

Editorial

Documentary Cinema Revisited

Documentary film is undergoing an intense transformation. In recent years, new genres have emerged, such as animated documentary or interactive documentary, as well as new names for previously existing but unrecognised phenomena, such as the mock-documentary. Technological changes have brought a lot of life to the subject, especially the emergence of mobile phones equipped with cameras, which brought filming almost under the radar, the spread of surveillance cameras and, last but not least, networking, creating global opportunities to show documentaries. The result is a situation in which anyone can, at least potentially, record reality with their phone (and there are few people who have never done so), anyone is subject to being recorded, even many times a day, and anyone can post what they have recorded to a global audience. Thus, with some exaggeration, it can be said that anyone can become the author, protagonist, producer or distributor, if not of a documentary film, then at least of documentary recordings of reality. There are also few spheres of life that escape documentary recording. The documentary is no longer just a social service, as it used to be, and not just a reverie about the fate of the individual, as it became somewhat later, but a form that has access to all forms and aspects of reality.

The watchword of our new issue of “Panoptikum” – “New Approaches to Documentary” should be understood in several ways. Firstly, then, it is about new phenomena in documentary filmmaking: new films that explore hitherto undiscovered territories or stand out for their original approach to film form. Secondly, transformations within documentary cinema, or more broadly, non-fictional recordings of reality – whether technologically motivated or not. Thirdly, new methodological approaches, new forms of reflection on the phenomenon of non-fiction, new conceptual categories, new theoretical approaches.

The volume begins with a definition of documentary filmmaking. Miroław Przyłipiak briefly reviews a selection of existing definitions and then builds his own. In his opinion, when defining a documentary film it is necessary to point out its difference not only from feature cinema – which most definitions have focused on – but equally from experimental cinema, as well as from various other factual forms. At the same time, the construction of the definition is an opportunity to consider issues such as the influence of the presence of the cam-

era on the behaviour of the people being filmed, the permissibility of staging on a documentary film set, a specificity of documentary editing, and many others.

Philipp Blum addresses one of the key issues in the reflection on documentary filmmaking, namely - the relationship between documentary and fiction. However, instead of separating the documentary from the fictional, as has been done so far, and building the definition of documentary on the juxtaposition of documentary and fiction, Blum proposes the exact opposite, metaphorically referring to gender theory. According to him, a queer person is a non-binary person who blurs boundaries and cannot be described in terms of a simple juxtaposition of male and female. Similarly, some documentaries are 'queer' - instead of separating the elements of documentary and fiction in them, we should recognise that they cannot be considered in these categories. Blum primarily includes so-called mockumentaries, but also other films that mix documentary and fiction. Since virtually every documentary film contains elements of both, it is reasonable to ask - although Blum himself does not draw this conclusion - whether all documentary cinema is queer?

Efrén Cuevas deals with documentary filmmaking about the past and introduces the concept of micro-history into the vocabulary of documentary filmmaking. It is taken from historical science, but on the ground of documentary film it is subject to modifications due to the specificity of the medium. Micro-histories are an attempt to combine, to synthesise, history and memory - in other words, macro history, dealing with major events and historical processes - with experiencing events at the grassroots level. Micro-historical documentaries are characterised by a narrow perspective, focusing on ordinary and sometimes even marginalised individuals, families, social groups, instead of the great figures and events so glorified by 'official' history. Moreover, they are keen to adopt a narrative form, making abundant use of family archives, family photographs, home movies, snapshots and sound recordings.

The subject of Sheikh Khurran's reflections is stock imagery and its impact on shaping the image of Pakistani society in documentaries relating to the events of 11 September 2001. Khurran looks at two films, or rather mini-documentary series: the two-part *Secret Pakistan* (2011) produced by the BBC and the five-part *Turning Point: 9/11 and the War on Terror* (2021), produced by Netflix. In both cases, there is a process of entextualisation, whereby images taken from the archives are detached from the context of their creation and placed in an entirely new context, that of the documentary in question, supporting its arguments. In both films, stereotypical images of Muslim communities are repeated, with women in hijabs (a symbol of oppression) and bearded men, often with guns,

without us ever knowing where, under what circumstances or why these images were created. They serve to portray Muslims as terrorists, hating the West, and Pakistan as a state playing a vicious game and in fact supporting terrorism. Thus, the stock archives become a new tool of colonial oppression. "What is lacking" – Khurran states – "are accounts of historically situated archives that could lead to a more nuanced understanding of post 9/11 trauma in the region."

The four abovementioned articles are theoretical in nature, dealing with the conceptual apparatus and mechanisms of documentary cinema. The following three, however, describe instances of activism when the aim of the documentary film is to effect social change. Thus, Raya Morag's article is devoted to a strand of Cambodian documentary cinema that attempts to confront the Khmer Rouge genocide in the country. At the same time, Morag sets in motion a broader context – that of documentaries which depict acts of genocide, so abundant in the 20th and 21st centuries. According to Morag, there is a new trend in recent times, which she calls 'perpetrator cinema'. Its focus is on the perpetrators of the crimes (and not, as before, on the victims); it is the perpetrators who are subjected to a kind of interrogation. A new phenomenon, previously unrecorded, has emerged in Cambodian films, namely the 'documentary duel' between the perpetrator and the victim, or the victim's descendant. What is at stake in this duel is not so much to get the perpetrator to confess, but for the victim to regain their dignity and for the perpetrator to be morally condemned.

Hongwei Bao dedicates his article to four films about the LGBT movement in China, made by activists of this community. The author emphasises that these films could appear thanks to the digital revolution, which has made it easier to produce and distribute independent films without financial, technical or institutional backing. In China, where the authorities are unfriendly towards the LGBT movement and the subject matter is virtually non-existent in the public sphere, it was particularly important. The films discussed by Hongwei Bao chart the history of LGBT movements in China, foster the formation of a collective memory of this community, consider the question of the specificity of China's LGBT movements, "they 'queer' the traditionally heteronormative documentary genre" – an interesting reference to Philipp Blum's article – and contest a heteronormative construction of China's collective memory by constructing alternative memories, all with the aim of changing the world with digital video cameras.

Chafic Najem's article is devoted to another phenomenon characteristic of recent years – the recording of reality with mobile phones. In this case, a particular situation is involved, namely films shot by prisoners, using smuggled phones. This gives rise to a new situation. For in the hitherto familiar genre of films

documenting the lives of prisoners, they were always observed from the outside. Here, the prisoners themselves shoot the film from their point of view. Moreover, Najem's article deals with a very specific situation: an attack by Lebanese police on a prison, recorded by a prisoner with a smuggled mobile phone and then spread on social media. Najem confronts two accounts of this police action: the official one, disseminated on television, and the 'underground' one, smuggled out of the prison.

Thus, the new approaches to documentary filmmaking presented in this volume have several dimensions. Firstly, it is about proposing terms, concepts, categories that are new to documentary cinema, such as 'queer' or micro-histories. Secondly, it is about the consequences for documentary filmmaking of new technologies, such as stock images, mobile phones, digitisation, the internet. Thirdly, it is about new themes, such as Chinese LGBT films or Cambodian 'perpetrator cinema', or new takes on old themes, like prison films shot 'from the inside'. Documentary cinema, as has always been the case in its history, is constantly evolving, transforming, reacting with its form and content to the changes brought about by reality.

Miroslaw Przyłipiak