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Cinematic Dissidence: Copel Moscu's Essay Subversiveness in Ceaușescu's Romania

Abstract: This article explores Copel Moscu's short essay films *Evening Classes / Seraliștii* (1982) and *A Day Like Any Other / Va veni o zi* (1985), analysing how a critical and political perspective was developed by the filmmaker under the inquisitive view of the communist regime's censorship. Moscu worked for the Sahia Film Studio production house, the official mouthpiece of the communist regime which employed documentarists to film and present the regime's achievements. He worked within these state-imposed limitations, managing to avoid the studio's directives by treating the reality he filmed in a highly creative manner. The two short essay films above-mentioned have a common denominator: as they depict the working lives of proletarians, a new and personal perspective is constructed by the filmmaker who employs associative editing practices, creating and cultivating a space of in-betweenness that engages viewers in a dialogue. This dialogue was carefully coded by Moscu to be able to bypass the censors employed by the state-owned production house. The dialogic form was a self-reference tool for the director who took the reality he filmed and rearranged it through creative editing. As a result, his own self was revealed to the viewers, and his condition of an artists subjected to censorship became clear. His evading practices of the subject matter imposed by the state became the means through which the director signaled oppressive practices. Moscu hoped to create meaning through a fluid interchange with the viewers, by which his personal experience and perspectives shone through. His aim was to criticise the political regime.

Keywords: essay film, subversiveness, communist censorship, associative montage, self-reference.

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Copel Moscu's Essay Films: Criticising the Regime from Within Ceaușescu's Romania

Copel Moscu is one of Romania's most prolific filmmakers of the 1980s generation. His filmography spans over two decades, starting out with short non-fictional films. Most of his early works were

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produced by the Alexandru Sahia Film Studio, the main documentary film studio of socialist Romania, established at the beginning of the 1950s. The studio documented daily life and the evolution of the communist regime over the course of four decades, in compliance with the directives and the boundaries imposed by the institution's political mandate (Brădeanu 2). Throughout its four decades of existence, the studio was regarded as an official mouthpiece of the regime, an institution directly involved in the social and political pedagogy practiced by the socialist state. The documentarists were the main category of film professionals called upon to present the so-called 'progress of communism'. They immersed themselves in a world undergoing profound transformation envisaged by the Ceaușescu regime to bring Romania closer to the dictator's utopian societal visions: from overindustrialisation, to the building of new cities and neighbourhoods meant to house the large displaced rural populations and the creation of the new model of a human being.

Working within these dire conditions, Moscu managed to use the essay film as a tool of cinematic dissidence. Laura Rascaroli sees the essay film as the expression of a personal, critical reflection on a problem or a set of problems ("The Essay Film" 35). In accordance, Moscu's film work does not try to present the achievements of communist Romania – instead, he offers an in-depth, personal, and thought-provoking reflection of the times he lives in. Moscu's success lies in his ability to entertain a hidden dialogue with the film viewers. In almost all of his short essays Moscu introduces an enunciator spokesperson for himself, editing together bits from interviews and carefully selected music parts with the images of the subject and social actors. Nora M. Alter, in *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction*, claims that the essay film is ambiguous. More specifically,

[essay films] draw the spectator into an intricate process whereby the perspective of the filmmaker is folded onto the spectators' own in the production of signification. The meaning generated is not only relational but also open-ended, an area of possibility where the spectator plays an ever-greater role. Unlike the relatively clear line of argumentation developed in documentary productions, the essay film's reader calls into question the very possibility of a single narrative logic or perspective. (7).

This kind of cinematic dialogue involves and demands a degree of self-reference from the filmmaker and from the viewers alike. Bill Nichols suggests that film is a simulacrum or external trace of the production of meaning which we ourselves undertake every day ("The Voice of Documentary" 27). Moscu foregrounds the active production of meaning, usually by using a vococentric system, heightening our conscious sense of self. The director edits together audio interviews creating an audio narrative separate from the visual one. Thus, sound and image convey opposing meanings. The director reveals his thinking by means of the disjunction created. The self-awareness that is reached while watching the films is another blow to the propagandistic system. Film viewers question what is shown on screen, using

their own set of experiences and norms—thus, the communist propaganda wall crumbles and individual freedom of thought is encouraged.

