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Staged reality in cinema: Contemporary interpretations and meanings

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Abstract

Relevance. The relevance of this subject is related to the development of information technology and new media, which has allowed wide access to cinema as a visual activity. The information media space is increasingly connected to human existence, and the demand for intangible goods and services inherent in post-industrial society is causing increasing demands for intellectual products outside the science and production industry.

Purpose. In this context, the purpose of the study is to identify the plane of the significance of the staged reality of cinema as a dominant form of synthetic art, the attitude between artistic and nonartistic features of staged reality on the example of fiction and documentary cinema, and to outline the transformation of the structure of film reality as a constructor and medium.

Methodology. The principal approaches to the study were structural and hermeneutic approaches to structural analysis in terms of the semiotics of culture of cinema reality sign space and the use of interpretive practices on textual objects.

Results. The study describes the connection between the simulacrisation of cinema as a separate staged reality, capable of gaining independence from the original author's idea; the loss of the original author's role and the work itself as a text that is part of the global inter- and hypertext; and the role of the medium as a coherent, semantic carrier of content in the act of communication, which in its unity infinitely increases the possible perceptible meanings determined by the form.

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Conclusions. The materials of this study harmonise the theories of simulacra, author's death and mediumship in the context of cinema semiotics in the interpretative vector "mediumship-discourse-sign" and orient further research towards establishing the attitude between individual authorial language and cinema discourse in the context of hyperreality.

Keywords: hyperreality; death of the author; representation; simulacra; documentary cinema.

Introduction

The information age has not only given humanity unhindered access to information and communication, but it has also provided a sense of omniscience and omnipresence. Modern people can learn anything, contact anyone and go anywhere with the help of technology that appeared fantastic at the beginning of the last century. The enormous information flow on the Internet has covered not only science and education but also the arts, which have been increasingly connected with entertainment since the end of the century before last [1]. With the development of mass culture and consumer society, the demand for new experiences possible with technology has also increased. Cinematography was no exception. From the moment of "Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat" to the present, cinema has been no longer a miracle, but the viewer's transfer to the scene depicted has remained the main mechanism of impact – the screen carries the viewer to another plane of being, exposes reality from an atypical angle [2; 3]. In current conditions, where media content establishes public opinion and discursive strategies of information warfare accompany actual armed conflicts, it remains relevant to comprehend the phenomenon of staged reality as a representation mechanism of reality in hyper-reality [4-6].

Like any art form like literature, drama, painting, etc., cinema has its range of artistic means for conveying an author's intention. While the author's intention may revolve around reality and fictional subjects alike, the crucial act is the conveyance of semantic connotations due to each art's genre-oriented form [7; 8]. The original intention of the author, who can depict the real world and design his reality, establishes and emphasises the finished work with specific means of expression. In this way, the picture, as a finished product presented from the screen, carries the viewer into a "designed from scratch" world, where narrative, internal logic and artistic language separately have a definite meaning and together outline the way viewers understand a particular intention.

If each film is perceived as a separate reality, then the reality of documentary cinema is equivalent to the reality of fiction cinema. In fiction cinema, the author's vision is the author's intention, whereas the documentary depicts reality mediated by the author's intention. Real events captured by filming are not presented to the viewer in a visual manner, which allows questions to be raised about the credibility of certain events [9; 10]. While the film director conveys his own experience from the scene, the final viewer does not receive it immediately, but a representation that is open to interpretation and carries over into subjective cognitive strategies [11; 12]. Establishing the attitudes and semantic connotations between screen reality and lived reality is the essence of the study.

All cinema, by its essence, is staged reality. The screen exposes the viewer to a different world, a reality grounded in an alien perception. The subject-viewer is always the subject of a one-sided influence of the author. It is the viewer orientation that determines the selection of artistic

means; reception is impossible without a common signifier space, which can be selected from the available conventional means or established in the course of contact with the recipient, who must interpret and understand the artistic language of film. Although the latter practice is more common in fiction cinema, documentary directors similarly use all resources to focus the viewer's attention on particular points. Although the legitimacy of the staging of cinematic reality has been examined previously, the question of the mechanism by which authorial representation is perceived, what the essence of such cinematic reality is, and how it impacts, remains open [13; 14].

