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Employing Theatrical Techniques in Documentary Film

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Abstract: This paper examines the intersection between documentary filmmaking and theatre, arguing that this fusion transcends traditional objective representations of reality. By incorporating elements of theatre, such as narrative structure, performance, and audience interaction, documentaries can offer deeper, more artistic explorations of complex realities and the human condition. Through the analysis of several films that exemplify this approach, the study demonstrates how theatrical techniques in documentary not only broaden the genre's artistic possibilities but also provide unique insights into historical, social, and personal contexts. This approach transforms documentaries into powerful tools for emotional and intellectual engagement, capturing the transformative journey of performers and their impact on both the film's subject and the audience, ultimately expanding the scope of documentary filmmaking.

Keywords: theatre, documentary, social impact, trauma representation, history revisited

Documentary filmmaking has, recently, expanded its means of expression by creatively incorporating theatrical techniques as new aesthetic ways of exploring reality, moving beyond traditional objective representations towards more meaningful artistic expressions. This approach not only depicts reality but also incorporates original narrative lines and audience reaction,

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while expanding the anthropological and observational perspective to include the creators of the performance (actors, amateurs, or professionals) and the director. The film narrative is amplified and its look benefits from capturing specific performances. This storytelling device expands the artistic possibilities within the genre, offering filmmakers new tools to engage with the complexities of the world.

Leading into this analysis are a few films that demonstrate the power of theatrical techniques in documentary filmmaking, confirming that the approach can provide unique insights into complex realities, making concrete elements such as war trauma, passage of time, social contexts. The case study films not only explore a range of difficult subjects but also offer a deeper understanding of the human condition by examining the transformative impact of performance on both participants and audiences. It also provides innovative and expressive tools for examining otherwise inaccessible past events. Through this more subtle, indirect approach the film offers a more nuanced and empathic perspective, as it finds a just tone for not preaching, but travelling through the characters' past and present experiences. The chosen case studies exemplify different dramaturgic approaches and their specific outcomes, according to the context they are in, historical, social, national or personal.

Theatre and documentary, while both potent mediums, engage audiences in distinct ways, employing different aesthetics and evoking varying emotional responses. Theatre offers a singular, immersive experience for a live audience, fostering immediate emotional and intellectual engagement through the shared presence of performers and spectators. The aesthetic of theatre is rooted in the immediacy of performance, the physicality of the actors, and the dynamic interplay between the stage and the audience, often prioritizing emotional intensity and catharsis.

Documentary, in contrast, extends engagement beyond the confines of a single performance by reaching a wider audience through the medium of film. Its aesthetic, rooted in cinematic techniques like editing, cinematography, and sound design, constructs a narrative that often incorporates factual and historical context, traditionally aiming to present reality in an objective way. While documentaries can evoke strong emotions, they generally aim for

a reflective or analytical engagement, balancing emotional impact with intellectual understanding. Crucially, when theatre is used as an aesthetic tool within a documentary, it broadens the film's scope to include both the audience and, significantly, the performers themselves as integral characters. By closely documenting the creative process, the performers' journey is captured in the film, transforming the performance's development into a profound character arc.

The focus of this paper are those specific documentaries that follow the buildup of a performance or that transform narrative elements with theatrically inspired techniques, such as the "tableaux vivants".