Rascaroli (*How the Essay Film Thinks* 5) and Nora Alter (*Essay Film After Fact and Fiction* 15) point to the tendency of the essay film to proliferate in times of social crisis. Therefore, the need for a complex and hidden cinematic dialogue between filmmakers and viewers can be interpreted as a grasp of intellectual freedom during the 1980s period in Romania. Moscu's works are based on a loose structure, a fluctuating meaning-creating mechanism. Rascaroli states that this kind of construction is intended to engage each viewer (as an individual and not as a member of an anonymous, collective audience) in a dialogical relationship with the enunciator, to make him/her become active, intellectually and emotionally, and interact with the text (*How the essay film thinks* 36). Moscu appeals to his viewers and to their humanism; he works with the assumption of a certain unity of the human experience which allows two subjects to meet and communicate on the basis of this shared experience. Moscu uses what Alter describes as pulling the spectator into the film by requiring him/her to invest meaning based on the relation with the signifying elements or narratives (*Essay Film After Fact and Fiction* 7). Establishing a common communicational ground, Moscu's films have become favourites among film goers, always eager to enter into a dialogue with the work, awaiting the next rebellious clue the filmmaker might insert in his essays.

I propose an in-depth analysis of Moscu's essay films works *Evening Classes / Seraliștii* (1982) and *A Day Like Any Other / Va veni o zi* (1985), the latter being a short essay which was never released, as it was deemed unworthy of distribution by the Sahia Studio's censorship board after a few exhibitions in film theatres. In time, Moscu's cinematic works evolved towards a radical form of essay, as his most subversive work, *A Day Like Any Other*, proves. Both essay films allow me to understand how the director honed his craft and became an actual threat to the communist regime of that time. I will analyse the meaning-making cinematic system he develops and employs in these two films in order to create his politically subversive messages. These two early works give an idea of the scale of Moscu's developing essayistic techniques and his growing distrust and disgust with the system.

Evening Classes (1982): Experimenting with the Essay Film and the Limits of Vococentrism

Evening Classes is the first film made by the political director Copel Moscu. The short essay film tells the story of a group of miners who wish to visit the seaside for once in their lifetimes. They express the need to relax after working in the mines by day and attending high school classes in the evening. Ultimately, the group of miners manages to get to the Romanian seaside, but unfortunately they arrive during a windy and cold winter day.

Moscu uses this first film as a way to represent himself and his own attitudes towards the system. As the workers are caught between the work hardships they face in order to meet the state imposed quota of coal production and the need to get an education, Moscu comments on the precarious situation of the working class, whose members are trapped within the communist regime paradoxes. What is of interest to me is how Moscu's technique of essayistic self-representation manages to avoid the censorship of the Sahia studio. The state censors were more inclined to accept the essay film form than a *vérité* or direct cinema endeavour, the essay being a highly subjective and freer practice with regards to the processing of the image and audio tracks. In her chapter titled "*Cottonopolis*: Experimenting with the Cinematographic, the Ethnographic and the Essayistic," Cathy Greenhalgh arrives at an interesting conclusion regarding her own work. She claims that essay filmmaking praxis incorporates "an improvisational aesthetic within a specific structure which privileges affective experience and contemplation, reflexivity and a poetics of revelation, providing uncertain answers rather than polemic ones" (80). Moscu may have been accepted by the censorship board due to the fact that he was perceived as an active producer of cinematic discourse rather than a neutral reporter of real-life situations found on the field.

Evening Classes opens with a scene that takes place in a classroom. We see how an instructor teaching astrology to his miner pupils, presenting them the Solar System and the Milky Way, and stressing the fact that the class students are also small parts of the known universe. Right after this scene, Moscu edits in early morning work routines performed by miners. As audio support, Moscu mixes an operatic aria with intra-diegetic sounds from the underground of the mine. The non-diegetic music layer in non-fiction essay films produces a tension not only between the on-screen and the off-screen, but also between the real and the imaginary" (Alter, "Composing in Fragments" 25). By adding non-diegetic music Moscu inserts fragments of what Peter Kilroy calls intersubjectivity, basically a reflexive undercutting of one's own enunciating position (128).