Materials and Methods

In addition to general scientific methods, discourse analysis, hermeneutic, structural and historical-philosophical approaches were used in the research process. Considering the multimodality of the material and the sufficient research of the footage, it was decided to distract from the semantic context of the individual documentaries by conceptualising the central categories, namely screen, reality proper, staged reality, perception and authorial intent. Based on the interaction of the real dimensions in the structure of the screening process through the vector "manipulation-representation-perception", the reality of documentary cinema was established as a staged reality, based on an analysis of the terms "artistic" and "nonfiction/documentary cinema", which provides for creative representation of reality due to the specificity of artistic means of expression. The historical-philosophical approach results from the necessity for a general historical method of the early history of documentary film and a critical philosophical reflection on the generalised historical material for the central categories outlined above. It was identified that the dichotomy "staged reality – reality proper" emerged shortly after the emergence of the documentary film due to the specific technical limitations of the industry and the attempt to represent authentic or close to such an experience to the viewer. Considering the specificity of the interaction of staged reality through the screen as an abstract conceptual wall of exclusion, the substitution of staged reality for the reality of the events represented in the viewer's perception was identified.

The application of discourse analysis towards contemporary film-philosophy in post-industrial society's dominant postmodern discourse was performed to identify an adaptive methodology that would consider the interaction of simultaneously author, audience and work itself, adjusting for the gap between the two forms of reality in the discourse. Thus, J. Baudrillard's simulacra theory which is a separate branch of cultural semiotics within the structural approach was used to explore the mechanism of displacement of the original semantic field of cinema through the process of simulacrisation, R. Barthes' theory of the author's death to establish the attitude

between the authorial intention, the staged reality of the screen as representation and the audience's interpretation, and M. McLuhan's theory of the medium, which explains the mechanism of film form, the indivisible unity of its representational means, the communicative code, the understanding of which primarily enables the act of communication between author and spectator.

The process of simulacrisation through active speculation with sign sets first warps, then substitutes, and finally self-substitutes the original meaning, releasing itself from the original intention-meaning, through interaction with other signs acquires self-sufficiency, and becomes self-referential. The metaphorical death of the author presupposes a departure from the author's intention in the world of intertext as context and hypertext – a network of mutually referential texts in global discourse. The language of cinema, like any inanimate language, depersonalises the author, assumes a performative function, and the text, with its variety of meanings, is open to interpretation without the total uniqueness of the authorial narrative. The communicative theory of the medium emphasises the role of the medium, i.e. the message form, in interpreting its content, under the criteria of which the means of expression of fiction and non-fiction cinema are included. In all three theories, which have a common postmodern basis, it is possible to identify the fact of deformation and variation of the original semantic intent, which is conceptualised as a text, after undergoing a certain sequence of steps in mass media space is connected to other competing self-referential and mutually referential texts. Their presence in common discourse and interaction determines the breadth of interpretation of the semantic context of cinematic reality.

Results and Discussion

R. K. Carmona notes the specificity of the representation of reality according to the type of cinema. According to the researcher, viewing and experiencing cinema requires schemes atypical of the real world and other art forms. It is an active manipulation of new information and ideas, working with expectations and hypotheses. Cumulatively, cinematic techniques are a language designed to convey a particular meaning, and a final picture is an act of communication. The essential distinction from other arts - the possibility of capturing movement - brings cinema closer to reality, as it captures events in the same way that humans perceive them in the process of experiencing them. However, the transfer of three-dimensional reality onto a two-dimensional screen is accompanied by several technical complications and limitations, which primarily predetermine the available means of transmission. The equipment, lighting, focus and movement of the camera allow this transfer but can call into question the reality of what is being portrayed. Event representation as part of the act of communication between author and viewer is possible when there is a match between what is depicted and how it is perceived, so the filming and editing process requires consideration of audience expectations, which may vary according to the socio-cultural landscape. A reliable depiction of reality involves an element of staging subject to technical limitations, but the same means can also be used to distort reality. It is not only a question of ideological purity or loyalty to the state that accompanied

