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GENDER HYBRIDIZATIONS AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS IN FICTION AND NON-FICTION FILMMAKING

HIBRIDACIONES DE GÉNERO Y REPRESENTACIÓN SOCIALES EN CINEMATOGRAFÍA DE FICCIÓN Y NO FICCIÓN

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The current presence of hybridization between documentary and cinematographic fiction has taken many directions, with disparate results. They aim at delivering works that provide new views on reality, which is understood as an entity represented through images. **Methodology:** The purpose of this research is to analyze four hybrid fiction/documentary narrative films to determine the elements that are used to create meaningful and unusual cinematic experiences. A film analysis is carried out with four categories of analysis: fictional elements, documentary style, timeline manipulation and interaction with the audience. **Results:** Four hybrid fiction/documentary films were analyzed. Some elements were identified such as dramatized situations and narrative tones that mix fiction and reality to question truth and lies. It was observed that temporal manipulation and interaction with the audience are crucial to create relevant cinematographic experiences. **Discussion:** Merging

genres allows for new ways of representing and questioning reality. The films under study show how fiction can enrich the documentary, providing an additional layer of meaning and reflection. **Conclusions:** The genre hybridization in filmmaking offers a powerful tool to explore and represent reality in an innovative way, challenging the traditional boundaries between fiction and documentary.

Keywords: hybridization; cinematography; fiction; documentary; communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fiction and documentary have always been taken as distinct genres, with their own distinct outlooks. This is not a new premise, but one that has been fixed in the collective imagery since classical times, in the literary sphere. Indeed, a distinction is made between historical and literary discourse. Aristotle points out in his *Poetics* that literature imitates, and history narrates (Redondo-Olmedilla, 2019).

In the cinematographic field, the idea is that documentaries have the ability to simulate life in motion, a historical discourse, and expose things as they appear to the eye. From the very beginnings of cinema, the film by the Lumière Brothers shows workers leaving a factory and contributes to corroborate this statement. The fact causes the documentary to be understood as an instrument for self-knowledge and that of others, but its objectivity is also questioned (Niang, 2017).

In the 1930s, the term documentary begins to be used because of the travel films made by Frenchmen, and later it is used by John Grierson (1966) to issue debates on the cinema of Robert Flaherty, with his now well-known phrase to conceptualize it as "creative treatment of reality".

Both fiction and documentary adopt a series of forms that have been used in different ways over the years. In the documentary field, it is possible to mention Direct Cinema, which in the 1950s claimed to be a pure cinema, without any fictional resources, but which did not quite succeed in establishing itself as a true cinema (Mínguez, 2014).

Based on fiction, there have also been recurrent approaches to reality, with movements such as the *nouvelle vague* or Italian neorealism. Within this, André Bazin (1966) has been one of the authors who has most advocated the cinema of reality, as opposed to that of appearances. This has not changed with the emergence of digital, but the new media have allowed new forms of expression and hybridization of visual content, to which have been added what video art, television and video clips do.

It is always appropriate to make an approach to the early period of cinema, since those origins allow us to point out narrative resources that, although they were typical of those beginnings, they are still used today. These resources were born as experiments, both in camera and in narrative logics, but they were fundamental for the evolution of cinema, and have also achieved postmodern reinterpretations that have put them back on the map (González, 2023).

This research is a contribution to the field of film studies due to its focus on the hybridization of genres from contemporary cinema. Through the analysis of four recent films, the article demonstrates how the blending of fictional elements into documentaries and vice versa creates meaningful cinematographic experiences that challenge traditional perceptions of reality and fiction. This perspective is particularly relevant at a time when the boundaries between what is real and what is fictional are increasingly blurred in audiovisual media.

The analysis of specific techniques is another important contribution of the article. It does not merely address hybridization in general terms but breaks down techniques such as temporal manipulation and audience interaction. By identifying and examining these elements, the study provides a deeper understanding of how these techniques contribute to the narrative and emotional impact of hybrid films. Indeed, this in-depth analysis of cinematic techniques offers valuable insights for filmmakers and scholars interested in exploring new forms of visual storytelling.

In addition, the article highlights the social and cultural relevance of genre hybridization. The films under analysis not only combine fiction and documentary techniques, but also address social issues by using hybridization as a tool for questioning and pondering reality. This ability of hybrid films to offer new perspectives on social and cultural issues is applicable to global contexts.

