

Master's Programme in Film and Television

Performance in Documentary Film:

Characters' Performance or Acting in the Short Documentary Film "Wind-keeper"

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Abstract

This thesis explores the performances of the documentary film characters in the short documentary film "Windkeeper".

Being provoked by the author's idea that a documentary filmmaker is in no position to record and transmit reality with his presence, because his presence unintentionally or intentionally will intervene in the reality of a subject, thus only giving opportunity for a filmmaker to record and transmit his interpretation of reality of his selected subject, this research questions to what extent a documentary character acts or performs their presence in the documentary film.

The thesis is based on literature review, involving the works of Bill Nichols, John Grierson, Paul Henley, Linda Williams and several other practitioners in the field of documentary film theory. The author's own short documentary film "Windkeeper" is used as a case study as well as his experimental approach to performance of the film's characters which is later analyzed by the theory of "On acting and not-acting" by Michael Kirby to determine the level of the characters' performances in different episodes.

As a result of this artistic research, it is evident that the documentary characters do not act – they perform and will always perform because we all perform as social beings and it is the beauty of human nature. However, a documentary filmmaker has to understand whether this performance of his filmed subject is good for him and if not, then he has to find a mechanism how to control this performance of the subject he has filmed or how to get behind this performance. In the "Windkeeper" I went through three different stages of director's intervention intensity position, starting with total intervention and ending with almost none. This process helped me find the best approach to my character and, most importantly, to my film.

Keywords documentary film performance, acting, presentation.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1. BACKGROUND, MOTIVATION AND OBJECTIVES

In order to analyze the performance (or presentation) of the characters in my short documentary film “Windkeeper”, it is important to understand my approach as a filmmaker to this film. My goal was to test the possibility of staying in total control while making a documentary film on a subject which is based on real situations, events and characters at the present time. My philosophy behind this approach was tied to the idea that a documentary filmmaker is in no position to record and transmit reality with his presence because his presence unintentionally or intentionally will intervene the reality of a subject, thus only giving the opportunity for a filmmaker to record and transmit his interpretation of the reality of his selected subject. Of course, this process goes both ways and a filmed subject will also present to a filmmaker as only the interpretation of his own reality by trying to filter what to show and what to hide from the camera; however, my focus is more on the filmmaker’s position as I am usually the director, less a filmed subject and I am more interested in the outcome of my presence in the process. Throughout the history of documentary filmmaking it seems to be a case which more often admits the author’s interpretation as an inevitable outcome of a documentary film rather than just a pure reality recording instrument. Even one of the first documentary films ever – “Nanook of the North” (1922) by Robert Flaherty seems to recognize the impossibility to record spontaneous acts of reality which led Flaherty to look for control mechanisms to make his film as he was visualizing it not as it had presented itself to him at that particular time. Bill Nichols goes as far with “Nanook of the North” as describing it as Robert Flaherty’s invention.

“His nuclear family matches European and American family structure more than Inuit extended families. His hunting methods belong to a period some 30 or more years prior to the time that film was made. The story is of a bygone way of life that Nanook embodies in what amounts to a role and character performance more than a presentation of self in everyday life at the time of filming. The film could be labeled either fiction or documentary.” (Nichols 2010, 12)

John Grierson does not necessarily support Flaherty's style of making "Nanook of the North" the way he did, but he acknowledges Flaherty's idea behind this approach – to get deeper into the story.

"I think we shall find that there are other forms of drama or, more accurately, other forms of film, than the one he chooses; but it is important to make the primary distinction between a method which describes only the surface values of a subject, and the method which more explosively reveals the reality of it. You photograph the natural life, but you also, by your juxtaposition or detail, create an interpretation of it." (Grierson 1932, 22)

John Grierson compares documentary film to a creative art form or, in his words; to a "creative treatment of actuality" which requires visionary approach from an author to generate something more than just "lecture films" (I would rather prefer Bill Nichols term of "non-documentary films", which "*function as documents rather as documentaries, conveying information in a straightforward, often didactic manner.*"(Nichols 2017, 105)) and Flaherty's "Nanook of the North" is a great example. Flaherty does not merely want to reveal just the lifestyle of the Inuit civilization, but he wants to tell a story of a human being who is very similar to us, but lives in very rough conditions far in the North. Nanook is not only a wild Inuit who hunts, eats and sleeps, but is also a father who takes care of his family, laughs, makes jokes and entertains the other members of his family. Without Flaherty's intervention as an author, there would not be the film "Nanook of the North" in the first place, but, more importantly, there would only be recordings without context about a wild Inuit who most likely only hunts, eats and sleeps. In my opinion, the only possible instrument to document reality without the filmmaker's presence in any possible form is by a surveillance camera. Nevertheless, what would happen if "Nanook of the North" had been filmed by a surveillance camera? In that case the film would have a very limited angle of recording, most likely showing only one particular location with one particular action. Imagine if this action showed Nanook's hunting tradition from just one particular position, with one particular lens which is in all probability a wide one and nothing more. The surveillance camera would only have recorded a wild Inuit family brutally killing a big seal, tearing it apart and eating its meat raw. This recording would not have created any emotional attachment and understanding of Nanook without previously seeing him interacting with his family, laughing and playing with his children, while trying to survive in the harshest climate zone for a human being. Meanwhile Flaherty's intervention creates powerful dramaturgy in this single hunting episode – there are close-ups with Nanook, how he carefully finds the correct spot for

hunting, how he observes and prepares for the hunt and how he desperately tries to hold a big seal under the ice. Then there is a wide shot in which Nanook is placed close to camera, but his family is in the same frame far away behind Nanook, thus generating extreme suspense between Nanook who is alone and tries to hold a big seal and his family who does not notice their father's struggle. Although it is possible to feel some elements being staged in this Flaherty's episode of Nanook hunting – different camera positions, editing, family blocking to stay in the frame far away; all of this does not take away the feeling of “authenticity” because dramaturgy takes over the rationality and the attention is more focused on drama than the technique of shooting it. Eliot Weinberger calls the idea of documentary filmmaking without the author's intervention a utopian mechanism which is possible either as a “dream of invisibility” or as “the practice of the surveillance camera”. Nonetheless, as I previously described my concern regarding “the practice of the surveillance camera” in “Nanook of the North” film, Eliot shares a very similar agitation:

“leaving aside the obvious moral and political questions of surveillance - white folks, as usual, playing God, albeit an immobile one with a single fixed stare - the value of such information could be nothing more than slight. The simplest human events unfold in a tangle of attendant activities, emotions, motivations, responses, and thoughts. One can imagine a !Kung anthropologist attempting to interpret the practices and effects of the American cash economy from footage obtained with the cameras in the local bank.”
(Weinberger 1992, 38)

Documentary filmmaking requires context, but without context it is nothing more than just a video surveillance recording. This context comes from the filmmaker's intervention, which includes all forms of filmmaking practices – starting from selecting a topic or characters, camera positioning, lens choice, framing, editing and so on. I found a similar view in the Paul Henley article “Narratives: the Guilty Secret of Ethnographic Film-Making?”. Paul Henley says that:

“the prevalence of manipulations of chronology in ethnographic film-making should not be the subject of gossip, shame or outrage, but simply remind us of the fact that the making of an ethnographic film does not consist of holding a mirror up to the world, but rather entails the production of a representation of it.” (Henley 2006, 394)

Although Paul emphasizes his focus on ethnographic film-making, which requires even more authenticity and transparency than other types of documentary filmmaking, he admits that the representation of ethnographic filmmaking “*can never be a literal reproduction of the world and will always be partial*”. (Henley 2006, 394) Paul mentions the author’s subjectivity as one of the reasons why this representation is only partial. However, this kind of subjectivity is not something to be ashamed of, quite the opposite – something to welcome and take advantage of in the process of filmmaking. If there is the inevitable author’s intervention in the process of documentary filmmaking, which makes this process an undoubtedly subjective interpretation of a selected subject, then the outcome of this process is an unreliable source of reference to the subject that has been filmed. Thus, a filmed subject will always have the option to deny the reality in the film produced by the filmmaker by referring to the author’s subjective interpretation of the filmmaking process. Additionally, these situations might happen between an author and a filmed subject in the documentary world. However, Linda Williams suggests that documentary film should not be approached as something, which will guarantee the truth, but:

“yet some kinds of partial and contingent truths are nevertheless the always receding goal of the documentary tradition. Instead of careening between idealistic faith in documentary truth and cynical recourse to fiction, we do better to define documentary not as an essence of truth but as a set of strategies designed to choose from among a horizon of relative and contingent truths.” (Williams 1993, 14)

Documentary filmmaking is not capable of guaranteeing the ultimate truth because “*documentary is not a reproduction of reality*”, but rather “*a representation of the world we already occupy*.” (Nichols 2017, 13). Documentary filmmaking offers an interpretation of a selected subject by an author who is only capable of revealing their version of the selected subject by any means of filmmaking instruments they manage. Nevertheless, sometimes this version of the author or, in other words, their documentary film is able to get closer to the truth than the truth represented by reality. A great example is the documentary film “The Thin Blue Line” by Errol Morris in which Morris reveals the truth of a wrongly accused man named Randall Dale Adams for the 1976 shooting of Dallas police officer Robert W. Wood. The truth represented by reality, which in this case was constituted by the US court system, had announced Randall Dale Adams guilty and sentenced him to death. However, the truth represented by Errol Morris in “The Thin Blue Line” questioned the nature of the actual truth constituted by the US court system and was trying to offer the counter truth in

which Randall Dale Adam was probably wrongly accused of the crime. Errol Morris offered a version in the counter truth where a passenger named David Ray Harris who was in the car with Randall Dale Adam actually was the shooter and had killed a policeman. Errol created a parallel reality with the help of reenactments showing how the truth constituted by the US court system might be controversial based on different angles of testimonies by the suspects, investigators and witnesses. Later, the US court system released Randall Dale Adams from imprisonment, which proves that the truth represented by Errol Morris in “The Thin Blue Line” was probably closer to reality than the truth represented by reality itself. Another great example can be found in the film “Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer” (2003) by Nick Broomfield. In this film the truth is much more complicated than in the previous example, since Aileen Carol Wuornos, who is accused of killing seven of her male clients, is changing her story throughout the film from being a victim and protecting herself to confessing of lying and killing those men on purpose. At some point in the film Nick is talking to Aileen in the prison and he asks her about one of her victims Richard Charles Mallory.

Nick asks: “What about with Richard Mallory? You gave that testimony with Richard Mallory?” Aileen’s response is surprising: “Richard Mallory was definitely not self-defense. I killed Richard Mallory for... I needed his wheels to move the stuff and he had right amount of money I needed to move in the apartment.” Nick continues: “But what about the testimony you gave in court?” Aileen does not hesitate and replies: “It just lies like I saying. I am just doing lying buzz. It just my lying gig trying to beat the system.” Nick is shocked: “Really? None of that was true?” (Broomfield 2003)

Nick realizes that the truth about Aileen Wuornos is complicated and it might have been affected by many factors, but he knows that to counter any other truth, he has to present all the truth he can collect in this film. The truth in “Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer” is somewhere in between and, in this case, probably the most honest truth is to present as many truths as possible, in order to understand the nature of Aileen Wuornos and her story. If Nick had stuck to the official truth by the US court system, then Aileen Wuornos would have been nothing more than just a monster. However, if Nick had supported only Aileen’s truth of self-defense, then he would have found himself in position of backing-up a serial killer. At the end of the film Nick is talking to Aileen in the prison again, but at that point it is their last conversation before the death sentence is served.

Nick is asking Aileen: "So you are saying you killed in self-defense or in cold blood? Because you have changed your story?" Aileen's face is confused: "What you talking about? Change story on what?" Nick tries to explain himself: "About whether it was self-defense or not?" Aileen is pissed of: "I am not going to say it, I am not going in depth about my cases, Nick! Mumma went to chamber nothing is going to stop this. You can believe it or you do not have to believe it. It is up to you, man. Put a big question mark on your film." (Broomfield 2003)

Although Aileen Wuornos is served the death penalty, it does not necessarily prove that this was the best possible outcome of this case. Nick and his film "Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer" reflects and brings up discussion of how complicated the nature of truth is, despite the fact that most probably Aileen killed those men. Aileen committing the murders was only the surface of a much more complex reality of Aileen's life, which played an important part of making Aileen of what she had become. As Linda Williams put this:

"...documentaries – films with a special interest in the relation to the real, the "truth" which matter in people's lives but which cannot be transparently represented." (Williams 1993, 13)

So far it is clear that intervention of the author is an inevitable outcome of documentary filmmaking, which allows picking any approach or strategy in this process as long as it is trying to reveal the truth of the present reality and is not deliberately falsifying the truth. Considering the disadvantage (not disability) of the status of a documentary filmmaker and his relationship with reality, I decided to be in a position where I rather work on a film which meets my expectations and standards instead of risking to adapt to given situations and facing disappointment of not being able to record footage in the way I would prefer and expect. Like Jill Godmilow has indicated:

"since I believe documentary images cannot claim to objectively represent the world and shouldn't be utilized as if they can, and because I believe these images, in context, can be as saturated with false consciousness as the fictional image, I stopped making classical documentary films around 1980." (Godmilow 2002, 8)

However, what are other alternatives to classic documentary films? There are limitless varieties of classic documentary films because the documentary film genre is more about

finding the right cinematic technique to reveal the truth (which is relative in its nature) than holding to facts and documents, which might be misleading in their nature. Bill Nichols expresses a similar opinion:

“There are no laws and few genuine rules when it comes to creative expression. What actually counts as a documentary remains fluid, open to debate across institutions, filmmakers, audiences, and the films themselves. Favored styles come and go. Institutional opportunities and constraints, technological innovations, creative inspiration, and evolving audience expectations constantly change the landscape of what counts as a documentary and what constitutes its horizon of possibility.” (Nichols 2010, 104)

Everything previously discussed and analyzed was the reason that made me realize that I am able to record and transmit only my interpretation of reality of a selected subject of mine as a documentary filmmaker. In turn, I decided to test the possibility of using total control in the filmmaking process, instead of adapting to situations which might be influenced by many other obstacles such as luck, weather, characters, finances, locations, permits and so on. In my experiment there was no particular style or approach to test the possibility of using total control in the documentary filmmaking process. My goal was to start from total control, even if it happened to be total fiction, and to observe where it takes me and what it brings to my creative process as a documentary filmmaker.

2. THESIS STRUCTURE

The thesis consists of an artistic and a theoretical part. The artistic part is a short documentary film titled “Windkeeper”, produced in 2021, directed by me. The theoretical part is based on the analysis of the film “Windkeeper” on the topic of documentary film character performance. The subject of research was ascertained in 2023 when I became more familiar with theoretical literature related to documentary films.

The first chapter introduces the background, motivation and objective of the research subject and creates a space for ideas and questions which are important to discuss in more detail. The chapter explains the structure and methods of my work and my principles which help to understand the significance of my standing point and my desire of the selected topic for analysis.

The second chapter describes a case study which is based on the short documentary film “Windkeeper”. I explain in more detail how I approached my work on “Windkeeper”, why the particular style was chosen and why it was important to make this film in the way it was done. After the introduction of “Windkeeper”, I present an experiment of three episodes which are selected for analysis. All three episodes had a different scale of director’s intervention intensity position, starting with total intervention and ending with almost none. All three episodes had contrasting performances by the characters; however, if these performances could be considered acting is yet to be researched and compared.

The third chapter offers different theories on performance in documentary film and what the main focus of each theory is. In order to analyze the performance of the characters in “Windkeeper”, I select the “On acting and not-acting” theory by Michael Kirby which particularly helps to determine the level of acting.

In the final chapter I sum up the outcome of the thesis and reflects on the process itself. The chapter concludes with my viewpoints on the subjects discussed and presented by providing general thoughts and suggestions based on results of research.

3. METHODOLOGY

The thesis is based on literature review, involving the works of Bill Nichols, John Grierson, Paul Henley, Linda Williams and several other practitioners in the field of documentary film theory. These authors have similar reflections or contradictions regarding documentary filmmaking, as does me. Many of the mentioned authors are considered to be the most influential in terms of documentary film development and analysis, hence inspiring documentary filmmakers around the globe and encouraging them to understand their chosen approach better.