In the first category, three films are included, that use as a starting point the work on a text as a source material that creates an independent artistic entity. In 2019, theatre director Roza Sarkisian created *H-Effect*, a performance based on the classic *Hamlet* by Shakespeare, the modern *Hamlet Machine* by Heiner Müller and the dramatic experiences of five Ukrainians during the 2014-2018 war. The experience of bringing to life the complied text as well as the show is followed in *Hamlet Syndrome* (*Syndrom Hamleta*, 2022) written and directed by Elwira Niewiera and Piotr Rosolowski. In *Srbenka* (2018, written and directed by Nebojsa Slijepcević) the camera follows the rehearsals for a special performance, based on the text *Aleksandra Zec*, written and directed by the Croatian director Oliver Frljić, a play that challenges the Croatian official perspective of the war. In *Cesar Must Die* (*Cesare deve morire*, 2012, directed by Paolo and Vitorio Taviani) the starting point is Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* performed by inmates of Rebibbia, an Italian high security prison. These documentaries use as a starting point existing texts on which to graft the real, often traumatic experiences of the performers in order to enhance their political and social impact. These films explore the cathartic potential of role assumption and the actor-spectator dynamic, extending beyond mere stage portrayal.

In films such as *Hamlet Syndrome*, *Srbenka* and *Cesar Must Die* the stage becomes a space for trauma processing, fostering empathy through witnessing the actors' journeys. The initial texts narratives offer the space for confronting with performers' own issues and past. Rehearsals facilitate personal transformation and self-exploration, revealing the human-actor

duality and extending the audience beyond the actual stage. *Srbenka* sees performance's text emerge from actors' stories and real-life events, *Hamlet Syndrome* blends life experiences with the well-known lines – the classic "to be or not to be" bearing a different weight for survivors of life-death circumstances –, and *Cesare* intertwines inmates' past situations as Mafiosi with Shakespearean themes of murder and betrayal. These documentaries offer a multifaceted exploration of rehearsals and actors – social, therapeutic, theatrical, and cinematic – extending engagement beyond live theatre. They focus on catharsis from actor-role and actor-spectator interactions. The stage becomes a trauma-processing space, fostering audience empathy through protagonists' journeys. Rehearsals reveal the human-actor duality.

Another category focuses on building visual references, glimpses into the past or the imaginary. By staging different *tableaux vivants* based on historical photos or testimonies, documentaries like *For Me You Are Ceausescu* (*Pentru mine tu ești Ceaușescu,* 2021*,* directed by Sebastian Mihăilescu) and *Arsenie. An Amazing Afterlife* (*Arsenie. Viața de apoi*, 2023, written and directed by Alexandru Solomon) reinterpret historical narratives using diverse official documents, searching for the TRUTH in a past distorted by the present. Here, the contemporary reactions of the performers serve as societal mirrors, the "actors" becoming representative for a whole slice of the population.

By following the intricate process of constructing and deconstructing performances, these films invite viewers into a collection of human experiences and creativity. Through the documentary lens, theater emerges as not only a subject of study but also a powerful vehicle for addressing complex societal issues and facilitating personal transformation.

War, Trauma, and Theatrical Expression

Theatre and documentaries humanize complex issues like war, allowing individuals to confront their suffering and reorganize their lives. Each protagonist in *Hamlet Syndrome* grapples with their own trauma, seeking resolution and purpose beyond the stage. The film documents the collaborative process of creating director Roza Sarkisian's *H-Effect*, a theatrical performance

that integrates the personal narratives of five individuals – professional and amateur actors and war survivors from the 2014 Russo-Ukrainian conflict. It highlights the integration of lived experiences within the dramatic representation, using them on stage, but also as a psychological purge, a way of facing trauma. The resulting performance is presented only in fragments in the film that follows loosely the chronological evolution of rehearsals, inviting the audience of each of the protagonists' personal road. The aesthetic modernity and impact of *H-Effect* performance, despite being the actual goal, becomes secondary in the film's narrative arch.