1.1. Fiction and reality intersections and limits

It should be understood that every audiovisual production, without exception, is fictional, since its nature is based on the prior and subsequent organization of filmed material by an author and his team (Orellana, 2003). Therefore, realism and fiction are clearly inseparable, and must be used in a flexible way, without this meaning that there is a neutral or objective view of reality:

In fiction, realism makes a plausible world seem real; in documentary, realism makes an argument about the historical world seem persuasive. Similar stylistic techniques come into play, but the end result is a distinctive blend of style and rhetoric, authorial personality and textual persuasion, which differs from fiction. Documentary realism is not only a style, but also a professional code, an ethic and a ritual. (Nichols, 1997, pp. 217-219)

At the time, it is the British School that provides a reason for realism in the documentary, since it states that it plays a modeling role in society, i.e., that there is a social commitment that urges an image loaded with realism. On the other hand, the Italian School, from neorealism, adds documentary techniques to fictional productions, in order to overcome the understanding of fictional cinema as entertainment cinema (Martínez-Cano et al., 2020).

Arthur Danto, in the research conducted by Branigan (2013) defines that evidence is the characteristic that completely defines the documentary:

Of all the materials available to a historian, "Something is true...a document is only true if it is caused by the events it records." A document proves something because it has been produced by the thing itself. Similarly, the images and sounds of a cinematic documentary are said to have such a close relationship to reality that it becomes proof of, or at least evidence of, the events that were in front of the camera and microphone at a time in the past. (p. 202)

When the documentary sets out to generate a narrative to feed its discourse, it is there when its moral perspective and ethics are questioned, since there is a keynote of moral supremacy in the documentary, which fiction does not have. Dziga Vertov, John Grierson, Paul Rotha and Pare Lorentz maintain the thought of the moral supremacy of the documentary, in contrast to a fictional cinema that is thought to be full of fantasy and illusion, especially the very important aspect that is elaborated in Hollywood (Nichols, 1997).

For his part, Metz (2001) indicates that cinema in its entirety should be considered as fiction, since it is recorded on photographic support and cannot be confused with objective reality.

However, it is always worth bearing in mind that film, from its beginnings, was an extremely relevant source for visual anthropology and ethnography and that this line of work and research has been extremely useful and fruitful for the field of Social Sciences (Brown et al., 2023).

On the other hand, Bruzzi (2000) develops the concept of "performative documentary" based on the understanding that expressive parameters should prevail over formal ones. From this point of view, a film is constructed from the author's own memory of the documentary's experiences, which shapes a cinema of reality based on what is fictionalized and on points of view.

Within this, the documentary must always be thought from levels of artificiality, since it also chooses modes of representation of reality, although this treatment of reality differs from that of fiction. In any case, this phenomenon is what gives rise to the convergence between fiction and documentary and its expansion into hybrid genres, so common nowadays. The situation reaches its complexity when it becomes questionable whether a narrative that is supposed to be based on real events, at the same time, fabricates plots or characters, or uses resources such as non-professional actors, should be used. It is there when the line is lost and the audience does not have a clear idea of the story (Sánchez, 2011).

Bordwell & Thompson (1995) establish that there is a difference between narrative and non-narrative forms, which arises from the field of staging, but it could not be said that it clarifies the differentiation between one genre and the other, since appealing to principles of truth also occurs in fiction.

A differentiating element may also arise from the field of fiction and documentary, understanding their language strategies, for example:

From the handheld shot, shooting in real locations, editing focusing on exposition as opposed to narration, possible presence of the producer in the shot, voice-over, use of archival documents, and the creation of a perspective, establishing the audience's point of view as a witness of what is shown. (Martínez-Cano et al., 2020, p. 117)

In any case, it is a complicated matter to support, since the language resources of fiction are used in the documentary, and vice versa.

Bruzzi (2000) points out that the documentary generates a taking of sides, that it poses a relationship between reality and representation and that it is shown as an alternative discourse of objectivity. It is in these circumstances that documentary film does not reveal realities as such, but rather creates truths from the basis of the narrative, which has a fictional component in its entirety, and which makes it possible to give meaning to the reality that is portrayed.