The short film progresses with shots from the mines, edited together to form a sequence that depicts the hardships of working in an underground coal mine. Images of miners drilling, pushing carts, carrying coal loads into underground elevators and operating machinery are coupled with reflective voice-over bits, taken from interviews, in which we hear the workers reflecting on their condition as people. A man states that "the best qualities of a miner are being *strong, well-built and stupid*"—an ironic standpoint hinting at the fact that the regime might have wanted workers to be exactly that.

In a scene in which we observe miners waiting for the small wagons that will get them underground, the audio track plays the testimony of a man elaborating on his high hopes of seeing the sea, describing the feelings he hopes to experience once he is there, witnessing the sunrise. Moscu follows what Rascaroli terms the constant interpellation of the essay film structure ("The Essay Film" 36). While in interactive documentaries the argument unfolds

on screen through the engagement of the filmmaker with the characters on specific issues, the viewers being most of the times enmeshed with the filmmaker in this process of exploring the cinematic world alongside the camera, Rascaroli sees the essay film quite differently: “[...] rather than pretending to discover things, the essayist asks many questions and only offers few or partial answers (“How the Essay Film Thinks” 16).

In *Evening Classes*, Moscu was sent to film the lives of the miners and he was granted access solely to the mine sites. Visually, he had to work within a very narrow field, which is why he opted to creatively exploit the audio track. The last scene of the film is the most revealing what Copel Moscu wants to achieve, namely the use of cinematic language to represent his political disdain towards the Ceaușescu regime. The last sequence starts with a scene in which we hear the miners acknowledging that they are well-paid, thus there is not much unrest among them but they miss the freedom they experienced before being employed and sent to evening classes. The images used to illustrate these voice over passages are shots of men exiting the mine, inspecting Moscu's film camera placed on a large tripod. The insertion of the camera is a way in which the director voices his active presence in the filmmaking process. The camera in the shot can be interpreted as a very direct, on-camera presence of Moscu himself, a privileged tool for the filmmaker's articulation of his own thoughts. The miners who gaze into the viewfinder of the huge film camera switch sides with Moscu, in a way gazing at themselves. Thus, the essay film does not bind the filmmaker to the rules and parameters of traditional documentary practice, and as Alter observes, it gives free rein to the filmmaker's imagination, with all its artistic potentiality (*The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction* 18). Moscu creates a fluid relationship with his subjects, collaborating with them to tell the story intersubjectively.

In the last scene of the sequence we see the miners and their wives and partners waiting for the sun to rise over the sea, yet they are wearing overcoats, hats and gloves because of the cold and windy seaside winter weather. Through a pan, in medium shot, we see the faces of the miners and their partners looking forward, gazing towards the horizon. The panoramic movement stops when one of the men reaches for his chest pocket, pulls out a pair of sunglasses and puts them on. Although the weather is cloudy, windy and cold, this particular miner makes a gesture of insubmission he will experience the seaside sunrise as he had imagined it back home. The miner wears his police styled sunglasses and gazes at the horizon, then turns and looks right into the camera lens; this is the moment when Moscu freezes the frame. The director manages to capture on film a small act of rebellion, as the miner will not let the system pervert his dream; he refuses to succumb to the failed seaside trip experience and hangs on to his individuality and right to experience happiness. The sunglasses give him an American movie star of the 1960s iconic look, staring the communist system directly in the eye by looking straight at the camera.

The music heard over the last pan shot is *Also sprach Zarathustra*, composed in 1896 by Richard Strauss. This choice of music refers to Stanley Kubrick's cinematic masterpiece,

