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Defining documentary¹

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to define documentary film. After a brief review of existing definitions, the author proposes his own. The methods of working on the set and the textual features of the films are considered as distinguishing documentary filmmaking from other film genres. Issues such as the filmmakers' interference with the filmed reality, the criteria for distinguishing between fictional and non-fictional elements, the admissibility of special effects, the specificity of editing, and the place of the documentary film among other non-fictional genres are considered. The final definition is confronted with the most recent genres of documentary cinema, namely the animated documentary, the mockumentary and the web-documentary.

Key words: documentary cinema, definitions, specificity, textual features, working on the set

¹ This paper is based on a chapter from my book *Poetyka kina dokumentalnego*, published in Polish in 1999 (1. Edition) and 2004 (2. edition). For the purposes of this publication it has been revised, abridged, and, where possible, updated. Nevertheless, its main part was written in the late 1990s and is based on the state of documentary cinema, and knowledge thereof, at that time. I decided to translate it into English and publish it in a volume on new approaches to documentary because, I hope, the way I define documentary is still new and fresh.

It is striking, how many works on documentary cinema begin with a definition. This situation is unprecedented. Among the thousands of works devoted to feature cinema, as well as other film genres, it is difficult to find any that take the trouble to define their subject. It is clear that their authors are content with the formula that a feature film is what it is, everyone can see it. Meanwhile, there are dozens of definitions of a documentary film, as if almost every author felt a necessity to define their subject.² No wonder, then, that documentary film is perhaps the only film genre to have an 'official' definition, adopted by the World Congress of Documentary Filmmakers in Prague in 1948.

This situation only confirms something that is also all too evident: that the status of documentary cinema is far from obvious, that it is not entirely clear what documentary cinema is, what its determinants are, what criteria should be used to distinguish and analyse it, how to draw lines of demarcation between it and other motion picture genres.

This situation stands in peculiar contrast to the fact of the enormous development and proliferation of documentary filmmaking that has been taking place since the 1960s at least. Filmmakers make documentaries, television broadcasts them, streaming platforms stream them, audiences watch them, and none of these sides of the communicative polyphony experiences any particular stress. Most viewers are able to distinguish easily a documentary film in the flood of various audiovisual works. The trouble begins when one tries to describe this specificity. Whether this is because the documentary film is the practical embodiment of the controversy over the relationship between cinema and reality, or because of the filmmaking practice, which is often forced to bend the boundaries of the genre, or because of the enormous diversity of documentary filmmaking, which cannot be crammed into any uniform pattern - the attempt to describe what is intuitively distinguishable faces enormous obstacles. In what follows I will briefly comment upon the most common approaches in defining documentary cinema and then I will dare to work out my own definition.

² A spectacular testament to this situation is the gigantic project by Israeli filmmaker and academic, Dan Geva. He published a book which offers close readings of 30 definitions of documentary coined between 1985 and 1959 (Dan Geva, 2021). Two more volumes are in preparation: "Vol. II (1960-1990), in progress, will offer a reflective rendering of an additional 50+ definitions given to Documentary between the years 1960 and 1990. Volume III (1991-2022), under construction, reads through, analyses, contextualises, and reframes an additional 70+ definitions attributed to Documentary between the years 1991 and 2022." (<https://www.cilect.org/news/view/1092>; accessed 09.05.2023). This means that Dan Geva has gathered at least 150 definitions of documentary.

Review of existing definitions

Creative treatment of actuality

It seems appropriate to start this brief review of existing definitions from the famous Griersonian phrase, according to which a documentary film is a "creative treatment of actuality" (Rotha, 1939, p. 70). The very wording is important here. "Treatment", often understood as "interpretation" (e.g. in Polish, where the Griersonian phrase is translated as "twórcza **interpretacja** rzeczywistości") means first of all 'working' the material through, 'processing' it, which can lead to interpretation (but also, for example, to dramatisation), while the word 'actuality' does not simply mean reality, but external, current, factual reality, thus emphasising the perceptible side of reality and the spontaneity of filming what is in front of the camera (Edmonds, 1974, p. 11). Grierson's phrase could thus more appropriately, though less neatly, be translated as 'the creative reworking of the footage of current (in relation to the moment of filming) physical reality'.

Grierson's phrase (which does not fulfill formal criteria of definition) is so lapidary that we should not expect too much from it. Nevertheless, it does locate the key tensions in documentary cinema that will be a constant theme of reflection from this point onwards. On the one hand, it is the tension between reality and its interpretation, between the object of observation and the observer's subjective relation to it. On the other hand, Grierson's term anticipates one of the most commonly used tools for describing this genre, i.e. the tension between surface and depth (More on this: Przyłipiak, 2006). The surface, or 'actuality', becomes merely a starting point, a material that, through a processing, will allow us to see the 'depth', that is, the invisible. John Grierson's monographer, Ian Aitken, has pointed out that the roots of such an understanding lie in idealist philosophy (the dominant current in Grierson's university education), which distinguishes between the phenomenal and the real side of reality. Phenomena are detailed and accessible to empiricism, while reality is abstract and general. Reflecting reality serves the search for its general laws, 'treatment' subordinates 'actuality' to itself, phenomena merely provide the means to comprehend the real (Aitken, 1990).

Defining through the subject and social aims

John Grierson, however, is known less as an adherent of idealist philosophy and more as an active promoter of the idea that documentary film has specific purposes to fulfil in terms of educating a democratic society (Andrzej Kolodyński, 1981). The active propagation of such an understanding of documentary cinema, which some believe Grierson practised for purely tactical reasons (it was

easier to obtain state money for films that were, by definition, congruent in their aims with those of the state apparatus than for purely artistic works) (Vaughan, 1983, p. 30; Winston, 1995, pp. 98-99) determined that for many years to come documentary filmmaking would be defined through the prism of social service, especially in Anglo-Saxon tradition.

The strength of the Griersonian legacy can be seen in many definitions of documentary filmmaking. For example, Basil Wright, one of the more prominent filmmakers within the Griersonian movement, wrote that “documentary is not this or that kind of film, but simply a way of approach to public information” (cited by Barsam, 1973, p. 2). Willard van Dyke stated that in a documentary film “the elements of dramatic conflict represent social and political forces rather than the individual ones” (Engle, 1965; Barsam 1976 p. 275). According to Philip Dunne, what most documentaries have in common is that they are conceived as ideological weapons (idea-weapons) that are meant “to strike a blow for whatever cause the originator has in mind. Therefore, in the broadest sense of the word, documentary film is almost always a tool of propaganda”. (Dunne, 1946; in Barsam 1973 p. 2). Raymond Spottiswoode defined documentary filmmaking as follows: “The documentary film is in its subject and approach a dramatised presentation of man’s relation to his institutional life, whether industrial, social or political; and in technique, a subordination of form to content” (Spottiswoode, 1950, p. 289). In a detailed discussion, Spottiswoode excluded educational films (lecture films) from the realm of documentary filmmaking because they are not sufficiently dramatised; films about nature and individual characters (personal films) because they do not deal with institutions; and so-called city symphonies because they do not subordinate content to form.

