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A DOCUMENTARY FILM IN REALM OF NATIONAL IDENTITY (UKRAINIAN AND FOREIGN EXPERIENCE OF COMPREHENSION)

The article examines the main approaches of Ukrainian and foreign researchers to the analysis of such a complex cinematic practice as the documentary film. In particular, the study focuses on key discussions about the genres of documentary films, their ability to construct "historical memory" as one of the key components of national identity constructing, and the notion of "truth" in relation to the analysis of the ability of a documentary to articulate "truth". The article explores the function of Ukrainian documentary films in the process of deconstructing Soviet myths of Ukrainian identity, and more generally, the ability of documentary films to serve as a tool in the construction of Ukraine's national identity. The research applies a range of analytical methods, including a comparative analysis, a thematic analysis, and a case study approach, to identify the key characteristics of the documentary film in the context of cinematic interpretation of reality. The results of research demonstrate that a documentary film does not merely reflect reality, but rather serves as an effective interpretive tool. The results of the research can be used in the analysis of the structure of a documentary film and its capacity to construct national identity. An analysis of national and foreign theories on documentary filmmaking reveals significant differences in the approaches to the subject of a documentary film. Ukrainian scholars focuses on the classification of types and genres of a documentary film. Foreign researches is mainly interested in the analyses of the dialogue between a documentary film and society, its abilities to respond to current social problems. A similar divergence is observed in approaches to the issue of identity. Western theorists certainly discuss these problems, but primarily within the framework of philosophy and cultural sociology. For Ukrainian researchers, these questions remain crucial, and consequently, an analyses of a documentary film is often focused on its capacities to explore and represent the topics of identity.

Keywords: audiovisual culture, film and television arts, documentary film, genre specificity of documentary film, concept of "truth", construction of national identity, interpretation of reality.

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The success of Ukrainian documentaries at international film forums, including the Cannes Film Festival, the Berlinale, and the Oscars proves the achievements of Ukrainian filmmakers and highlights the importance of examining the evolution of Ukrainian documentaries over the past decades. To develop a comprehensive analysis, it is essential to consider a range of analytical issues relevant to various aspects of a documentary film as a holistic phenomenon. The method of comparative analysis allows to identify both the differences and the similarities in the genre characteristics of a documentary film and will contribute to a more profound understanding of the specifics of contemporary documentary filmmaking in Ukraine.

The purpose of the article: to analyse key discussions on the problems of the genre specificity of a documentary film; to reveal the differences and similarities in Ukrainian and foreign researchers' analytical approaches to the genre specificity of a documentary film.

The study of the challenges faced by documentary filmmakers has consistently captured the interest of researchers since Ukraine gained independence. In the early 1990s, documentary filmmakers tried to interpret the historical, cultural, and political aspects of the nation's development, offering an alternative to the prevailing Soviet ideological clichés. In this context, documentary films were regarded as a truthful representative form of reality, provoking interest to the very notion of "truth" in visual representation of history. To a certain extent, the attempts of Ukrainian documentary filmmakers contributed to a process of deconstructing the myth of Soviet Ukraine and attempts to shape the space of identity: the ability of a community to explain itself, its place in the world, and its own mental boundaries.

Researchers O. Polishchuk and R. Hutsal emphasise that in the early years of independence, "national films presented viewers a more accurate in terms of historical justice approach of representation historical events,— something that was entirely forbidden during the Soviet era" [Поліщук&Гуцал, 2019, p. 175]. Consequently, the nation's awareness of events and documents concerning the Holodomor, the Holocaust, World War II, the UPA struggle for freedom, and repression was enhanced through documentaries. However, this new historical reality obscured a critical perspective, resulting in an imbalance in identification: "Instead of developing a forward-looking model, national cinema took the path of total rejection of the values of the past era" [Поліщук&Гуцал, 2019, p. 175].

