

**INSTITUTE OF ART STUDIES, BAS**



**Tamara Valerieva Peshterska-Iordanov**

**WORK OF THE DIRECTOR  
IN THE DOCUMENTARY FILM–PORTRAIT**

**ABSTRACT**

ON A DISSERTATION FOR THE AWARD OF  
THE EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC DEGREE OF *DOCTOR*

SOFIA  
2023

**INSTITUTE OF ART STUDIES, BAS**



**Tamara Valerieva Peshterska-  
Iordanov**

**WORK OF THE DIRECTOR  
IN THE DOCUMENTARY FILM–PORTRAIT**

**ABSTRACT**

of a dissertation for the award of an educational and scientific degree *Doctor* in the scientific specialty *Cinema Studies, Cinema Art and Television*, 8.4. Theater and film art

Supervisor:

Prof. Dr. Nadezhda Mihailova [Marinchevska]

Reviewers:

Prof. Dr. Ingeborg Bratoeva-Darakchieva

Prof. Lubomir Halachev, Ph.D

Sofia, 2023

The dissertation work was discussed and directed for public defense at a meeting of the Screen Arts sector, held on 23.11.2022.

The dissertation is in a volume of 243 pages, including a preface, six chapters, a conclusion, an appendix, a bibliography of 109 sources and a filmography of 219 titles.

The public defense will be held on 18.09.2023 at 11:00 a.m. at a meeting of a scientific jury composed of: Prof. Dr. Ingeborg Bratoeva-Darakchieva, Institute for the Study of Arts, BAS, Prof. Lyubomir Halachev, PhD, NATFIZ, Prof. Dr. Ivo Draganov, New Bulgarian University, Assoc. Dr. Alexander Donev, Institute for the Study of Arts, BAS, Assoc. Kostadin Bonev, Southwest University "Neofit Rilski"

The defense materials are available to those interested in the Department of *Administrative Services* of the Institute for the Study of Arts at 21 *Krakra Street*.

# CONTENTS

<b>1. General characteristics of the dissertation</b>	p. 6
1.1. Relevance of the topic	p. 6
1.2. Goals and tasks of the dissertation	p. 7
1.3. Object and subject of the study	p. 8
1.4. Methodology	p. 9
1.5. Scope of the study	p. 10
<b>2. Evolution of the portrait genre. Historical development and trends of documentary cinema in the context of building the image of man</b>	p. 12
2.1 World historical trends in film portraits	p. 13
2.2 Bulgarian documentary cinema during socialism	p. 15
<b>3. Credibility and subjectivity when building the image in the portrait documentary</b>	p. 17
3.1 Author's objectivity in building the image of the "hero" in the documentary film - portrait. Is complete credibility possible?	p. 18
3.1.1. Different perspectives on the character	p. 20
3.1.2 The different faces of the character in front of the camera	p. 21
3.2 Author's subjectivity - manipulative practices. Subjectivity in presenting a director's position to the character	p. 21
3.2.1 Who narrates the portrayed? Close or impartial?	p. 22
<b>4. Director practices when the director works with the character</b>	p. 23
4.1 Building a relationship between the character and the director	p. 24
4.1.1 Method of long-term monitoring	p. 25
4.1.2 Method of reportage photography	p. 26
4.1.3 Interview method	p. 27
4.1.4. Hidden camera method	p. 27
4.1.5 Creating a staging situation	p. 29
4.2. Scenario. Assembly. Directing practices when using voice-over	p. 30

<b>5. Typology of portrait cinema. Types</b>	p. 31
5.1 Portrait of a historical or distinguished person	p. 32
5.1.1. Building an image through archival material. Cinema of the fact	p. 32
5.1.2. Building the image when the character cannot be captured. Reenactments, people's memories, cinema and photo material	p. 33
5.1.3 Building the image of a contemporary hero. Different approaches.	p. 34
5.2 The freaks in Bulgarian documentary cinema	p. 35
<b>6. The documentary hybrid. The portrait in the age of computer technology</b>	p. 36
<b>7. Director's ethics in revealing the image in the documentary-portrait</b>	p. 37
<b>8. Appendices</b>	p. 37
<b>9. Scientific contributions of the present dissertation</b>	p. 38
<b>10. Publications on the topic of the dissertation</b>	p. 39
<b>11. Acknowledgments</b>	p. 40

# 1. General characteristics of the dissertation work

## 1.1 Relevance of the topic

Man and society are the center of the plots in documentary cinema. Man with his thinking and conditions has always provoked the interest of documentarians, regardless of whether he is contemporary or belongs to a more distant historical era. But how has the focus of cognitive interest on the part of the filmmakers towards the individual person changed during the different historical periods of the development of documentary cinema? How far did the tasks of penetration by the authors in the world of photography go and do they go? What were the approaches and directorial practices that have been carried over from the historical development of the documentary form to today? What are the new trends in the ever-enriching language of cinematic knowledge about man? All these questions provoke deeper research and consideration of the topic. What are the ranges of portrait cinema? Most often, documentarians focus on a prominent historical or public figure. However, it is not rare that their interest is also provoked by the so-called "ordinary person", through whose life they can raise or explore important topics of society. This opens wide the possibilities for different directorial approaches to the material. Depending on the nature of the subject and plot of the portrait film, reportage and event photos, interviews, photo or film archive and documents are used. Also, documentaries now openly make use of game techniques – pre-structured plot, use of actors in a frame, game reenactments of given events, etc. What is the reason for the director's choice to fall on the particular person? When watching a portrait documentary, one should not forget that it is not only a portrait of the hero or a group of people, but also a kind of "portrait" of the director, of his views and subjective authorial attitude. This gives reason to claim that the choice of a character is already an author's message, which is transformed into a documentary image by means of the selected director's tools.

How far can subjective authorial intervention go without destroying authenticity? Which side of the character's personality will be shown on screen? Are there ethical boundaries that a filmmaker must adhere to, and where are they? How should the footage be organized? How to weave the individual elements into it? The answer to all these questions that excite me is hidden in the individual-professional, aesthetic and ethical personality of the director. This is also the reason for

me to turn my attention to this area of research and to devote my dissertation work to the work of the director in the documentary-portrait.

I think that the topic is current and interesting, even more so taking into account the wide interest in recent decades by directors in Bulgaria to create film portraits. For example, in the competition program of the last edition of the Festival of Documentary and Animated Film "Golden Riton" (2022), out of the total of sixteen participating documentaries, nine are portraits. This means that even more than half of the directors fighting for the distinction directed their cognitive interest towards the person. Bulgarian documentary cinema abounds with portraits, and a separate question is how much and what makes a portrait a real film work, and not an extended television report. A topic I try to address in the present work.

Despite the wide film production of documentary portraits, at the moment there is a lack of research in Bulgaria that would analytically study the different approaches, directorial skills and techniques, to systematize and typologize the work of the various artists, comparing it with their specific film works in the field of documentary portraiture.

The lack of theoretical work that covers the work of different directors on documentary portrait cinema and traces the references from the established film works to the current successful works also substantiates the need for the present scholarly study.

