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## DOCUMENTARY STYLE IN FICTION FILM

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nonfiction;  
Dziga Vertov;  
avant-garde;  
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sound;  
found footage**Abstract**

**The purpose of the research** is to analyse the genesis and development of the documentary style in fiction film; to investigate the prerequisites for its emergence, its main characteristics and their evolution, and the reasons and peculiarities of its use by various filmmakers in different historical periods; to examine the influence of the significant trends of documentary, television and amateur video content on its formation and application in fiction films; to identify essential trends in modern fiction filmmaking related to the use of the documentary form and its influence on the emergence of new genres and subgenres of this type of cinema. **The research methodology** is based on a comprehensive approach, which includes the analysis of literary sources to form a theoretical basis and define key concepts, historical and cultural analysis to study historical, technical, social and cultural prerequisites, the chronological method to establish the causality of the phenomena under study, the case study method, involving stylistic and critical analysis of selected films as the most expressive examples, as well as comparative analysis to compare different films and cinematic trends. **Scientific novelty.** For the first time, all the most critical aspects related to the formation and evolution of the documentary style in fiction films have been summarised, from the experiments of Soviet avant-garde filmmakers to its use in modern cinema. Based on the study of the most characteristic examples, the standard techniques on which this style is based have been identified and the main reasons and peculiarities of their use. Special attention is given to some prerequisites for the emergence of new genre forms that arose from the exploitation of "documentary" in fiction films. **Conclusions.** The article identifies the role of the main trends in documentary, television content, and, to some extent, amateur videos in establishing and developing the documentary style in fiction film. The direct and indirect influence of the ideas of Soviet director Dziga Vertov on cinema, where it was applied, has been proven. This style's role in forming the hybrid genre mockumentary has been analysed.

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## Problem statement

In the postmodern era, the boundaries of the main types of cinema became quite blurred. New hybrid genres appeared, combining elements of documentary and fiction, such as docudrama, docufiction, and mockumentary. A clear example of these transformations is the claim of fiction films to documentary, as demonstrated by many movies and television series "based on true events". However, the stylistic influence of nonfiction cinema on fiction, which is no less obvious, deserves much more attention.

The documentary style has become a rather powerful and popular tool in the arsenal of fiction film directors. It is worth noting its direct connection with such resonant phenomena of classical cinema as Italian neorealism and the French New Wave, or the more modern and equally iconic *Dogma 95* and the relatively new subgenre of horror films "found footage". The popularity of this method is mainly due to many filmmakers' commitment to a realistic approach to filmmaking. Still, the documentary form can also serve as a serious means of manipulating the viewer's consciousness, making it an essential object for in-depth research.

## Recent research and publications analysis

In recent years, several scientific works have been published dedicated to the documentary style, particularly its penetration into fiction films and other aspects of the influence of nonfiction on fiction. For instance, in analysing existing definitions of

the term "documentary film" and trying to create his own, M. Przylipiak (2023) not only proved the existence of a documentary style in fiction films, but also drew attention to the fact that nonfiction cinema cannot "disguise" itself as fiction.

B. Nichols and J. Baron (2024) examined documentary film style in their fundamental work, pointing out the stylistic differences among documentary films from different countries, trends, and historical periods. The authors also noted the lack of a fixed set of forms and techniques in this type of cinema. In their view, new approaches are constantly being tested as alternatives and are either spread or rejected.

The impact of technical innovations on changing the visual aesthetics of documentary films over the past three decades was investigated by S. Dux, C. Ise-li and E. Vitija (2020). In particular, they noted that the growing diversity of cameras and filming styles contributed to the emergence of new forms of visual aesthetics and began to offer new ways of perceiving reality.

The usage of documentary style in auteur fiction cinema was examined by G. Pohrebniak (2023). In her opinion, the main reason for the stylisation of fiction films "like *Chronicle*" is the directors' desire for the life-like authenticity of a picture, their desire to film a natural, unconstructed atmosphere. She also noted that the influence of "documentary aesthetics" is primarily manifested in the use of relaxed, unfinished frame compositions and the same approach to the film's lighting atmosphere, for example, creation of "functional overexposure".

Analysing the realism of Thomas Vinterberg's film *The Celebration* (1998) of the Dogma 95 movement, D. R. Bagaskara, M. A. Amri, N. F. Choiron and E. Eliyannah (2022) concluded that the techniques, typical for this film and the movement in general, such as shooting with a hand-held camera, low image quality, absence of decorations, post-processing and non-diegetic sounds, caused the effect of presence within the plot and the sense of involvement for a viewer.