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968). Within the sci-fi film, this particular piece of music is used in scenes when the sun rises and shines over the Solar System, a site that our miner character witnesses for himself. Moscu ends the film as he started it: whereas in the first scene a teacher tells his miner pupils that they are part of the universe, in the last scene one of the miners truly witnesses this fact for real. Rascaroli analyses the visual system of making an argument within the essay film form. The author tries to demonstrate that the essay film is a dialectical form which thinks not exclusively through verbal commentary, but also via an audiovisual and narrative disjunctive practice that creates textual gaps from which new meanings are allowed to emerge (*How the Essay Film Thinks* 175). Rascaroli sees framing as the process through which the film's main theme may not be evident, but must be looked for. She believes that this process is always a fabrication, representing the selection of a perspective ("The Essay Film" 171). Moscu invites us to enter this world where meaning can be grasped only after we, as viewers, produce our own associative schemata from the visual, the verbal and the music that the director shows us. The last scene draws a lot on the viewers' associative abilities, as the musical support gives an entirely new meaning to the miner's stare at the ocean and the look at the camera. Analysing Jean-Luc Godard's use of music in one of his documentaries, Alter concludes that the critical use of music can disrupt the continuum of everyday life and encourages recollection ("Composing in Fragments" 35). Thus Moscu gives us access to his personal perspective on the matter, a perspective that has its true meaning outside the action that is filmed and edited.

The last shot from *Evening Classes* differs from the rest of the film, as the audio track is reduced to Strauss's music *Also sprach Zarathustra*. In his article "The Limits of Vococentrism: Chris Marker, Hans Richter and the Essay Film (2012)", David Oscar Harvey observes that an understanding of the essay film in vococentric terms minimises the system of signification specific to cinema (8). The author points out that vococentrism takes away "the complex vagaries the cinematic image conveys to a certain situation" (10), not permitting the non-vococentric elements to challenge the status quo authority of a transparent profilmic reality. Harvey pushes the notion of vococentrism further, stating that the very rhetoric of the essay film is constructed by the logic and nature of the voice-over (7). In Moscu's *Evening Classes* we can identify a preference for a leading voice-over as a meaning-making process. The voice is the main narrative drive that brings new elements into the construction of the film, while the images have a secondary role—that of illustrating and sometimes pointing out certain aspects aforementioned by the voice over. However, Moscu's last shot from the film, consisting of a pan filmed in middle shot distances itself from the literary or the linguistic way of communicating, drawing only on the power of argument and meaning making that cinema has. The miner who puts on the sunglasses and stares at the horizon encapsulates all the messages that Moscu tried to convey earlier through the use of the audio track comprising interviews edited together.

The iconic shot shows us the rebellion and political resistance that was brewing among the group of miners and the working class as a whole. *Evening Classes* was released in the year 1982, the last decade of the Ceaușescu regime, a decade that was mostly characterised by economical shortages generated by overindustrialization. In “The Strange History of Romanian communism (2016)” Lucian Boia describes the 80s as a period of cold and darkness. Large quantities of raw materials and energy were imported in order to keep the gigantic industrial system afloat, while the same amount of goods needed to be exported in order to pay for the imports (182), a zero sum game. These excesses were made possible by exploiting the working class to the maximum.

Moscu's film breaks up with the cinematic practices of the 70s, a decade characterised by films focused on entertainment, in line with the communist propaganda. In his PhD thesis about Alexandru Tatos, Matei Lucaci-Grunberg observes that the 70s were defined by film themes such as the workers' problems, the glorious world of the factories, the communist fighters who opposed the fascist Antonescu regime and more universal themes like love, revenge and betrayal (22). Sergiu Nicolaescu was one of the most prolific Romanian directors from that period, managing to direct more than 15 films in a decade, mostly comedies and thrillers. These escapist products were designed by the system to act as a break from the daily routines of the working class.

Moscu's essay *Evening Classes* comes from a different cinematic lineage, representing a direct critique of the system by engaging the viewers in a dialogue with the characters and the filmmaker. The viewers build the argument alongside the director, they are involved and live a shared cinematic experience that sheds new light on a broken system. The film's last shot, seen in freeze frame, acquires photographic properties, becoming what Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, describes as a simultaneous past and present lived experience (75). Barthes claims that a photograph has the power to resurrect some past realities whereas a film disrupts this phenomenon because it is a flux of frames, in which one photograph is pushed towards another and is prevented from claiming its own reality (81). Moscu manages to endow the last frame of the film with the qualities of a photograph; his short film ends like a photo book and the last frame encompasses the whole theme of the book. Thus the viewer has time to ponder and interact in a different manner with the visual material. Following Barthes's line of thought one could say that the last shot of the miner wearing sunglasses and staring at the viewers is a gaze that comes from the past and claims its own present tense reality.