Paul Rotha made the definition of documentary filmmaking the subtitle of his book. On the first page, under the title ‘Documentary Film’ embossed in large letters, he explains: “The use of the film medium to interpret creatively in social terms the life of the people as it exists in reality” (Rotha, 1939). Throughout the book, Rotha emphasises the social aspect of documentary filmmaking, proving to be the most faithful propagator of Griersonian ideas, more radical and explicit than his master. A documentary film should present the mechanisms that govern reality, and Rotha saw them in the sphere of social life, understood in a Marxian way. The documentary filmmaker is “a propagandist making use of the most influential instrument of his time. He does not march in the crowd, but goes just ahead” (Rotha, 1939, p. 114).

The aforementioned official definition, enacted in 1948 in Prague at the conference of the World Union of Documentary, can be regarded as the quintessence

of this trend. According to it, “By the documentary film is meant all methods of recording on celluloid any aspect of reality interpreted either by factual shooting or by sincere and justifiable reconstruction, so as to appeal either to reason or emotion, for the purpose of stimulating the desire for, and the widening of human knowledge and understanding, and of truthfully posing problems and their solutions in the spheres of economics, culture, and human relations.” (in Barsam, 1973, p. 1).

According to Andrzej Kołodyński, the main sin of this definition is its excessive generality, as a result of which its requirements are met by every film of a realist nature. Indeed, the effort to cover as many areas as possible can be seen in its use of phrases that are either all-encompassing or poorly differentiated, such as “any aspects of reality” or “all methods of recording” (Kołodyński, 1981, p. 27-28). On the other hand, some formulations are unduly restrictive. While the restriction of recording technology (celluloid) can be understood, the restriction of the subject matter of documentaries to “economics, culture and human relations” is puzzling. In light of this, it is impossible to make a documentary film about nature (such as Muridsany and Perennou’s *Microcosmos*, 1996) or space (such as Drygas’s *State of Weightlessness*, 1994), or, for example, about rain (such as Joris Ivens’s *Rain*, 1929).

It is interesting to note the presence of wording that refers to the ethics of documentary makers. They are supposed to pose problems in a ‘truthful’ way, and their working methods (e.g. reconstructions) on the set must be “sincere and justifiable”. The introduction of such formulations into definitions must astound, for they clearly confuse the descriptive and normative approach. One does not say of poetry that it must be sincere and justifiable to be poetry, nor even of mathematics that it must rely on good counting to be mathematics. We usually say that dishonest poetry is bad poetry (but poetry nonetheless) or that a miscalculated mathematical equation is bad mathematics, but mathematics nevertheless. Here, by contrast, the ethical postulate becomes the criterion of the genre. A dishonest or unsubstantiated reconstruction (never mind who is judging it or on what basis) excludes the film from the noble documentary genre; and similarly, a film that presents a problem in a false way is not an unreliable, untrue, biased film, but nevertheless a documentary, it simply ceases to be a documentary. This ethical saturation of genological formulations has become firmly established in the history of reflection on documentary filmmaking, contributing to a great deal of confusion.

According to the official definition, the genre hallmarks are its extremely pragmatic and noble aims: to develop human knowledge and to pose and solve

(!) problems. A sceptic would probably ask whether any documentary film really develops human knowledge and understanding better than, for example, the films of Ingmar Bergman, or would demand an explanation of what problem was solved by, for example, Grierson's film about fishing for herring in the North Sea (*Drifters*, 1929), or the film about delivering letters by train (*Night Mail*, 1936). There is, of course, no good answer to these questions, except one that situates the definition under discussion in the historical context of 1930s British documentary filmmaking.

As far as the film form is concerned, only the question of reenactments is addressed, which is also a reverberation of the time when the definition was forged. The members of the Griersonian movement used reenactments so often that they could never have enough discussion on the subject. A distinction was made between the reconstruction of events that happened and events that did not happen - the latter being dismissed as fiction. A distinction was also made between the reconstruction of events that did not happen, but could have happened as typical or constituting a synthesis. Recurrent staging practices led, according to Brian Winston, to a complete confusion of boundary lines between fact and fiction (Winston, 1995, p. 120).

Defining through style and working methods

Documentary filmmaking can also be defined through the formal qualities of the films and the methods of working on the set. According to Richard Barsam, a non-fiction film

stems from, and is based on, an immediate social situation: sometimes a problem, sometimes a crisis, sometimes an undramatic and seemingly unimportant person or event. It is usually filmed on the actual scene, with the actual people, without sets, costumes, written dialogue, or created sound effects. It tries to recreate the feeling of 'being there', with as much fidelity to fact as the situation allows. A typical nonfiction film is structured in two or three parts, with an introduction and conclusion, and tends to follow a pattern from problem to solution. Even more typically, it is in black-and-white, with direct sound recording (or simulated sound), a musical score written expressly for the film and conceived as part of a cinematic whole, and, often as not, a spoken narration. Its typical running time is 30 minutes, but some films run less, last less and some are ninety-minute feature-length films (Barsam, 1973, p. 4).

Bill Nichols found this definition ludicrous, not unreasonably so (Nichols, 1981, p. 173). Of course, a documentary film can have two or three parts just

as well as four or five; it does not need to use a musical score specifically written for it, and even if it did, this very characteristic would make it more like its great rival - the feature film - than different; a note that spoken narration can but need not occur, is only important as a tribute to the historical value of off-screen narration in documentary cinema. The exact specification of the type of tape and the length of the film is an aftermath of the stage when Barsam's definition was created, i.e. the late 1960s; while the statement that the sound can be direct - which could be a hallmark of documentary filmmaking - but can also be postsynchronous again makes it difficult to separate the documentary from the feature film.

The second part of Barsam's definition is vague and incidental, but the first one encapsulates, as if in a nutshell, several ways of defining documentary cinema. First, its distinguishing feature is the subject: the social situation. This sounds Griersonian, but the author immediately expands the field of definition in such a way that the Griersonian tinge disappears when it turns out that a social situation can be a problem, a crisis, but also "an undramatic and seemingly unimportant person or event."