Similar conclusions were made by S. Honcharuk, O. Levchenko and N. Tsimokh (2022), in their study of the forms of artistic embodiment of mockumentary films, noting the increasing penetration of techniques that make a fictional plot leave a realistic impression on the viewer (hand-held camera, natural lighting, location shooting, actors' improvisation and tools for explicating subtext) into auteur cinema, genre fiction films and television series.

P. Carrera (2021) studied fiction films positioned as "based on facts," arguing that documentary techniques in fiction films are used to establish a mode of perception where plausibility is replaced by truthfulness. That is, narrative works appeal to facts not for historical accuracy, but rather for various kinds of indoctrination of the viewer's consciousness.

The documentary style of mockumentary horror films in the context of post-truth was examined by R. Wallace (2021), who concluded that the documentary form in films of this genre refutes the idea that the documentary method of production is more related to "truth" and that this type of filmmaking is insufficient for finding answers or even simply presenting facts.

Therefore, most studies that reflect the issue of documentary style in fiction films consider this phenomenon only within the framework of individual films, genres,

or cinematic trends. On the other hand, works devoted to developing the style of documentary films usually do not analyse their influence on fiction films.

**The purpose of the study.** To investigate the origin and evolution of the documentary style in fiction cinema. To examine the prerequisites that influenced its emergence, the main formal features and their transformation, as well as the reasons and peculiarities of the use of documentary form by directors of various genres of fiction films. To analyse the impact of significant trends in documentary cinema, television content, and amateur videos on their development and use in fiction films. To determine this style's role in forming new genres and subgenres and its general significance in modern fiction cinema.

### Main research material

Renowned film historian R. M. Barsam (1976, p.14), analysing the peculiarities of documentary films, points out that "it is usually filmed at the actual scene, with the actual people, without sets, costumes, written dialogue, or created sound effects. It tries to create the feeling of 'being there,' with as much fidelity to fact as the situation allows". However, the paradox that the author does not consider is that although factual accuracy is not always typical for fiction films (as well as for a significant part of documentary films), all of the aforementioned stylistic techniques have also been exploited in films of this type for a long time, that is, as M. Przylipek (2023, p.18) points out, fiction films can simulate documentaries. It is worth emphasising that this "simulation" (the usage of various stylistic peculiarities, typical for documentary films and amateur videos when creating fiction films) is referred to as "the documentary style".

The idea of abandoning actors, scripts, props, sets, costumes, and studio filming was first proclaimed by the Soviet documentary filmmaker Dziga Vertov in a series of radical manifestos (modeled after the Futurists), in which he, along with his followers "kinoks", ruthlessly criticised the cinema of the time and called for a complete rejection of fiction films (Myslavskiy, Chmil, Bezruchko and Cherkasova, 2020). This was one of the characteristic attempts of the early years of Soviet power and the early 20th century to deny traditional art and seek a new filmic reality. As the director points out regarding the essence of the movement he initiated: "Kino-eye is an ever-growing movement for influence through facts as opposed to influence through fiction, no matter how strong the imprint of fiction. <...> Kino-eye plunges into the seeming chaos of life to find in life itself the response to an assigned theme" (Vertov, 1984, pp.87-88). Although contemporary critics uncertainly perceived Vertov's work and, despite its political engagement and propagandistic aims, did not always find support from the Soviet authorities, his theoretical ideas and the filming methods he invented (for example, hidden camera shooting and unrehearsed film interviews) significantly influenced the entire subsequent development of world cinema (Myslavskiy, Chmil, Bezruchko and Kupriichuk, 2021).

As J. Leyda (1983, p.179) notices: "Willingly or not, Vertov gave new strength to his fictitious 'enemy' – the acted film". The truth of this statement can be proven through the works of one of the leading opponents of the kinoks' ideas, Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein. For instance, the influence of their work can be seen in the propaganda film "October: Ten Days That

Shook the World" (1927), co-directed with Grigori Aleksandrov. The film lacks a straightforward dramatic plot, with few professional actors involved in its creation (some participants even played themselves), most of the filming took place in real locations of events, and the style of camera work resembles the documentary chronicle of that time.

J. Leyda (1983, pp.231-232) points out that the film crew, in preparation for filming, reviewed all available newsreels and news photographs taken in Petrograd during the First World War and the revolutions, even the scene of soldiers shooting the demonstrators was so accurately reproduced from the famous picture that the film footage was sometimes confused with the original. However, N. Drubek (2020, p.9) comes to the opposite conclusion: "Eisenstein seems neither interested in the geographical authenticity of the event nor chronology or historical accuracy". The difference between these two opinions can be explained by the fact that the director was as accurate as possible in the facts that supported the Soviet narrative about the revolutionary events of 1917 and did not contradict artistic expediency, but easily deviated from them when it did not work for the propagandistic or creative intent of the film (Bezruchko, Gavran, Hrabarchuk, Kostyuk and Kot, 2020). It is worth adding that this is not the only film by Sergei Eisenstein that was shot in a documentary style. His previous works, created in tandem with the experienced documentary cameraman Eduard Tisse, "Strike" (1924) and the recognised masterpiece "Battleship Potemkin" (1925) were stylised as a chronicle. Such a method created an illusion of reality, correlating with the director's famous theory of "montage of attractions", which, according to H. Chmil and K. Pshenychna

(2018, p.104), aimed to enhance the emotional impact on a viewer.