In any case, the documentary discourse proceeds with a characteristic that makes it unique and that is its assertive character, since there is a premeditated attempt to affirm that a fact exists in the world, and although this is also a characteristic of fiction, a documentary film:

It is an extended treatment of a subject in a moving image medium, often in narrative, rhetorical, categorical or associative form, in which the filmmaker overtly signals his intention that the audience 1) adopts an attitude of belief toward the relevant propositional content (the part that is "said"), 2) takes the images, sounds and combinations of these as reliable sources to form beliefs about the subject matter of the film, and, in some cases, 3) take relevant shots, recorded sounds and/or scenes as phenomenological approximations to the visual aspect, sound and/or some other feeling or sensation of the pro-filmic event (the "showing" part). (Plantinga, 2005, pp. 114-115)

This approach is interesting for its ability to take into account some elements such as the fact that the documentary presents itself as a discourse linked to authenticity, which requires the audience to enter into that sense of reality that is presented to him/her and that is formally organized in a similar way to fiction (Felici, 2008).

Finally, a situation that should be taken into account is that the classification of a film as fiction or documentary, on certain occasions, obeys commercial reasons. That is to say, the need for films to aim at a certain target audience and to respond to the expectations that this audience expects from the films they are going to watch, since they expect to consume certain shared meanings (Sánchez, 2011).

1.2. Non-fiction genre

Audiovisual genres can no longer be conceived as unitary, distinctive and univocal elements, but rather generic permeability is the element that arises in the fluctuation of meanings that surrounds today's audiovisual productions:

The omnipresence of the image and the constant evolution of the media ecosystem are the perfect breeding ground for the ad infinitum hybridization of the taxonomies of the motion picture. Even those classifications within the documentary genre that have been established from the thematic, to those identified by the participation of the author in the footage, passing through those currents more related to the anthropological, sociological or historical, are intertwined in an oxymoron of fact and fiction. (Martínez-Cano et al., p. 112)

Nowadays, the term documentary does not provide a conception that encompasses all the diversity of the phenomenon of factual cinema; therefore, the term that best fits the purposes of such diversity is "non-fiction", which refers to works that have the real as a direct reference (Weinrichter, 2004).

Thus, it is important to be clear that the term "documentary" is in crisis, but not the genre itself. The current reality is thought from the dissolution of the classic conceptual framework of the genre, which was formulated in the 1960s, and which challenges some of the key concepts, such as objectivity, truth or representation, previously indissoluble in documentary cinema (Liberia, 2022).

One of the key reasons for the paradigm shift in the evolution of the documentary is television, especially the programming that is oriented towards reality shows providing entertainment at the expense of the real. This leads to a mixture of genres and elements of fiction and documentary without hesitation, which generates a rupture of boundaries between fiction, non-fiction and experimental "moving away from the quintessential vocation of the classic documentary: the representation of reality with the minimum possible mediation" (Weinrichter, 2004, p. 10).

Fiction and non-fiction are on the side of representation, that is, they are forms of language that allow representing realities, or inventing them. The concept of fiction arises in the 15th century and achieves a high degree of expansion during the 20th and 21st centuries. However, among the specialized sectors of cinema, it does not have the degree of prestige of nonfiction (Mínguez, 2014).

Nichols (1997) states, at that time, that the documentary should be validated by a discourse of sobriety. However, nowadays, this conception is invalidated by the new formulations of disruption, which since the mid-1980s have made the documentary enter postmodernity and the more encompassing concept of non-fiction, which includes disparate genres such as docudramas, audiovisual essays, found footage or infotainment (Liberia, 2022).

An important example of these hybridizations is the mockumentary, a genre that models fictional films that make use of documentary style to bestow feelings of credibility and authenticity and "create a documentary experience defined by its antithesis, a self-conscious detachment" (Juhasz, 2006, p. 7).

Narrativity, which is sometimes assumed to be only exclusive to fictional forms, is also an option for documentary, which has sometimes taken on significant power: The suspense-inducing structure of Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*; the everyday framework of city symphonies such as *Man With a Movie Camera*, *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* and *A Propos de Nice*; the crisis structure of Drew Associates' films. (Renov, 2012, p. 2)

Mututa (2024) points out that *Nanook of the North* suggests many documentary styles, including experimental, poetic, ethnographic, fiction, modes of participation, travel portraits, adventure cinema, among others, and refers to the understanding that no audiovisual medium is neutral in its production, observation or interpretation, and it stands out as a product, both ethnographic and substantially subjective.