My own short documentary film “Windkeeper” was used as a case study of this paper. “Windkeeper” tells a story about Katrina (30) who seems to be just like the rest of us. She has a mundane “office job” and lives in the capital of Latvia, Riga, in a three-room block-house apartment. On the other hand, she differs from us with her unusual hobby – she keeps two horses. By following Katrina, we see how the sense of big city life gets deformed and we start to re-evaluate what is possible and what is impossible in an urban environment. Although, it is a story about boldness, it is also a story about a confused child of nature that is forced to obey the rules of the urban jungle, in order to survive. She knows the rules, but

still she stubbornly continues to pursue her desires, daring to keep two horses as pets in a city.

After my studies as a documentary film director, I was looking for a challenge to test my new knowledge and ideas in practical filmmaking. “Windkeeper” was a perfect fit – there was no apparent conflict or drama present in the story that would have simply driven the story forward, regardless of any other artistic approaches that would have been used. I came up with a twelve-pages-long screenplay with the help of the main character Katrina. The main conflict of the story was built around Katrina’s inability to decide what to do with her life and the issue of being pressured by her loved ones to do something with it. This approach of making “Windkeeper” was bound to affect the performance of the characters, as they were supposed to follow the instructions which were indicated in the screenplay.

I decided to focus my analysis on the performance level of the “Windkeeper” characters by using Michael Kirby’s theory of “On acting and not-acting”. I chose to present three different episodes from the film “Windkeeper” as the basis of the analysis; two of them were included in the film, one was deleted. All three episodes had a different scale of director’s intervention intensity position, starting with total intervention and ending with almost none. Two of the episodes were scripted in the screenplay, and one was improvisation, based on the instructions included in the screenplay.

Going into the process, I did not know what to expect as an outcome of this analysis. I was open to any possible results because there was not one concrete certainty regarding the performance level of the “Windkeeper” characters. The three-episode experiment was very contradicting in the sense that where the acting was supposed to work, it did not, and where the acting was not supposed to work, it seemed to work quite well. Nonetheless, ‘was it acting at all’ has been the central question right from the beginning. Either way, the results of this research would be considered as a success because there was no right or wrong presumption. The documentary film character performance is a never-ending discussion among practitioners in the field of documentary film theory and there is no consensus regarding this matter.

CHAPTER II: CASE STUDY

1. THE “WINDKEEPER”

My first struggle was to find a story for my experiment. The “Windkeeper” was a perfect fit for my goal because in this story there was not an apparent conflict or drama which would just drive the story regardless of any other artistic approach used in the film. The only thing which stood out regarding the story of “Windkeeper” was that my character, Katrina, was keeping two horses as pets, while she was living in a nine-floor residential building complex. Everything else was very usual and typical as many of us are in our ordinary lives and it did not make Katrina different or special in any other way. I had to come up with some drama or conflict together with Katrina which did not exist at that particular moment of her life, but had some connection to the dimension of Katrina’s real life somewhere in the line of her inner time and space. My principle behind this approach was that all people experience dramatic events throughout their lives; however, these events are separated by time and space and are on a different scale in certain situations. Nevertheless, these events could be repeated or provoked by various outside elements like a film director for the sake of a documentary film, while they are based in the reality of someone’s life and do not cross the moral barrier of filmmaking responsibility. I believe there are many mechanisms how to recreate something from the past, starting from a more direct approach as an interview format and ending with a more complicated approach as reenactment with actors or a filmed subject himself. The question is not which mechanism the author of the film selects to present the past, but why he decides to go with a certain approach and what it helps to reveal. In the article “Honest, Straightforward Reenactment’: The Staging of Reality” Brian Winston discusses the reenactment approach in documentary filming. He says that:

“reconstruction was an 'honest, straight' alternative to factual shooting. ... Documentarists were driven, as it were, to this procedure by many factors. For example, there was the failure of the documentary to develop modes of representing time and space which were specific to this particular film form, using instead the grammar of representation which had been developed primarily by the fiction film in Hollywood. Moreover, these filmmakers were also heirs to a persistent tradition of re-enactment which embraced Nanook's building of the igloo or Grierson's construction of the trawler's bins, and also encompassed the even cruder subterfuges of the earliest days of the cinema when, for example, footage of toy ships shot on a table top were presented as The Battle of San Juan Bay or the Boxer

Rebellion as restaged in a building in upstate New York. We might call this 'insincere but (commercially) justified reconstruction' - 'dishonest, crooked reenactment'. (Winston 1999, 164)

Although Brian Winston indicates the necessity of reenactment strategy in documentary filming as something to cover events from the past, he also mentions “*the failure of the documentary to develop modes of representing time and space ...*” (Winston 1999, 164). Primary, the time and space issue is related to historical events which do not have any video material for a documentary filmmaker to work with and, in that case, reenactment is a good alternative to tell the story. However, could this be an alternative for the story which would be recovered in the present time, but does not have video material, just as my documentary “Windkeeper”, in which I ask my characters to reenact situations from their past, although they could just tell me this in the form of an interview? I think this has been happening with documentary filmmaking since the beginning – filmmakers reenact simple situations all the time. They ask their characters to repeat actions from the past, they ask their characters to repeat actions from the present, they ask their characters to act by not looking into the camera and they ask their characters to pretend that there is no film crew around them. Joris Ivens presents a great point regarding my previous statement:

“why are people opposed to organized, re-enacted shooting in documentary films? Because they think it makes the film less truthful, it undermines the confidence of the audience in its authenticity, or they just cling to narrow classifications and definitions in film art and declare that asking people to act before the camera belongs solely to the domain of the fiction film.” (Ivens 1954, 4)

In my opinion, reenactment is only a tool for a documentary filmmaker and he has all the freedom to decide when and why he wants to use this method in this film even if there are other or better alternatives. In my case, with “Windkeeper” I felt that visual story telling is a much stronger approach than an audial one because video creates a more intense connection to the story than words. By keeping my intention to test the possibility of staying in control of my film, reenactment was a perfect tool to maintain the control and it did not contradict my philosophy as a film director.

Eventually, I came up with a twelve-pages-long screenplay together with Katrina, where the main conflict was built around Katrina’s problem to decide what to do with her life and how she was pushed by people close to her to move on with her life, even if Katrina was content with her current lifestyle. Meanwhile, the drama was supposed to come from the fact that

Katrina sustained a head injury falling off her horse in the recent past and she was afraid that this injury might affect her health at some point, but she was not ready to quit horse riding just yet.

This approach of making the “Windkeeper” most certainly affected the performance of my characters and especially that of Katrina because she and the other characters were supposed to keep certain instructions in mind which were indicated in the screenplay. The screenplay did not only describe the action parts, but the dialogues for the main characters were also written down in it. I did not find any inconsistency in the fact that my main characters actually knew their parts for the film, as if they were actors that played certain roles because they were the actors of their own lives and were playing as themselves in this film. There are several arguments of why I chose this particular method. Firstly, I believe that even in real life people act all the time, using different social masks in specific circumstances, which leads to the impossibility of capturing a pure form of someone’s personality. Secondly, knowing their roles and parts, my characters developed an illusion of control in the process of filmmaking and they were willing to trust me more openly. Finally, the screenplay gave me control over the process of filmmaking and the ability to make a film the way I wanted it to be made which was the main goal of this experiment in the first place. However, in the end, whether my characters were acting or simply performing in the “Windkeeper”, is the central question to be researched.

2. THE EXPERIMENT OF THREE EPISODES

In relation to the analysis, I would like to discuss three different episodes from the film “Windkeeper” (the full film is available here: https://youtu.be/W_A5JJuRTHo) – two of them were included in the film, but one was not. All three episodes have a different scale of director’s intervention intensity position, starting with total intervention and finishing with almost none. Two of the episodes were scripted in the screenplay and one was improvised, based on instructions written down in the screenplay for a similar situation. From my point of view as a director, all three episodes have contrasting performances by my characters and especially by Katrina; nevertheless, whether these performances could be considered acting is something to be explored and compared. Each of the three episodes will have a specific name, in order to distinguish which one is analyzed. The first episode, which was deleted, will be called “Katrina and her friend”, the second episode, which was in the middle of the film, will be called “Katrina and her farther”, and the last episode, which was at the end of the film, will be called “Katrina and the boy”.