Although the film was received rather coldly by Soviet critics and was generally unknown to viewers, some scenes, especially the storming of the Winter Palace, are actively used in documentaries and television programs. The general public often perceives these scenes as real, making the film somewhat pseudo-documentary after its release. It is also worth noting that the re-shooting of archival materials has become widespread in modern cinema and television series, especially those based on real events. For example, a recreation of the famous photograph that captured the train wreck at Montparnasse can be seen in the film "Hugo" (2011) by Martin Scorsese. One of the scenes in the American-British miniseries "Chernobyl" (2019) directed by Johan Renck imitates archival footage of liquidating the disaster at the eponymous station, shot by a television cameraman.

The works of Soviet avant-garde filmmakers significantly influenced the founder of British documentary filmmaking, director John Grierson, who first used the term "documentary" in his review of Robert Flaherty's film "Moana" (1926). In this regard, J. Leyda (1983, p.195) points to the plausibility of the statement that "the British documentary film movement was born from the last reel of Potemkin". Despite criticising some of Vertov's works for being meaningless, Grierson, as well as the Soviet director, rejected fiction film. He gathered a group of filmmakers who, following the kinoks, published a manifesto opposing the use of pavilions and acting.

The influence of "Griersonian" films, the involvement of documentarians in the creation of fiction films, and the propagandistic necessity caused by unsuccessful for Britain start of World War II, became the

preconditions for emergence of an interesting phenomenon in the cinema of this country, which was later called "wartime wedding" – a kind of combination of fiction and documentary cinema. Such films were often based on real events and, as J. Chapman (2019, p.69) points out, they were characterised by socially authentic characters and situations. The usage of documentary approaches and techniques, pared down visual style, and unsensational plots reflected stability and emotional restraint in contrast to melodrama, as well as the emotional excess of Hollywood, as British film critics believed.

One of the typical films of this period is the propaganda film by director and authoritative researcher of Soviet cinema, Thorold Dickinson, "The Next of Kin" (1942), which depicts the work of the network of German spies in the kingdom and the unsuccessful British naval landing caused by their activities. The film was intended to convey to citizens, in the most accessible form, the possible consequences of careless handling of secret information. The plot of the film does not differ much from the rest of the spy films of the time, although it is based on some documented cases of information leaks. However, the exception is the film's last part, which shows the unsuccessful landing of the British marines. It was shot in a somewhat realistic manner, and, as G. Thompson (2016, p.816) notices, it involved professional military personnel and used real military plans instead of a script. Additionally, its documentary nature consisted in using real newsreel footage, location shooting, "sloppy" compositions and naturalistic lighting, absence of famous actors and, most importantly, in breaking the main "taboo" of British cinema at that time – showing a large number of defeated

British soldiers. The scenes showing the death of entire units looked so truthful for the time that, according to the director himself (Thompson, 2016, pp.817-818), some viewers fainted while watching the film, and some were even sure that these were shots of real combat operations.

Although most of the films from the “war-time wedding” period remain relatively unknown outside the English-speaking world, it can be stated that they significantly influenced war fiction cinema worldwide, where the use of documentary form became one of the traditional techniques. Thus, the stylistic echoes of the film “The Next of Kin” and British cinema of that time in general can be seen in the movie “Overlord” (1975) directed by Stuart Cooper, where the Normandy landings are depicted through a masterful combination of documentary chronicle and staged scenes. And we may also recall, as such an example, the more widely known scene in Steven Spielberg’s film “Saving Private Ryan” (1998), dedicated to the same operation.

It is worth emphasising that during the Second World War, not only did British filmmakers adopt the documentary style for creating military propaganda films. However, in particular, in fascist Italy, around the same period, Roberto Rossellini’s debut fiction film *The White Ship* (1941) was released, which, like Dickinson’s work, depicted military operations. Although Rossellini followed the cinematic techniques of the film’s co-author, the ideological fascist Francesco de Robertis, L. Longhi (2016, p.147) also admits the influence of Sergei Eisenstein’s film *Battleship Potemkin*: “It is easy to single out a whole series of shots from a battleship that are a direct tribute to the Soviet director’s masterpiece”. It should be noted that, paradoxically, the film *The White Ship*, aside from its propagandistic

nature, adhered to all the canons of the film movement that would soon conquer cinemas worldwide – Italian neorealism.