cinema in the first half of the twentieth century; understanding the cognitive base of one's audience allows one to predict and provoke this or that reaction, actively used outside the political context [2; 15]. The urge to be understandable corrects the communicative strategy of the author, forces him to select the tools to establish his message with the resources of the surrounding reality, to outline the accents through cinematic expressiveness. Consequently, in cinema, it is no longer about the real world but about a part of it that will be perceived and understood in a way that is desirable to the director.

It is indicative of an understanding of the phenomenon of staged reality that documentary cinema is designed to authentically record reality and inform the viewer of certain events. To obtain a balance between the typology of image-action and image-perception determines the vector of representation, the documented event is placed in a semantic matrix within which the viewer receives a variety of opinions on a certain event, and the time-limited presentation of information provokes an interweaving of phenomenal and sensual images, which determines the development of attitude based on impressions. Regardless of the chosen principle of film's interaction with humans – viewer, observer or user – the individual technical means constitute an affect and then a position on the depicted subject matter [16-19]. The presented reality is not a reality in itself, it is the reality of the screen, and the more artfully designed visual media and the more perceptually engaged the viewer, the greater the illusion of involvement, so in addition to the rational field, an emotional field emerges.

The manipulative potential of cinema, in general, has resulted in several trends in documentary cinema. The stylistic restrictions of Canadian Direct Cinema are deliberately designed to prevent the manipulation of reality, prohibiting the recording of more than one camera, voice and music behind the scenes, artificial lighting, and the non-interference of the author in the recording process. The French Cinema Verite followed a similar approach, except for the author's active stance. All the above-mentioned means prevent straightforward staging, the facts unfold in their immediate fluidity, but the final instance of staging remains the editing. Hours of footage are converted into minutes the temporal aspect is manipulated, the time of the real event as it emerges from the screen is fragmented by the real, conceptual and inter-subjective thus, the subject-viewer experiences it not as a spontaneous existential situation given in existence, but as a planned model of it [20; 21]. The authenticity of a subject's experiences, regardless of their nature, does not negate that they are a reaction to the non-authenticity of the staged reality of the person depicted [16; 22].

Carmona also identifies the necessity of using artistic means in documentary film, which places an inherent contradiction in the definition of documentary film as non-fiction, since the means of expression inevitably lead to the addition of certain artistic elements. Therefore, when it is about the representation of one's reality, there is a necessity to establish the meaningfulness and appropriateness of the terms "fiction", "non-fiction", and "documentary". The intra-discursive discussion about the possibilities and limitations of cinematic representations of reality interacts ambiguously with reality, and the absence of well-established criteria for film documentary and their constant

evolution together with the cinema, in general, complicates the search for a strategy for authentic representation of reality through cinema narrative [3; 17; 23].

The manipulative and artificial nature of cinema as a genre defines its partially staged nature. The ambiguity stems from the mediumistic nature of cinema and documentary cinema in particular, which throughout history has been attributed truthfulness to what is being depicted. With the radicalisation of subjectivity in the filmmaking process, there has gradually been a shift to the terms "honest" or "fair" cinema, which also allows for a field of ambiguity due to the broad moral, historical, social and cultural context, so without explicit criteria for fairness and honesty even in a specific context, the usefulness of applying these concepts to the cinema is highly questionable. The subjectivity of the author's life experience and worldview will always influence the choice of the vector of representation and the selection of artistic means appropriate to the selected vector. The technical skill of the film's author, however, allows him to represent a fixed event in such a way that the work will later be perceived as an artistic rather than a documentary work, where the use of "fiction" will in itself be an artistic device designed to mislead the viewer, which will certainly confuse reality and fiction. In addition, fiction films may similarly appeal to conventionally documentary means to achieve maximum authenticity [17; 24].