Sarkisian integrates the protagonists' personal stories into the performance, drawing mental parallels between their wartime experiences and the text. She serves as both a catalyst for communication and as a character in the film, facilitating trust and managing difficult moments. The five stories are treated in a similar way and constitute a mosaic of perspectives. Slavik, captured and brutalized, was forced to choose between his friend's life and his own, a moment of dehumanization captured on video and replayed online. In the play, he is Hamlet, as he grapples with reclaiming his lost dignity and life. Katya, chose, after Maidan, to become a soldier, armed and ready to die rather than be captured, fighting with a grenade strapped to her chest, she bears both a physical scar and the emotional weight of her mother's potential rejection for her life choices. Roman, a paramedic, haunted by the grotesque reality of war's casualties, is viscerally thrown back into war and has a panic attack when a body bag is used as a prop, reliving the moment he found an exploded corpse lying in its own excrements. Rodion, an openly gay man, seeks refuge outside Ukraine from homophobia, only to find it persists, with the added pain of maternal rejection. Oxana, an actress, disillusioned with post-Maidan Ukraine, finds her liberal ideals in stark conflict with those who fought for a homeland, such as Katya, Slavik or Rodion. Their conflict, within the confinement of theatre, reflects the wider one, in the Ukrainian[1] society.

"Trauma is not easy to talk about. Despite the efforts and expectations of the «listeners», it cannot be squeezed into a ready-made narrative form. It

[1] The performance was constructed in 2019-2020. Due to the pandemic restriction, it was initially released as an online version in 2020, based on footage shot by DOP Piotr Rosolowski. *Hamlet Syndrome* developed from that footage.

breaks through into consciousness in the form of shattered fragments. It does not give in to logic and chronology, escapes from linearity. The construction of the performance is therefore a mosaic: a mosaic of stories, events, quotations from reality, memories and images," explains Sarkisian when talking about the project. "The background of this whole story is the war. You cannot run away from it, you cannot talk about it, but you cannot remain silent about it either"

In *Hamlet Syndrome* we follow the birth of a new text inspired by both Shakespeare and *Hamlet Machine*, as well as the lives of the participants. The classic text meets the extreme situations they have endured, and the concrete elements of the director's vision become trigger points onto which their own memories are grafted. For the protagonists, it is not easy to speak about the past and without these prompters, they would probably never have done it. The documentary extends the quest for a language that can talk empathically about trauma. As Sarkisian builds her *H-Effect* around war, she looks for a "proper language for it, as for trauma." She tries to look beyond "stereotypes, lies and understatements." and asks valid questions. The process is "like moving through a mine field, as it is said in the show: «You can't go there – a trap. You can't go here – death.» Talking about war is like war itself."

But, more than the actual performance, the film breathes in a different way, as it has the ability to show also the cathartic experience of the actors involved. The camera follows them as they walk out into the light of day, finding closure to past conflicts, being able, even if they are hurt, to assess what is happening. The film alternates stage interiors with open space exteriors creating a visual rhythm that expands the scope of the process, following the protagonists as they are journeying back into real life, while the traumatic past remains mostly confined in the stories told in rehearsals.

Rehearsing Tragedy: Writing and Performing History

In *Srbenka*, the documentary uses space differently. Without stepping outside the theater building until the last sequence, a feeling of claustrophobia builds up. As in *Hamlet Syndrome*, war and death are central to the performance. Even if the actors themselves, or the director have not been confronted to actual

war experiences, by centering on personal narratives of the creative team we gain a profound understanding of the human dimension amidst community issues.

Oliver Frljić chose to tell the story of the tragic murder of a Serbian girl, Aleksandra Zec, together with her family, by Croat militia men during the war. Her story not only offers insight into the complexities of conflicts, the destruction of war, but also serves as powerful tool in dismantling stereotypes and nurturing empathy. In 1991, Alexandra Zec and her family were killed by a group of Croats, belonging to the national militia. Despite being discovered and captured relatively quickly and the fact they confessed to the crime, providing detailed information, they were not tried and sentenced. Because they were interrogated without a lawyer present, they were rapidly released without any subsequent conviction.

The documentary sets a confessional and exploratory context from the first frame, a close-up of a spectator with her face hidden by long hair. "I am from Croatia, but of Serbian origin," she says, as her face crumbles into tears, recalling the abuses suffered because of this, in her childhood. We are in a theater hall, at the end of a performance. A space where the scenic events have crossed the barrier to the spectator, extending into the society's collective traumatic past.