But the true example of a picture of this movement is Rossellini’s later film *Paisà* (1946), which, although stylistically resembled his films from the Mussolini period, promoted completely different ideological narratives, showcasing heroic struggle of the Italian people against the Nazis and difficult post-war life of ordinary people. As M. Shiel (2006, p.50) points out: “<...> Rossellini begins to build a new mythology of Italian national identity whose humility contrasts with the bombast and corporatism of the fascist era”. Five of the six episodes of this film begin with newsreel footage, which stylistically does not contrast much with the staged part, shot in a somewhat reportage manner. It should be emphasised that, while in the films *The Next of Kin* and *The White Ship* the use of real combat footage is primarily driven by cost reduction, in the case of “*Paisà*” this technique was aimed at enhancing the realism of the film, creating “the reality effect” according to the concept of R. Barthes (1968). This statement is proved by the fact that the only episode in which the director refrained from using chronicle begins with shots of a real corpse, thus achieving the mentioned effect through other means. Non-professional actors were involved in the film, which was generally typical for films of this movement, and, as S. Kracauer (1960, p.98) points out, along with the “street” quality, it added an element of documentary, as in Eisenstein’s film *Battleship Potemkin*. The stylistic features of the film also include the absence of studio shooting, complex editing and staged mise-en-scènes, while A. Bazin (1971) points out one of the main characteristics of this film and neorealism in general: ac-



tor improvisation and the ability to easily walk away from the script during filming, distinguishing it from high-budget cinema. He notes: "The Italian film has that air of documentary, a naturalness nearer to the spoken than to the written account, to the sketch rather than to the painting" (Bazin, 1971, p.32).

Although films in a style close to neorealism had been released earlier, the reasons that played a significant role in forming the movement included, for example, the influence of French poetic realism and Soviet avant-garde cinema, the adherence of filmmakers of this technique to left-wing ideas and the reaction to fascism. We should emphasise that the difficult economic situation of post-war Italy and destroyed film studios did not allow them to make films differently, and the neorealists only transformed a lack of financial and technical opportunities into an aesthetic approach.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Dziga Vertov's films and theoretical works became popular among French filmmakers. Fascination with his ideas, the relatively recent success of neorealist paintings, and the technical evolution of filmmaking techniques are usually considered the main preconditions for the emergence of a new movement in documentary film, initiated by director Jean Rouch and philosopher Edgar Morin – "cinéma vérité". Although R. Armes (1970, p.159) disagrees with this point of view, since in his opinion, the main reason for the appearance of this phenomenon was the influence of television reporting. The name of the direction was French translation of the name of the chronicle series Kino-Pravda / Film Truth (1922–1924), which the group of kinoks produced, and, according to S. Honcharuk and O. Provolovskyi (2020, p.87), its primary goal was to reflect reality and rep-

resent the truth. Although this statement is entirely accurate, it does not explain the main difference between the films of this movement and a significant number of documentaries, whose directors pursued the same goal. In this regard, R. Armes (1970, p.160) notes: "Cinéma-Vérité is in effect a rejection of the whole aesthetic on which the art of the cinema is based. An interesting visual style and stunning effects are rejected as a hindrance to portraying the vital truth". The use of a hand-held camera distinguished these films, the rejection of artificial lighting, made easier by the increased availability of light-sensitive film, and the use of live synchronous sound, which became feasible with the advent of silent cameras and portable sound equipment.

It is worth emphasising that both documentary and fiction films in France underwent revolutionary changes during this period. Influenced by A. Bazin's (1967; 1971) theory of realism, a new film movement emerged in response to the need for revitalising the country's cinema and as a protest against the commercial films of the era. It was called the French New Wave. Unlike neorealist films, the films of this movement did not have a clearly defined everyday style. Still, many of them were characterised by the *cinéma-vérité* style, as, for example, one of the key films of the movement, Jean-Luc Godard's debut work *Breathless* (1960). The rather unoriginal plot of the film tells about the love between a car thief and a young American journalist, reminiscent of American film noir, but, as J. Lourcelles (1992, p.2) notes, "from a visual point of view, its sloppy, rough style, which denies – and this is the main novelty – all the connective techniques of traditional cinematic language <...> will itself become a symbol of the younger generation". However,

the “roughness” of the style was not only in the complete disregard for the editing rules. The picture was shot in a dynamic reportage style with natural lighting by the cameraman and former photojournalist Raoul Coutard, who, a year later, would take part in the creation of the *cinéma vérité* program film *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961). The director’s innovative technique was also a complete rejection of the script, which was invented before the start of the shooting day; the dialogues were improvised directly during the shooting, and the film has no titles.