The musical background also places the scene within the essayistic bounds. By contrasting the wondering gaze of the miners with the epochal rhythms of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Moscu produces what Alter terms a complex “thought that at times is not grounded in reality but can be contradictory, irrational and fantastic” (*The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction* 23). Vivian Sobchack states that “films make sense through a similar manner of perceptual orientation that the subject relies upon to comprehend the world” (“The Scene

of the Screen” 100). Thus, our experience with the non-vococentric film elements takes us a step further into our dialogue with the film’s subject matter, sampling the essay as a slice of life via our own acquired perception. To be precise, when the miner stares at the ocean and shortly afterwards stares us in the eye by looking into the camera lens, we perceive his way of making sense of it all, we understand that his inner mechanisms are using our own perception arsenal.

The space between the camera’s gaze (as well as that of the viewers) and the man suddenly becomes habitable, informed with the real possibility of bodily movement and engagement, infused with lived temporality. This meeting results in an accumulation of experience, a shared body of present tense experience that will result in a direct dialogue with(in) the film. In her book *The Address of the Eye* (1992), Vivian Sobchack refers to the moving picture viewing as “the expression of experience by experience” (3). *Evening Classes* manages to offer the viewers, on the last scenes of the film, an experience of mutual possession of the experience of perception. This practice became feared by state censors because of the mutual capacity for possession of experience achieved through cinema’s common structures of embodied existence. During communist times the state-owned media tried to transform reality into a spectacle, thus practices where spectators got access to an alternate experience of perception, like Copel Moscu’s work, were quickly banned from distribution of any kind.

A Day Like Any Other (1985): Censoring the Editing

Moscu used the Sahia Studio system of production to create his own rebellious diary depicting the flaws in the Romanian communist society —from the overindustrialisation of the economy that led to the lack of consumer goods, to the forced relocation of the rural population towards cities,¹ and to the infamous Decree 770 from 1967 which encroached on women’s freedom of choice, to have an abortion or not. Moscu managed to direct no less than five short essay films during the time he worked for Saha Studio. One of the films, entitled *A Day Like Any Other* (1985), was banned from distribution, as the state censorship intervened and deemed it too subversive to be exhibited after only a few public screenings. This essay film made use of the power inherent to non-vococentric cinema mechanisms, especially associative montage, and this proved too much for the authorities to bare.

The film opens with a hand-held tracking shot depicting a building that functions as a kindergarten for the children of the workers of a turkey farm. The hand-held camera

1 According to Lucian Boia, Nicolae Ceaușescu had plans to reduce the number of villages from 13,000 to 5,000 in 30 years (153).

movement is a way for Moscu to take the viewers alongside him into this film. They take part, like the children, in another day at school. The choice of a wide lens allows for a clear depth of field, another way to make the viewers take an active role in the action, appearing to occupy the same space of the image itself. The short opening credits scene ends with an emblematic image: in the foreground there is a baroque-style street lamp, while in the background, a large industrial grain container, newly constructed, encroaches upon the lines of the street lamp. Moscu, who also operated the camera, chose a telephoto lens to capture this image. His choice of focal length brings both planes of the image closer together: the two elements are closer than in real life and the viewers understand the contrast between them. As the essay film was made in 1985, a time when the Ceaușescu regime was turning into a strange and broken dictatorship, the red bourgeoisie was enjoying a “feudalistic” lifestyle while the rest of the country toiled in poverty, working in the industrial, agricultural and public sectors. In the film *A Day Like Any Other*, framing becomes a performative act of essayistic reflection, an active practice of thinking made by the filmmaker, uncovering the essayistic endeavour. What is distinctive of the essay film is its shifting perspectives, its positioning, and its distance from the world as Laura Rascaroli contends: “[...] the visible result of this labor is that the essay film detaches objects from their background, thus introducing a gap of potentiality between object and world” (*How the Essay Film Thinks* 190).