Following the etymology of documentary results in the word document, which provides information or evidence, while the best-known definition of documentary cinema as providing nonfiction content is "the artistic representation of reality". This definition is not primarily concerned with authenticity but with the creativity of representation, which can, however, be applied with equal success to the artistic. Separately, the criteria for documentary cinema to be constructed from elements of ordinary life, or to be actively transferred to screen reality through a combination of artistic time and intersubjective spectator time, establishing an atmosphere of the actively deployed "here and now" rather than a past reality, have been proposed. Based on the criteria of non-subjectivity and non-transformative about reality, however, it appears that no film can perform these criteria [17].

Both fiction and non-fiction cinema provide terms of designation and organisation by the creators of the type of experience towards the viewer projects, their expectations. Although both documentary and fiction cinema summarise the experience as a staged reality from a particular perspective to convey that experience, each concept is used separately to define various approaches to form and content [25]. The cinema cannot, by its species, authentically represent reality, but the individual human experience in its diversity is as ambiguous and subjective as fiction or documentary cinema. Whereas nonfiction cinema presents reality as that which the viewer himself compares to the historical world and which exists independently of his own experience, fiction appeals to the imagination, and which does not exist outside of the viewer's experience [26]. Whereas fiction in the process of staging reality on historical subjects may be limited to verisimilitude, documentary cinema must inspire belief in its reality, given the staging of reality identical to that of the viewer, imposing certain limitations on the author and

raising complicit socio-cultural, political and ethical questions about the responsibility for the authenticity of the staged reality [17; 27].

From the standpoint of semiotics and sociology of culture, the works of J. Baudrillard are basic for this study, in particular his introduction of the concepts of hyperreality and the simulacra. Baudrillard's hyper-reality is something more than reality itself, it is "the generation of models of the real without first cause and reality", where the decayed map of empire lives longer than empire itself and, at a particular stage, begins to signify it [28]. The sum of signs that signify meaning, replace it, gain self-value through the supplantation of old meanings. The obtained sign without an original meaning – simulacra – in the process of development proceeds through successive stages of reflecting reality, masking and distorting reality, masking the absence of reality, and severing the connection with reality [29]. When the real loses itself, the meaning content becomes a field of nostalgia, secondary, possible to experience content and meaning detached from the original object, which only multiplies its meanings devoid of original meaning [4; 6].

Just as the fiction of Disneyland provides a cover for the fiction of America, an embodiment of the regeneration of the depleted and discarded imaginary, which is more real than its fairytale cartoon prototype, so the film "Apocalypse Now" has become more real than the Vietnam War, whose events it depicts. The intervening power of cinema is expressed in its means of expression, where budgets, decorations and visual effects become not determinants but extensions of real violence. The war does not end but devolves into a series of visual effects. The film's grandiose scale replaces the real event, staged reality displaces reality, the Vietnam War becomes Vietnam, then becomes a film whose individual episodes become self-referential and go beyond their context. A film that was intended to represent a global historical narrative becomes a global historical narrative on its own. The staged reality becomes actual enough to become hyper-reality, the index becomes greater than the signified and begins to live its own life, the viewer does not experience the horror of war, he experiences the horror of screen events, the separation with the primary source of emotion entails a replacement of the source, which for the viewer is a model of events, but not the events themselves. The hyper-reality of the hegemony of the United States redefines war defeat into victory, where the film is the next phase of the war [4; 18].

The shooting subject is reality, and the actual process of shooting is a reflection of that reality. However, the minimal necessary means of staging, be it cinematography by arbitrary rules, staging of light, decorations or editing, distort reality, and the status of the film production disguises it [30-32]. The manipulation of temporal and spatial aspects by transferring the viewer to another time and place of events disguises the fact of the past, the real absence of time-space recorded by the camera. At the moment of the viewer's perception, the event has already passed through three stages of simulacrisation, but it is at the moment of comprehending the staged screen reality as such, the cognitive and psycho-emotional response to the depicted events that the final separation from the original reality occurs, and cinema becomes a self-sufficient simulacra [5; 33].