It should be noted that the documentary nature of the film can be explained not only by the director’s intention, but also by the same reason which the neorealists faced – lack of a significant budget, in this regard J. Lourcelles (1992, p.2) points out that the film “cost 3–4 times less than most contemporary films and achieved instant and great success, providing it with a whole cohort of followers”. Although the avoidance of studio filming, actor improvisation and reporter style of camera work, as in neorealist films, enhances the film’s realism, the abrupt change of scenes, at first glance, contradicts the emergence of this feeling in the audience. However, such editing (most likely accidentally) made the film somewhat akin to dreams, characterised by sudden transitions that unexpectedly bring it closer to the works of surrealists. The director’s innovative approach can partly explain its incredible success, the talented acting of Jean-Paul Belmondo, and somewhat provocative dialogues, but also the simultaneous intensification of realistic and oneiric elements. Thus, C. Metz (1982, p.140) points out in this regard: “If cinematic fabulations are endowed with this sort of credibility, which has struck every <...>, this is at once, and contradictorily, because the psychical situation in which they are re-

ceived involves certain features of the day-dream and the dream, which also belong to the pseudoreal”.

Godard did not stop experimenting with the search for a new filmic reality, and one of his bravest ideas was the establishment, together with other directors, of the politicised cinematographic Dziga Vertov Group, which produced films based on the theory of Soviet cinematographer, leftist political ideas, and in opposition to Eisenstein’s approaches. It is also worth emphasising that the *cinéma vérité* style became widespread in world cinema, mainly due to the popularity of Godard’s work and the French New Wave in general.

However, *cinéma vérité* developed not only in France, but also in the USA, where it is more often called “direct cinema”, a more radical form of the movement that gained popularity. For this variant, according to S. Honcharuk and O. Provolovskiy (2020, p.86): “The idea of non-interference of the author in the direct process of filming is conceptually important <...>”. Meanwhile, new cinematic trends also made an impact in Hollywood. By the late 1960s, the competition for a young audience against television and European cinema led to the abolition of strict censorship restrictions (Hays Code), including young directors, and, most importantly, granting significant creative freedom.

One of the most interesting experiments of the New Hollywood period was the directorial debut of the famous American cinematographer Haskell Wexler in the fiction film *Medium Cool* (1969), shot under the influence of Godard’s work, *cinéma vérité* and the director’s own experience in documentary filmmaking. Through the story of a television cameraman’s work and life, the film draws attention to the issues of journalistic ethics and American television in general,



reflecting the tense political situation in Chicago at that time and, according to K. Moskowitz (1977, p.19), "also considers the pregnant questions regarding film reality which Godard, McLuhan, and others have raised". It should be noted that the film is considered a unique experiment in the history of cinema, as it successfully combines staged scenes shot in a reportage style (sometimes even in an emphasised amateurish one) with the involvement of little-known actors and real people, alongside documentary footage and action scenes set against the backdrop of real political events and protests. Let's note that the stylistic unity of the film sometimes does not allow to immediately distinguish action scenes from non-action ones, and actors from real people, which, according to the director himself, was an attempt to make a film that would become a "marriage" of fiction cinema and *cinéma vérité* (Shatnoff and Corliss, 1969, p.47).

It is worth noting that overall, despite its documentary style, the film is perceived as artistic due to the fictional plot. However, despite professional actors' participation, some scenes involving real people outside the film's context look like ordinary documentary footage. This combination of fictional and non-fictional has found its application in mockumentary films. Thus, the technique of combining real and staged interviews, used in the movie, can be seen in many pseudo-documentaries, for example, in the French television film by William Karel, *Dark Side of the Moon* (2002). And a significant part of Larry Charles's controversial comedy film *Borat! Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (2006) is built on the reportage-style interactions of the famous British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen, who pretends

to be a foreigner, with real Americans. It is important to emphasise that the above techniques in mockumentary films, as well as probably in Wexler's film, are borrowed from television production methods or serve as a parody of them.

However, from the perspective of mass media's influence on cinema, the late 1990s and early 2000s, marked by a surge in the popularity of reality television, are of greater interest. In this regard, J. Corner (2002) points out that this was the beginning of the "post-documentary" era on television and led to changes in documentary. On the one hand, it made this content more entertaining and stylistically closer to other media formats (advertising, music videos, dramatic fiction films, etc.). On the other hand, it led to the adoption of the "documentary look" by some television programs. Thus, despite the entertainment purpose of the new screen product, the *cinéma-vérité* style has become an integral part of many reality television formats, often associated by modern viewers with the reality show genre.