The title sequence of the film makes use of the formalist and associative montage techniques once used by the Russian avant-garde. In “Cinematic Expression: A Look at Eisenstein’s Silent Montage,” John B. Kuiper states that the process of editing endows a sequence of shots with a discursive dimension of meaning that creates a complex chain of logical relationships in the mind of the viewers (39). Kuiper observes how the avant-garde Russian director Sergei Eisenstein capitalised upon “the metaphoric quality that can arise from the juxtaposition and comparison of mental attitudes arising from two or more shots edited together (40)”. Much like Eisenstein, Moscu hoped to create new meaning by editing together disjunctive images and sounds, for example a concert hall with an egg—a music conductor welcomes the children to music classes, while the camera, in a wide angle tracking shot, films egg cartons. From a framing standpoint, the shot of the conductor and the class is similar to the one depicting the egg cartons. The musical background is continuous, both images sharing the same chorus. Moscu uses the formalist montage technique of association to create a new message—he risks a lot by suggesting that the children of communist workers are standardised by means of the education they receive at the hands of an oppressive regime, made to think and act collectively instead of discovering their own individuality. Like eggs in a carton, they are all made to be the same, picked carefully and made ready for distribution and consumption.

In the next scene the music is abruptly interrupted by the intra-diegetic sound of the poultry farm. A wide shot of an empty corridor marks the start of another sequence as the

next image depicts chicks hatching from their eggs. The audio track consists of a man's monologue centred on a philosophical enunciation of the human condition, reflecting upon our origins and final destination as a species. The audio monologue gives the images a new meaning and dimension. As editing these two pieces together encourages the spectator to fill in a gap, a relationship is created in "a space of in-betweenness" (Rascaroli, "How the Essay Film Thinks" 32). The interest lies in addressing the dialectical tension created between juxtaposed or interacting filmic elements and the gaps that this method of juxtaposition opens in the text. The spaces of in-betweenness created by the ways in which the essay film is constructed are key elements in moving beyond logocentrism and understanding the inner workings of this genre.

This practice is also used in the interactive non-fiction film (Nichols, *Representing Reality* 49). The interactive mode of meaning-making lies in the relationship established between filmmaker, social actor and viewer. This form of documentary film also appears to have a performative nature, the present tense of the encounters within the film creating a witness-centred argument, rather than a voice-of-God authorial one. The essay film also makes use of the interaction between filmmaker, viewers and characters, but in a different manner. Its way of creating meaning changes the traditional position of the creator and the spectator: the creator provides the viewers with tools to create their own meaning, facilitating a flow of creation, and inviting them to establish a deep relationship with the filmic material, thus becoming contributors/creators themselves.

The next scene in *A Day Like Any Other* is visually composed of close-ups of children watching a Looney Toon animation. Moscu cuts between the children's faces and the television images they are watching. It is not surprising that the cartoon they are enjoying depicts the canine character Pluto being violently modelled and bended by a mad scientist. The same procedure as in the previous scene is employed here in terms of the audio track. The film viewers listen to a monologue edited together from the many interviews Moscu had conducted. This monologue praises the order that the kindergarten brought into the lives of the children and their families. The interviewee, never seen on camera, goes so far as to state that the children manage to bring order into their own families, thanks to the kindergarten way of forming them, as disciplined and law-abiding people. The film viewers are invited again to draw their own conclusions from the clashing of the video images and audio track.

In "Cine-Graphism: A New Approach to the Evolution of Film Language through Technology," Tom Gunning explains how "through editing the shot loses its relative autonomy of reference and reproduction and becomes a differential unit within a sequence, thus coming closer to a linguistic unit within an utterance" (196). This is a process Moscu perfectly understands and uses with great effect: after a close-up of a blonde child looking directly at the camera, a chiaroscuro wide shot of an interior site of the factory is edited in, accompanied by a sinister-sounding melody. Moscu's editing style is a mode of

self-representation, a way through which the director communicates his subjective view on the world he experiences, revealing and concealing himself at the same time. By following the cues provided by the film's editing, the viewers realise that Moscu manages to make a film about himself: he lets his disdain towards the regime transpire by means of his editing choices, while concealing his critical viewpoint in the cuts and shots he makes. To decipher his essay is to get to know the director and his inner *angst* towards a regime that threatens his world. As a documentarist, Moscu gains knowledge through the realities he films; through the act of filming he gains an intimate access to the world. Moscu not only manifests empathy towards the social actors he films, but he employs participatory engagement in the actions that are shown in order to build trust-based relationships. Belonging to several inner circles, the filmmaker needs to represent them to the viewers using his own viewpoint and experiences, an act increasingly difficult in a regime that became more and more opaque and closed in what regards the daily reality of Romanian life. Thus Moscu's personal point of view was less and less acceptable by the state censorship mechanism.