In the first episode “Katrina and her friend” (<https://youtu.be/fAP3MFmXA2Q>) Katrina is visited by her friend Kristine who loves horse-riding, but does not have the guts to keep horses herself. This episode was supposed to reveal how Katrina struggles with keeping horses and would like to share some responsibility with others, but Kristine would not answer Katrina’s call for help because she enjoys her own freedom and comfort more. Both characters were fine with the construction and message of this episode because it was based on a real pattern of their relationship and habits which I had observed and discussed with Katrina. They both had learnt their dialogue parts by heart and we had a few rehearsal sessions; however, when the filming actually took place, something did not feel natural. The problem was not only the way how they carried out their dialogue and their body language, but the entire setting seemed installed, artificial and fake. No matter how hard we tried to use different shots and camera positions, it did not lose the effect of being staged. In a different case this staging effect would not be a problem because it would draw the natural line between the simple reality and a more complex reality that I was trying to build in the film. The simple reality in this film (based on my interpretation) consisted of a reality represented to me as a filmmaker without my intervention whatsoever. In a way the simple reality is incomplete reality which surrounds us constantly, for example, people passing by, cars driving by, random conversations, weather conditions, wildlife and nature and so on. This reality is incomplete because it usually lacks context– we do not know who and why is driving

or walking by, why the weather is changing suddenly and so on. Katrina's simple reality was her life which was happening regardless of our presence as filmmakers, for instance, she trips on a rake or steps in horse manure which makes her react accordingly. Meanwhile, the complex reality consisted of my intervention as a filmmaker in the reality represented to me and controlled by me. The complex reality was based on my screenplay, but the foundation of this reality still existed in simple reality, for example, I did not want to control the way Katrina was walking, but I wanted to control where and why she was walking. Nonetheless, my goal was to test the possibility of controlling a simple reality by building a more complex reality within the borders of the already existing simple reality and not losing the sense of it all being real. Thereafter I realized that the rehearsal of the dialogue was overdone and it would have been enough to give my characters the opportunity to become familiar with the screenplay and follow my instructions, if there had been a need for correction. Additionally, I observed that Katrina became more and more comfortable with the filming process after all these pre-filming experiments and her performance evolved into something very natural and real. Although, she was still playing herself rather than just being herself, Katrina coalesced with her role like a professional actor and she could easily adjust to different situations.

The second episode "Katrina and her father" (<https://youtu.be/Qkl6v-CmFSM>) shows Katrina collecting bales of hay for her horses with the help of her father. Katrina's father does not mind helping his daughter take care of her horses, although, sometimes it can get really exhausting. This time they were organizing a van to come and get as many bales of hay as possible for the winter season because nobody nearby was offering bales of hay for sale. This episode was supposed to reveal how Katrina's father helps his daughter and tries to support her in any way possible, but deep-down he wants Katrina to move on with her life and establish a family for herself. However, Katrina does not feel the need for a family of her own and enjoys the life that she has right now. Despite their differences in principles, they both have a very strong bond and mutual respect. Both characters were fine with the development and message of this episode because it was based on a real pattern of their relationship and habits which I had recognized and discussed with Katrina. This time both characters did not learn their dialogue parts by heart and we did not organize rehearsal sessions. They only read the screenplay and their dialogues once a few days before shooting. The only contrast comparing to the first episode, in terms of preparation, was between the supporting characters – Katrina's father and Kristine. Right in the first meeting I observed that he and Kristine were quite different. Katrina's father had a strong personality and he

did not care what others thought about him and he was not afraid to speak his mind. Kristine, on the other hand, was shy, well-mannered and cared what others thought of her. I knew that Katrina's father would act naturally and would perform well, being given few instructions; however, Kristine did not give me the same confidence. The episode "Katrina and her farther" is quite long because it starts with Katrina calling a lady about the bales of hay, then driving to the farm, collecting the hay bales and driving back to the horse field. Nevertheless, the core of this episode is the ending when they both sit down in the back of the van and finally have a moment to relax. While they sit, the father starts an unintentional conversation about a recent doctor's visit that Katrina had, which only makes sense, due to the previous editing sequence of Katrina seeing a doctor. Soon their conversation develops into more personal communication which reveals her father's concerns about his daughter's future. Right before the conversation in the back of the van, I reminded both characters of the subjects they should be discussing in their dialogue. Both of them were familiar with each other's topics of the conversation from the screenplay that they had read some time ago, but I intentionally talked to each of them individually right before the dialogue scene, in order to make their responses and reactions more natural, had they suddenly forgotten the content of the screenplay and were surprised by its essence. This strategy paid off, since Katrina did not expect that her father would ask her anything personal, based on her assumptions. What is more, she expected him to ask about her future and the plans regarding settling down. Having finished this scene, Katrina revealed to me that she had been so shocked by her father asking her about children that she almost choked and wanted to stop shooting, but continued out of respect for our work, having trust in me as a director. This time I was very satisfied with the performance of Katrina and her father and everything seemed to look very natural. The only concern was regarding the level of spontaneity of their conversation – how intentional or unintentional did their dialogue seem? Would Katrina's father have asked all these personal questions in that particular situation otherwise? It is very hard to predict how and when your characters will decide to discuss something personal, especially while being filmed. Nonetheless, my goal was to avoid prediction and to control this time and space of randomness by risking to expose my staging strategy. As I mentioned before, I was trying to control a simple reality by building a more complex reality within the borders of the already existing reality and not losing the sense of being real. By my standards this very personal conversation between Katrina and her father might have happened in that particular situation anyway because there was a build-up for this dialogue in the previous scenes and Katrina and her father were reacting truly emotional to the context of the conversation. Then again, the question is, how natural were they? Probably, they

were acting so well that it seemed natural or perhaps were they only performing as themselves and it was the secret of making it look natural?

The third episode “Katrina and the boy” (<https://youtu.be/T6O6tuZGxpU>) explores Katrina finding out that a neighbor boy Aigars wants to buy a horse because he was inspired by Katrina’s lifestyle. Katrina is afraid that Aigars is not ready for this responsibility and she wants to talk him out of this decision. Their conversation happens in the courtyard of their nine-floor residential building complex where Katrina sometimes brings her horses, while she is doing some work at home. This episode was supposed to reveal how much the boy reflects Katrina’s passion when she was about the same age as him and this becomes a reason for Katrina to find a way to talk some sense into Aigars before it is too late. In this situation Katrina is facing a dilemma because, on the one hand, she loves horses and thinks there is nothing better for a human being than to own a horse, but, on the other hand, she realizes how much time, financial resources and effort it takes just to keep a single horse. Katrina does not want to take away Aigars’ curiosity about horses; however, she has to figure out how to lower the boy’s excitement. A similar episode was scripted down in the screenplay in which Katrina was supposed to take the horses for a walk together with Aigars. The screenplay mentioned that this episode was supposed to reveal how similar they both were while having a walk. During their conversation Katrina finds out that the boy recently fell off a horse, but he has not lost his love and passion for these animals anyway. Aigars’ courage inspires Katrina and she starts to share stories of her childhood when her parents did not like her hanging around horses which quite often ran away from neighbor pastures. At some point during her conversation with Aigars Katrina was supposed to compare her childhood with the current time and realize how much local environment has changed from the wild to industrial. When we tried to film the episode according to the screenplay, everything was falling apart: the conversation between Katrina and Aigars did not work out because Aigars was not responding the way he was supposed to respond, the camera work did not look clean because the camera was shaking and losing focus and the setting was different than we imagined before we arrived to the location. Finally, due to a terrible result of recorded footage, we called the day off and decided to rethink the entire style of our approach to this film. A few days later when we restarted shooting, we decided to drop the episode with the boy and focus our energy on other topics. We arrived to film the episode in which Katrina’s father was supposed to pick up horse manure from the courtyard, due to some complaints from the neighbors, but during our conversation with Katrina she announced that Aigars had told her of his desire to buy a horse the day before. I realized that this might

be a great opportunity to substitute the failed episode with the boy. I talked to Katrina and gave her instructions on how to talk to Aigars. Katrina was supposed to call Aigars and invite him to the courtyard where she was petting her horses. When Aigars would come out, she was supposed to start a conversation about his idea of getting a horse and slowly talk some sense into him not to get one. When Aigars showed up, Katrina started her improvisation and we just observed it. Katrina did so well that we did not have to interact at any point. Comparing to the episode “Katrina and her father” where Katrina knew the screenplay and what we were trying to gain, in the episode with the boy, she could not predict what would happen, how Aigars would respond and how she had to react to that. Katrina was improvising her performance, but it progressed completely naturally which again seems to raise the question – was it acting or just an everyday performance by Katrina which made the episode look extremely real?