The mechanism of the separation of signifier and signified as a separation between action and cinema derives from another postmodern construction, notably R. Barthes' "death of the author". The death of the author is not literal here, it is a transition from a dogmatic conception of the meaning of a certain text as authorial, containing a certain predetermined plane of meaning, to a field open to readers' interpretations. It is no longer the author who speaks, but language itself, as language depersonalises the author's intention and assumes a translational, performative function as an instrument. From the perspective of literature, the example of which Barthes explores the problem, what is described in the text develops into an authorial figure, the work as object acquires its cultural significance, and the work as text through its cultural background as context becomes part of the global inter- and hypertext, becoming the background for subsequent, author-free texts. From a linguistic standpoint, the figure of the author is also secondary, as the process of speech is self-contained without the personal content of the speakers, language knows a self-subject, but not a self-person. The metaphorical death of the author occurs at the same time as the metaphorical birth of the text [11]. Although Barthes applied linguistics and the literature of diversity in a particular methodological way, these disciplines, together with the concept of text through a systemic metaphor, can be transferred to the cinema. In the same way, the picture becomes a text that is historically and culturally connected to other texts in a unified cinematic discourse, the language of the text becomes the means of artistic expression in cinema, and the messages conveyed by these means of expression outgrow and replace the author's intention [34]. Similarly, as a work discarded its original significance in the process of simulacrisation and acquired its own at the discretion of the recipient, with the death of the author, the work discards its genealogical relationship to him, becoming an independent unit of sense-making, an object not of authorial representation, but spectatorial interpretation [12; 14].

Considering the cinema's semiotic and textual freedom from authorial significance, the expression "medium is the message" emphasises the significance of the medium for the message. The message as content is contained in the medium, but the nature of this medium, and hence the nature of the message, is another medium that produces an infinite development of meanings around the original statement [8; 14]. Changing the scale and plane of the medium allows for a transition to other levels and categories of content interpretation, in the process fragmenting this content into contentless elements on the communicative slice, but only in unity do the aspects constitute structure and semantic integrity. The interpretation of the communication media precedes the descriptions of the message, the signs-means of expression establish the form of a single, self-contained sign-production and at the same time establish its content [35-37].

A.S. Temlyakova concluded that cinematic reality and hyper-reality are connected. The social aspect of cinema is closely connected to the director's imagination; the world of the director's fleeting fantasies, embodied in a particular picture, crosses over into reality. Cinema emerges in the

realm of the imaginary, the author's idea, appears as an image against the existing reality, completes the spectrum of signs with new accents, and provides the viewer with a new way of perceiving reality. However, due to the detailed copying of reality, the real and the imaginary are merged into a single structure, a "one operational unit" that ecstatically denies and destroys the signified. The intrinsic coherence of the real, balanced by an appropriate stock of the imaginary had a set reality quotient, amidst the endless information and semantic beachheads of mass communication that loses its sense [19].

O. Bezruchko and V. Chaykovskaya, in their analysis of documentary cinema as a film-observation and the specifics of the author's intention embodiment, note the undesirability of simplifying non-fiction cinema into a purely informational fixation. Documentary cinema developed as a purely observational medium, but as the genre and the industry in general developed, it developed its poetic artistic language, designed to record reality in a way that was atypical and impossible for human observers to understand. By avoiding staged images as much as possible through detailed analysis of the subject and predicting its behaviour, and editing as a way of reorganising a fragmented reality, the early documentaries attained a staged reality of their own. At the same time, staged documentary cinema was developing in parallel to represent reality, but it was already being staged through the explicit manipulation of reality, particularly in the form of decorations. Researchers similarly capture the debate about staged reality, contrasting it with reportage as a benchmark for documentary cinema that does not seek to demonstrate an authorial attitude [10]. Notably, the metaphor of the early directors' mechanical eye, which perceives differently from the ordinary eye, echoes the metaphor of the optical prosthesis, which removes the superfluous from reality but adds it into an experience that is impossible for ordinary subjective perception, and adds the world as only it can capture it, thus expanding the horizon of cognition. It is how the world of reality becomes an illusion, and the visible is displaced because it no longer provides new information without additional optical tools. The eye is no longer able to grasp reality, which is reflected on the screen by the prostheses [20].