## **1.2 Goals and objectives of the dissertation work**

The dissertation work, which is dedicated to the director's work in the documentary-portrait, aims to systematize and analyze the main levers and various directorial methods of working with the main character and his narrative in the creation of a documentary-portrait in its two variants - archival and contemporary. To achieve this, basic key concepts are considered: credibility, authenticity, ethics, degree of penetration into the more intimate dimensions of the personality, etc. Attention has also been paid to the work of directors who have chosen a variant in which the emotional and intuitive are combined to varying degrees and at different levels with the rational beginning. The purpose of the research is also to show the dynamics in the development of artistic media over time and especially the changes occurring with the introduction of rapidly developing new technologies – from the introduction of video and lightweight cameras to today's digital methods of photography and image processing.

In addition, the research sets itself the following main tasks:

- to trace the historical dynamics in the development of the documentary form;
- to systematize and typologize the different forms of the portrait documentary;
- to outline the changes that occur in the director's view of the hero in the evolutionary development of the Bulgarian documentary-portrait;
- to look at the different practical approaches and techniques used to build the image by different directors and how they affect the visual perception of the character by the audience. To analyze these methods in the different stages of film production and to classify them;
- to outline the mechanisms and trace the role of the director in building the documentary image;
- to discover and trace the "craft" references in the work of contemporary directors, which are borrowed from works already established in our historical past;
- to explore the methods of depicting the human in the portrait documentary and their transformation in the digital age.

### **1.3 Object and subject of the study**

The main object of the study is the analysis and tracking of how the mechanisms of the different directorial approaches to the character in portrait documentary cinema work. And they are, without a doubt, closely related to the historical, technological and social development of society, reflecting on the evolutionary development of the form.

An important object of analysis are the changes that have occurred in the film language of documentary cinema as a result of digitization and the possibilities provided by the hybrid form. Changes that have a direct impact on film aesthetics and contribute to the modern documentary portrait getting a new director's toolkit.

In an effort to outline the heterogeneous practices of the director's work with the character, different directorial approaches to structuring the individual elements and how they in turn fit together in the shooting and editing period are also analyzed. The systematization and typology of the different forms of the portrait documentary film examined in the text proves how the choice of one of them shapes the future film already to a large extent.

The subject of the study is tracing the historical dynamics in the development of directing practices, primarily in the construction of the image in Bulgarian documentary cinema. And how these practices, in turn, are transformed into the present, enriching the film language and allowing



directors to reach a denser and more multifaceted psychological knowledge and visualization of the intimate world of the shot.

#### **1.4 Methodology**

In the present dissertation work, film studies analysis is applied to the widest extent, but interdisciplinary methods are also applied, including historical, sociological, cultural approaches to the documentary form - from Robert Flaherty's "Nanook of the North" to today. This kind of tracing is used in order to highlight and characterize the most striking films of the genre form and their reference to the period that is central to my current work.

In the text presented to your attention, ways are sought through the documentary practice to include an apparatus from the field of philosophy and, in particular, ethics, which is mandatory in the analysis of documentary cinema. Answers were sought to the questions: to what extent is the director allowed to reveal the image of his character to a wide audience? If he is defamatory, is the public interest more important? Is the director allowed to manipulate the character or use the hidden camera trick? Where are the boundaries?

In the present work, an attempt has been made to trace and analyze the different directorial approaches of working with the main character, through an applied systematization and typology in the development of the different forms of the documentary-portrait. For this purpose, in the course of the research, the following was carried out:

- Study of specialized cinematographic literature that affects the development of the documentary form, both in Bulgarian documentary cinema and on a global scale;
- Searching for various cinematographic and sociological scientific works, reports, studies and articles;
- Comparison and analysis of directors' opinions with prominent Bulgarian or world documentary filmmakers about the work practices used by them in building the image, which are published in specialized publications or are from personal interviews with the creators;
- Research in the archives of the National Film Center, Vreme Documentary Film Studio and the Bulgarian National Film Library.

The applied film studies and interdisciplinary approaches used in the present work seek to trace the dynamics in the historical and creative development of the documentary form. In order to analyze and trace the processes in the individual periods, an attempt has been made, by means of

comparison and research of specialized works, to look for a methodological key that would unite the relationship between film studies, film practice and the closely related sociological paradigms developing in society.

### **1.5 Scope of the Research**

The focus of the present dissertation is primarily directed towards Bulgarian film portraits from the last 20-year period. Of course, within the scope of the research, there are also film works that significantly expand this temporal framework, stemming from the desire to trace phenomena in the development of the documentary form. An attempt has been made to examine and compare theoretical orientations, working methods, or films by renowned directors, as well as works by film critics and film historians.

In my work, I mainly refer to our native directors who have created established film masterpieces in the field of portrait genre. Among them are the names of Yuliy Stoyanov, Nevena Tosheva, Svetoslav Ovcharov, Kostadin Bonev, Ralitsa Dimitrova, Anna Petkova, Asen Vladimirov, Adela Peeva, Lyubomir Khalachev, Kosta Bikov, Malina Petrova, Andrey Kulev, Maria Nikolova, Borislav Kolev, Andrey Paunov, and others. At times, I also provide examples from the works of directors from the world of documentary cinema, when they illustrate the use of a distinct directorial approach.

Undoubtedly, the topic of how to successfully create a documentary film portrait is present in numerous literary sources. Many books have been published by theorists or famous directors who share art-related perspectives, analyses, or their specific creative practices, addressing questions that have intrigued them and the solutions they have discovered. I have utilized dissertation texts, books, and articles from Bulgarian established directors and film theorists like Liliyana Chernokoleva, Margit Sarivanova, Dimitar Kabaivanov, Nadezhda Marinchevska, Svetoslav Ovcharov, Lyubomir Khalachev, Nedelcho Milev, Petya Alexandrova, Teodora Doncheva, Andronika Martonova, Alexander Donev, Rosen Petrov, Deyan Statulov, and others.

In my work, interviews conducted jointly with colleagues Teodora Doncheva and Yosif Astrukov (at the Institute for Art Studies, BAS) with our proven documentary director colleagues are quoted

and incorporated. Some of the interesting practices and cases shared by them, which emerged during their creative work and specifically concerning the portrait form, are applied at the end of my theoretical work.

It is important to mention that the unfinished film digitization in Bulgaria or unresolved technical issues (as is the case with the Documentary Film Studio "Vreme") have made it impossible for me to familiarize myself with individual documentary film works from the recent and more distant history of Bulgarian documentary cinema. This is also a reason why, in the presented work, I occasionally rely solely on Bulgarian film criticism represented by Liliyana Chernokoleva and Margit Sarivanova, whose monographs are indicative of the development of our documentary filmmaking during the late socialist period.

The text does not claim comprehensiveness but rather represents an attempt to trace the historical dynamics in the development of the portrait. I believe that my scholarly research could have practical value and would be useful and interesting for future directors who have decided to create in the genre of documentary film portrait, which often serves as a mirror of our life reality.

In the past decades of post-socialist transition, there has been a wide interest among Bulgarian cinematographers in creating film portraits, outlining the need to study the topic. This first chapter describes the main goals and tasks set for this research, as well as the methodology and the temporal scope that the dissertation text aims to emphasize.

## **2.Evolution of the Portrait Genre. Historical Development and Trends of Documentary Cinema in the Context of Constructing the Human Image**

The primary criterion of portraiture is the likeness of the image to the model (original), achieved not only through accurately reproducing the external appearance of the chosen subject but also through revealing their spiritual essence, the dialectical unity of individual and typical traits that reflect a specific era, social environment, and nationality. Simultaneously, an interesting aspect in portrait creation is the relationship between the author-creator and the model, their own spiritual, life, and creative creed, as well as their aesthetic views. Undoubtedly, this conglomerate of factors imparts a subjective and specific authorial perspective to the portrayed image.