This part of Barsam's definition also considers work on the set. A documentary film should be "shot on the actual scene, with the actual people". Work on the set is confined by a series of prohibitions: what must not be done in a documentary film. There are: no set design, no costumes, no written dialogue and no artificially fabricated sound effects. The list of prohibitions is random and could easily be made longer, but more importantly, this definition by negation is perhaps the most common in the colloquial understanding of documentary filmmaking.

Finally, this definition also refers to the filmmaker's goal (recreate the feeling of "being there") and, above all, to the viewer, who, while watching the film, is supposed to feel that he or she "is on the scene of events". Fidelity to the facts must, of course, be preserved, but only as much as the situation allows. It may be presumed that if maintaining fidelity to the facts could disturb the viewer's sense of "being on the scene", the facts should rather be dispensed with.

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson define documentary filmmaking by the peculiarity of the process of production. In their view, the genre is distinguished by less control both in the preparation phase and during shooting:

"Typically, the documentary filmmaker controls only certain variables of preparation, shooting and assembly; some variables (e.g., script, rehearsal) may be omitted, whereas others (setting, lighting, behaviour of the figures) are present but often uncontrolled" (Bordwell, Thompson, 1990, p. 23).

The idea of documentary filmmaking as an ‘uncontrolled’ genre was first put forward by Richard Leacock in an article entitled “For an Uncontrolled Cinema” (Leacock, 1961), published at the dawn of the direct cinema movement. In his polemic, Bill Nichols argues that the documentary filmmaker does not have less power over the material, but understands this power differently. The aim of his work is ‘to evoke highly natural behaviour’ (Nichols, p. 1991, p. 13). Indeed, the technique of the documentary filmmaker differs from that of fiction directors. However, I agree with Bordwell and Thompson, that in many instances the filmmaker ‘gives’ voice to reality, without influencing or controlling it.

Nichols also makes an attempt to define documentary filmmaking through the properties of the ‘corpus of texts’, i.e. the immanent properties of documentary films (Nichols, 1991: 18-23). The American researcher enumerates the properties that characterise documentaries, such as: the predominance of argumentative structures, including in particular the structure of ‘problem-solving’; a relative ease of jumps in time and space, considerably greater than in feature films (the spatio-temporal continuity is less important than the fluidity and continuity of the argumentation); the great role of the soundtrack and the verbal layer in building the dramatic structure of the film. One can argue about whether the American researcher has actually listed all the textual features of documentary film, but another factor is more important: textual features cannot be hallmarks of a documentary film, because they can very easily be faked.

Indeed, there is an asymmetry in this respect between the two great rivals, documentary and fiction film. A documentary film cannot ‘simulate’ a fiction film without falling into an internal contradiction, without self-destructing. A feature film, on the other hand, can perfectly - and has repeatedly done so, at least in fragments - simulate the documentary style. From this it follows that such a style actually exists, that there is a set of textual features that the viewer routinely associates with the documentary film. However, this set of characteristics is not sufficient to reliably identify documentary filmmaking, as they can easily be forged.

Defining through the context: indexing

Since the attempts to define the genre by the uniqueness of its social mission and by the peculiarity of its textual features fail, some researchers have turned to the option that a film becomes documentary not by its properties, but by the context in which it is placed. The viewer, when judging that the film they are watching is a documentary, sets his or her mind to a particular type of reading. This decision depends to a large extent on extra-textual circumstances. The

placement of a given film on a documentary TV channel, or a simple announcement of it in newspapers as a documentary, triggers the right type of reading, at least until the properties of the film itself, its textual features (e.g. excessive staging) make the viewer doubt the reliability of the extra-textual information. At the same time, the information that some fragments of a given film, even if they look very credible, have been staged, fabricated, immediately changes the viewer's attitude and effectively blocks the type of reading proper to documentary filmmaking.

Starting from these premises, Noel Carroll believed that the basis for considering a film as a documentary is to index it, i.e. to label it through the relevant institutions (Carroll, 1996a, p. 232; Plantinga, 1997, p. 16). In other words, a documentary film is a film that has been labelled as documentary by credible institutions or practices. The indexing of a film can be done in a number of ways: by discussing it in magazines devoted to documentary film or in documentary film history manuals, by showing it at documentary film festivals or in a television slot or on channels, by announcing it appropriately on television or in newspapers. Bill Nichols emphasises the role that the documentary community plays in the recognition of a film as a documentary. A documentary film is the product of those who consider themselves documentary filmmakers (Nichols, 1991, p. 15) and form a community, integrated through 'institutional practice', i.e. festivals, seminars, magazines, production and distribution companies, committed capital, etc. (Nichols, 1991, p. 15-18).

Certainly, in many cases, a film begins to function as a documentary because it has been screened at a documentary film festival, shown on television in an appropriate programming 'slot', or because it has become labelled as documentary in the cinema history. Yet it is not the case that any film can be labelled as documentary. For this designation to be effective, to be accepted by the audience, the film in question must be in harmony with the viewer's idea of what the documentary style looks like. The viewer will easily agree that *Gimme Shelter* (1970) by the Maysles brothers, showing the tragically ended concert of the Rolling Stones in Altamont, California, is documentary. The Rolling Stones are real, the concert at Altamont did happen, the people shown there did not play for the film. However, if Fellini's *Rome* (1972) were to be announced as a documentary, the viewer would have doubts, and if *Casanova* (1976) by the same director were to be announced in this way, the viewer would simply shrug his shoulders, because the textual features of the film (e.g. the elaborate, clearly artificial scenography, etc.) clearly indicate a way of working on set that cannot be reconciled with the common understanding of documentary style.

It follows that the textual characteristics (i.e. the qualities of the finished film) may be sufficient to exclude it from the documentary family, but they are not sufficient to establish its belonging to this family, because a feature film can “fake” all the textual characteristics of a documentary film. This is where the need for indexing comes from. The recognition of a given film as documentary demands three things to be taken into account at the same time: the method of working on set, the textual features, and indexing. Indexing is in fact nothing more than informing the viewer that there is a correspondence between the textual features and the methods of working on set suggested by them.

An attempt at my own definition

When we look again at all the definitions cited above, it becomes apparent that documentary film has attempted to be defined by: its social objectives (the education of a democratic society); its subject matter (the working people or, in other terms, the fields of economics, culture, human relations, or the “immediate social situation”, and finally, most generally, man and his affairs); the methods of working on set, and more broadly, of working on the film; the textual features of the film itself, its style; the effect exerted on the viewer (the impression of truth, direct contact with reality, being on the scene of events); indexing, that is labeling as documentary by credible institutions or practices.