CHAPTER III: PERFORMANCE OR ACTING

1. DIFFERENT THEORIES OF PERFORMANCE IN DOCUMENTARY FILMS

There are quite different theories on performance in documentary film; nonetheless, a large part of these theories do not compare performance with acting which is important in my case. Let's take for instance the theory of "conceptualizing documentary performance" by Elizabeth Marquis. She makes a statement already at the beginning of the article that "*everybody in the world is an actor*" (Marquis 2013, 45). Acting or, I would prefer social acting, is an accurate term when referring only to human behavior which is a priori filtered and affected by our own personalities, education and the origin in the process of interacting with other people. In other words, we, as social creatures, constantly use different social masks in different situations – basically, we pretend all the time. However, social acting does not have any connection to acting as a form of artistic manifestation. In her article Marquis distinguishes between social acting and documentary performance furthermore by using three-tiered model, which she explains as:

"the vast majority of performances in documentary texts consist of everyday communicative activity, which has been framed, influenced by and/or tailored to the camera and which is carried out within specific non-fiction film frameworks." (Marquis 2013, 46)

The first model is 'everyday performance' or everyday communication activity which on a large scale consists of language and non-verbal activities, such as gestures, facial expressions, intonation and other extra-linguistic behaviors. This everyday performance might change when a filmed subject knows he or she is being filmed by trying to present themselves as a better person. Nevertheless, this usually stays within a frame of classical everyday performances when interacting with other people because a documentary character does not have the necessary skill set, knowledge and ability, comparing to a professional actor. The second model is called filmic performance or performance which is "*framed, influenced by and/or tailored to the camera*" (Marquis 2013, 46) and this performance consists of limitations affected by current technological possibilities and the chosen artistic approach which further will create a particular meaning, despite any given performance by a filmed subject. The third model is documentary performance or "*specific non-fiction film frameworks*" (Marquis 2013, 46) and this performance consists of the chosen stylistic approach between a filmed subject and their relationship to the camera; either they have to pretend

to ignore the camera or do quite the opposite, or the mixture of both. Taking all three models into consideration, it is interesting to apply this system, in order to analyze Katrina's performance. Initially, it is important to establish the documentary performance in the "Windkeeper" film because it makes the general impact on the everyday and filmic performances. I chose to approach the "Windkeeper" as a representational film "(i.e., those that foster a 'naturalism' by refusing to acknowledge the camera's presence)" (Marquis 2013, 51), thus instantly forcing my characters to pretend that the camera and sound equipment surrounding them was non-existent which also made limitations to the camera and sound departments because they had to find a way to imitate the spontaneous style of capturing the moments of Katrina and her co-partner's everyday performances. After establishing the documentary performance, next in line comes the filmic performance which was decided to be kept within the style of distant observational frame where the camera starts every episode from a distance and then gets closer and closer to our characters. These two performances really restricted the everyday performance of my characters and especially Katrina's performance because throughout her presentation she had to pretend that the camera and sound equipment surrounding her did not exist and keep the framework of camera and sound abilities in mind. Nonetheless, the documentary and filmic performances were adjusted to everyday performance as well, for instance, when an accidental recognition of the camera occurred by the characters or when the natural borders of the camera and sound ability were overstepped to follow characters in the covered frame. Despite that, these adjustments were kept to a minimum by the intervention of the director constantly reminding the characters of the existing restrictions. Thus, mostly Katrina's everyday performance was adapted to fit the requirements of documentary and filmic performances; however, to what extent these adaptations affected her and her co-partner's performance, is open for discussion. There is no doubt that Katrina and the others were giving performances based on the theory of Marquis, but how much do these technical and artistic limitations really affect the characters' performances? In my three experimental episodes Katrina went through three different interventions from my side, starting with complete intervention and ending with almost none. In the first episode "Katrina and her friend" (<https://youtu.be/fAP3MFmXA2Q>) she and her friend had learnt scripted dialogues by heart, in the second episode "Katrina and her father" (<https://youtu.be/Qkl6v-CmFSM>) Katrina and her father only knew instructions from the screenplay they had read before, but in the third episode "Katrina and the boy" (<https://youtu.be/T6O6tuZGxpU>) Katrina and the boy improvised the entire scene. During all three episodes Katrina and the others had the same documentary and filmic restrictions in place which, of course, became more natural as the filming process progressed for the

involved characters and especially Katrina. However, in my opinion, the most natural episode seems to be the improvised one – “Katrina and the boy”. So, either Katrina became a better performer or she adapted the skills of acting – imitating herself in very staged situations. The problem with the theory of Marquis is that it determines the performance in documentary film, but does not analyze the level of performance whatsoever. I have no doubt that documentary characters of any kind will always perform to some extent, but I would like to discover, if there are tools to determine the difference between acting and everyday performance.

2. “ON ACTING AND NOT-ACTING” THEORY

In order to distinguish between a simple performance or everyday performance and acting as an artistic manifestation, I was searching for the theory which is focused on acting levels. I came across the theory of Michael Kirby called “On acting and not-acting”. Kirby describes acting as something meant “*to feign, to simulate, to represent, to impersonate*” (Kirby 1972, 3), nonetheless, he admits that not all performing is acting. Hitherto, I already discussed that obviously not all documentary performances are reaching the levels of acting because merely a filmed subject in most cases is not a professional actor with the necessary skill set to act and usually their goal as a documentary character is to be themselves rather than feign, simulate, represent, or impersonate. Also, I previously promoted the idea that, in my opinion, all documentary characters are giving some sort of performances, but usually these performances are not distinguished between everyday performance and acting by assuming that documentary characters are not acting whatsoever. In my case, with the three episode experiment my documentary character Katrina went through three different levels of performance. In the first episode “Katrina and her friend” (<https://youtu.be/fAP3MFmXA2Q>) Katrina is staging her performance entirely – she is not only following instructions from the filming crew during shooting, but she is also learning the dialogue by heart from the given screenplay. From this point of view, I would assume that Katrina is acting because we are reconstructing a fragment from her life which is completely reenacted. Nevertheless, this fragment is based on Katrina’s everyday performance and her life and she is performing it herself. Could we actually act as ourselves, if we only have to give the performance constructed on our personalities and everyday life? On the opposite side there is the third episode which is improvised mostly by Katrina and the filming crew, meaning that Katrina did not have a written screenplay to follow and the filming crew could not prepare in advance. Based on this, I would definitely assume that Katrina was only giving an everyday

performance not acting, on the other hand, Katrina had already been working on this film for some time, she had gone through different performance experiments, she knew the entire narrative of the film and she felt very comfortable around the filming crew. Could Katrina have obtained the necessary skills to act as herself, which most certainly is much easier for an unprofessional actor if you do not need to impersonate somebody else? Therefore, we get to the point where in order to distinguish between everyday performance and acting, Kirby's theory might become very helpful. Kirby divides his theory in five stages, starting from zero acting and ending with complex acting. The first stage is non-matrixed performing which basically means that a film subject is doing nothing to provoke the information or identification.