In this chapter, an attempt is made to trace the long historical development of portraiture, which is one of the fundamental genres in painting, sculpture, graphics, and photography. This tracing is not mechanical but seeks references and markers that can be related to the subsequent toolkit of directorial practices in constructing the image in documentary cinema. Starting from our earliest known endeavors to capture the human image in rock drawings, progressing to the realistic elegance in the works of Renaissance masters, continuing with new creative explorations during the Enlightenment, and the aesthetic challenges posed by photography, the emergence of the portrait subgenre in the realm of cinematic art becomes evident. However, this process, despite its logical progression, did not occur automatically; it required traversing a specific historical path.

This chapter also addresses the debate about which art form cinema is more closely related to. A discussion that has taken place throughout its history, prompting individual creators to express their preferences in shaping the image through visual (observation) or verbal (interview) methods. The text upholds the view that every author has the right to shape the image according to their professional and aesthetic understanding and perceptions of humanity, as long as this doesn't transgress ethical norms. However, it's important to note that "the image in non-fiction film is the element that carries the authors' ideas unchanged through the years. Similar to ancient hieroglyphs, the film image contains eternal signs and concepts."

A synthesis is made, stating that as a synthetic art, cinema organically borrows and manipulates the artistic means and technical techniques of other art forms. A characteristic feature of the documentary film portrait is that it retains the specific inter-genre characteristics that are equally typical of painting, photography, and literature. Simultaneously, the toolkit of the documentary film portrait extends beyond what is inherited from earlier arts. It employs its own palette of methods and techniques, which is rich and diverse, leading the documentary film portrait to evolve in its own direction.

## **2.1. Global Historical Trends in Cinematic Portraiture**

Despite the established position of the portrait genre within the spectrum of other arts, the portrait in cinema is not automatically assumed. Cinematic portraiture follows its own dynamic historical development, where initially, the depiction of individual figures exists within documentary

sketches merely as part of the overall tableau, an inseparable element of the mass, rather than as a standalone entity conveying individuality. The focus on the individual, on their inner world, within cinematic storytelling is observed to a significant extent at a later stage.

This subsection traces the dynamics of the historical evolution of portraiture in world cinema and aims to highlight the principal trends and directors that play an undeniable role in the subgenre's development.

The works of two foundational directors who are significant in shaping the language of documentary cinema and defining the two contrasting attitudes towards the captured subject – Robert Flaherty and Dziga Vertov – are examined. Their contributions are undeniable, both practically and theoretically. Through "Nanook of the North" (1922), Flaherty introduces elements of staged imagery into documentary cinema, portraying the individual fate of the person. On the other hand, Vertov, who constructs the image of a new hero – the hero of the masses, theorizes in his works on the further path of documentary evolution, progressing from "the creation of poetic image films towards the exploration of human behavior." Vertov's theoretical calls for profound introspection into humanity, for the revelation of the human soul, remain pertinent for decades, not just within Soviet documentary cinema, but as a unique theory in itself.

The subsection further examines the establishment of the British documentary school in the 1930s, spearheaded by John Grierson, who advocates capturing real people in real environments and events, excluding any elements from narrative cinema. The protagonists in the films of this school become individuals with complex destinies, compelled to work strenuously under demanding conditions. Despite the school's lack of focus on individual exploration, it narrows its gaze to encompass group portraits within real communities.

During the same historical period, within the Soviet Union, emerges the cinema sketch portraying the working class, which aims not to penetrate their intimate world but rather to depict their labor achievements, showcasing a perfected and problem-free world on screen. In Nazi Germany, where documentary film is a crucial part of the propaganda machine, the most renowned documentarist of the Hitler era is Leni Riefenstahl, who paints a portrait of an entire nation, utilizing avant-garde techniques and staging.

Post-war documentary cinema in both capitalist and socialist blocs experiences a period of stagnation, lasting until the mid-1950s, as the need for change becomes evident. This need is driven by technical innovations that stimulate the use of new expressive means and shifts in the directors' cognitive interests. Documentary cinema starts delving into the sphere of individual self-awareness, not content anymore with external, visual observation of individuals and the recording of facts, but striving to showcase their internal experiences and issues.

The text attempts, through a comparison between specific film works from both political blocs ("Primary Elections" (1960, dir. Robert Drew and Richard Leacock), "Our Nikita Sergeevich" (1961, dir. Irina Setkina), "Georgi Dimitrov, Pages from a Great Life" (1960, dir. Yordan Velichkov)), to illustrate how the propaganda machine influences the creative pursuits and cognitive interests of its authors.

## **2.2. Bulgarian Documentary Cinema during Socialism**

This subsection is dedicated to the development of portraiture within Bulgarian cinematography, where, for an extended period, in our cinematic overviews and films, the individual was primarily considered a representative of society. The reason behind this lies in the ideological and artistic imperative of socialist realism, which was prescribed by the authorities as the sole path in the creative realm of our domestic film production.

New documentary cinema arrived in Bulgaria around the mid-1960s, but what distinguishes it from the "old"? This rhetorical question is posed by Liliana Chernokoleva in her book "Contemporary Bulgarian Documentary Cinema." "Is it the entrance of sharp social issues, the inclusion of 'imperfections' from reality that were finally allowed on the documentary screen, or perhaps the technical advancements (light synchronous camera, telephoto lens, more light-sensitive film, etc.)? However, it seems that we won't be mistaken if we define the 'new' by another dominant factor – changes in the directions of cognitive interest. The new significance differentiates itself from the old when its cognitive interest extends to all spheres of contemporary societal activity, and its main subject becomes the psychology of the individual interacting with society." Our documentary

cinema becomes journalistic. The interest in an individual's life, their world of emotions, inner experiences, and interactions with society captivates Bulgarian cinema. Despite these changes "in the directions of cognitive interest" towards the individual, which the socialist authority partially supports, it still prefers films whose focus is directed towards the hero of socialist labor. This individual is now separated from the crowd, brought to the forefront of the stage, but the crowd – whether visible or not – surrounds them, and they become a symbol and example, an active part of socialist society, whose life path shown on screen serves as a model for affirming the bright belief in building a communist future.

One of the main challenges addressed by our documentary cinema from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s is the "problem of individualizing the human image." Denying documentary as a paradoxical escape from reality, principles that aim to present a polished and problem-free world without conflicts on screen through staged scenarios, the efforts of these "Don Quixotes" – specifically Yuliy Stoyanov, Nevena Tosheva, Eduard Zahariev, Hristo Kovachev, Oskar Krustev, Nikola Kovachev, Georgi Stoyanov, and others – are focused "on interpreting contemporary socio-political issues of the time" through the prism of personal issues.

"The mid-1970s brought an undeniable hegemony of the research element in our documentary filmmaking and led to the development of two mutually complementing directions in avant-garde film practice: problem-oriented investigative reporting and cinema observation in its more intimate variations, among which the portrait gains the most momentum." The isolated individual with their thoughts, intimate feelings, inner experiences, biography compared to the era they lived in or are living in – characterizing societal and social issues through the individual – all of these aspects drive the creative endeavors of Bulgarian documentarians.