In what follows we will try to forge yet another definition of documentary. I will focus on working on the set and textual features – as they seem to me the most pertinent – and I hope to develop some new ideas and lines of argumentation.

The vast majority of the definitions of documentary film formulated so far have been guided by the intention of separating it from its great rival - feature cinema. This is justified by the history of reflection on documentary film, as well as the common understanding of this type of cinema. The first impetus in both colloquial discussions and theoretical reflection have been to distinguish “cinema of fact” from “cinema of fiction”. However, such a distinction, while important, is not sufficient. In order to define documentary film, to highlight its distinctiveness, we must demarcate the boundaries on three sides. First, to separate it from fiction; second, to separate it from the so-called “experimental” or avant-garde cinema; third, to make distinctions within the vast field of factual programming.

Films of facts and films of fiction

The starting point for a definition of documentary film (...) is the simple conclusion that what the documentary “actually” records is not reality in itself, but a moment of encounter of a film crew with reality, or – more precisely – of people behind the camera with reality in front of the camera. This moment is the key distinguishing feature of documentary cinema, and the one that most clearly distinguishes between a documentary and a fictional film. To put it bluntly, in fiction film people behind the camera shape reality (space, set) and behaviour of the filmed people; in documentary cinema people behind the camera should not influence reality and the behaviour of the filmed people. So let us consider the most general formula of a documentary working method. It reads as follows (working definition no 1):

A documentary film is a film in which the filmmakers do not interfere with the filmed reality.

If this definition were to be elaborated on, it would take the form of a series of prohibitions. Their relatively complete list would be as follows: documentary filmmakers are not allowed to hire actors, write dialogues for the filmed people or influence their activities, direct their behaviour in front of the camera, change their appearance, transfer them without the viewer’s knowledge to new places; they can’t adopt the appearance of the filmed places to the filmmakers needs, or deform them using photographic or editing techniques. We can also try to use a positive clause: a non-fictional film is a film that records the natural behaviour of “normal” people (i. e. not actors) in their natural environment.

There are usually two kinds of objections to such formulations. First of all, talking about non-interference with reality as the basic distinguishing feature of documentary film is wrong, because the very fact of making a film, the appearance of a film crew in a given reality, is a powerful interference with reality, after which it is no longer the same. Secondly, the claim that in documentary cinema the filmmaker is not allowed to direct people’s behaviour in front of the camera obviously disregards not only the elementary requirements of working on the set of each film (including a documentary), but also historical practice, i.e. the fact that among all the films that are regarded as documentaries, it would be difficult to find those in which there was no element of directing behaviour of the filmed people. One can, of course, say that it is all the worse for history, or that, in fact, hardly any real documentary has been produced so far, or, as some would like, that a documentary film is virtually impossible. Perhaps, however, it would be wiser to consider both the issue of the presence of the camera and the directing of the behaviour of the filmed people before reaching a final conclusion.

The presence of the camera as a form of interference with reality.

The first objection to defining a documentary film as the one in which the filmmakers do not interfere with what is in front of the camera is an assumption that the mere appearance of a film crew is a powerful interference with reality, because people change their behaviour in the presence of the camera.

The easiest way out of this situation, it seems, is to film with a hidden camera. It completely eradicates the abovementioned objection. The filmmakers do not interfere with reality, but observe it, as a result of which the full truth of human behaviour, its naturalness and spontaneity is saved. Yet it is puzzling that very few of the major films in the history of documentary cinema have been made using this method. This fact alone is enough to exclude it from our considerations. Although theoretically it solves many problems, in practice it is rarely used (above all for ethical reasons), and therefore it cannot help in an attempt to elaborate the determinants of documentary cinema.

So if we abandon the hidden camera solution, the problem of interference with reality returns. However, does it concern all documentary cinema, or only some of its forms? The categories of addressing proposed by Bill Nichols (Nichols, 1981, pp. 182-198) are useful to consider this issue. Nichols distinguished two types of addressing in documentary cinema: a third-person address and a first-person address. Nichols calls third-person addressing (which is typical to observational mode) such a form in which the characters shown in a documentary film do not in any way signal that they are aware of the presence of a camera. So they behave as if the camera were not there: they do not make eye contact with it, they do not talk to it, they do not make any gestures because of its presence. In this kind of documentary, the situation is fictional and similar to that of feature cinema. The filmed people pretend that they are not being filmed, that there is no camera, that they behave as if the act of filming were not taking place at all. First-person addressing, on the other hand, takes place when the viewer is the direct addressee of the speech from the screen. This happens in the case of an off-screen narration or when the filmed people talk directly into the camera. In both cases the fiction which we are dealing with in the observational formula is removed. It is especially visible in the form of an interview or in the statements of the filmed person directly to the camera. The filmed people do not pretend that the camera is not there. On the contrary: the crew and the situation of filming exist and are often shown openly (for example in the form of a reporter - the crew's delegate to the world of the film). Moreover, the filmed people behave the

way they do precisely because of the presence of the filmmakers. It seems that all the conventionality commonly associated with the observational model of documentary film has been overcome. The filmmaker does not act on the principle of non-interference with reality, but on the contrary - they openly interfere with it and films the effect of this interference. So, the problem of filmmakers' interference with reality, as formulated here, does not concern the whole of documentary cinema, but only a part of it, the one that uses a third person address. Let us limit ourselves now to this kind of cinema.

It must first be said that this problem is not the same in all situations. There are situations in which the presence of the camera is not only not a surprise and a deforming intervention, but is even an expected contribution to the ritual. This is what happens nowadays in all public events - celebrations, festivals, important political meetings, etc. The multitude of TV crews contribute to the atmosphere and scenery of such events.

The presence of the camera crew is relatively indifferent not only in the pre-planned public situations, but also in completely different situations, such as unexpected, violent cataclysms and catastrophes, when people are so preoccupied with their activities that they do not pay attention to the presence of the camera.

So, the power of the film crew's interference with reality is directly proportional to the degree of intimacy and privacy of the situation. The more public it is, the more we can be sure that the presence of filmmakers did not change it. There is also a certain spectrum of relatively indifferent situations - e.g. when people just walk down streets, in parks or museums. The presence of the film crew in these places does not confuse them either, although some of the filmed people may already start to behave differently. When, on the other hand, proverbially speaking, the door to the apartment closes, and a documentary crew faces private situations to which it usually does not have access, the problem becomes acute. The documentary filmmakers do not give up without a fight, though, but try to accustom the filmed people to the presence of the camera and the film crew. For example, they stay at the shooting site for a long time, merging with reality, or they initiate the filmed people - like Flaherty the Eskimos - into the technical nuances of film production, and befriend them. It also happens that they arrange situations that serve something other than what the filmed people think, and in this roundabout way they achieve the naturalness of their characters' behaviour. At this point, Nichols seems to be right when, contrary to Bordwell, he writes that the directing of a documentary does not depend on less control over reality, but on other methods of exercising this control and its other goals.