At the same time, one of the most resonant phenomena in the fiction cinema of this period was undoubtedly the avant-garde cinema movement *Dogme 95*, which, as H. Chmiland and K. Psheychna (2018, p.103) note, was initiated in 1995 with the proclamation of the manifesto of the same name by two Danish directors Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, imitating the manifestos of the *Kinoks*. According to the strict rules of the movement, called the "vows of chastity," filming could only take place in real locations without scenery and props, unless they were already present at the location. Musical accompaniment could only be used if it sounded in the scene, and filming was allowed only with a handheld camera, without artificial lighting (except

for on-camera light), filters, or optical effects. Imaginary actions (shootouts, murders, etc.) and temporal and geographical deviations were also prohibited, meaning all events in the film had to occur here and now. According to the founders, such strict restrictions were meant to deprive the movie of this direction of illusoriness. As G. Giralt (2003, p.4) observes in this regard, the movement sought to become the antithesis of high-tech Hollywood, and most of its stylistic elements were borrowed from the films of Italian neorealism and the French New Wave.

One of the most famous films of the Dogme 95 series is Lars von Trier's *The Idiots* (1998), which tells the story of a group of people who shock others by pretending to be individuals with intellectual disabilities. Its release caused a real scandal due to the depiction of unsimulated sex scenes (according to the movement's rules) and the overall controversial theme of the film. However, the discussion within the world cinema community was caused not only by the depiction of explicit scenes, but also by the emphatically amateur style of the film. Regarding this, K. Pandža (2018, pp.86-87), notes that the absence of point-of-view shots in the film, i.e., first-person shots, forces the viewer to identify not with the characters, but with the camera, whose shaky movements and following of the actors without prior choice of the angle, occasional appearance of the microphone in the frame, jump cuts, and, importantly, the absence of temporal and geographical transitions enhance the feeling of direct presence. But the author does not pay attention to an important aspect – all the listed techniques, at the time of the film's creation, had become an integral part of specific reality television programs, which, to some extent, are per-

ceived by viewers as reality. That is, the feeling of realism in the film is caused not only by the method of filming itself, but also by association with a television product filmed in the same manner, with the participation of real people, which also explains the director's imitation of another typical reality television technique – interviews with participants, as well as the abandonment of film in favor of the then still quite imperfect digital image. Zs. Gyenge (2009, p.74) also points to the stylistic proximity of Dogme 95 films to television products, as he notes that the "poor" video quality of the films in this movement demonstrates a desire to break with the traditional style of fiction films and corresponds to the trends of simplifying the visual sequence in news reports, namely, abandoning "professionalism" in favor of "spontaneity". According to J. Corner (2003, p.96), this is a tendency toward the literalism of representation, that is, a complete rejection of style, which is part of the conventional grounds for trust and credibility in documentary material.

It is worth adding that this is not Trier's first attempt to shoot a film in an amateur manner: the miniseries *The Kingdom* (1994–1997) he directed and the movie *Breaking the Waves* (1996) resemble the Dogme 95 style, but only the film *The Idiots* looks truly amateurish. This effect was achieved by refusing to involve a professional cameraman to shoot most of the scenes, which the director himself shot. From the perspective of applying the documentary style, his early work *Epidemic* (1987) also deserves attention, where most of the screen time is occupied not by the film about a terrible epidemic itself, but by a pseudo-documentary depiction of the process of writing its script. In addition, the musical scenes of

his movie *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) are also worth noting, which were shot with a hundred cameras set up in advance to imitate the style of a concert recording.

Although *Dogme 95* ceased its official existence ten years after proclamation of the manifesto, its radical rejection of many conventional techniques of fiction film and the provocative plots of some films attracted considerable attention from both viewers and world film critics, inspiring directors worldwide to make new attempts to make feature films more realistic using documentary methods. Moreover, this approach to filmmaking, like that of their predecessors, the neorealists and French New Wave filmmakers, significantly reduced production costs, allowing actors (often non-professionals) to more easily get into character and improvise. And the absence of complex visual techniques encouraged the search for interesting dramaturgical solutions. The influence of films from this film movement remains quite noticeable in modern cinema, especially in the drama genre. Examples of this can be seen in the works of contemporary Belgian directors, the Dardenne brothers, or Austrian cinematographer Ulrich Seidl.