During the 1980s, Bulgarian documentary cinema enters a new period influenced by changes in the country's socio-political life. The impact of the arriving Perestroika is felt on all levels and inevitably leads to changes in our documentary practice. The most notable change is the gaining of greater creative freedom and rights for the director in documentary filmmaking. Whereas before, the director skillfully hid behind the theme, trying to subtly convey their presence, during this new stage of development, the director begins to showcase their individuality and subjective authorial perspective. The director transforms into a "co-equal participant alongside the subject and reality.

This cinema begins to attest to the development of a thought (an authorial one), which is also its subject. And since thought is characterological and imposes a certain form, all visual decisions influenced by subjectivity and the suggestion of authorial choice fall within its parameters."

Relatively late in joining the changes that occurred in global documentary filmmaking, almost a decade prior, Bulgarian documentary cinema quickly catches up on what it missed. It becomes recognizable and interesting beyond Bulgaria's borders due to its new perspective on interpreting reality, on the Bulgarian people's psychology, and on the image of both distinguished and "ordinary" individuals. These accomplishments are mainly associated with the names of directors such as Yuliy Stoyanov, Nevena Tosheva, Eduard Zahariev, Hristo Kovachev, Oskar Krustev, Nikola Kovachev, and those who joined Bulgarian documentary cinema later – Zdravko Dragnev, Ilko Dundakov, Vasil Zhivkov, Henri Koulev, Adela Peeva, Georgi Stoev, Yuri Zhirov, Nikolay Volev, Petar Popzlatev, Svetoslav Ovcharov, among others. The films created by them bring awards and popularity to our documentary cinema, yet unfortunately, both then and now, they do not receive sufficient distribution in Bulgaria, and a significant portion of them remains unknown to the mass audience.

### **3. Authenticity and Subjectivity in Constructing the Image in Documentary Portrait Films**

In this chapter, the topic of objectivity and subjectivity in constructing the image in documentary portrait films is explored.

The uniqueness of documentary cinema lies precisely in the desire for authenticity, for the genuineness of the image, for the transmission or representation of "reality," which should be observed and studied impartially. However, is this achievable? Concerning the external and formal reflection of reality, there are no doubts regarding authenticity. But when it comes to organizing the captured reality, eliminating the "excess," the unnecessary that only distracts and obstructs the conveyance of the director's creative concept in creating a documentary work, things take a different turn.

In a documentary portrait film, the real person and their image are initially perceived by the audience as identical, given that the film is documentary and "documentary cinema is directed



towards the world we live in, not towards a world imagined by the director; and it distinguishes itself uniquely from other types of cinema." What is its uniqueness? It lies in its handling of facts, real people, or true events, and its nature inherently strives to reflect reality. "Its 'objectivity' is embedded in the very automatism of cinematographic technique," and documentary cinema adheres to the principle of reproducing this 'objective' reality as its primary characteristic.

At the same time, the director's creative decisions in presenting and constructing the captured reality, reflecting their authorial creed, modify it. This process occurs during both the filming and editing stages. But is full authorial objectivity possible, or is it an unattainable goal?

### **3.1. Authorial Objectivity in Constructing the "Hero" Image in Documentary Portrait Films. Is Full Authenticity Possible?**

In this section, the argument is put forward that full authorial objectivity is inherently unattainable in the pure sense of the term, but at the same time, the pursuit of authenticity should serve as an ethical and moral framework for every documentarian.

Cinema, like any art, is created by an author (director), and its foundation is built upon the subjective directorial perspective, shaped individually through feelings, emotions, moral principles, societal paradigms, and more. Clearly, a documentary film is not projected as a cinematically fixed, undifferentiated stream of reality. It embodies a distinct authorial approach and attitude towards life's phenomena and the subject matter. If documentary films merely reproduced reality, "we would simply have a replica or a copy of something that already exists. But a documentary film is not a reproduction of reality; it's a representation of the world we already inhabit. It's a perspective on the world that we may have never encountered before, even if the aspects of the world presented are familiar to us." Therefore, the cinematic image of a person created by the director is not a mere reflection but a deliberately conceived and structured image in a cinematic-creative form, presented to the audience in a specific manner.

The text also examines the two main forms of film synthesis that constitute audiovisual storytelling – photographic elements and editing – which serve as fundamental structural elements in creating a filmic work. The choice between these two principles also determines the different ways the

director communicates with the viewers. By favoring one of these tendencies, the director essentially defines their individual interpretation throughout the entire audiovisual work in terms of representing "reality." According to Nadezhda Marinchevska, in the photographic approach, the author emphasizes the "authenticity" of the dramatic action and "editing plays a subordinate, supporting role, detailing events and explaining circumstances without disrupting spatial-temporal continuity. The focus is on the action that unfolds before the camera."

In montage films, the spatial-temporal framework is disrupted by the author, and through the interweaving of spaces and times in the cinematic narrative, which serve the directorial intent, a new "reality" is created that is subject to the director's message and concept through the act of editing.

From this, it can be concluded that in both forms of synthesis, the director is present in guiding the cinematic dramaturgy. However, the director consciously chooses where they "stand" in relation to their subject. Creative intervention is inevitable. It can be subtly concealed or distinctly discernible, also being a choice made by the director, who has previously evaluated the subject.

### **3.1.1. Different Perspectives on the Hero**

Through the selection of a thematic concept, the director becomes the one who, guided by their initially subjectively formed idea of the future image, sets the framework within which they will reveal the story of the real existing person. They express their preferences whether the focus will be directed towards a more intimate aspect of the hero's life or if their biography will be explored to analyze the broader context of the time in which the hero lived. The distinct context of the cinematic narrative, as well as the directorial toolkit of approaches and methods chosen by the director to present the image, can lead to the creation of different portrait films about the same person, carrying different or even opposing messages. It's important not to overlook the individual creative potential possessed by each director. Against this backdrop, different films can emerge about the same individual, creating distinct cinematic images and aiming to convey varying authorial messages that can distort or align with the person's image.

An example is provided with the documentary films "A Man of the People" (1981) directed by Hristo Kovachev and "The Man and the People" (2012) directed by Svetoslav Ovcharov. These are biographical-historical documentary portrait films that construct the image of Todor Zhivkov, a well-known long-standing leader of our country, in different ways, seeking through him distinct ideological overviews of his connection with the people. The cinematic nod from Svetoslav Ovcharov to the earlier film is not accidental; it's a directorial emphasis not only through the title but also through direct references using archival footage.

The directors of both films have an unprecedented place in the history of our documentary cinema. They construct images of the former leader that carry different messages, reflecting onto the audience. History and time provide the most impartial assessment of the authorial objectivity in the created cinematic image, especially when dealing with such a significant figure from our past.

### **3.1.2. The Different Facets of the Hero on Camera**

In the pursuit of a broader audience, directors often aim to create documentary portrait films about famous and established personalities in cultural, political, or social life. Frequently, more than one film is made about them, portraying them with various facets (different nuances of character; to varying extents, filmmakers are allowed into their intimate world).

The text examines documentary films about both famous individuals (Maya Plisetskaya and Christo Yavashev), where comparisons can be drawn among the numerous portrait films made about them, as well as contemporary figures (Ivan Veselinov, Toni Trayanova), for whom only a single film is analyzed. In this case, one can judge whether the cinematic portrayal aligns with the real person's existence solely based on statements from individuals who know them in real life. Their opinions are subjective and shaped by their familiarity with a specific aspect of the individual.