The film follows the creation of a performance that confronts the present with the horrors of war, 25 years later. Oliver Frljić transforms the murder of Aleksandra Zec, the child of Serbian origin, who was only 12 years old when she was shot in the head, in a striking stark performance. His approach, sparked controversy. The film, *Srbenka* follows the casting and rehearsals process. Hidden traumas come to light in the rehearsals that become collective psychotherapy. As the camera focusses on the young actress Nina, 12 years old, we find out that anti-Serbian prejudice is still very much alive. Nina does not have the courage to say in school that she is Serbian, she "feels as if the war never ended." In contemporary Croatia, Serbs are condemned and most of them hide their origin.

We observe the construction of the performance, deciphering, with the help of the actors and the theater director, the connection to the present. On stage, actors study photographs of Aleksandra's exhumation, documents

from the police investigation. The trauma is distanced in time. The dramaturgy of the performance, the text, starts from the real fact and materializes in the bodies and voices of the actors. The director physically brings soil onto the stage. The rehearsals are intense, and Frljić becomes a character in the documentary, as he is deeply involved, emotionally touching those around him. He aims to depict on stage the horror of a child's last moments, being taken to a mass grave, being told she would be killed. "The political context is important, but so are the individuals," he says.

In the film, both the director and the actors take center stage, assuming roles as protagonists in the narrative. The camera discreetly shadows Frljić as he navigates the process of selecting a young actress to portray Aleksandra Zec. In this intimate moment, we glimpse a semblance of normalcy: a group of 6th and 7th-grade girls engage in candid conversations about their friendships, school life, and perceptions of Serbs. Their casual dialogue strikingly echoes the essence of Aleksandra's character. These girls, the same age as the tragic victim, embody her spirit. The documentary is not telling Alexandra's story in a straightforward manner, but uses the casting to multiply her as a character, as each and every one of the girls could have been at the center of the story.

The adult actors, too, grapple with their own challenge of bringing to stage the criminal actions of their characters, such as the murderous Croat Militia men, adding a supplementary layer of complexity to their portrayal. We are not dealing with imaginary murderers, such as Macbeth, or Brutus, but with real people and this weight becomes a burden about which actors find it difficult to talk. The space has a poetic resonance, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. One of the actors is from Vukovar, a city marked by a camp that witnessed the tragic demise of 86 Croatian children.

Nebojsa Slijepcevic, the documentary director, makes the aesthetic choice of including the theatre building as a silent witness to the process. With the camera as an indiscreet, yet omnipresent observer, we follow actors into their dressing rooms, where their vulnerability is starkly captured. The camera fluidly traverses the vacant stage as they recount, off screen, their own struggles. The voices resonate throughout empty corridors, over the dark boards, floating over the ethereal dance of dust particles under the spotlight. Once more, the theater becomes a sacred place, a space where one

can lay bare their vulnerabilities, exposed yet secure within its protective walls.

For Frljić, the ethnicity of the murdered child does not matter, but the fact that she was killed does. A profound humanist discourse emerges from the antagonism between dramatic creation and society, as right wing protesters gather at the building's entrance, condemning the play and the fact that it is based on the story of a Serbian, not Croatian, child.

The documentary tracks the cathartic odyssey. However, it is not offering a definitive resolution to the age-old inquiry: can art truly serve as a healing force? Probably not, as in the last image of the film, Nina runs away from the theater, on the streets full of people, terrorized that, during the performance, she has revealed her own Serbian descent.

In both *Hamlet Syndrome* and *Srbenka*, the film courageously confronts the intimate narratives of its protagonists – be they professional or amateur actors – and juxtaposes them with society's reaction to recent historical events. Here, the theater serves as a crucial interface through which the complexities of the past are filtered and examined, though it's acknowledged that this filtration process does not inherently guarantee social healing.