The process of defining the distinctive features of documentaries is ongoing, thereby emphasizing the relevance and significance of the issue. As an artistic practice located at the intersection of media journalism and cinematography, documentary cinema must continually defend its right to be regarded as a unique artistic phenomenon with specific abilities for creative representation.

Contemporary studies of documentary filmmaking offer two main types of definition. The first type are formal definitions, when scholars attempt to establish the principles of artistic thinking. The second type concerns the uncertainty and dynamism of cinematic narration of a documentary film.

The distinguished documentary film researcher, K. Shershnova, offers a definition of a documentary film as "a material object containing specific information that reflects real facts." [Шершньова, 2014, p. 119]. She underlines the principle of "factual purity" and the avoidance of any fiction narratives.

A. Drobotenko highlights that different definitions of a documentary film have one thing in common: the use of documentary material presented as visual fact. The researcher states that this 'reduces all definitions to the idea that a documentary film is based on real events, real-life footage and supported by documents' [Дроботенко, 2017, p. 5]. The practice of documentary filmmaking is inextricably linked to the domain of the media sphere and is a "product of journalistic activity." The distinguishing characteristic of this "product" is its artistic orientation, which means that a documentary film adheres to the "rules of artistic and analytical genres" [Дроботенко, 2017, p. 7]. Ukrainian researchers agree that the development of genres of documentary films commenced in the mid-1990s [Лущик, 2024, p. 144]. These genres were centered on historical reminiscences, with a focus on the search for historical truth and the restoration of the essential meaning of events.

According to I. Havran and M. Botvyn, the capacities of a documentary film as an artistic and social phenomenon, "have not yet been the subject of sufficient study and systematic research" [Гавран&Ботвин, 2020, p. 12]. As E. Shershnova emphasizes, "a documentary film is the oldest form of screen art, capturing life in the midst of events, in its dynamic aspect and continuous transformations" [Шершньова, 2014, p. 115].

To summaries, in Ukrainian academic discourse, the question of defining the essence of a documentary film remains highly contested. Broadly speaking, the core dilemma can be formulated

as follows: is documentary cinema primarily cinema (with all the inherent features of this art form), or is it rather a document (that uses cinematography for its own purpose)?

In the context of this debate, it is important to consider the point of M. Mishchenko, who regards the documentary principle as fundamental. M. Mishchenko asserts that "the specificity of a documentary film is primarily in the facts, which are carefully selected, deeply analysed, and thoroughly supported by materials that are not always accessible to viewers (such as archival data)" [Міщенко, 2014, с. 47]. However, it is important to note that a document itself does not equate to a screen product; it must acquire a specific form of expression and become a narrative with a structured storyline [Mishchenko, 2014, p. 48]. Therefore, despite its direct association with the notion of a "document," documentary filmmaking is always considered an "authors" space, even the chronicles or scientific-popular genres [Mishchenko, 2014, p. 48].

It is important to underline that such generalisations can also be considered in a reverse direction, because documentary filmmaking demands artistic interpretation. For instance, M. Hertz brings as an example the film *Буна* (1990) as a case study. It is formally a feature film, that uses elements of documentary material in its visual structure. Furthermore, the lead actress (R. Nedashkivska) acts so convincing that at times it seems to be a documentary film [Герц, 2012, p. 41]. O. Levchenko characterises this issue as the "conditionality of narrativity" of a documentary film, which manifests the need for "stories about real people, true events, and documents" [Левченко, 1998, p. 195]. A similar perspective is shared by Kharkiv-based documentary film researcher D. Konovalov [Коновалов, 2021].