However, even the radical style of *Dogma 95* doesn't imitate documentary films to the level typical for films of the hybrid genre of mockumentary or pseudo-documentary, which, according to the definition of D. Jacobs (2000, p.1): "Has the shape, content and formal components of pure documentary. Yet, it is known, or revealed, to have been scripted and acted in the manner of a fictional film" That is, mockumentary films can use all the arsenal of documentary film tools, but they do not claim authenticity in any way, unlike, for example, scenes of documentary films, recreated with the help of acting. A sig-

nificant portion of films in this genre are practically indistinguishable in form from ordinary documentary films and have not particularly influenced the evolution of the documentary style. Still, the exception is mockumentary horror films, most belonging to the "found footage" subgenre. Its main difference is the positioning of all or a part of the film's video sequence as filmed by a character (or characters) and found after some time. Regarding this, J. Baron (2014, p.17) notes:

"This 'foundness' of the archival document exists in contradistinction to documents that we perceive as produced by the filmmaker specifically for a given film, and this sense of 'foundness' <...> is part of what lends the archival document in the appropriation film its aura of 'authenticity' and enhances its seemingly evidentiary value".

Thus, such a relatively simple technique allows for the creation of a sense of authenticity in the film's events, which, in turn, intensifies the viewer's emotions of horror.

It can be argued that the style and popularity of these films were influenced by the advent of inexpensive and easy-to-use digital cameras, which, on the one hand, led to the creation of countless amateur videos (mostly of poor quality), but on the other hand, simplified the production of low-budget films. In turn, disguising the modest technical capabilities of low-budget films as amateur or semi-professional shoots prompted creating a whole series of films in the "found footage" subgenre. One of the first among them is the innovative pseudo-documentary horror film by Stefan Avalos and Lance Weiler, *The Last Broadcast* (1998), which shows the investigation of the mysterious murder of an amateur film crew of a cable TV channel. The film uses stand-

ard techniques such as documentaries, interviews with witnesses and experts, archival materials, voice-over by the author, etc. Still, a significant part of the picture consists of found, partially damaged footage that the victims shot on the eve and at the time of the crime, restoration of which is the key to solving the mystery.

It is the imitation of damaged or poorly shot first-person video (low resolution, underexposed, out of focus, etc.), bad angles or incorrectly directed camera, or even a black screen due to destruction or failure of filming equipment, especially in the climax, that will become the main stylistic feature of pseudo-documentary horror films. On this subject, R. Wallace (2021, pp.12-13) notices: "There is a profound paradox at work here, because the documentary form's perceived function is turned on its head. Instead of the documentary-like textures signifying a process of showing and illuminating, they act to disguise and distort". It is worth adding that such films are usually shot with a point-of-view camera. However, there are exceptions (video surveillance cameras, webcams, etc.), and the technology of shooting itself is often part of the plot. They usually avoid complex editing, use minimised non-diegetic music and special effects or none of them, and post-processing, if used, is only for stylisation (for example, like VHS) or to deteriorate the image quality. The other standard technique in creating these films involves non-professional actors and their improvisation during filming.

Besides its innovative approach, *The Last Broadcast* is also interesting for its reflections on the role of documentary film and information technology, which, together with its showing the work of television, connects it with Wexler's film *Medium Cool*. However, the in-

fluence of Wexler's work on the film is proven not only by the common theme and presence of pseudo-documentary scenes, but also by the last frame of the film, which is preceded by the revelation of the hoax through the transition from a point-of-view camera to an objective camera. Thus, it shows the author of the film filming himself, and resembles the finale of "Medium Cool" – appearance of the cameraman who directs his camera at the viewer, which is also at the exact time imitation of the corresponding technique of metacinema and a kind of "revelation" through "breaking the fourth wall". Although the film, like Wexler's work, did not have commercial success, it greatly influenced the film *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, the wild success of which could be attributed to the popularity of pseudo-documentary horror films and, to some extent, mockumentary in general. A significant number of films shot in the subgenre of "found footage" are still being released even today, which, as A. Heller-Nicholas (2014, p.4) points out, is due to the growth in popularity of amateur media caused by the emergence and development of the YouTube platform.

It can be stated that the application of Dziga Vertov's ideas in fiction films, which according to the author's plan were aimed at finding "film truth", has undergone fascinating evolution (Myslavskiy, Chmil, Bezruchko and Markhaichuk, 2020). Thus, repeatedly becoming either a tool for searching for a new filmic reality or an instrument of propaganda, they became an overt means of mockery in mockumentary films in the era of postmodernism. Let's compare two rather radical phenomena in cinema of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Despite some noticeable differences, the *Dogma 95* movement and

the “found footage” horror films’ main feature is the almost complete rejection of visual imagery because of the radical simplification of their style. This is a specific confirmation of J. Baudrillard’s (1981, p.80) idea that cinema gradually ceases to be an image (a myth, a thing that has something of a delusion, a fantasy, a mirror, etc.) due to the infection of television, which no longer carries any imaginary. Although nowadays, considering the decline in television’s popularity, it is more appropriate to consider the “infection” of cinema not so much by television as amateur media products, which evoke a special trust in the modern viewer, being perceived as “more real than reality”. This also correlates with the author’s opinion: “Cinema, which seeks to eliminate itself in the absolute of the real, the real, which has long been absorbed by the cinematic (or television) hyperreal” (Baudrillard, 1981, p.76).