So, responding to the objection to defining a documentary film as one in which the filmmakers do not interfere with the reality filmed, based on the argument that the mere fact of the appearance of a film crew is a powerful interference with reality, we can say that:

- this objection is justified in relation to only one form of documentary film, i.e. to the observational mode with a third person address;
- even within this model it is graded along the axis of privacy of the filmed event;
- at the most troublesome end of the scale, i.e. when filming small and private situations is concerned, the mere presence of the crew on the spot becomes a serious challenge for documentary filmmakers. Here, more than anywhere else, faith breaks down that it is enough to film reality to show what it is like. For in order to show what it is, you need to work on it, you need to restore it to its natural state, destroyed by the presence of the crew.

Trying to modify the initial definition, so that the results of the above considerations are taken into account, it can be said that:

(working definition no.2; new part in italics)

A documentary film is a film in which the filmmakers do not interfere with the filmed reality, *or they interfere and this interference is a structural element of the film (1st-person address), or they interfere only to restore the state of reality which existed before the film crew was introduced.*

Let us now move on to the next problem, which is the issue of staging in a documentary.

Mise-en-scene in documentary

It seems that nothing could be more opposed to the idea of documentary cinema than directing events in front of the camera and staging the behaviour of the filmed people. And yet, perhaps as a paradox, the practice of staging is as old as documentary cinema, and it would be difficult to find a film in the history of documentary cinema that completely avoids any form of arranging what is there in front of the camera. Therefore it is necessary to ask why documentary directors use staging, despite the fact that it seems to be clearly contrary to the basic principles of the genre. There are several answers to this question.

First, the staging is driven by the elementary requirements of working on the set. In order to film someone, you need to set up the film equipment, and very often also the sound and lighting equipment. If in the script of the film there is a scene in which the protagonist crosses the street, instead of chasing him around the city and waiting for the moment when he decides to cross the street, he is asked to perform this easy-to-use action especially for the camera.

A second possible reason for staging is that the filmmakers would otherwise not be able to film a certain situation, either because they were simply not there, or because the situation by its very nature takes place away from the film lenses. Moreover, filming can be harmful to the filmed people. For example, the presence of a film crew at a court hearing, and then the public functioning of the finished film, can affect the verdict and the fate of the main character. For this reason, it is safer to use fiction.

Finally, sometimes staging is used in order to “open” reality, reveal some of its traits, which otherwise would not be revealed to the camera’s eye. As Marcel Łoziński put it:

[...] sometimes reality needs to be “activated”, one has to give it some ignition, trigger certain objective situations - help to reveal its hidden truth, hardly accessible to the “objective” documentary camera. The trick is not to lie to the reality, but to be in harmony with it (Łoziński, 1992).

Are stagings and reenactments allowed in documentary cinema? It depends on what is expected of it. The task of a documentary filmmaker is to show filmed people in their full truth, starting from basic, administrative data such as name, age, gender, profession, through the truthfulness of the surroundings of the place of residence, to the truthfulness of their activities and behaviour. This means that we can immediately exclude from the area of documentary cinema such situations in which characters are played by actors, whether professional or even non-professional, but who play other people’s roles during the film.

On the other hand, staging that consists in recreating simple, repetitive activities by real characters is allowed. Such reenactments, necessary for production reasons, belong to the everyday practice of documentary filmmaking and should not pose any ethical problems. Whether such reenactments are credible, and whether they are faithful to the actual behaviour of a given person, depends on the skills of the filmmaker, whose aim is to show natural reactions and behaviour of the filmed people.

As for the other forms of staging, let’s call them “complex”, in which whole situations are staged, or an actor is introduced, in order to “disturb”, “press”, “ac-

tivate” reality or to reveal its actual face, a valuable hint was offered by Krzysztof Kieślowski in his diploma thesis at the Lodz Film School. Kieślowski used an example of a hypothetical film about seducers and beautiful girls. If we make a movie about seducers, we can work with beautiful girls. They, by their behaviour, prompted by the filmmaker, try to extract the idiosyncratic behaviour of the seducers. If we make a film about beautiful girls, we can cooperate with seducers. What is unacceptable, however, is a collaboration with seducers when making a film about them and, likewise, a collaboration with girls when a film is about them (Kieślowski, 2020, p. 15).

That means that such staging is legitimate if a fictional element plays an auxiliary role, provoking a reality which is genuine and unstaged. However, situations in which fictional elements introduced by the team become the carrier of the film’s message are not allowed.

Let us take a real example here. In the film *Curriculum Vitae* (Życiorys, 1975) by Krzysztof Kieślowski, a fictional element was introduced into the fabric of reality. An actor (though not a professional one), with a cooked biography and fictional name (Gralak), sat down in front of a real communist party control committee, which was to judge his life. If *Curriculum Vitae* was a film about Gralak, then of course the abovementioned rule would be infringed, because Gralak is a fictional entity. If, however, we treat this film as a film about the communist party, about the party control committee, about the mechanisms of its operation and the people who belong to it, then the staging used in this film is legitimate: the protagonist and his biography are only catalysts, which help to extract genuine reactions from real people.

After taking into account the latest findings, the definition will read as follows (working definition 3; new part in italics):

A documentary film is a film in which the filmmakers do not interfere with the filmed reality, or they interfere and this interference is a structural element of the film (1st-person address), or they interfere only to restore the state of reality which existed before the film crew was introduced, or to extract the genuine behaviour of the filmed people, who are “normal” people at the moment of the filming.

Non-fictionality

The phrase about “normal” people in this definition is clearly awkward. It means, of course, that these people are themselves, do not play anybody else, that documentary cinema shows reality as it is, not distorted by fiction. Although intuitively understandable, it eludes a precise description. The con-

cept of artistic fiction belongs to the most complex and ambiguous aesthetic categories, so an attempt to define non-fictionality as a negative for fiction would have to entail entanglement in the whole baggage of doubts surrounding fictionality.