The conclusion drawn from the analysis in the dissertation text is that regardless of an "impenetrable mask" or heightened interest in a particular personality, banality in cinematic narrative can be avoided when a director manages to find an intriguing perspective on their subject. This involves presenting them on screen through an image that diverges from the familiar societal or cinematic perception. However, the pursuit of such a new perspective might distort and distance

the portrayal from the understanding of the real person. The moral responsibility for this lies on the shoulders of the director.

### **3.2 Authorial Subjectivity - Manipulative Practices. Subjectivity in Presenting the Director's Position Towards the Subject**

This subsection emphasizes that a documentary portrait is not only a portrayal of the subject but also a unique "portrait" of the director, their views, and subjective authorial stance. As the creator, the director makes choices based on their ethical, aesthetic, social, and ideological beliefs, determining their approach to telling the subject's story. They utilize their entire directorial toolkit to make individual decisions on how to present the subject. Since a documentary portrait is an authorial product, the "creative act is at the core of every work of art, automatically involving the refraction of objective shots through the subjective expression of the creator."

The text seeks answers to questions like: What is the responsibility of subjectivity, where are the boundaries, and should there be any in documentary cinema? These questions, not new to our documentary cinema, mostly concern film ethics, focusing on how a subjective position, even from the nature of the documentary, resonates with the lives of real individuals.

The film about animator Antoni Traianov, "Uncle Toni, The Three Stooges, and The DS" (2013) directed by Mina Mileva and Vesela Kazakova, is examined in the text. This film sparked one of the biggest scandals in the history of our post-socialist documentary cinema.

#### **3.2.1. Who Tells the Story About the Portrayed Individual? Close or Unbiased?**

Subjective interpretation of "facts" is inevitable, but it varies depending on the personal relationship between the director and the film's subject. This section of the text examines cases where the director, aside from being the author, is also the subject of the documentary narrative or portrays their close ones, with whom they have a pre-established emotional connection.

The rise in first-person narrative films is attributed to a changed psychological and philosophical self-assessment, where factors like narcissism and the desire for self-improvement, self-display, self-awareness, and exploration of one's spirit and body play a significant role. This shift in self-perception is linked to the consumer culture that emerged in America during the 70s. However,

the widespread accessibility of the internet and evolving technologies have transformed personal home videos into a rapidly growing trend in documentary cinema. These changes have blurred the lines between traditional cinema and the I-movie genre. The artistic value of these "for oneself" films, like any other works, varies in terms of artistic quality. Some focus solely on accumulating likes on sharing platforms, while others compete for the attention of film critics and audiences at niche festivals.

Characteristically, the film form "cinema for oneself," which includes I-movies, inherently adopts a subjective viewpoint, often told in the first person singular. While traditional documentaries strive to depict reality as faithfully as possible, hiding the production process and maintaining a balance between objectivity and subjectivity, films told in the first person singular possess a "different concept of documentary 'truth', acknowledging the construction and artificiality even in non-fictional films."

The ethical question in I-movie documentary portraits shifts from intruding into someone's personal space to self-censorship, which the creator is willing to impose when sharing their own life or portraying close ones. The "for oneself" film can oscillate between painful personal revelations and narcissistic forms of self-expression.

#### **4. Directorial Practices When Working with the Subject**

Directors have the opportunity to employ a variety of dramatic, psychological, technical, sound-related, editing, and directorial practices specific to the documentary portrait format. Through their intended goal of revealing an image, "reality" is subjected to the dramatic form of the cinematic image constructed by the author. This allows for a wide range of variations, which can't be distilled into a precise algorithm, as is typical for works of art. The fourth chapter attempts to describe and systematize the palette of artistic directorial tools (the so-called "toolkit") used to construct the image in a documentary film portrait.

The periods of filmmaking are examined from the viewpoint of characteristic directorial practices for building a documentary film portrait. These practices are subject to a certain conditionality based on who the subject is and how their image will be constructed. The portrait film, broadly speaking, can be divided and analyzed based on the director's work with the main character and their narrative, categorized into two types: archival (cinema of facts) and contemporary. Each

carries a specific toolkit of directorial practices for working with the subject – through archives or engaging with the present.

This leads to the logical conclusion that for constructing the audio-visual image of the portrayed, the director employs various directorial techniques. These include structural, stylistic, and sound-editing aspects. The scope of portrait cinema can be quite extensive, opening up a wide range of directorial approaches to the material.

#### **4.1. Establishing a Connection Between the Subject and the Director**

At the core of the director's work, the focus is on the individual and psychological penetration into the world of the subject, as "the portrait is not only comprehensive and precise factual information but also insightful psychology." The director's task and responsibility, both artistic and ethical, are to successfully reveal (without distorting) the subject's image to the audience through methods and practices for creating a documentary portrait. While the saying goes that a good director can turn a bad script into a bad film, but it's hard to make a good film out of a bad script, the opposite can be true for documentary portraits – an interesting and inherently valuable individual might lead to a bad film, while it's difficult to create a good film about a mediocre and unremarkable person. Of course, every rule has exceptions, but they often involve situations where the director doesn't initially view the person as an "ethically" equal subject, but rather from a pedestal.

The director's work with the subject is one of the main elements that shape the future cinematic fabric of the documentary portrait. This element, its inner content, energy, and degree of penetration into the individual feelings and emotions of the person, is sealed in the cinematographic substance of the reel. It remains unchanged. It encapsulates the reality containing the sealed truth or falsehood, the (un)played, (un)directed presence and behavior of the filmed individual. Sometimes even the simplest action, directed by the director, can undermine the sense of truth.

There's no precise scheme for winning the subject's trust and getting close to them as a director. The director must understand human psychology, be communicative, and know how to interact and provoke. Through their authentic life experience, they need to quickly orient themselves and

sense changes in the subject's mood. With experience, each director develops their own sensibilities and psychological "tricks" for uncovering the "truth." Shared practices from our own directors (Eldora Traykova, Borislav Kolev, Adela Peeva, Stefan Komandarev) in their work with the subject are cited in the text, proving that it's all a matter of individual human measure and directorial intuition.

The aims, methods, and observational approaches used by documentarians have evolved due to technological advancements and changes in societal perceptions. Today, the primary goal of documentary portraiture is to, through external observation, reveal the subject's inner world, capture the hidden and hardly noticeable, and bring the individual and characteristic aspects of the person to the forefront.

#### **4.1.1 Method of Prolonged Observation**

The method of prolonged observation is an important tool for insight and study of individuals and reality. It allows not only capturing specific phenomena, emotions, gestures, and situations on film but also tracking their emotional and eventful development over time during this prolonged observation.

Key features of this method are its duration and regularity over time during the filming process, as well as the large amount of raw material accumulated. This material provides the director with a greater choice during the editing and sound mixing stages.

The text explores films where a dramatic life conflict existed prior to filming and those where the conflict wasn't evident or was absent. The complexity of the prolonged observation method fully manifests in the documentary portrait, particularly when the subject doesn't have an inherently vivid life conflict whose development can be traced over time. The subject might be colorful, different, and impressive to the director at the start of filming, but they might not be part of a strongly expressed social or life conflict. In such cases, the director's only option is to wait and observe. The lack of temporal specificity during the shooting period makes finding means to realize this type of films almost impossible. Hence, in Bulgarian filmmaking, these films are often realized through private production and directorial resources.