"When the performer, ..., is merely himself and is not imbedded, as it were, in matrices of pretended or represented character, situation, place and time, I refer to him as being "non-matrixed." (Kirby 1972, 4)

Kirby gives a great example for this stage referring to a person who is wearing cowboy style clothing, but who is neither identifying himself as a cowboy, nor is he pretending to be one. This person just happens to like wearing cowboy style clothing. The second stage is non-matrixed representation, when *"the referential elements are applied to the performer and are not acted by him."* (Kirby 1972, 5)

"When, ..., the character and place matrices are weak, intermittent or non-existent, we see a person, not an actor." (Kirby 1972, 5)

Let's continue using the example of the cowboy. If we see a person wearing cowboy style clothing and drinking a cup of coffee in the city coffee shop, we might assume that this person only happens to like wearing cowboy style clothing. Alternatively, if the same person is wearing cowboy style clothing and drinking a cup of coffee next to a pasture full of cattle, it will be much harder to assume that this person only happens to like wearing cowboy style clothing. The third stage is received acting which is described as an honorary title.

"Extras, who do nothing but walk and stand in costume, are seen as "actors". Anyone merely walking across a stage containing a realistic setting might come to represent a person in that place - and, perhaps, time - without doing anything we could distinguish as acting." (Kirby 1972, 5) "... Although the performer seems to be acting, he actually is not." (Kirby 1972, 6)

If a person is wearing cowboy style clothing and drinking a cup of coffee next to a pasture full of cattle, it does not matter if he is a real cowboy or a person pretending to be one, while his function is only to wear cowboy style clothing and to drink a cup of coffee next to a pasture full of cattle because, in any case, there is not enough action to determine his skill set, if he is only pretending. The fourth stage is simple acting:

“in which only one element or dimension of act is used. Emotion, as we have seen, may be the only area in which pretense takes place. Or, ..., only an action such as putting on a jacket may be simulated. Other acting exercises attempt to isolate various aspects of acting, and they are proof that behavior, which is complex, can be broken down into simple units. (Kirby 1972, 8)

If a person is wearing cowboy style clothing and drinking a cup of coffee next to a pasture full of cattle and suddenly emotionlessly pretends to be shot in the chest and falls down dead, then this person is definitely acting. However, acting in this case might be very simple because even a person who is not a professional actor can pretend to be a cowboy shot dead. The fifth stage is complex acting, which means that:

“acting becomes complex as more and more elements are incorporated into the pretense. Let us say that the performer putting on a jacket is part of a scene: he may choose to act emotion (fear, let us say), physical characteristics (the person portrayed is old), place (there is a bright sun) and many other elements. Each of these could be performed in isolation, but when they are presented simultaneously or in close proximity to each other the acting becomes complex.” (Kirby 1972, 9)

If a person is wearing cowboy style clothing and drinking a cup of coffee next to a pasture full of cattle and suddenly emotionally pretends to be shot in the chest and falls down dead, then this person is definitely acting. However, acting in this case might get more complex by adding other elements, such as serious pain of the gunshot wound, agony and shock of suffering, particular choreography of falling down and crying of impending death.

3. ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERS' PERFORMANCE IN THE SHORT DOCUMENTARY FILM "WINDKEEPER"

Before analyzing the performance of characters in the short documentary film "Wind-keeper", it is important to establish some ground rules. In his theory "On acting and not-acting" Michael Kirby focuses on theatrical acting which is different from cinematic acting, but, then again, both artistic expressions have a lot of similarities. It is a commonly known fact that quite a few theater actors perform in films and vice versa because acting in its general sense requires a particular set of skills which are important in both artistic expressions. Be that as it may, acting in documentary films is even more different from theatrical and cinematic acting because in its general sense documentary film characters usually do not use acting as a form of artistic manifestation, except when it is openly required, for example, in historical reenactment sequences or in films such as "The Rider" 2017 by Chloé Zhao (which actually is drifting somewhere between the documentary and fiction genre). In my case, I am not trying to prove that documentary film characters are acting because usually they are not actors and they do not possess a particular set of skills, but when documentary film characters are directed by filmmakers and are following instructions – how far or close is this process from actual acting?

First, I will discuss the episode "Katrina and her friend" (<https://youtu.be/fAP3MFmXA2Q>). In it Katrina's friend Kristine comes for a visit. Kristine loves riding horses, but does not have the guts to keep horses herself. The episode was initially aimed to show how Katrina struggles with keeping her horses and would prefer to share some responsibility with others. Kristine, however, does not answer Katrina's call for help as her freedom and comfort are more important to her. Both of the characters approved how the episode played out because it went along the lines of how their relationship actually is. I had the possibility to see this for myself and discuss it with Katrina beforehand. Both women were given directions according to a screenplay which also contained dialogue parts for them that they learnt by heart. We held a few rehearsals before filming, but the rehearsals were quite superficial – I asked both of them to act out the dialogue and that nothing else. We used the natural pasture of Katrina's horses as the film set which we slightly altered – we constructed a bonfire place close to water where both girls were supposed to have a picnic. The girls were following my instructions which I kept very simple and as few as possible during the actual filming process. I did not try to intervene when they were running their parts, I collected all my comments after we completed the entire episode. When we discussed the necessary improvements and came up with a new plan, we ran the episode

again. The camera was recording from a distance, in order to create the illusion of candid moment capturing, and later it moved closer.

I guess from my description of how the episode “Katrina and her friend” was built and recorded, Katrina and Kristine’s performances would be placed in the fourth stage as simple acting. Simple acting only shows one element or dimension of an act and can be broken down into simple units. Although Katrina and Kristine had learnt the dialogue by heart and tried to imitate a random sequence of their interaction from the past, they both were only playing as themselves and were not trying to impersonate anybody else. They both could not imitate real emotions because they were focusing on the dialogue and did not have the skills to add some diversity to their performance. The acting done by Katrina and Kristine was very simple, so to speak, similarly to the example with the person who is wearing cowboy style clothing and drinking a cup of coffee next to a pasture full of cattle, and suddenly emotionlessly pretends to be shot in the chest and falls down dead. They both were together with the horses and had special equestrian clothing on; both of them made a bonfire place and had a picnic next to the pasture of Katrina’s horses – all these matrices of pretend or represented situation, place and time are very persuasive to make the acting look more convincing. Nevertheless, everything that I mentioned now also belongs to the non-acting stages and does not necessarily lead to acting, except the dialogue part. The dialogue part is the only thing which technically forced both girls to act despite of the lack of emotional and physical diversity. However, is it possible that both girls actually were only performing the received acting not simple acting? In received acting *“anyone merely walking across a stage containing a realistic setting might come to represent a person in that place - and, perhaps, time - without doing anything we could distinguish as acting.”* (Kirby 1972, 5). So far this is very similar to what Katrina and Kristine were doing – they both were in equestrian outfits moving around in a very realistic setting. The dialogue part complicates everything because received acting is more built on strong outside elements, such as very persuasive clothing, realistic settings and less on inner appearance – language, gestures, facial expressions and intonation. Inner appearance is harder to feign, simulate, represent or impersonate than the outside appearance and requires more skills, but if somebody only presents dialogue by keeping emotions to the minimum – is it not similar to received acting when the dialogue is only technically repeated words lacking any emotional meaning? Looking back at the dialogue between Katrina and Kristine, I can see now what I was actually missing. It was the emotional performance in the dialogue. In my opinion, back then I thought that documentary characters would easily perform anything, while they act as

themselves within their natural frame, but I forgot that to imitate something it requires not only being yourself in your natural surroundings, but also to imitate emotions which require some basic acting skills or at least some decent preparation. Therefore, I would describe my first experiment “Katrina and her friend” as non-acting performance despite of extreme staging build-up and process. Katrina and Kristine were imitating the acting, but they were not even doing simple acting because even simple acting requires advance preparation.

As the second, I will discuss the episode “Katrina and her farther” (<https://youtu.be/Qkl6v-CmFSM>). Here Katrina and her father are shown gathering hay bales for Katrina’s horses. The father likes helping his daughter tend to her horses, although sometimes he finds it draining. This time they were arranging a van to collect as many bales of hay as possible for the upcoming winter, since no one in the neighborhood had offered to sell hay bales. This part was meant to portray Katrina’s father helping her and providing his daughter with support to the best of his abilities, despite wishing deep-down that Katrina would change her life and settle down. Katrina, at the same time, does not feel like she wants to change anything in her life right now and has no desire to start a family of her own. Putting their differences aside, both of them remain close to each other and have respect for one another. Neither Katrina, nor her father objected to the way this episode was constructed because it was based on their real life interactions which I had the chance to see and discuss with Katrina prior. For this episode there was no dialogue learning by heart and there were no rehearsals. Both characters had gotten acquainted with the screenplay only once shortly before the shooting started. The only way that this episode differed from the first one was related to the supporting characters – the father and Kristine – in terms of preparation. I had my observations of Katrina’s father and Kristine from the start which revealed that they were quite different from each other. The father possessed a strong personality, was not afraid to speak what was on his mind and did not care what others thought of him, whereas Kristine was timid, well-mannered and cared what others thought of her. I was sure that Katrina’s father would be a natural and would perform well with few instructions, but I did not have the same confidence with Kristine.