Shakespearean Drama in Unconventional Settings

Cesar must Die, by the Taviani brothers, falls in a distinct cinematic category. Here, the cathartic role of theater is more concrete, clearer, simpler. By participating in the theatrical act, the protagonists are spiritually elevated from their status as social outcasts to that of artists. We are not dealing with a social or political message but with the pure pleasure of discovering, through theater, one's self. The choice of text – *Julius Caesar*, by William Shakespeare – was certainly not random: "the characters are assassins, tyrants. It's about friendship, but also about betrayal. And because it takes place in Rome, we thought about how prisoners felt before entering prison. When we spoke to the inmates about Shakespeare, they said he was their comrade," comments Taviani. The director of the performance is Fabio Cavalli, who is not at his first experience of prison staging. Starting first as a volunteer, he has been working

with the Rebibbia prison for almost three decades. “I thought that theatrical art is a pale imitation of the power of life lived. Aristotle says so. He could not have foreseen that, after two millennia, a gang of criminals would take over the scene, revolutionizing and giving concreteness to his idea of «catharsis»: the purification of the soul through the art of representation.”[2]

While the actions of the protagonist inmates are compelling, it’s the film’s aesthetics that truly captivates. The documentary’s visual language is refined and potent, using high-contrast black-and-white imagery – a stark juxtaposition of infinite white against deep black – to vividly convey the “violence of reality,” as explained by the Taviani brothers themselves[3]. The striking visual beauty significantly enhances the film’s dramatic impact, prompting an exploration into the technical processes employed to achieve such a profound effect. The DOP is Simone Zampagni and it was his first digital production, due to the need for speed and flexibility when filming within the prison walls.

The documentary is aesthetically elaborate, following the long career of Taviani brothers as fiction film directors. Zampagni explains that selecting RED cameras was crucial, as they “exacerbate the bright parts.”[4] He created a specific LUT[5] that drained all color and maximized contrast. A further step in color grading increased the contrast, exaggerating the whites and blacks to their utmost, and eliminating, as much as possible, the mid-tones. “This was combined with the use of a lighting system that relied on single light sources, without diffusion.” The harshness of the light, strong contours matched the strong features of the hardened criminals that were acting in the play. This is particularly powerful in the casting sequence, where each inmate had a personal introduction including their impressive sentences: 14 years and eight months for criminal organization, 17 years for drug trafficking, life for murder... Each “actor” speaks with their native accent, lending authenticity

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[2] Linda Russo, “Fabio Cavalli and the incredible power of theatre in prison”, October 9, 2023, https://www.spazio50.org/fabio-cavalli-e-lincredibile-potenza-del-teatro-in-carcere/

[3] Patricia Thomson, “The Bard Behind Bars”, *American Cinematographer*, February 2013.

[4] Patricia Thomson, “The Bard Behind Bars”.

[5] LUT – a digital color filter applied to the raw image, which selectively processes the image according to a table, altering only certain colors.

and natural power, further defining them as characters. Few minutes later, the same tough men, burdened with a heavy conscience, rejoice like children over receiving the parts in the play.

The film follows the rehearsal process, even when inmates are by themselves or in the shared prison cells. The rehearsing takes over the sun-drenched courtyard, where other inmates observe from the grated windows. But Shakespeare's words sometimes ring so true, with their stories of murder and betrayal, that the protagonists forget they are enacting a work of fiction, four centuries old, and real violence erupts. The fragility of the theatrical endeavor becomes apparent. Temperaments flare dangerously, reminding us of the situation's volatility. Shakespeare's expression, "men of honor," takes on different connotations here – "uomini d'onore" refers to members of the Calabrian Mafia. The Taviani brothers' film documents more than a play, it looks into the human nature and is also an homage to the power of words, the power of theatre, transforming the film into a metaphor about the redemptive quality of art. Cavalli, too, bares witness. Even if the recidivism percentage of people who come out of prison is 70%, "Then there is the cathartic power of Art. Of the 2000 cases I have followed in 20 years, the recidivism rate of inmate-actors does not reach 15%. It will be a case. It will be luck. It will be a sleight of hand."[6]