It is complex to distinguish a documentary performance, when musicians, actors or politicians are exposed as well as ironies, cross identifications and others that allow discerning that the categories of what is fictional and non-fictional are mutually shared (Renov, 2012).

It should be noted that, although academic research has been constantly seeking a greater theoretical and epistemological explanation of the identity of nonfiction, the answers are still not general and they leave some inaccuracies, although there is consensus in pointing out that it is a macro-genre of reality that is nourished by fictional, experimental and real cinema (Feria-Sánchez, 2023).

2. OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study is to explore and analyze the genre hybridization between fiction and documentary in contemporary cinema, in order to understand how this fusion creates new forms of audiovisual representation and narrative. Through the detailed analysis of four recent films that exemplify this blending, the study seeks to break down the techniques and strategies used by filmmakers to integrate fictional elements into documentaries and vice versa. In doing so, the study aims not only to provide a deeper understanding of technical and narrative innovations in hybrid cinema, but also to explore how these films address and reflect on relevant social and cultural issues. Ultimately, the aim is to provide a theoretical and practical basis for filmmakers and scholars interested in exploring the creative and discursive possibilities of genre hybridization, highlighting its impact on the perception and representation of reality.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative methodology. The study techniques applied were content analysis and theoretical sampling, and the instrument used was a matrix of categories of analysis.

The sequence of actions carried out to reach the films was as follows: 1) bibliographic review; 2) elaboration of a list of ten films; 3) watching the selected films; 4) selection of four films as the object of analysis; and 5) approach of the matrix of categories of content analysis.

The first phase made it possible to understand the phenomenon of fiction and non-fiction, in addition to deepening the understanding of the documentary, and its limits and influences in contemporary audiovisuals.

In the second phase, a list of ten films released between 2015 and 2023 was compiled. In these films it was possible to identify elements of fiction and documentary that were innovatively integrated. The list was created by films that were awarded in recognized international film festivals, since this allows demonstrating that the films had an impact on the film industry. To conclude this phase, the ten films were watched.

Once the films had been watched, four films were selected, since they were the ones that best fit the objective of the study. For this purpose, the theoretical sampling technique or subjective sample by reasoned decision (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbetta, 2007) was used, taking into account that the selected films are representative and relevant examples of the hybridization between fiction and documentary in contemporary cinema. Each of these films has been recognized for its innovation and this ensures that the chosen examples are relevant to explore the techniques and strategies of genre hybridization. In addition, the selected films cover a diversity of approaches and contexts, allowing for a variety of hybridization techniques to be observed. Each film offers a perspective on how fictional and documentary elements can be combined, which contributes to a panoramic view of the phenomenon under study.

Finally, a matrix of content analysis categories was elaborated, which allowed the study of the four films and the extraction of results on hybrid narration in contemporaneity. The categories of analysis were: fictional elements, documentary style, timeline manipulation and interaction with the audience. Table 1 shows the technical data sheets of the selected films:

Table 1.

Technical Data Sheets of the Films Selected for the Analysis of Hybrid Narrative in the Contemporary World

Title	Year of release	Country	Directed by	Synopsis
<i>Kate Plays Christine</i>	2016	United States of America	Robert Greene	Actress Kate Lyn Sheil is hired to play journalist Christine Chubbuck, who committed suicide on a live news broadcast in 1974. As she advances in the investigation of the character she is to play, an introspection is generated about her profession and about representation and reality.
<i>The Lovers & the Despot</i>	2016	United Kingdom	Ross Adam and Robert Cannan	The film tells the story of two filmmakers, Shin Sang-ok and Choi Eun-hee, who were kidnapped by the North Korean regime of Kim Jong-il in the 1970s to make films close to their ideology. Within it, one can observe how the regime functions and certain ways of operating.
<i>Tower</i>	2016	United States of America	Keith Maitland	This is an animated film that tells the story of the 1966 University of Texas shooting, based on interviews with witnesses, survivors and authorities. It takes different points of view to recreate the event and generates a debate on violence and acts of altruism.
<i>American Animals</i>	2018	United Kingdom	Bart Layton	This is a real movie that tells the story of four young men who plan a robbery of a university library, especially a copy of <i>Birds of America</i> by author John James Audubon. The story is complemented by the versions of the real perpetrators.

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2024).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Fictional elements

García-Martínez (2004) states that, in postmodernity, suspect images have gained importance, in the sense that the rhetorical structures of fiction and non-fiction merge and pose a questioning of truth and lies.