This time we did not intervene in the filming set, we organized our filming process around natural movement of all characters, but we asked Katrina and her father to hold their conversation in the back of the van because we felt it would look very organic and it had better light and composition. Before the actual filming Katrina and her father were given the last instructions by me where I reminded them what the main goal of this conversation should be. These instructions I gave them separately, in order to keep both sides from finding out

the possible subjects that they would discuss. This way I hoped to create more natural reactions from both characters and generate space for improvisation as response to unexpected questions. The camera work was the same – we started recording from a distance, in order to create an illusion of candid moment capturing, but later the camera was moved closer to capture more emotional reactions from the characters.

Taking into consideration my description of how the episode “Katrina and her father” was built and recorded, Katrina and her father’s performance would be placed in the third stage as received acting. In the received acting “*anyone merely walking across a stage containing a realistic setting might come to represent a person in that place - and, perhaps, time - without doing anything we could distinguish as acting.*” (Kirby 1972, 5) Katrina and her father were not doing anything artificial outside their natural everyday performance because every year there is one day when they both collect bales of hay for Katrina’s horses. Although this time bale collecting was organized especially for our filming, sooner or later this day would have come anyway. Hay bale collecting is something that Katrina and her father have been doing for years and picking out a day for it did not change anything for them and did not demand any specific skills. Also, they did not have to pretend that this day was happening before the actual timeframe because it was basically organized during the month when it is usually done anyway. The only thing that was forced from my side was the topic for discussion. Katrina knew that I asked her father to discuss something personal with her, but she did not know how directly her father would approach her and what he would ask her. On the other hand, Katrina’s father was well informed about the particular subject of the conversation, but I did not guide him on how direct he had to be and when he had to bring up the main subject during the conversation. Despite of the imitated conversation between Katrina and her father, which otherwise would probably place this episode in the fourth or fifth stage as acting, Katrina and her father did not feign or impersonate anything else outside their natural behavior or outside their regular mutual conversation. Katrina’s father was asking Katrina about her future plans regarding horse keeping (which he thought she has to stop someday) and starting a family, which probably he would not bring up during filming, unless I had asked him to, but he would probably bring up this subject at some point in their lives anyway. Then again, also due to this imitated conversation, I would not place this episode in the first or second stage as zero acting because they both pretended that this conversation was entirely happening spontaneously (to some extent it was happening naturally – Katrina could not prepare how to react and her father did know how to bring the subject into conversation), which demanded some skills of

convincing presentation and simulation of the particular subject and reactions. Looking back at this episode, I can see now that Katrina and her father were not acting despite of the staged conversation between them. First of all, their actions and setting were as natural as possible; we as a filming crew did not intervene in the characters, situations, place and time whatsoever. Secondly, despite of the staged conversation between the characters, this conversation was organic because there was no screenplay with dialogues, there were no instructions on how to hold this conversation, there were no rehearsals to prepare for this conversation and both sides did not know how the other would react. Thirdly, Katrina and her father would not simulate their emotions so well, unless they would have had professional acting experience or if we had had a decent preparation before filming. Although Katrina and her father pretended that this conversation was happening naturally – right in this moment of filming, but such a small simulation of imitation is not enough to award somebody with acting skills.

As the third, I will discuss the episode “Katrina and the boy” (<https://youtu.be/T6O6tuZGxpU>). In this episode Katrina finds out that the neighbor boy named Aigars wishes to buy a horse, having been inspired by Katrina’s lifestyle. Katrina is afraid that Aigars is not prepared for this kind of responsibility and she wants to talk him out of it. Their conversation takes place in the courtyard of their nine-floor residential building complex where Katrina sometimes takes her horses to, while she is busy with some work at home. This episode was supposed to showcase how much the boy mirrors Katrina’s passion of when she was about the same age as him. This becomes a reason for Katrina to figure out how to talk to Aigars to persuade him to change his mind before it is too late. At this point Katrina has a dilemma before her – a part of her knows there is nothing better in life than owning a horse, but the other part of her is fully aware of the amount of time, money and effort that it takes to just keep a single horse. Katrina does not want to destroy Aigars’ interest in horses, but at the same time she has to think of a way how to reason with the boy. An episode similar to this one was scripted in the screenplay, which would involve Katrina taking horses for a walk together with Aigars. Yet, when we started filming this episode according to the screenplay, everything was falling apart; the conversation between both characters was not going well because Aigars was not responding the way he was intended to.

The camera work was not clean, since the camera kept shaking and losing focus. The setting was also different from what we had visualized initially, prior to arriving to the location. Finally, due to the faulty footage, we called it a day and decided to rethink the entire style of our approach to this film. A couple of days later we resumed shooting and then decided to

drop the episode with the boy altogether to focus our energy on other topics. We arrived with the determination to film the episode where Katrina's father was supposed to pick up horse manure from the courtyard after some neighbors had complained. However, at some point, in the middle of the conversation Katrina announced that Aigars had confessed his desire to buy a horse the day before. I realized that this might be a great opportunity to substitute the failed episode, having learnt the new information. I had a conversation with Katrina and gave her instructions on how to talk to Aigars. The plan was for her to call the boy and invite him to the courtyard where she would be petting her horses. Upon his arrival, she was supposed to start talking about his idea of getting a horse and move the conversation slowly towards talking some sense into him not getting a horse. When Aigars showed up, Katrina started her improvisation and we just observed it. Katrina did so well that we did not have to intervene one bit. Comparing to the episode "Katrina and her father" where Katrina knew the screenplay and what we are trying to gain, in the episode with the boy, she could not predict what would happen, how Aigars would respond and how she had to react. The camera work was the same – we started recording from the distance, in order to create the illusion of a candid moment being captured, but later the camera was moved closer to capture more emotional reactions from the characters.

I guess from my description of how the episode "Katrina and her friend" was built and recorded, Katrina and the boy's performance would be placed in the first stage as non-matrixed performing which basically means that a film subject is doing nothing to provoke the information or identification. *"When the performer, ..., is merely himself and is not imbedded, as it were, in matrices of pretended or represented character, situation, place and time, I refer to him as being "non-matrixed."* (Kirby 1972, 4). Katrina and the boy did not do anything outside their everyday performance. All the matrices of character, situation, place and time were as authentic as possible because it was happening in the exact moment in time; nothing was forced from the outside. Neither I, nor my filming crew intervened in this episode whatsoever, except by basking Katrina to call the boy and get him to come outside. However, our instructions to call the boy were very simple and could not affect Katrina's mindset or influence her behavior. Of course, there is always a possibility that Katrina adapted more as the filming process was going on for a certain period of time and she learnt how to behave in certain situations in front of the camera. Nevertheless, could she learn how to act in particular situations? I would highly doubt this statement, based on previously analyzed episodes. Firstly, like it was pointed out in the discussion of the first episode, Katrina could not imitate emotions for the dialogue which was totally structured and made

up by me. Despite of learning the dialogue by heart and being herself, Katrina did not have the necessary skills of acting to imitate the dialogue for it to look and sound natural. Next, in the second episode Katrina had the opportunity to imitate emotions during her conversation with her father based on her experience from the first episode filming process, but she did not do that because and, most importantly, she did not know how to do that and it means that she just did not act. I think that Katrina just became more comfortable around the camera and she understood my instructions better. On the other hand, I realized that keeping instructions to the minimum helps my characters to feel more comfortable and think less of the filming process. Acting demands special skills which either you learn somewhere or you have decent preparation for it. In any documentary film usually the characters are not acting and the process of filming is built in a way which does not allow preparing for acting. Katrina was most definitely performing in all three episodes, but she did not act because she did not know how to do it and she did not have the necessary skills.