The concept of identity has been defined in a number of ways, but a classic definition was proposed by the established American scholar Anthony Smith. He considers this category to be "the ability of a (self-)defined community to identify itself (primarily mentally, intellectually, and emotionally) with its 'own' local group". This identification is reinforced through shared symbols and value-based approaches, the desire to construct collective histories, as well as formal societal attributes such as territory, culture, state and legal institutions [Сміт, 1994, p. 26]. Another significant contribution to the interpretation of this concept is the work of Benedict Anderson, who considers mental constructions of communities as the "material" for self-identification, defining the nation as an "imagined community" [Anderson, 2001]. While this category is not new to Ukrainian documentaries, it continues to generate diverse perspectives. For instance, in the article "*The construction of national identity in visual culture*", Y. Pavlichenko considers the primary function of national identity to 'ensure social unity' (Павліченко, 2023, p. 81).

Summarizing the positions of various authors, we conclude that identity in the realm of a documentary film manifests two key aspects:

1. There is the comprehension of one's cultural code through a broad spectrum of facts, events, and phenomena (K. Shershnova, Z. Alfeyorova);
2. There is the interpretation of historical events and the past (O. Kuzmenko, O. Levchenko);

For instance, O. Kuzmenko emphasises that "the issue of interpreting historical events is one of the most relevant in the context of a nation's existence and the formation of national identity" [Кузьменко, 2012, p. 70]. This aspect forms the basis of her analysis of the Ukrainian context in a documentary film.

Meanwhile, M. Mishchenko does not focus solely on identity as a problem of cinematic reflection but rather explores ways to represent the "self" within the collective "we." He conceptualises cinematography as a medium for the articulation of the "need to present oneself within the spiritual culture of the contemporary world" through "finding a place for the Ukrainian context in world cinema, defining the characteristics our cinema is recognised, analysing how Ukrainians perceive their own films and how Ukrainian cinema is recognized abroad" [Міщенко, 2014, p. 48]. Within this theoretical framework, documentary cinema functions not only as a "tool for socialization" but also plays a crucial role in shaping "national identity and uniqueness, which can be described as the search for a 'national face'" [Міщенко, 2014, p. 48].

The process of reconstructing forms of identity contains inherent destructive aspects that a documentary film cannot ignore. For example, V. Antonov's analysis of the thematic repertoire of documentary films highlights the focus on historical trauma. His explanation is worth quoting in full: "Why is this so? The answer, is that we make films about things that pains us, we make films about things we want to warn against, we make films about mistakes we deem unacceptable to repeat" [Antonov, 2019, p. 90].

On the other hand, a documentary film, as a reflection of societal moods, has a distinctive tendency to process "experiences of pain and trauma" as a foundation for expressing identity through documentation, recording, and interpretation [Smith, 2014]. These documentaries serve as a unique

"voice of the document" [Jones, 2019]. The following Ukrainian films have this "voice": *Witness Testimony* (1989), *Pieta* (1993), *Time of Darkness* (2003), *The Great Hunger* (2005), *The Technology of Genocide* (2005), *Zhytjiv* (2008), *Krasjina popered masovoi smerti* (2009), and *Pobratovana zemljja* (2012). O. Kuzmenko emphasises that "soviet identity was artificially constructed through mass media, propaganda and cinema that played the crucial role. Consequently, it is important to acknowledge the major role of a documentary film in the processes of rethinking identity" [Кузьменко, 2012, p. 67]. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize the role of a documentary film, associated with both demythologization and the formation of a new image of Ukrainian society, defining itself through its own culture and history.

L. Novikova examines the role of Ukrainian documentary filmmaking in shaping national identity in the early 2010s. "Modern national documentary film is primarily focused on transforming the canon and the iconostasis of national culture. Leading film studios in the country create specific audiovisual information flows aimed at forming the sociocultural matrix necessary for modelling national identity in the era of Ukraine's independence" [Новікова, 2012, p. 148]. She describes documentary films of this period as fragmented and unsystematic, yet she recognises in Ukrainian documentary cinema a manifestation of a broader European trend. In contrast to national non-fiction cinema, which continues to focus on reflections on the past, Western documentaries, in her view, "focus more on the inner world of contemporary individuals, their emotions, and unique traits" [Новікова, 2012, p. 150].

