratio of 2.35:1. This wide aspect ratio of the image is used for practical reasons: capturing the interior of a small, crowded apartment as completely as possible, and for artistic reasons: the presence of many characters in the frame emphasises the close bonds that are established between brothers and sisters. Georgiana is the only one framed alone in the shots, while the brothers and sisters are mostly filmed as a group, as a single unit, dependent on Georgiana and her affection. She is exposed to several risks throughout the narrative as she experiences personal, extra-personal, and inner conflicts. An example of a scene where the director deals with Georgiana's internal and personal conflict takes place when the older sister is putting on her make-up to go out. The cameraman shoots the beginning of the scene using a long focal length; we see a close-up of Georgiana applying foundation. The next shot is a wide one, showing the interior of the entire children's bedroom. Georgiana steps in to reassure the crying youngest brother, Stelian, that she will return. She heads back to

the bathroom to continue applying her makeup. Stelian won't stop crying, as he feels abandoned for a second time – if his mother left him behind, now he sees his older sister leaving too. Georgiana's dilemma is three-dimensional: she can abandon her role as a sister-mother to live as her friends do, she can devote herself entirely to family life to replace and heal the trauma of her mother's absence, or she can place the decision between the two options and live out her adolescence while fulfilling, as well as she can, the role of family leader. Georgiana's decision to go out, to have a partner, to spend time with her friends, is not one that can be morally qualified from the outside. Robert McKee observes that we as viewers must understand that a human being is only capable of acting toward the good and right that he or she has come to believe in or has been able to rationalise (McKee 194).

The climax of the film is represented by the return of the mother. The family reunion is filmed using a short focal length, and the camera is held on the shoulder. Cinematographer Joachim Philipe compositionally closes the shot and thus places us in the position of close observers of the action. This type of framing allows us to observe the scene without being directly involved, providing a distance that we use for analysis and introspection, without being thrown into the middle of the events. Georgiana is detached from the event of her mother's return, being much more interested in her own existential journey. The only one who accepts close physical contact with their returning mother is Stelian, the youngest child in the family. He is taken into his mother's arms, but during the embrace, he avoids looking at her and treats her with reluctance. She asks him why he does not enjoy her presence or look at her directly, likely because Stelian perceives her emotionally as a stranger. However, he is the one who needs affection the most and ultimately accepts his mother's presence. In contrast, the rest of the siblings view their relationship with their parents as instrumental and detached. The film's ending features a telephone conversation. We hear the mother planning another departure to Italy. This resolution throws Georgiana into conflict once again: although she needs to experience her own life through personal experiences, she will be forced to take on the responsibility of leading the family again.

Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu analyse the independence of women in Romania, from war and fascism to Soviet occupation, from the establishment of communism and the development of nationalist communism to the rebirth of democracy. Romanian women relied much less on men, who usually assumed a secondary role in the household, either because they were away at war (their fathers)

or at work (husbands). Many women of the transition generation were the main source of family income in the 1990s, when many men lost their jobs (Bucur and Miroiu 305). This state of affairs is also observed in Teodora Mihai's film, where the eldest sister takes on the role of mother, caring for the household and the children, while her actual mother takes on the role of breadwinner, being absent from the household. The film explores this new reality and its effects on the development of teenage Georgiana and the upbringing of her younger siblings.

5. Participation versus cinematic dissimulation

Laura Căpățână-Juller and Ana Teodora Mihai use distinct methods to present their arguments on screen. Whether we observe Laura Căpățână-Juller's fluid compositions and interactive dramatisation, or we analyse Ana Teodora Mihai's controlled reconstruction of scenes from her subjects' reality, both directors invite spectators to experience new ways of building relationships with the characters and the filmic action. These relationships differ from those circumscribed by the conventional hierarchies of fiction films, which are usually built around an assumption of directorial authority. Grimshaw and Ravetz note that within the observational-interactive documentary film, we witness firsthand an attempt to cede control of the film, transforming it into a fluid process shaped by the subjects' interventions, the interruption of unexpected or spontaneous events, and the viewer's empathic or imaginative participation (8). Using observation (seeing, hearing, feeling) and interpretation (what sense can be made of it?), the viewer, much like the filmmaker, develops a complex relationship with what is represented (Grimshaw and Ravetz 124). This method of experiencing a story erodes the boundary between the filmmaker, the subjects, and the audience.

However, multiple differences can be noticed between the films analysed here: if Teodora Mihai prefers a more formalist approach, combining techniques specific to fiction filmmaking with documentary practices, Laura Căpățână assumes a participatory and active perspective in the drama represented. The director of *Waiting for August* prefers to superimpose a scenario inspired by the observed actions onto the filmed reality. The opportunities for direct representation are few but genuine. In this form of documentary filmmaking, the relationship between the social actors and the filmmaker is unequal, as the filmmaker has the power to determine the course of the story. In contrast, Laura Căpățână adopts a totally different approach, placing herself on the same level as her characters. The director of

the film *Aici...adică acolo* uses the camera to position herself alongside the social actors she follows. This participatory dimension allows the two sisters, Ani and Sanda, to have a much more open and truthful attitude in their interactions with the filmmaker.