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

My goal was to try out the possibility of being in complete control, while making a documentary film on a subject which is based on real-life situations, events and characters at the present time. The concept behind this approach was closely related to the idea that a documentary filmmaker is in no position to record and transmit reality with his presence because it would intervene the reality of a subject anyway, in turn only giving the option for a filmmaker to record and transmit his interpretation of reality of the subject he has selected.

Documentary filmmaking offers an author's interpretation of a subject that they have selected, thus only revealing their version of the subject selected by any tools of filmmaking instruments they manage. What is more, at times this version of the author's documentary film is able to move closer to the truth than the truth represented by reality. At this point it is undeniable that the intervention of the author inevitable in documentary filmmaking and this allows choosing any approach or strategy to be implemented as long as it is trying to reveal the truth of present reality and is not deliberately falsifying the truth. Considering the disadvantage of the status of a documentary filmmaker and his relation to reality, I decided to invest myself in something that meets my expectations and standards, instead of risking adapting to certain situations and facing disappointment of not being able to record footage in a way which would not be expected for me. My main aim was to begin by having total control over everything, even if it turned everything into complete fiction, and to observe where it might take me what it might bring me along the way in relation to my creative process as a documentary filmmaker.

Initially, I struggled when looking for a story for my experiment. The "Windkeeper" was the perfect fit for what I was looking for because it did not involve any clear conflict or drama which would just move it along no matter which artistic approaches would have been used in the film. Eventually, with the help from Katrina, I created a screenplay where the main conflict was centered around Katrina and her struggles in deciding what she wants to do with her life and how she is being pushed by the people close to her, even though Katrina was content with her life the way it was. On the other hand, the drama was meant to derive from Katrina having suffered a head injury after falling off her horse not so long ago and she was afraid that this might affect her health overall at some point, but she was still not ready to quit horse riding, even after the injury.

The way I had chosen to make “Windkeeper” most certainly affected the performance of my characters, especially Katrina. All the characters were expected to remember all the instructions indicated in the screenplay. It not only included the description of action parts, but also contained the dialogues for the main characters.

As the basis of the analysis I presented three different episodes from my own film “Windkeeper” – two of them remained in the film, but one was excluded from it.

All three episodes had a different scale of director’s intervention intensity position, starting at complete intervention and finalizing with almost none. Two of the episodes were scripted in the screenplay, but one was improvised based on instructions included in the screenplay for a similar situation. From my point of view as a director, all three episodes had contrasting performances by my characters and especially by Katrina; however, there was one question that remained – could these performances be considered acting? That is something I tried researching and comparing. Each episode had a specific title, in order to distinguish which one is analyzed at that point. The first episode, titled “Katrina and her friend”, was deleted, the second episode, titled “Katrina and her farther”, took place in the middle of the film and the last episode, titled “Katrina and the boy”, was put at the end of the film.

While I was working on “Windkeeper”, I really wanted to try something new for myself as a documentary director. I took a position in which I wanted to be in control of every aspect of the filmmaking process, despite of making a documentary film – almost turning documentary filmmaking into fiction filmmaking with a screenplay, constructing “mise-en-scène”, and organizing the setting and so on. My philosophy behind this radical approach was clear and strong for myself and at the end of the day I was truly very satisfied with the outcome of “Windkeeper” as a documentary film. Nonetheless, during the actual filmmaking process itself, I encountered this concern about the performance of my characters – were they acting and if they were, why, when it was supposed to work it did not work, like in the episode “Katrina and her friend”, but when it was not supposed to work, it worked quite well, like in the episode “Katrina and the boy”? Only now, after I did my analysis of the three experimental episodes, I realized that my documentary characters were not acting even when I tried to force them to act. The answer is very simple – documentary characters in most cases are not professional actors; thus, firstly, they do not acquire the necessary skill set for acting and, secondly, they need very decent preparation for acting requirements, even if they only need to act as themselves. My mistake was that I took a documentary character for granted that would be able to act as him or herself without a proper preparation and

even then it does not guarantee that it would work. Although documentary characters do perform, it is more related to social acting than acting as artistic manifestation. Instead of using acting requirements in documentary filmmaking, I would rather spend some extra time with my characters to build-up mutual trust between us as filmmakers and them as characters and make them realize and understand the rules of filmmaking. Documentary characters usually do not have any problems in acting out their everyday performance in front of the camera, following restrictions imposed by the limitations of filming equipment framework, either it is the camera or sound and following restrictions imposed by the instructions of the director because when a documentary character trusts the filmmaker and knows the filmmaking process, he or she feels comfortable and is more open to different experiments. Also, the same applies to filmmakers – when they know their characters better, it is easier to improvise and adjust to different situations created by a documentary character.

Documentary characters do not act, they perform and will always perform because we all do so as social beings and it is the beauty of human nature. However, a documentary filmmaker has to understand whether this performance of their filmed subject is good for them and if not, then they have to find a mechanism how to control this performance of their filmed subject or how to get behind this performance. In the “Windkeeper” I went through three different stages of the director’s intervention intensity position, starting with total intervention and ending with almost none. This process helped me find the best approach to my character and, most importantly, to my film.

Certainly, I must take into consideration any other possible obstacles in the process of my documentary film “Windkeeper” characters’ performances, such as my own experience working with non-actors, the presence of the film crew, the distractions from the surrounding environment, blocking limitations and many other factors. One of the most dominant effects might be my own lack of experience working with non-actors in conditions which required acting principles from the characters because this approach demands a particular skill set and the knowledge from the director as well. I have already emphasized prior my assumptions that a documentary character that has to act him or herself out should have the ability to imitate themselves without a lengthy preparation. Right now, I know that this was a false assumption on my side which also indicates my lack of experience working with non-actors; however, I wanted to test the possibility of staying in total control while making a documentary film and directing non-actors was part of this experiment, which means that everything in the filming process was new and unfamiliar to me and I was willing to go with

the flow. Undeniably, if I had prepared better for this situation where I worked with non-actors, for example, read other authors' experiences and learnt some methods, I would have probably been able to prepare the "Windkeeper" characters for their task better. Then again, I would not have been so open to adjust to different conditions, based on my characters' performances, for instance, changing my strategy of complete intervention to very little intervention. Moreover, it concerns other obstacles I mentioned above in the process of my documentary film "Windkeeper" characters' performances. Although, my entire thesis is focused on analyzing the characters' performances in my film "Windkeeper", the most important discovery for me was the filming process itself. I wanted to test the possibility of staying in total control while making a documentary film – this was an extremely unusual and new approach to me as a filmmaker. The overall goal for me as a filmmaker was to challenge myself and try my freshly gained knowledge in practice in my studies and meanwhile get over my concerns from the previous events of disappointment in documentary filmmaking. Basically, everything in the process of making "Windkeeper" was foreign to me, which required constant analysis and adjustment from me as a director. Nonetheless, to start this experiment with such an extreme ambition as total control was important from a point of view where the ultimate borderline was created and everything down this line was less exaggerated or, in other words, was a more classical approach to documentary filmmaking and was easier to comprehend. Documentary filmmaking is like a living organism which consists of many different elements, starting from the story, characters, funding, filming crew, filming strategy, filming equipment, environment and ending with editing. Subsequently, by bringing all these elements together there will always be new challenges, discoveries and the possibility of disappointment. Therefore, there is not one particular formula in the process of documentary filmmaking because even an advanced, well-prepared and developed strategy before the filmmaking might become useless and dysfunctional in the actual filming process. This is what happened with the characters' performances in the "Windkeeper". Although, we can separate the potential obstacles which might or might not have affected Katrina and her friend's performances, I must acknowledge that in different circumstances the same obstacles probably would not work or create problems. After "Windkeeper" my next short documentary was "The Last Date" where I told the story of my grandfather. This time, based on my experience with "Windkeeper", I was more open to adjust to situations and my characters than I had previously been. I discovered that the entire process is more natural and authentic, but then there were other problems. However, this time I felt calm and confident in spite of the other problems in the process of "The Last Date" filmmaking because I knew that there are boundless mechanisms and strategies how

to make a documentary film and none of them guaranties success, but there will always be the option to change your strategy and find the best approach to your film.

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