### **4.1.2 Method of Reportage Filming**

The method of reportage or event filming has always been fundamental to documentary cinema, not just as a filming technique but also as a way of recording the filmmaker's attitude toward the captured reality.

Unlike television, which strives for immediacy, documentary cinema doesn't always prioritize timeliness. In documentary cinema, the event is crucial primarily if it brings characterization and emotion to the subject. Documentary cinema seeks enduring and artistically meaningful themes and visual solutions. It's characterized by a psychological approach to the subject and the interpretation of the complex conglomerate of events present in their life.

Reportage filming is a frequently used observation method in filming documentary subjects. It's characterized by its specific visual style, with a distinct tempo rhythm. Reportage filming involves a certain unpredictability, often arising from the unfolding of the event itself. However, it still maintains temporal specificity and a degree of predictability about what's happening.

### **4.1.3 Interview Method**

The documentary interview actively plays a role as a primary or accompanying method in constructing the fabric of a documentary portrait of the subject. Its purpose is to tell the story (biographical, social, psychological, emotionally intimate, or spiritually valuable) of the subject through words. During the conversation between the subject and the interviewer (often the director), the image of the subject is constructed for the audience, making them the main focus of the film.

The interview method can be used in a monological form, but it can also take the form of an interview-dialogue (dialogic form), where questions accompany the answers. The third form is the "collective" interview, where multiple interviewees, whose stories intertwine during editing, collectively build the image of the subject. This can apply to films about contemporaries as well as historical figures.

To avoid a film being labeled as "talking heads," the director must manage to "push the participants to share their feelings, not just facts." The lack of emotional content in filmed interviews, where



informational function prevails over emotional function, combined with visual monotony where little changes, can quickly become tedious, especially in today's dynamic life. This makes the term "talking heads" synonymous with "boring."

In contemporary documentary portrait cinema, the use of the interview method isn't particularly impressive for constructing the image, unless it's deeply emotional revelation and not in monological form. It should also be noted that the interview method involves a dual form of authorship - the subject's answers on one side and the director's questions on the other, guiding the subject towards certain topics and reflections, potentially manipulating them at times.

#### **4.1.4 Hidden Camera Method**

In documentary cinema, the hidden camera method refers to covert observation and filming of the subject, where it's crucial for the subject not to know they are being filmed. The physical presence of the camera can be concealed or not, as long as the subject is unaware of being observed.

Ethical concerns regarding the use of the hidden camera method have led to countless discussions over the years, not only among practitioners and theorists in the film industry but also in society. Today, using the hidden camera method to create a documentary film, especially one intended for public broadcasting, is not solely reliant on the director's moral and ethical considerations. It's also regulated by law in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, Article 32(2). All these legal and moral measures applicable in documentary portrait creation create a barrier for using this method as a consistent directorial approach throughout the film. In other words, for the hidden camera method to be used, the subject needs to be aware in advance that they will be filmed, granted with prior written consent. This requirement forces the subject to be cautious and maintain their "mask" or even develop a new one to present themselves in a specific light.

Undoubtedly, the hidden camera method allows for capturing genuine, unfiltered emotions and behavior that characterize the subject.

Considering the aforementioned issues that could lead to the emergence of fiction in the subject's behavior, the legal framework, and the substantial ethical responsibility that arises from using the

hidden camera method, unfortunately, it's not commonly employed in documentary portrait cinema. What possibilities are left for the director to capture moments when the subject has dropped their "mask"? Some directors resort to using a telephoto lens, the use of a "false" camera (the subject believes the camera isn't recording), or through open observation during the filming process, a situation might arise where the subject "forgets" they are being filmed. This approach is possible when the subject's reactions are driven by life events that are emotionally charged, allowing the director to capture unguarded responses and genuine emotions towards a life situation.

#### **4.1.5 Creating Staged Situations**

A staged situation is any situation that doesn't naturally occur in real life, giving the director the opportunity to document it according to their creative understanding. In a staged situation, the director intervenes to varying degrees by reconstructing, provoking, and even manipulating the subject's behavior in life. The director's considerations for using staged situations are often linked to their desire for the future on-screen image of the subject to be richer, more colorful, more vivid, more cinematic, more memorable, etc. In terms of type, the types of staged situations in documentary cinema can be reconstruction, reenactment, and intentional situations.

In the use of the reconstruction method, the aim is to reconstruct events from the subject's life through dramatic or animation practices. These events may have already occurred and cannot be captured on film, or the intention might be to enrich the visual-emotional understanding of the subject. This directorial approach in storytelling provides directors with a new way to bring the filmic biography of the subject closer to the audience.

In reenactment, the boundary between blending documentary and fictional elements is not clearly defined. It's elusive for the viewer, and its presence in the documentary fabric of the film is often intuited by sensing falsehood or stiffness in the behavior of the subject or the surrounding events. Sometimes, the boundary between the documentary and fictional elements is intentionally obscured by the directors. In this method, the subject is placed in a life situation that has been pre-staged to serve a creative, presumed purpose. This categorizes this type of staged situation as unacceptable for documentary cinema.

Unlike reenactment, the intentional situation, within certain limits, is considered permissible for documentary cinema. In this approach, the director doesn't have predetermined specific goals for the subject's behavior, leaving the subject to lead. The subject isn't aware of the development and outcome of the situation, and how it will precisely contribute to building the portrait. However, the director has assessed in advance that capturing this situation could contribute to unfolding the portrait. In an intentional situation, the director remains entirely within the "arena" of documentary cinema.

#### **4.2. Script. Editing. Directorial Practices when Using Voice-Over**

In this section, the question of the script and whether it's necessary in documentary cinema for the director's work is explored. It's a topic that has always been widely discussed. Many filmmakers believe that having clear expectations for the upcoming film, analyzing the chronology of events in the subject's life, determining the approach to filming, setting locations, and defining the technical characteristics are entirely sufficient. The director can then observe and explore the subject while filming, without being burdened by a rigidly predefined framework. During editing, the captured material is analyzed, and the structure of the future film is built. I don't mean to diminish this approach to directing a documentary portrait. Not everything is so simple, and certainly behind the creation of any valuable documentary film lies the director's masterful, aesthetic, and individual perspective.

When working with a script written in advance by the director, moments of small (and sometimes large) deviations during the filming process are always possible. Nevertheless, unlike directors of narrative films, documentarists work with real life, which cannot be entirely foreseen.

Of course, every documentary script is conditional because documentary cinema doesn't deal with scripted plots, actors, and lines; it captures real people and "real" life. Sometimes, due to life circumstances, even with a ready script, it's possible for it to be entirely changed, forcing the director to seek a new perspective to convey the concept.

The editing period in documentary cinema is perhaps the most creative phase in which the director has wide opportunities to construct the narrative film whole, due to the often non-linear nature of the recorded material.

The text quotes opinions from prominent documentary directors who share their practices from a first-person perspective, both regarding the script and the work during the editing and sound design period.

Working with sound in terms of dramaturgy is no less significant. Skillful manipulation and use of sound possibilities (voice, music, noise, silence) by the director play a vital role in building the portrait.

The text explores the most common variations for using voice-over in documentary cinema, where it's possible to use a narrative model "by the author." In this approach, the voice-over can take on various roles – commentator and/or narrator.