Promising prospects for the distinction between fiction and non-fiction relate to the category of possible worlds. Usually, the real world is defined as one of the possible worlds, but differing from them in some aspects. Among these differences, the issue of the completeness is crucial. Fictional worlds are functional, that is, they contain only what is needed to tell the story and describe the surroundings. No matter how detailed the description of reality in a fictional work is, it is never complete, for its many properties go beyond the boundaries of this world. The test is the kind of questions that can be asked about such a world, led by the famous “How many children did Lady Macbeth have?” This question must remain unanswered, because Lady Macbeth’s children do not belong to Shakespeare’s drama. Unlike fictional worlds, non-fictional worlds are complete, i.e. they can be reasonably asked about facts and events not presented in the work itself. “The world is complete if every sentence (in a logical sense) that describes it is either true or false” (Łepkowska, 1991, p. 66). One can reasonably ask what illnesses Nanook suffered from as a child. The average viewer does not know the answers to this question, because the Flaherty film does not say it, but the question itself is sensible, and the answer belongs to the complete world, a section of which has been portrayed.

In view of the above characteristics, it can be objected that many feature films are reconstructions of real events. Almost every feature film contains authentic elements, such as real places, characters modelled on real or reconstructed events. Typically, films combine, in various proportions, fictional and non-fictional elements, and then “the descriptions of ontologically incomplete people, places and events or variations on real people, places and events [...] transform all units of the fictional world into incomplete units” (Carroll, 1996a, p. 238). However, one can imagine a very careful reconstruction, where all the elements relate to real people, events and places. Asking about Lady Macbeth’s children does not make sense, but a question about the children of Christopher Columbus from Ridley Scott’s *1492* does, because, although the film is fictional, (...) the main character is based on a real historical figure.

There is usually an attempt to resolve these dilemmas by saying that the documentary shows “genuine”, “normal”, “real” people or, as Bill Nichols wrote, “social actors.” Each time the point is the same: that there are no actors in the documentary (even non-professionals), that no one plays a role, at least in the

sense that is proper to a feature film. However, all the above terms, are not only awkward (because one might get the impression that the actors are “abnormal” or “unreal”), but are still imprecise, partial (they concern only the authenticity of people, not, for example, places or events) and do not cover various less typical cases (e.g. a documentary about an actor).

This can be remedied by differentiating the levels of meaning of the cinematic image. There are many classifications of this type, to recall those from Barthes, Panofsky, Gombrich or Pryluck. For the purposes of this work, I want to use the Monroe C. Beardsley classification, cited by Noel Carroll (Carroll, 1996, pp. 240-241). According to it, three levels of meaning can be distinguished in every film image. First of all, each shot physically portrays its source, i.e. a real object, place, person or event recorded on the tape. In this sense, every shot of Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind* portrays Clark Gable, the shot of the interior of a spaceship from *Star Wars* shows an excerpt from the film set, and Godard's *Alphaville* shows the streets of Paris. Let us call this kind of meaning a source meaning.

Second, each shot represents a class of objects, people, or events: “people”, “men”, “women”, “city”, “forest”, “catastrophe.” Let us call this meaning “general meaning”.

Third, the people, places, objects and events shown in a film have names and functions assigned to them for the purposes of that film. And so, Clark Gable becomes Rhett Butler, a fragment of the film set - the interior of a spaceship, and Paris - a gloomy city of a dystopian future called *Alphaville*. Let's call this meaning “nominal”.

In a documentary film, the first and the third of the above-mentioned meanings must overlap. In other words: the source meaning is the same as the nominal meaning.

After supplementing it with the findings regarding the status of the presented reality, it takes the following form (working definition no. 4; new part in italics):

A documentary film is a film *that presents a fragment of the complete world, in which the nominal meanings are identical to the source meanings, in which the filmmakers do not interfere with the filmed reality, or they interfere and this interference is a structural element of the film (1st-person address), or they interfere only to restore the state of reality which existed before the film crew was introduced, or to extract the genuine behaviour of the filmed people.*

Documentary Cinema and Avant-garde

We are interested in the borderline of avant-garde and documentary cinema for the simple reason that there are quite a few films that meet even the strictest conditions of documentary filmmaking in the stage of shooting, in which the condition of non-interference of the film crew into the filmed reality is fully respected, and which at the same time look radically different from mainstream documentary films. I am thinking of such films as *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) by D. Vertov, *Back and Forth* (1969) by Michael Snow, the series of “hyperreal” films by Andy Warhol such as *Sleep* (1964), *Kiss* (1963), *Eat* (1963) or *Empire* (1965) and *Real Italian Pizza* (1971) by David Rimmer. I have chosen these particular examples (you could put dozens of others in their place), because they reflect a relatively complete range of deviations from the documentary mainstream.

And so, the documentary character of *Man with a Movie Camera* is sometimes questioned due to the unusual editing of this film and the use of tricks, special effects such as superimpositions, split screen, animations, “strobe” photos (more on this: Petric, 1978). Snow’s *Back and Forth* raises doubts as it breaks the traditional bond between the means of cinematic expression and the story. This film consists of shots of the classroom, captured in pans and tilts. You can see people coming in, talking inside the room, and also outside the window, etc. It is impossible to follow the story or the characters. The camera movements don’t depend on the action, but become the objects of attention themselves. In order to understand this film, one must assume that “its subject are shots and camera movements” (Salska-Kaca, 1989, p. 191).

Warhol’s hyperreal films are based on rejection of editing (*Sleep*) or any thematic development (*Sleep*, *Empire*). *Sleep* shows several hours of a man’s sleep, captured in long takes, whereas in *Empire* we watch many different takes of the Empire State Building shot at different times of day and night. In *Real Italian Pizza* by David Rimmer we see

an entrance to a pizzeria filmed on many different days and seasons, at different speeds. In a short film of just fifteen minutes, taking advantage of experimental means, Rimmer creates a dense, documentary image of a pizzeria in an average big American city. (Salska-Kaca, 1989, p. 194)

The aforementioned films raise three issues with regard to the definition of documentary.

First, it is an issue of applicability of special effects, such as high-speed, slow-motion, superimpositions, computer simulations, to documentary films. Secondly, there is the question of the relation of the means of cinematographic expression to the filmed reality (in the case of Snow's film). Third, it is a question of the syntagmatic order, or in other words, the editing of a documentary film.

CGI and special effects

With regard to the first of these issues, I want to adopt a normative solution: special effects and CGI shouldn't be used in a documentary film because they distort the indexical bond between filmed reality and its recordings.

In recent years, due to, among others, changes in technology and the style of communication, the limits of the documentary cinema tolerance for special effects and transformations of time and space have shifted significantly. Sometimes such effects play the role of an ornament, in other cases they play an important role in the aesthetic concept of a given film. Films in which technological transformations prevail, should be excluded from the genre in question. In other cases, however, when they play subsidiary role, there may also be arguments in favour of the documentary nature of a given film.