Nazaryuk offers an intriguing perspective on the interplay between media and cinematic documentary. The scholar positions documentary cinema within a "media niche," analysing audience perceptions of documentary filmmaking [Назарук, 2012, p. 124]. This approach facilitates an exploration of identity and self-identification as markers of socially relevant themes, functioning simultaneously in both media and artistic spaces.

In his review of the *5th Odesa International Film Festival* (2014), O. Voloshenyuk conceptualises documentary cinema as a "school of thought" and integrates identity issues with thematic, visual, and narrative aspects of documentary filmmaking [Волошенюк, 2014, pp. 86–97]. D. Dziuba examines the reimagining of T. Shevchenko's image in Y. Makarov's documentary cycle from an archaic sufferer to a modern harbinger of change and social progress. Her research focuses on Shevchenko's representations in Soviet and contemporary Ukrainian documentary filmmaking [Дзюба, 2013, pp. 122–125].

In opinion O. Moskalenko-Visotska and R. Shirman after the Revolution of Dignity Ukraine witnessed a new demand for documentaries, subsequently the mid-2010s became a crucial era of Ukrainian documentary filmmaking [Moskalenko-Visotska&Shirman, 2024, p. 52]. These films contain a certain "shift in reality", when the "truth of the document" corresponds with the "truth of the street", when "the reality not only corresponds to the author's vision, but also reflects aspects that the author might not have noticed". This demonstrates the interconnectedness of visual language and documentary content as a specific "*expression of events*" [Москаленко-Висоцька&Ширман, 2024, p. 55].

Foreign researches on documentary cinema are widely represented in contemporary film studies. Scholars from the United States and Western Europe agree that the concepts of a documentary film were formed in the 1930s on the wave of the relevance of the generic function of cinema: to shape, present and explain facts and events [Arda, 2020, p. 2944]. Authors of the article "*Contextual Analysis of Documentary Cinema as a Product and Tool for Academic Exercises*" (2023) underline that documentary filmmaking is not a neutral or objectively presented form of reality, but rather a constructed vision shaped by the director's subjective perspective [Gbambu, Dramani, & Adekunle, 2023, pp. 25-26]. In the early 1980s Christian Metz stated that first and foremost every film is an artistic film. Twenty years later Bill Nichols suggested the opposite assumption — the core of every film is documentary. According to A. Lebow, the only valid conclusion in the face of such contrasting viewpoints is to acknowledge the "expansion and deepening of the range of contemporary documentary filmmaking" [Lebow, 2012, p. 2].

Scholars assume that technological innovations, particularly in the media, significantly shape our understanding of a documentary film. It can be seen in the emergence of new documentary filmmaking formats initiated by state or public television in the 1990s [Rosenthal & Corner, 2005] or the profound impact of the Internet industry, which has led to significant redefined aspects of documentary filmmaking, resulted in new audience engagement strategies. In this regard, the research of Anthony Guneratne, an expert in the field of "new realism" in visual practices, is of particular interest. Guneratne positions cinema within a conceptual "triangle" alongside with

photography and painting, thus establishing a framework for exploring both artistic and factual documentary filmmaking. He asserts that this approach is essential for comprehending documentary cinema within its proper context. He contends that documentary filmmaking constitutes a more

global phenomenon than to be a merely screen product, as it perpetually assimilates alternative models of engaging with reality [Guneratne, 1998, pp. 165-187].

Dirk Eitzen challenges the conventional definition of the category "documentary film" and states that a documentary film might be characterised as a mode of perception rather than a form of representation [Eitzen, 1995, pp. 81-82].

Bill Nichols' investigation of a documentary film is based on Eitzen's premise "a flagship of social engagement" [Nichols, 1991, p. 24]. According to Nichols, this definition encloses the fundamental essence of documentary filmmaking in contemporary cinema and media, characterised by its social orientation and reflection on societal issues.