Copel Moscu makes use of the essay film's semi-documental nature in building the structure of this short film. Bill Nichols categorises the documentary in several modes: the poetic, the expository, the reflexive, the observational, the performative and the participatory (*Representing Reality* 33). Each way of dealing with the surrounding reality has its own particularities and involves a certain practice, the documentary director being situated in different relations with the filmed material. In the scene I am about to analyse, Moscu combines the expository mode with the observational and reflexive ones, the argument made by the film stemming from the clash between these two modes of documentary representation.

In one of the film's scene the viewers are introduced to the hard labour women are doing when separating the male from the female small turkey chicks. The voice-over narrator informs the viewers that this hard job is mostly performed by women, who seem to have the patience and dexterity required to separate the small chicks. Visually, the dreadful separation process is introduced by a series of wide tracking shots that are edited together. The viewers watch how the camera approaches the work benches by passing through scarcely-lit corridors, in a manner that brings to mind the work of the expressionistic filmmakers of the 1920s. While the voice-over comments upon the fitness of the women to perform the task, the viewers watch a strange composition depicting only the hands of a female worker going through small chicks relentlessly, like a machine which has no need of pausing. The last shot of the scene is wide and taken from a high angle. The composition is in tune with the message of the whole scene, consisting of a woman positioned in the lower left half of the screen, literally squashed by the chick-filled crates that face her and that have to be processed.

In the following scene, Moscu uses different angles to describe the separation process, editing together close shots of the women's hands and close-ups of their faces, with small

chicks being thrown into crates and camera movements that plunge the viewers into the depth of the large and dark bags where male chicks are being discarded. The voice-over, edited from interviews conducted with the women, explains the psychological torment they have to face while separating the small turkeys, knowing that the females will be exploited for egg production while the small males will be thrown in large bags and turned into food for the females to eat later. This sequence has a strong factual element to it, as the voice-over narration and the image cover the same idea, bringing the argument forward while working in a consensual manner.

However, Moscu abandons this expository documentary mode when editing a piece of voice-over in which one of the women workers explains explaining the hardships of finding a suitable husband, while the image track still depicts workers separating turkey chicks. The scene ends with another tracking shot, this time taken in outdoors and showing the faces and bodies of women workers. They chitchat, in what appears to be a work break. Moscu subtracted the diegetic sound of the women talking and substituted it for an eerie music. The director is not interested in the factual points of reality or in representing it as it is; he is more inclined toward using bits of reality to construct his own argument about the historical world that surrounds him. According to Rascaroli, essay film endeavours are often only held together by fluidity, “the unifying visual and conceptual force of the film’s probing of issues of history, society, identity, subjectivity, culture, art, and the cinema.” (46). Moscu does not edit images together to move towards a unified whole. On the contrary, he is more interested in the meaning generated by the impact of different images and sequences clashing, which he achieves by using the disjunctive role of associative montage. This authorial concept keeps the structure of the film together, letting new images spring out from the junctures of passing images. A good example of this practice is a scene where all the kindergarten children are in a hall, listening to an orchestra, learning about music. Moscu makes the audio and visual tracks clash, as he zooms out from a small child’s face in tears while the voice-over informs us about the great ways through which music brings serenity and empathy to a child’s character. After showing the children in distress, Moscu edits in shots of women workers relaxing in the factory yard. A new meaning springs from this alternation of shots: parents and children alike are being subjected to the will of a system, all designed and assigned to be working cogs in the state led mechanism. Alter sees the essay film as the primary vehicle through which critique is developed in audiovisual practice due to its capacity to denaturalise events, (*The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction* 13).