However, it is worth emphasising once again that the genre classification of a given film has nothing to do with the degree of its truthfulness. A film about a pizzeria in the middle of a city, which condenses time and space, can be much deeper and more incisive than a film about this pizzeria, which fully respects the principles of documentary cinema. Only the former, possibly wise, engaging, true and incisive, will not be qualified as a documentary, while the latter, possibly boring, false and superficial, will gain this qualification.

After modifying our definition by the recent findings, it takes the following form (working definition 5; new part in italics):

A documentary film is a film that presents a fragment of the complete world, in which the nominal meanings are identical to the source meanings, *in which the indexical fidelity to reality is maintained in each shot*, in which the filmmakers do not interfere with the reality in front of the camera, or they interfere and this interference is a structural element of the film (1st-person address), or they interfere only to restore the state of reality which existed before the film crew was introduced, or to extract the genuine behaviour of the filmed people.

The problem of autotelicity

Another issue, raised here by the case of Snow's film, concerns the distinction between a documentary film and the so-called structural film. Structural film is a type of experimental film that exposes the structural, or even better - material factors of films, i.e. makes a type of film stock, lighting, camerawork, individual means of expression, etc., its subject, and makes the viewer aware of them. Thus, structural film operates on the lowest levels of film, examines the properties of language and material, its role ends where the primacy of the filmed reality begins, when the film begins to present, describe or tell something. In a structural film the filmed reality is secondary to the (exposed with special force) properties of the material, the camera or elements of the film language. According to Mirosława Salska-Kaca:

the most characteristic and tangible feature of the avant-garde is the orientation of its work towards autotelicity, (...) i.e. (...) towards the film medium, means of expression available to cinema, methods of film narration, etc., and this influences the development of the specific aesthetics. Although a current of structural film has been distinguished, which deals only with such issues, the truth is that in all avant-garde works the trend of metalinguistic reflection is something that comes to mind from the very beginning (Salska-Kaca, 1989, p. 190).

The following reservation should therefore be made here: in a documentary film, the autotelic function either does not exist, or if it exists, it cannot suppress or dominate the basic function of recording of reality. Our definition then, supplemented with the issue of autotelicity, will be as follows (working definition no. 6; new part in italics)

A documentary film is a film that presents a fragment of the complete world, in which the nominal meanings are identical to the source meanings, in which the indexical fidelity to reality is maintained in each shot, in which the filmmakers do not interfere with the filmed reality, or they interfere and this interference is a structural element of the film (1st-person address), or they interfere only to restore the state of reality which existed before the film crew was introduced, or to extract the genuine behaviour of the filmed people, *in which the autotelic function cannot suppress or dominate the function of recording reality.*

Editing and syntagmatic organisation of the material

A trivial experience of anyone who watches documentary films is that there are films which admittedly have been shot in compliance with the rules of documentary filmmaking (basically – respecting the rule on non-interference with the filmed reality and its consequences), but still do not resemble what is customarily regarded as documentary films. This is the case of Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, which undoubtedly belongs to the canon of documentary cinema, but which to contemporary viewers who do not know the broader context may seem very far from it. Moreover, Vertov's film is not the most extreme example of this phenomenon – other examples are provided by Stan Brakhage's films, shot in compliance with documentary demands, but usually regarded as representatives of experimental cinema. More broadly, one can imagine a completely random montage of a series of documentary shots. Apart from special cases, we will not be inclined to consider it as a documentary film. To put it another way, some methods of syntagmatic organisation of material and some methods of editing adhere to the common understanding of documentary cinema, while others do not. A similar problem, although for completely the opposite reason, arises in the case of "hyperreal" films by Warhol. While in the first case, exemplified here by Vertov's films, the problem was the excess of editing and unconventional ways of combining shots, in the case of Warhol it would be the complete lack of editing. It means that there are some if not rules, then at least habits, concerning both the duration of film shots and the methods of their combination, which determine that a certain type of combination of shots is accepted as documentary, while some others are not.

When it comes to the shot length, it seems that general rules regarding film editing can be applied here, linking the duration of the shot with its informative content and the level of interest of the viewer. The length of the shot is regulated by the categories of minimum and maximum of perception, the minimum being the lowest threshold necessary to recognise the content of the shot, and the maximum being the moment when the content of this shot is already well recognised. Shots that are shorter than the time of the perceptual minimum cause an informative hunger, that is a lack of time to recognise their content, while shots that are longer than the maximum become boring or begin to have a contemplative value, which results not so much from the content of a given shot, but rather from the very fact of the flow of time. In both cases, the autotelic value looms ahead. The few-frame shots by Vertov, as well as the many-hour-long shots by Warhol, are devoid of any informative value, and at the same time they maximise the autotelic value, i.e. they draw the viewer's attention either to the editing itself

- in the first case - or to the length of the shot - in the second. For this reason, both of them fall outside the boundaries of documentary cinema.

However, the issue of the editing rhythm, duration of the shot, is only a prelude to the real problem, perhaps one of the most difficult, which is to define the boundaries between the editing forms allowed in documentary cinema and those that are not acceptable and the use of which “pushes” a given film beyond the boundaries of the genre. A documentary film should be composed in such a way that the viewer has a sense that a recording adheres to profilmic reality. At the same time – as Wojciech Wiszniewski, an outstanding Polish documentary filmmaker rightly states – documentary film manifests, if only primitively, an ordered image of the world, that is, a striving, characteristic of all human culture, to understand the world, to find its essence, its general principle (Wiszniewski, 1976, pp. 62, 63). The world can be chaotic, but the viewer expects an orderly image of it, which they can identify with reality itself. Therefore, a documentary film must imitate in its structure the conventional methods humans use for ordering reality. I consider this matter in details elsewhere (Przyłipiak 1998; Przyłipiak 2004, p. 98-103), so here I will just give my conclusions. Documentary films are commonly organised according to the category of time (e.g. one day in the life of a city) and space (near, far, beside, behind, etc.). In addition, the bond between the elements of the film may be analogous to the bond which humans use when connecting phenomena in reality. Willem Hesling (1989) attempted to establish a basic repertoire of argumentation patterns found in documentary cinema. In his view, the bond between assertion and argument acquires an irresistible power in the eyes of the viewer when it resembles the kind of bond that the viewer believes connects phenomena in reality. Hesling distinguishes six possible types of such bond – cause-effect, indexical, parallel, analogical, generalising and classifying) – which, to my mind, can be reduced to three: cause-effect, analogy/contrast and part/whole.