Considering the trend towards mediatisation of society and the rapid evolution of technical means, we can state that the documentary style continues to change actively (Bezruchko and Chai-kovska, 2020). The improvement of existing and the emergence of new filming equipment (for example, inexpensive drones and action cameras), proliferation of cameras, development of social networks (including video hosting), evolution of video communication tools are just some of the aspects that are already influencing nowadays or will do so shortly (Havran and Botvyn, 2020). In this context, the study by C. Iseli, S. Dux and M. L. Loertscher (2020) is noteworthy, which found that videos with considerable depth of field are no longer perceived as more authentic by the modern viewer, but rather the opposite, unlike a similar experiment conducted in 2012. That is, this

proves that not only is the documentary style itself changing rapidly, but also its perception by a viewer. All this indicates the broad spectrum for further research on this topic.

### Conclusions

We can conclude that the emergence and further development of the documentary style in fiction film are determined by the formation and evolution of the documentary itself, and later by television products and amateur videos. However, it is worth emphasising that using this style in fiction films was influenced by non-fiction films and attempts to imitate narrative films, in which documentary stylistics had already been used before.

The impulse for its active usage was the work and ideas of Soviet director Dziga Vertov, who greatly influenced world cinema. This influence was often indirect, for example, through one of the most famous films of Soviet avant-garde cinema, *Battleship Potemkin* by Sergei Eisenstein, or the films of Vertov’s followers from the *cinéma vérité* movement.

The documentary style in fiction film was actively used as a propaganda tool, sometimes driven by limited financial resources. Still, the main reason was the desire to make films more realistic, expand the means of cinematic language and the search for a new filmic reality. It should also be noted that pseudo-documentary scenes in such films as *The Next of Kin*, *Medium Cool* and to some extent some fragments of the film *October: Ten Days That Shook the World* became the forerunners of the hybrid genre of cinema–mockumentary. Thus, this proves that the documentary style in fiction films influenced the formation of this relatively new genre.



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## ДОКУМЕНТАЛЬНИЙ СТИЛЬ В ІГРОВОМУ КІНО

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## Анотація

**Мета статті** – проаналізувати генезис і розвиток документального стилю в ігровому кіно, дослідити передумови його появи, основні характеристики та їх еволюцію, а також причини й особливості використання цього стилю кінематографістами в різні історичні періоди. Розглянути вплив основних напрямів документалістики, телебачення та аматорського відеоконтенту на його формування та застосування в художніх стрічках. Встановити важливі тенденції сучасного ігрового кінематографа, пов'язані з використанням документальної форми, та окреслити її вплив на появу нових жанрів і піджанрів цього виду кіно. **Методологія дослідження** базується на комплексному підході, який охоплює аналіз літературних джерел – для формування теоретичної бази та визначення ключових понять, історико-культурний аналіз – для вивчення історичних, технічних, соціальних і культурних передумов, хронологічний метод – для встановлення каузальності досліджуваних явищ, метод кейс-стаді, який полягав у стилістичному та критичному аналізі обраних фільмів як найбільш виразних прикладів, а також компаративний аналіз – для порівняння різних картин і кінематографічних течій. **Наукова новизна.** Вперше узагальнено всі найважливіші аспекти, пов'язані з формуванням та еволюцією документального стилю в ігрових стрічках у період від експериментів радянських кіноавангардистів до його використання в сучасному кінематографі. На основі дослідження найбільш характерних прикладів визначено поширені засоби, на яких базується цей стиль, а також основні причини та особливості їх використання. Окрему увагу приділено деяким передумовам появи нових жанрових форм, що виникли внаслідок експлуатації «документальності» в художніх картинах. **Висновки.** У статті визначено роль основних тенденцій документалістики, телевізійного контенту та, зокрема, аматорських відео у становленні та розвитку документального стилю в ігровому кіно. Доведено прямий та опосередкований вплив ідей радянського режисера Дзиги Вертова на картини, в яких вони застосовувалися. Проаналізовано роль зазначеного стилю у формуванні гібридного жанру мок'юментарі.

**Ключові слова:** кіномистецтво; документалістика; Дзига Вертов; кіноавангард; сінема веріте; мок'юментарі; псевдодокументалістика; звук; знайдений кадр