Conclusions

The cinema as an art form is not free of its expressive means, which on the one hand constitute its form and content as a form of visual art, and on the other hand, distort the reality it represents. Postmodern discourse encourages the simulacrisation of cinema, moving successively from the original sign to its demise. Thus the individual film, on the one hand, transcends the real and becomes hyperreality, but on the other hand, it avoids the original author's narrative and is therefore open to endless interpretations within the body of global hypertext. The death of the original semantic context, along with the death of the author, provides an infinite number of new meanings in the context of other cultural signs-elements of discourse. The authors' search for alternative truthful means of staging the reality of documentary cinema reconstructs and transforms discourse, but the inter-subjective spectator-recipient remains the main interpreter; not only does he transfer the staged reality of cinema to himself by rational

hermeneutic and discursive means, but also psycho-emotionally; by other subjects he determines the conventional means of fiction and non-fiction cinema.

Once the film appears on the screen, the author loses power over the narrative, reality-perception appears to the audience as a context-neutral reality-screen, to then become reality-experience through subjective perception. The subjective authorial experience acquires objectivity in the discourse as a sign without meaning, which the viewer will then imbue it with, passing it through the prism of his own experience and incorporating it into the discourse. The cinema language acquires autonomy and authenticity and the screen itself, its staged reality, becomes a medium where the form of a message, a discursive statement

without an author, constitutes its comprehensibility and interacts with the audience's comprehension and its expectations based on conventions. Epochal films, which have become or will become iconic symbols of their era, have outlived and will outlast their authors, and their defining meaning for particular discursive development will establish the discourse and the generations that follow.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Постановочна реальність у кіно: Сучасні інтерпретації та смисли

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Анотація

Актуальність. Актуальність цієї теми пов'язана з розвитком інформаційних технологій та нових медіа, що уможливило широкий доступ до кіно як візуальної діяльності. Інформаційний медіапростір все більше пов'язаний з людським існуванням, а попит на нематеріальні товари та послуги, притаманний постіндустріальному суспільству, спричиняє зростання попиту на інтелектуальні продукти поза межами науки та виробництва.

Мета. У цьому контексті метою дослідження є виявлення площини значення постановочної реальності кіно як домінантної форми синтетичного мистецтва, співвідношення художніх і позахудожніх ознак постановочної реальності на прикладі ігрового та документального кіно, а також окреслення трансформації структури кінореальності як конструктора і медіума.

Методологія. Основними підходами до дослідження стали структурний та герменевтичний підходи до структурного аналізу з точки зору семіотики знакового простору культури кінореальності та використання інтерпретаційних практик щодо текстових об'єктів.

Результати. У дослідженні описано зв'язок між симулякризацією кіно як окремої постановочної реальності, здатної набувати незалежності від первісного авторського задуму; втратою ролі первісного автора і самого твору як тексту, що є частиною глобального інтер- і гіпертексту; і роллю медіума як зв'язного, смислового носія змісту в акті комунікації, що у своїй єдності нескінченно збільшує визначені формою можливі сприймаються смисли.

Висновки. Матеріали цього дослідження гармонізують теорії симулякрів, авторської смерті та медіума в контексті кіносеміотики в інтерпретаційному векторі "медіум-дискурс-знак" та орієнтують подальші дослідження на встановлення співвідношення між індивідуально-авторською мовою та кінодискурсом в умовах гіперреальності.

Ключові слова: гіперреальність; смерть автора; репрезентація; симулякри; документальне кіно.