In the cinematic structure of a documentary film, the two fundamental components for building the portrait are the visual and the auditory. Their interaction can vary in different hierarchical positions, determined by the director's overall perspective on constructing the image.

## **5. Typology of Portrait Cinema. Types**

The fifth chapter presents a typology of the main models of documentary film portraits, each characterized by specific directorial tools. This text focuses on the individual film portrait, which can encompass several subgenres depending on the subject of the documentary film portrait:

- **Prominent Personality:** In this case, the subject might tell their own story, their image could be constructed through other people, or it could be entirely built using archival material, sometimes referred to as "cinema of fact."
- **"Ordinary" Person:** This individual is not famous but represents an everyday person, and their story raises important societal themes.

Depending on the focus the director places on the subject's life story, the narrative of the film can explore the individual and unique life journey of the subject or analyze historical processes within a broader societal context. The director chooses which aspect of the subject's life to emphasize. Whether it's the social and public aspect of their life ("The Bookseller" 2016, dir. Asen Vladimirov and Katrin Berndtstein, "Citizen Sis" 2018, dir. Gospodin Nedelchev) or their inner intimate world

("What Color is the World" 2019, dir. Ralitsa Dimitrova; "Eternal Hunting Grounds" 2007, dir. Docho Bodzhakov) and others.

This choice is often influenced not only by the director's preferences but also by the documentary material they have access to. For instance, if the subject is someone whose creative journey is connected with the arts (poet, artist, etc.), references to their internal sensitivity are often sought in their artistic work. On the other hand, if the subject is a historical figure who dedicated their life to society, their personal aspects might be harder to uncover (if memoirs are lacking), and therefore, the director may rely on external manifestations of their personality preserved in documentary archives to construct their image.

### **5.1 Portrait of a Historical or Prominent Personality**

This form of the genre is widely popular in our documentary cinema, covering nearly all stages of its development. Depending on the historical period, aesthetic and social changes in society, this type of portrait evolves, both in terms of the perspective on the subject and the directorial approaches. However, its core essence lies in the desire of the author to tell the story of a significant individual, someone noteworthy, bright, unique, and deserving of their memory to be preserved.

In terms of the director's approach to the subject, types of portraits in documentary cinema can be broadly divided and analyzed based on the directorial methods used when working with the main character and their narrative. These can be categorized as archival or contemporary. Each of them outlines practices for using a different directorial toolkit when working on constructing the character.

#### **5.1.1 Constructing the Character through Archival Material. Cinema of Fact**

The directorial approach to portraying a figure in the "cinema of fact" differs from creating a portrait in other forms of documentary filmmaking.

For constructing a portrait in the "cinema of fact," facts come into play as a directorial building arsenal (documents, photo and film archives, newspaper illustrations, postcards, engravings, etc.). The "plot and narrative organization is performed by placing them in a certain context derived from the documents themselves, based on the will of the authors, not through the comments of

third parties such as eyewitnesses, historians, specialists, etc. Furthermore, this organization is always subordinated to a certain dramaturgical thought, which is derived again through the facts."

At the same time, the documentary portrait, built from the "cinema of fact," less frequently remains solely in the field of "pure" documentary (archival material).

It has been generalized that in search of paths for visual diversity and emotional closeness of the character's image to the viewer, several established Bulgarian directors (Svetoslav Ovcharov, Kostadin Bonev, Asen Vladimirov, etc.) working with the "cinema of fact" incorporate reconstructions into the visual film structure (often focusing on details where the image cannot be clearly examined), computer animation, street and natural landscape shots, etc., carrying allegorical messages, as well as current event situations and observations. In such moments of visual substitution, the only carrier of the "fact" becomes the voice-over.

### **5.1.2 Constructing the Character when the Subject Cannot be Filmed. Reconstructions, Memories of People, Film, and Photo Material**

Outside the realm of the "cinema of fact," which relies entirely on documents to construct the character, creating a documentary portrait when the subject cannot be filmed for various reasons requires the director to find alternative methods for character construction. Another way to portray a historical figure is by including interviews with people close to the subject, colleagues, historians, or experts in the film's structure, in addition to the characteristic archival material, photo and film documents, who, through their emotional or professional assessment of the individual, build his or her image.

In documentary film portraits of non-contemporaries dedicated to art, there is often an attempt to create a psychological and emotional portrait of the character through their created works.

Although not all documentary portraits of non-contemporaries aim to delve into the intimate world of the subject and succeed in doing so, it should be noted that the construction - a mixture of interviews with people (relatives, friends, historians, experts) providing their assessment of the subject's life with their creative works (cinematic, artistic, literary, musical, theatrical, etc.)

contributes to visualizing and revealing the inner world in character construction. This is something difficult to achieve when making a film about a person who has not pursued a creative profession but has been a public figure.

In summary, films in which the subject is not a contemporary man, through directorial approaches, documents, photo and film archives, interviews, computer effects, reconstructions, and reenactments, to introduce the viewer to the biographical-historical fate of the individual. To some extent, they recreate the subject's inner-intimate feelings. These portrait films encompass an important characteristic in their narrative: the director provides, and consequently, the viewer forms their assessment of the individual from a distance of historical time that separates them from the subject. However, it must be acknowledged that these types of portraits rarely succeed in uncovering and penetrating the inner-individual essence of the human soul. Yet, they bestow society with historical memory of a figure that should not be forgotten, and whose story should be heard.

### **5.1.3 Constructing the Image of a Contemporary Subject. Various Approaches**

A contemporary person is a catalyst of the time they live in. They can be compared to an optical lens that allows the surrounding world to pass through, the world in which we all live.

In documentary filmmaking, "every problem can be expressed through the fate of a specific, real person." Depending on the nature of the theme and plot of the portrait film, the director chooses to use and often blend various observational, presenting, and exploratory approaches to the subject's "world." They may employ prolonged observation, reportage or event filming, interviews, photo or film archives, and documents in their work.

While the director's efforts in making a portrait film about a historical figure are focused on constructing an image through shadows of the past and memories of colleagues, experts, and family, working with a contemporary subject presents a different set of challenges. When constructing the image, the director has the "undeniable advantage in interpreting the subject that they can capture the person's behavior in all its diversity, see them in public and private life, and

characterize their spiritual essence." They have access to the full directorial palette of practices and methods employed in contemporary documentary filmmaking for image construction.

During the production of a documentary film portrait, the director makes choices between technical and artistic methods, selecting filming locations that, according to their judgement, will characterize their subject, and more, to create the artistic image through material organization.

When portraying a contemporary individual, the director forms direct socio-psychological relationships with the subject. These relationships aim not only to gain the subject's trust for filming but also to pave the way to their emotional and intimate world. The text also notes that while films about non-contemporaries often lack the individual's assessment of the historical time they lived in, these assessments frequently appear in films about contemporaries and serve as distinctive marks for the portrait films. A documentary film portrait contains a conglomerate of past and present time, constructed based on the subject's personal emotional experience, which they share with the viewers.

## **5.2. Eccentrics in Bulgarian Documentary Cinema**

The change in the country's political regime, the fall of socialism, and its replacement with post-socialism in 1989 shook all areas of Bulgaria's socio-economic, cultural, and societal model, naturally creating a historical divide not only in the country's history but also in that of its documentary cinema, dividing the films made before 1989 from those made after.