Brian Winston shares this position and in his retrospective analysis of documentary filmmaking, demonstrates how the concept of a community that produces itself through the assertion of facts and events as a "space of inevitability". [Winston, 2019, pp. 11-12].

There are several influential typologies of a documentary film. Bill Nichols suggests original "documentary mode scheme," containing four components that collectively form a cinematic sphere of reality documentation: Direct/expository; Verité/observational; Interactive; Reflexive/self-reflective [Nichols, 1983, pp. 19-21].

Nichols summarised the multiplicity of characteristics of a documentary film as "a distinct cinematic form" may not necessarily require a rigid conceptual definition but does demand an ongoing discussion on its evolution, transformations, and renewal practices [Nichols, 1991]. Nichols' ideas provoke discussions among researchers. Carl Plantinga noted that "a documentary film should be a structured rhetorical discourse" [Plantinga, 2005, p. 108]. Jay Ruby suggested a new concept based on Nichols' theory. In the work *"Reflexivity and Documentary Film"* she focused on self-reflexivity—proposing that factual and artistic qualities in cinema should be interpreted through this perspective. Since cinema operates with "illusions" and "reality," the presence of documentary elements has inevitably made the issue of "self-representation" highly relevant [Ruby, 2005, pp. 34-47]. This work is particularly important for discussions on identity in a documentary film.

The notion of "truth" has been in focus of film studies, beginning from Dziga Vertov's *"kino-pravda"* (cinema about life [Myslavskyi, 2020]) to Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin cinema vérité (*"truthful cinema"*) [Bradbury & Guadagno, 2020, pp. 339-352]. The issue of "truth" in documentary filmmaking has been a subject of discussion since the late 1970s. Richard Blumenberg's *"Documentary Films and the Problem of Truth"* shaped the frames for future discussions on the topic [Blumenberg, 1977, pp. 19-22]. The relationship between cinematic artistic approaches and "factual" reality remains a contentious issue. A researcher of totalitarian cinema Joshua Hirsch explores the structure of Leni Riefenstahl's films and reveal the following categories: "between facts, near-truth and manipulation with the truth. The author comes to conclusion that there is no "truth", there is only artistic interpretation of "truth". The concept of "truth" in a documentary film is linked with the systems of images, particularly the so-called artifacts of reality, such as photographs, documents, and epistolary testimonies. Roger Hallas refers to methodology of the "other side" through a still image, positing that it looks at the viewer "from within the film itself" [Hallas, 2023]. This evident discrepancy between the on-screen and real-life imagery frequently results in the categorisation of a documentary film within stylistic contexts.

Özlem Arda asserts that a contemporary documentary film may not comprise factual material, but rather constitutes 'docudrama', a genre that combines elements of a documentary film with fictional storytelling [Arda, 2020, p. 2940]. She developed the concept of the "media document"—a fact that has emerged in the digital domain and does not inherently possess the traditional qualities of documentary authenticity [Arda, 2020, p. 2946].

In this context Patricia Zimmerman introduces the concepts of the "ethics of caution" or "documentary ecology," emphasising that they encompass the full spectrum of documentary filmmaking. Zimmerman proposes to replace the traditional definition of a documentary film, that consists of opposite categories that contrast each other. Zimmerman delineates the conventional paradigm of documentary filmmaking in terms of four dichotomous types: mainstream versus author; commercial versus independent; documentary versus experimental; documenting versus docufiction. She proposes an alternative perspective based on the "dynamic interaction between nature, social relations, and the anthropogenic environment," which can assist audiences in transcending the impasse of a documentary film's truthfulness debate [Zimmerman, 2019].