"Tableaux vivants" and Historical Figures

The "tableaux vivants" can be considered precursors of certain forms of theatre, as scenes were staged to tell mythological stories in the 18th century. In this modern take, the "tableaux" are used as ways to investigate significant moments in the lives of two prominent historical figures: Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Romanian dictator, and Arsenie Boca, a priest and monk that is on its way to being sanctified by the Romanian Orthodox Church. An intrinsic parodic tone is central to this documentary approach, due to not only the careful selection of source materials and the semi-improvised

[6] https://www.spazio50.org/fabio-cavalli-e-lincredibile-potenza-del-teatro-in-carcere/

construction of the poses themselves, but also to the casting process and the collaborative interaction between the film's director and the chosen ensemble cast. The focus shifts dynamically, from documented history to placing emphasis on the journey of the performing participants – a microcosm of society.

For Me, You are Ceaușescu sits on the border between fiction and observational documentary. The debut film of director Sebastian Mihăilescu follows a group of teenagers who, through an extensive casting process, spanning two weeks, attend auditions for the role of Nicolae Ceausescu in his youth, in the mid-1930s, trying to find the motivation behind his actions. With each passing day, Mihăilescu brings up new (for the participants) biographical details, sourced from documentary materials used to build Ceasușescu's mythical image as hero of the communist movement before 1989. The young future actors transform the official documents into fictionalized scenes. The formative years of Nicolae Ceaușescu are expanded through biographical details that track a troublesome rebellious youth: group outings at the city pool, his encounter with Lenuța Petrescu, his future wife, the early joining of the Communist Party, his subsequent imprisonment at Doftana become stepping stones in the film narrative. Emil Bobu, Vasile Luca, Emil Botnăraș and other communist figures, names that once carried weight, now drift through the air, meaningless to a generation unfamiliar with their own history.

Without knowing too much, the young cast is transforming, through their own perspective, sometimes loaded with clichés of commercial cinema, appropriating Ceaușescu's life characteristics, according to their own resonating points. Mihăilescu's approach is neither critical, nor ironic but instead embraces a fresh and uninhibited playfulness. The result is less a portrait of Ceaușescu and more a picture of a new generation and an image of the too quickly forgotten legacy of the past.

The use of long lenses in filming records the candid conversations between the youngsters struggling with unfamiliar history and the enigmatic character of Ceaușescu. This truncated rediscovery of history is framed by the elaborated "tableaux vivants," captured in color, reproducing as well as possible the light, where the protagonists are roughly dressed like the characters from the photographs they emulate.

Juxtaposition highlights the ethical dilemmas and choices faced by the generation born after the year 2000, with regards to their own past, mirroring the challenges that the 1920s generation faced as they came of age in the tumultuous interwar period, just prior to the outbreak of World War II. The image of a young participant, reading on the steps of the entrance, amidst the ruins of the former socialist factory, in a white designer jacket, engulfed in a book about Ceaușescu, while simultaneously searching for references on his very up-to-date phone is a memorable one. This image epitomizes a generation for whom the communist past is as remote as ancient history, yet they are driven by a curious hunger sparked by their involvement in this theatrical and cinematic exploration. Director Sebastian Mihăilescu maintains a subtle presence in the film but emerges at the end, when, with his back to the camera, he presents himself as a guide to knowledge, discovery, and investigation, watching alongside one of the protagonists a sky obscured by clouds, pierced by an eclipsed sun. Was this ending a metaphor for the fact that communism was a historical eclipse for the Romanian people, a moment when the destiny of a nation was overshadowed, leaving behind only the ruins of a factory and a partially faded slogan that concludes with "...răiască tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu" ("…Ong live Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu")?