An interesting point, however, is that even after the first decade of transition, Bulgarian documentary cinema saw the return of films about "eccentrics," about marginal individuals who found themselves on the fringes of the newly created post-communist society. A society where material prosperity became an overt measure of individual success, discrediting other human values like morality and spirituality.

The subsection attempts to explore this phenomenon and search for reasons behind it in Bulgarian documentary cinema. It is concluded that both historical periods are characterized by a crisis of



values in society, and the films about "eccentrics" serve as a breath of fresh air in the search for alternative paths towards "freedom."

## **6. The Documentary Hybrid. Portraiture in the Age of Computer Technologies**

Cinema is a synthetic art, and this synthetic nature doesn't only end with its initial form but naturally extends from its inception to the present day. It synthesizes between types of cinema - narrative, documentary, and animated. The blending, interweaving of fundamental characteristics - genres, styles, and more, is an essential characteristic of contemporary culture and art. Cinema, in a way, is one of the brightest expressions of these alchemical processes. The active incorporation of new technologies in all forms of cinema in recent years provokes directors, cinematographers, artists, and all participants in the creative process to use these new technical possibilities as a new expressive language, creating a new visual-narrative screen model. This gives rise to the mixing of genres and the creation of hybrid films. The hybrid nature of documentary with other types of cinema, facilitated by the digital revolution, offers documentary portraitists new visual techniques for guiding the film narrative and creates models for a new screen aesthetics. Directors openly and freely start employing techniques from narrative and animation genres - a pre-structured plot, use of actors in the frame, narrative or animated reconstructions of events, memories, dreams from the subject's life, or even concealing the real person behind a rotoscoped image, aiming to achieve a deeper insight into the subject's intimate world.

The text examines and provides examples of documentary film portraits that contain different types of hybridity within their structure. Attempts are made to analyze both the goals set by directors through the usage of these hybrid techniques and the new visual possibilities for constructing a documentary reality that unfolds before them.

## **7. Directorial Ethics in Revealing the Portrait in the Documentary Film**

The ethical approach to the subject is a moral unit that should stand higher than the creative ego and ambitions of the director. A main reason for the discussions in this chapter is the appearance

of film portraits where directors register, through their directorial tools, their ironic attitude towards the portrayed subject. The ethics theme is important, extending not only to films about contemporaries but also to the construction of the image of historical figures.

Shared opinions from distinguished Bulgarian directors are included in the text, delving into the topic and illustrating it through specific examples from their film practices.

The conclusion is drawn that ethical treatment of the subject cannot be legally defined as a concept due to the individuality of each case. However, it remains a moral characteristic that most prominently defines the personality of the director.

## **8. Appendices**

This dissertation includes interviews with Bulgarian documentarists conducted by me, along with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodora Stoilova-Doncheva and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yosif Astrukov from the "Screen Arts" sector, Institute of Art Studies - BAS in 2019.

## **9. Scientific Contributions of the Current Dissertation**

1. This study provides a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the characteristics of the documentary film portrait in terms of both film language and individual aesthetic, ethical, and socio-cultural parameters of the phenomenon. The evolution of key works in film portraiture in both global and Bulgarian practice has been traced.
2. The dynamics in the historical development of the documentary portrait in Bulgarian cinema within two periods - socialist and post-totalitarian - has been outlined. It is concluded that unlike the more official ("social," "class") nature of film portraiture during the era of socialist realism, contemporary documentary cinema increasingly interprets the inner, more intimate world of its subjects without neglecting their societal significance.
3. The most important techniques, directorial "levers," and methods from the directorial "toolbox" that contribute to the construction of visual and narrative structures and messages in the documentary portrait have been analyzed in detail. The range of relationships

between documentary authenticity (truthfulness) and authorial subjectivity (intervention, bias) is commented upon. A typology of different methods and formal directorial approaches in the documentary film portrait has been proposed, along with a detailed analysis of the most frequently encountered directorial practices.

4. Changes in the cinematic language of documentary cinema (especially in the film portrait) due to digitization and new technologies, which generate and develop widely spread hybrid forms, have been analyzed. Attention has also been given to emerging new trends, such as the I-movies movement (cinema for oneself). Stimulated by the accessibility of new technologies and the limitless audience attraction provided by the internet, this type of film exhibits specific aesthetic and ethical qualities, gaining increasing popularity and having the potential to become a mass-significant phenomenon in documentary practice.
5. The contribution of the text lies in the updating of commentary and interpretation of ethical issues, without which documentary cinema can no longer function in civilized and legal societies.

### **Publications on the Subject of the Dissertation**

1. Peshcherska, Tamara. "The Portrait in Documentary Cinema - Between Truth and Lie." In Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference "Truths and Lies About Facts, News, and Events," vol. 2. Ruse: Regional Library "Lyuben Karavelov," Ruse, 2018, pp. 158-163.
2. Peshcherska-Iordanov, Tamara. "The Documentary Film Portrait in the Age of Computer Technologies." Art Studies Readings 2019, vol. II - New Art, IIS - BAS, Sofia, 2020, pp. 504-510.
3. Peshcherska-Iordanov, Tamara. "The Director Leni Riefenstahl - From the Triumph of Propaganda to the Coral Reefs." In Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference "Ideas, Ideals - Rise and Fall," vol. 1. Ruse: Regional Library "Lyuben Karavelov," 2019, ISBN 978-619-7404-08-1, pp. 181-189.

4. Peshcherska, Tamara. "The Journey of the Hero - Directorial Technique for Building the Portrait in the Documentary Film." *Art Studies Readings 2020*, vol. II - New Art, IIS - BAS, Sofia, 2021, pp. 251-257.
5. Peshcherska, Tamara. "The Hybrid Documentary Film Portrait. Development Models." In *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference "Evolution vs. Revolution or Development Models."* Regional Library "Lyuben Karavelov," 2020, Ruse, pp. 387-393.
6. Peshcherska-Iordanov, Tamara. "Society and Its 'Oddballs' in Bulgarian Documentary Cinema." *Journal "Problems of Art,"* Issue 2 / 2020, IIS - BAS, Sofia, pp. 53-57.
7. Peshcherska-Iordanov. "Kostadin Bonev: I am Allergic to Clichés," *Magazine "Artisan"* ISBN 2535-1273, Issue 17 / February 2019, pp. 96.

## **Acknowledgments**

I want to express my profound gratitude to my academic supervisor, Prof. Dr. Nadezhda Marinchevska, for her professional guidance, support, patience, and assistance in writing this dissertation. Her well-informed opinions and valuable advice on documentary cinema consistently motivated me to uncover new insights, view things more deeply, and from different perspectives.

A special thank you to my colleagues from the "Screen Arts" sector at the Institute of Art Studies - BAS, who welcomed me into their friendly and supportive team. To Nadezhda Marinchevska, Ingeborg Bratoeva-Darakchieva, Andronika Martonova, Petya Aleksandrova, Alexander Donev, Maya Dimitrova, Radostina Neykova, Teodora Stoilova-Doncheva, Elitsa Gotseva, Deyan Statulov, and Yosif Astrukov, I am grateful for your professionalism and insightful discussions.

To Zlatina Vülchanova, thank you for the journey we embarked on together.

To my spouse, brother, and son, your encouragement and patience have been invaluable.

To my father...

To my mother, for everything!