If we now complete the definition of documentary cinema developed so far with this thesis, our definition will read as follows (working definition no. 7; new part in italics):

A documentary film is a film that presents a fragment of the complete world, in which the nominal meanings are identical to the source meanings, in which the indexical fidelity to reality is maintained in each shot, in which the filmmakers do not interfere with the reality in front of the camera, or they interfere and this interference is a structural element of the film (1st-person address), or they interfere only to restore the state of reality which existed before the film crew was

introduced, or to extract the genuine behaviour of the filmed people, which imitates conventional methods humans use for ordering reality, in which the autotelic function cannot suppress or dominate the function of recording reality.

Documentary cinema and non-fictionality

The third context that must be taken into consideration when defining documentary cinema is the context of the documentary film itself, or rather its place among various non-fictional (factual) subgenres. Two things at least must be taken into account: a Griersonian attempt to distinguish a “proper” documentary film among the plethora of early factual genres, and a proliferation of factual programming brought about by television.

As early as in the wake of documentary cinema John Grierson distinguished a genre of proper “documentary cinema”, as opposed to “inferior” types, such as travelogues, nature films, etc (Grierson, 1932-1933). A distinguishing feature of this group would be the superb quality of the films, their incisiveness, their ability to catch the crux of the matter. Despite the efforts of Grierson and many other documentary filmmakers and theorists, it has not been possible to convincingly demonstrate that this quality can be expressed in terms of genres, that is, for example, that films which particularly profoundly portray human existence constitute a separate genre of documentary cinema.

Television has complicated the field of non-fictional broadcasts in two points at least: live broadcasts on the one hand, and snapshots, short documentary material used within other types of show (such as news), on the other. None of them can be regarded as a documentary film. Excluding snapshots means that what we call a documentary film must be autonomous, and documentary film material used within other types of show can't be regarded as such. A distinction between live (direct) broadcast and a documentary film is carried out on the basis of a time lapse (or the lack thereof): in live broadcast the moment of action, recording and the viewer's reception overlap, whereas in documentary films moments of action/recording precede the moment of reception.

After this modification, having taken into account the latest findings, the definition is as follows (final definition; new parts in italics):

A documentary film is such an autonomous audiovisual text, existing as a separate whole, which presents a fragment of the complete world, in which the nominal meanings are identical to the source meanings,

in which there is a time lapse between the moment of action/recording and the moment of reception, in which the indexical fidelity to reality is maintained in each shot, in which the filmmakers do not interfere with the reality in front of the camera, or they interfere and this interference is a structural element of the film (1st-person address), or they interfere only to restore the state of reality which existed before the film crew was introduced, or to extract the genuine behaviour of the filmed people, which imitates conventional methods humans use for ordering reality, in which the autotelic function cannot suppress or dominate the function of recording reality.

I consider the above definition of documentary cinema complete at the present stage of development of this genre. It formulates a set of criteria on the basis of which I will select the material discussed in the following parts of this work. However, since many of the films I will discuss are situated on the margins of documentary cinema, their analysis will also be a form of verification of this definition. I wanted it to be as precise as possible. More important, however, than precision, never completely attainable, is that it provides tools for the analysis of borderline, impure cases, which supplement documentary cinema with methods and styles derived from other audiovisual kinds and genres.

Postscriptum

This was the final version of the definition when I first published it, in 1999. To my mind it was then “complete at the present stage of the genre”. However, almost a quarter of a century has passed and “the present stage of the genre” is different now, because new forms of documentary cinema have emerged, which are not compatible with the definition. This is, interestingly, one more proof that definitions of documentary are closely linked with the time of their creation and that the necessity to constantly define the genre anew results from its incessant development, both in technology and aesthetics.

By “the new forms of documentary cinema” I mean animated documentary, web (interactive) documentary and – to a lesser degree – mock documentary. Each of them poses a challenge to the ways documentary cinema has been perceived throughout its history.

Animated documentary massively breaches the above definition of documentary. First of all, the idea of indexical fidelity to reality is breached. In some forms of animation, generated via algorithms, we do not have any form of reality in front of the camera. In other forms, like stop-motion or puppet animation, we

don't have a recorded independent reality, but a reality completely fabricated. Likewise, it is difficult to talk about non-interference with reality in front of the camera. And, finally, the division into nominal and source meanings is doubtful, when the look of the source is also fabricated.

I can see two possible solutions to this dilemma. The first one is similar to the way the issue of autotelicity was resolved: animated parts cannot suppress or dominate the function of recording reality. In this mixture of documentary and animated imagery it is still the documentary material which has the upper hand. The story and the characters are real, the worlds are complete, the film is imbued with real documentary records, both pictorial and acoustic. Animated fragments can illustrate some parts of the story, supplement it with emotions, enable a fresh look at worn-out documentary imagery, but in essence are subordinated to a documentary account about the real world.

The second solution is more radical. According to it, an explosive development of animation in recent decades is a result of more profound change, namely - a shift of moving images from analogue to digital recording. This shift absolves the very idea of representation. Instead of indexality, complete worlds and non-interference with reality we should talk about simulations, avatars and non-binarity. The question appears, though, if documentary cinema can survive without a binary idea of representation at its base? To my mind, it can't.

Web-documentaries pose another problem. They do not breach the definition in any explicit way. Perhaps only the part of the definition in which a documentary film exists "as a separate whole" can raise some doubts in face of the many modalities that web-documentaries can afford. Still, this objection is not fundamental, since any web-documentary is a separate whole, even if it offers many modalities of the recounted reality. So, the real problem lies elsewhere: our definition does not allow differentiation of something which is very different. It is as if this new form, a combination of documentary film with computer games, in which the viewer is not doomed to follow the only route through reality provided by the author, but instead can choose from among many routes, in which they can impose their own ways of ordering reality, doesn't in essence differ from regular documentary film. Perhaps a clause should be added to the definition, which would display a sensitivity to this new phenomenon.

Last but not least, mockumentaries. We can dispense with this problem easily, stating that mockumentaries are not documentaries at all, for they are all made up. The thing is not that easy, though. Mockumentaries usually use lots of documentary archival materials, and routinely use basic and well-recognised

documentary means such as interview and off-screen narration. Their relation to regular documentary films resembles the relation between regular and conceptual arts. They challenge premises on which regular documentary is based in order to raise awareness of these premises among viewers. Therefore they shouldn't be excluded from the domain of documentary.

There is also an additional reason to count mockumentaries in the documentary genre. We rejected the idea that a film can be called documentary only when it is truthful. Documentary films can and usually have a strong bias, can propagandise and even lie, without ceasing to be documentary. If we grant the right to be a documentary to films that lie, then all the more so can we not deny this right to films whose outright mission is to make people aware of lying. It is tempting to introduce the abovementioned modification to the definition, in order to update it. I will leave it to others, though, if anyone would like to take up the challenge.

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