The film’s scenes and sequences are edited together in a manner similar to the one employed for single shots juxtaposition, with the same intent of developing a dialogue between creator and spectators, engaging the viewers in a constructive practice of understanding and decoding the cinematic choices made. A good instance for this kind of editing occurs right after the scene depicting the children in the music class. There Moscu introduces a sequence

in which the viewers see adult workers marching towards the factory where later on engage with the automated machines that process the turkeys, sacrificing them and hooking them up on conveyor belts in order to be distributed. The editing of the scene is disruptive, as the shots in which the workers approach the factory are filmed alternately from behind and from the front. The 180-degree editing rule is flawed intentionally, having a jarring effect on the viewers. The scene ends with a long tracking shot, depicting a man who is washing away the blood splashed by the turkeys. The audio track that accompanies this visual montage is Richard Wagner's aria, *Die Walküre* (1856). The triumphant Wagnerian music gives the entire scene a sarcastic tone, which is Moscu's take on reality.

This mix of audio and visual elements creates pauses or gaps into which the viewers may insert their own repertoire of images that are associated with Wagnerian opera while watching the visual flow of turkeys being killed. As in narrative cinema, these breaks are meant to forestall the relentless logic of automatically attributed meaning. The retardation of information —what Hitchcock calls frustration (Bordwell 44) —accesses entirely new levels in essay films, as Moscu positions himself not as a producer of images and schemata but as a critical spectator of the world as image (Rascaroli, *How the Essay Film Thinks* 66). Procedural and template schemata (a search of appropriate motivations and relations of causality, time and space) are substituted by associative schemata that generates an intellectual dialogue. This form of communication is established only when the spectator and filmmaker have the same level of cognitive involvement and both share previously acquired knowledge. The essay film is a performative venture by not having a clear progression; instead one posits a rather vague investigation, the essay film insisting that the viewers take part in the director's intellectual reflections. Consequently, the narrative becomes more volatile and shifts from a cause and effect logic towards a reflective oriented one.

The last scene of *A Day Like Any Other* starts with interior shots from inside the kindergarten. A male voice-over is heard; it belongs to the factory director, who is explaining that the kindergarten is his most prized achievement. He believes that the children who are educated there will identify with the poultry farm, always thinking of the factory as a good place that has always felt like home. Visually, a crane shot depicts the director and a teacher going through a class catalogue, probably monitoring the pupils' performance and grades. The last shot of the film depicts turkey carcasses that are hung up on a conveyer belt, all headless, featherless and with the same body size. The editing of the last two shots creates a new meaning as an original relationship is established between the two motifs explored in the film —the kindergarten and the turkey processing plant. By seeing the director monitoring the pupils' grades and then being presented with images of processed turkeys, one develops the idea that all is a creation of a controlled system where in the end we are all the same and will eventually mindlessly serve the said oppressive system. This new image is arrived at by the film viewers, through own procedural and template schemata. Moscu uses the associative

montage technique proficiently and creatively, bringing forth notions and images that are outside the reality he explored with the film camera, thus posing a threat for the oppressive Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime.

Conclusions

The essay film director Copel Moscu was seen by the communist regime as a potential threat because of the very nature of what the act of seeing means. Sobchack notes, in *The Address of the Eye*, that “the act of seeing is entwined intimately with the act of being, seeing incarnates being and connects it with the visible world in a living engagement” (51). Moscu managed to build a system of engagement with the world that implicates the context of choice, as the viewers are not just seeing the world but they get to inhabit it actively. Film goers and television spectators are thus granted access to the flaws of the communist regime; they are set free to think for themselves and construct complex relations with the world that is presented in the essay films, warping the fake and single image that was strived for by the central authorities' propaganda system. Moscu's processes of manifesting artistic freedom, of opposing an oppressive system from inside its own core, was too much to be allowed by the Ceaușescu dictatorship.

Sobchack acknowledges that “the condition of being conscious of the world is being a consciousness in it and sharing the materiality that provides consciousness with its objects as well as the grounds for its own subjective being” (*The Address of the Eye* 59). Moscu manages to induce in viewers a subjective consciousness of the world, often stressing the flaws and inadequacies of the communist dictatorship. It is worth mentioning that many Romanians knew of these facts, living and experiencing the dictatorship every day, but they never saw this situation presented so bluntly by the central media. Moscu managed to deliver his message directly to the regime through the essay form, thus pushing authorities to truly look into the world that they had created, making them aware of the scam that they truly were.

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