In a less controlled way, director Alexander Solomon leads a bus load of pilgrims in his quest, *Arsenie. Viața de Apoi*. In the more and more conservative Orthodox Romanian society, the figure of Arsenie Boca has gathered power and strength becoming one of the most important one in the Christian panoply of recognized or future saints.

We witness the deliberate casting process, where the filmmaker assumes the role of both director and orchestrator. From the outset, he declares this his personal and creative journey in deciphering the mystery surrounding the creation of a new mythology around the real Arsenie Boca. Unable to access and engage with representatives of the Orthodox Church, Solomon transforms the documentary-exploration into a social one.

The casting becomes itself a well-defined process, as the director does not aim for a slice of the society, but more for worthy companions, that have both experience in pilgrimages and filming, that can assist him in the journey. The chosen individuals become characters – protagonists of the documentary, a slice of social interaction that would never happen again. The director himself

steps into the film, serving as the rational counterpoint to myth-making. The film crew is also visible, part of this physical journey by bus to the sites, where they are systematically denied access and the right to film on church premises. Driven by necessity, Solomon proposes to the protagonists the creation of "tableaux vivants" that reproduce the mythical event adjacent to the respective location.

Forced by circumstances to film largely outdoors, albeit accompanied by makeup artists and costume designers, the scenes have an air of improvisation, ready to unravel at any moment, to be blown away by the wind, a constant of the journey. The framing is elaborate and chosen with humor by the director on three layers: while in the background other "pilgrims" try on costumes and check poses suitable for the "tableaux vivants", in the foreground, against moving draped curtains, the protagonists take turns in telling their own stories to the camera. They bring the "reality" into the film, as they talk about financial difficulties, their spiritual relationship with Arsenie Boca, disappointments, and hopes, building a social fresco.

The director is always present in frame or off-screen and challenges his interviewees with questions, logic and inviting them to an open dialogue. Day by day, he becomes increasingly intertwined with the phenomenon, until he enters the circle of discussions himself, becoming the antithetical protagonist who brings his own Jewish background into the conversation, considering that Boca was an Iron Guard (Romanian fascists) admirer, included on the list of martyrs on the Poarta Albă monument, most of them also "legionaries".

The film contains numerous socio-historical references from recent years, often necessitating explanations or footnotes to provide context for the protagonists' statements that highlight the significant social changes that have occurred over the past three decades of social and economic turmoil. This led to a greater need for religion, for faith and contributed to the development of the legend surrounding Arsenie Boca. For instance, the Caritas phenomenon, a Ponzi scheme left many people impoverished, as they lost all their savings from the communist era. By giving the "pilgrims" milestones in the Arsenie Boca story, Solomon builds a coherent chronological structure, on which he paints a portrait of the current society, its fears, crazy beliefs, where actual facts are refuted.

Conclusion

By filming the process, the documentary films based on stage plays extend an engagement to a wider audience, allowing people who may not have access to live theater to experience the story and connect with the issues depicted. This also provides the background for a wider discussion, as society itself, in most cases, is put on trial. The use of theatrical techniques in documentary filmmaking, moves beyond traditional objective representations to offer more artistic and nuanced explorations of reality. By incorporating elements of theatre, documentaries can engage audiences on a deeper emotional and intellectual level, capturing not only the subject matter but also the transformative impact of performance on both participants and viewers. This trend expands the artistic possibilities within the documentary genre, providing filmmakers with new tools to address complex themes and offer unique insights into the human condition. Rather than centering on the theatrical performance per se, these films dig into the cathartic potential born from the quasi-ritualistic interchange between the individual and the role assumed, as well as the dynamic between actor and spectator. This exploration, through lens, extends further to encompass the broader relationship between the stage – perceived in its capacity as place of human actor-character interaction – and the societal fabric.

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