Geoffrey Geiger's book *"American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation"* is devoted to American nation-building strategies through the lens of documentary discourses. G. Geiger argues that there is a strong interconnection between "American documentary cinema and the very idea of national cinema," when both are shaping one another. For the scholar, U.S. documentaries contribute to national cinematic discourse that always exists beyond the boundaries of the document, factual truth, or the pursuit of "historical truth" [Geiger, 2011, p. 28]. An essential aspect of documentary filmmaking is highlighted by V. Rosas and R. Dittus in their recent study on autobiographical documentary filmmaking. It is important to note that shooting "from oneself" (in the first person) is one of the most characteristic features of a documentary film [Geiger, 2011, p. 28]. In his opinion, a "personal" film is "a type of collage—a construction that provides a common foundation for the emergence of identity and subjectivity" [Rosas & Dittus, 2021, pp. 216-217].

Narrating of personal stories results in a reinterpretation of history, which actively reconstructs the past, delving much deeper than simply consuming memories and recalling individual stories around a photo album.

Conclusions: An analysis of national and foreign theories on documentary filmmaking reveals significant differences in the approaches to the subject of a documentary film. Ukrainian scholars focuses on the classification of types and genres of a documentary film. Foreign researches is mainly interested in the analyses of the dialogue between a documentary film and society, its abilities to respond to current social problems. A similar divergence is observed in approaches to the issue of identity. Western theorists certainly discuss these problems, but primarily within the framework of philosophy and cultural sociology. For Ukrainian researchers, these questions remain crucial, and consequently, an analyses of a documentary film is often focused on its capacities to explore and represent the topics of identity.

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ДОКУМЕНТАЛЬНИЙ ФІЛЬМ У СФЕРІ НАЦІОНАЛЬНОЇ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ (УКРАЇНСЬКИЙ ТА ЗАРУБІЖНИЙ ДОСВІД ОСМИСЛЕННЯ)

У статті розглядаються основні підходи українських та зарубіжних дослідників до аналізу такої складної кінематографічної практики, як документальний фільм. Зокрема, дослідження фокусується на ключових дискусіях щодо жанрів документального фільму, його можливостей конструювати «історичну пам'ять», як один із ключових компонентів творення національної ідентичності. У статті проблематизується поняття «правди» та розглядаються основні підходи до аналізу можливості документального фільму артикулювати «правду». Розглянуто функцію українського документального фільму в процесах деконструювання радянських міфів української ідентичності та загалом спроможність документального фільму бути одним з інструментів для конструювання національної ідентичності України. Використовуючи компаративний метод аналізу, проблемно-тематичний метод та метод кейс-стаді, дослідження ідентифікує основні характерологічні характеристики документального фільму в контексті дискусії про кінематографічну інтерпретацію реальності. Доведено, що документальний фільм не є відображенням реальності, але ефективним інструментом інтерпретації реальності. Результати дослідження можуть бути використані в аналізі структури документального фільму та його можливостей для конструювання національної ідентичності. Аналіз дослідницької вітчизняної та зарубіжної літератури показав, що підходи і погляди на документалістику різняться саме у розгляданні документального кіно як окремого жанру. Для української науки питання видів і жанрів залишається першочерговим, на подібній аналітиці і класифікації стоїть база кінознавчих досліджень. У зарубіжному кінознавстві проблеми жанрів також обговорюються але не є першочерговими, оскільки і на практиці відсутні принципові бар'єри між ігровим і неігровим кіно. На перший план виходять питання діалогу документального кіно з соціумом, його оперативність у висвітленні гострих і актуальних громадських запитів, важливим є і комерційні економічні питання. Так саме відбувається і з підходами до проблеми ідентичності. Західні теоретики, звісно, обговорюють ці питання але на рівні філософії і соціології культури. Для українських дослідників ці питання залишаються першочерговими і, відповідно, на їх думку, цінність документального кіно також залежить від того, як документалістика висвітлює тему ідентичності.

Ключові слова: аудіовізуальна культура, кінотелемистецтво, документальний фільм, жанрова специфіка документального фільму, поняття «правди», конструювання національної ідентичності, інтерпретація реальності.

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