6. Shared directorial perspective

The complexities of these directorial perspectives are explored by philosopher Sybille Krämer in her 2016 article “Truth in Testimony: Or Can a Documentary Film ‘Bear Witness?’ Some Reflections on the Difference between Discursive and Existential Truth,” in which she argues that testimony becomes epistemically valid when it can be verified by receivers through their own epistemic abilities such as memory, perception, and reasoning (31). The assumption that testimony can generate any truth is questionable, as testimony is a fictionalised form of reality rather than an absolute truth. Thus, there is no causal connection between the observational documentary and the observed historical world, only a contract of faith in the testimony presented to viewers by the filmmakers, similar to the one we have with a text of fiction. In Krämer’s search for a new model of testimony, she explores a framework put forward by philosopher Søren Kierkegaard: the truth of a testimony lies in the authority of the sender, an authority validated by a divine entity (Krämer 33). Krämer uses Kierkegaard’s model to explain existential truth, where the witness does not just verbally testify to an action but lives it, with authority derived from their existential experience of the events testified to. Krämer identifies a weak point in Kierkegaard’s model, as the role of authority in transmitting the message must be validated by a belief that receivers voluntarily accept (Krämer 33). Thus, this type of testimony presupposes a convention where receivers must suspend their own epistemic knowledge, replacing it with the authority of the one who enunciates or acts. So, the knowledge they receive through testimony becomes subordinate to an authority.

Krämer identifies a model of appropriating knowledge through witnessing that does not assume a top-down relationship but a balanced one—the ‘second person model of witnessing.’ The author uses the social theory of knowledge, which associates testimony with concepts such as social interaction manifested through trust (Krämer 34). In the second-person model of witnessing, authority is no longer imposed but is a product of social interactions that build bonds of trust. Operating with this new model, the witness is no longer assertive. Testimony is rather an

assurance by which the sender guarantees the intended statement to the receivers. Receivers can recognize the authority of the sending witness only if they accept this guarantee, thus building trust in the witness's authority (Krämer 34). Krämer points out that the processes mentioned above can occur when the witness-transmitter does not just report facts but directly targets the receivers (Krämer 35). The model proposed by Krämer is based on the direct and unmasked mode of address that the witness uses to involve and engage the receivers of the testimony in a genuine social relationship of knowledge acquisition.

Applying the model of second-person testimony, we realise that the observational documentary cannot issue arguments vis-à-vis the historical world as long as the filmmaker constructs a testimony from a position of authority. Thus, Teodora Ana Mihai's way of engaging her characters and their historical reality may seem uneven. The director claims a non-intrusive observation into the historical world she is documenting. In other words, she asks the receivers to accept a convention whereby her and her crew's presence is absent from the world she documents, and the characters are engaging each other naturally. So, the receivers are involved in a relationship through which they are supposed to suspend their own epistemic experiences vis-à-vis the proposed theme and experience the filmic text as a historical reality. This way of transferring knowledge lacks the epistemic proofs that the receivers and viewers would have, especially the receiver-emitter social interaction that results from the non-assertive nature of the transmitter. Thus, Mihai's formalist approach, favouring cinematic framing and a rigid narrative arc often imposed onto the historical reality, does not favour the communication of assurance guaranteed directly by the author. The masking of the directorial perspective and the refusal to address the audience directly can make the observational documentary film problematic from the point of view of constructing common knowledge. The viewers' experience is authoritatively substituted with the author's proposal, their epistemic experience being manipulated by the transmitter through various cinematic techniques.

In *Aici...adică acolo*, the director proposes a different perspective and stance. The committed directorial perspective, located next to the protagonists, helps Sanda acknowledge the futility of her parents' efforts abroad; the unfinished but enormous construction of the house is associated with the loss of family unity. Thus, the director actively participates in Sanda's experiences, becoming the young girl's confidante in the documentary. Sanda re-evaluates her parents' decisions, concluding that the

pursuit of wealth has cost the family unity. Through direct testimony, Laura Căpățână-Juller provides an assurance by which she vouches for the statement proposed to the receivers, thus building knowledge based on the interaction between her presence in the film, the characters, and viewers. Marion Froger develops this concept by referring to the cultural-anthropological phenomenon of the gift. Froger believes that in the case of documentary films, the informational value of the image is subordinated to the function of the film to build community connections between the person filmed, the filmmaker, and the audience (Froger 76). The present directorial perspective, assumed within the film's text, can deliver such knowledge by placing the author's voice on the same level as the people filmed and the viewers. Once the filmmakers occupy space in the documentary film, they can take actions that themselves become direct witnesses to the historical world, providing receivers with guarantees related to their proposed claims.

Communal knowledge can be realised when these testimonies of truth are available for argumentation and epistemic proof by spectators. If the filmmaker takes an active and assumed role within the film by engaging the proposed theme directly, this context invites such a relationship. Krämer points out that truth is not attributed to simple sentences but to statements produced in dialogue situations (29). Thus, the acknowledged presence of the filmmakers in the documentary film represents such a dialogue, a way of direct communication with the receivers of the film. Krämer identifies a condition that must be met to propose a true argument: "receivers must be enabled to separate the genesis of the argument from its validity" (30). The active and assumed perspective of director Laura Căpățână-Juller in the film does not claim the assertive superior position of an authoritative argumentative testimony but rather proposes an exploration of a particular vision of the historical world. A documentary film in which the filmmakers have an active presence inside the filmic text, using fluid camera work, reframing shots, and vocal interventions from behind the camera, can differentiate the process of the genesis of the proposed truth in relation to its validity.

The empathetic immersion in the world of Ani and Sanda leads us to reflect on their drama from the inside, while Teodora Mihai's formalist approach gives the viewer a safety net from which to elaborate a critical understanding of the narrative. The two documentaries facilitate a unique experience through which we come to understand what Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu define as the transformations that women experienced in the years of the Romanian transition (253). Both Laura Căpățână-Juller and Ana Teodora Mihai manage to capture the capital role that

female characters occupy in contemporary Romanian society, building and reclaiming the cinematic feminist perspective on contemporary Romanian society and representing women as embodied subjects of their own experience and desires.

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