Postmodernity has taken shape, among other elements, through its expanded use of irony, cynicism and simulation. This has generated a renewed understanding of what is real and authentic as forms of cultural and artistic present-day. There is a constant questioning of meanings and re-readings of the past are adopted, to be brought into the present as superficial aesthetic renovations (Stoddart, 2024).

Both fiction and documentary share their own tools, aesthetics and visions, and when a director is confronted with a reality, one of the decisions he or she must make is whether the film works better as one or the other.

Fictional elements are some of the key tools used to construct these types of narratives, and the films analyzed in the study also use them in an effective way for their development.

4.1.1. Dramatized situations

An interesting fictional element as a stylistic device, which also adds a layer of content. It is found in the film *Tower* (2016). In this film, dramatized situations are fundamental, as they are recreated through animation. In addition, the casting was carefully done to find actors that looked remarkably similar to the real protagonists, which adds authenticity and a sense of depth to the narrative.

The animation technique used in this film, known as rotoscoping, allows the characters to look very similar to how they were in their youth and recreates events based on testimonies, despite the scarcity of original footage. The director shows a clear intention to distinguish the genre being used, combining traditional interviews with real people along with dramatized situations, thus creating a richer and more complex narrative.

American Animals (2018) stands out for its dramatization. The real protagonists, who lived the story, are there telling their version, while the actors recreate those events. This gives the film a strong documentary component. However, it also adopts elements of thrillers and heist films, which turns it towards fiction, creating a hybridization of genres.

Kate Plays Christine (2016) is a film that relies on a constant dramatization, standing out in the final scene, where Christine's suicide is recreated. This scene challenges the audience's perspective and expectations and causes the audience to think about representation and reality.

For its part, *The Lovers & the Despot* (2016) does not use this resource, as its main argument is in the use of archival material.

4.1.2. Narrative tone

All four films use a narrative tone that wraps their stories, thus moving away from a sense of reality and into the realm of fiction. The narrative tone used in *The Lovers & the Despot* (2016) is dark, tragic, and one of constant anxiety. In *Kate Plays Christine* (2016), the narrative tone is dramatic, with tinges of black humor. *Tower* (2016), although with a tragic event that always keeps the audience engaged, gives a more accessible atmospheric treatment, not as dark as the other films, which is also in tune with the animation technique and color palette used. *American Animals* (2018) uses a dark tone as well, but tries to soften it with humorous parts.

4.1.3. Dramatic irony

In *Kate Plays Christine* (2016), an interesting fictional motif that emerges is that of black humor and absurdity. In fact, the main slogan of the film itself has its lurid overtones, by placing an actress to recreate a tragic event, and that is exposed from the very beginning: a news presenter commits suicide live on air. The key issue there is that the documentary records the actress' process, as she prepares for her role. It is in these circumstances that a level of cruel humor with tragic undertones is found.

Something similar happens in *American Animals* (2018), which poses a clear conflict with some protagonists who intend to steal famous paintings, to later sell them and obtain great economic returns. The execution of the robbery is produced from the absurd, and it is necessary that the audience accepts the absurdity of the events, because otherwise, it is complicated to enter into what is intended to be told. Once the film establishes the humorous, ironic and dark tone, it never stops using it, although there are several passages in which the tragic surpasses it, especially in the last part of the film.

The Lovers & the Despot (2016) and *Tower* (2016) have elements of drama, but their complexity has nothing to do with the ironic, so their footage is free of it.

4.2. Documentary style

The documentary style can be understood as an exercise of reliable statements based on a high level of thoroughness of disclosure (Laffond & Jiménez, 2010). Currently, this genre tends towards intentionality and style. Within it, the reconstruction of events is a "fundamental feature, since it addresses representations of memory as unique documentary trends" (Arias, 2010, p. 49).

The documentary style, which allowed it to be clearly identified from fiction, has become more complex, to such an extent that the style makes a considerable difference. This is the case of all the documentaries that are part of this analysis, given that their focus aims to subvert the stylistic forms of documentary and refer to hybridization with fictional forms, in order to obtain unconventional products.

4.2.1. Handheld shot

The handheld shot is one of the most recognized documentary style resources, which refers to states of representation of reality. Fiction has resorted to this element in several of its genres, coming to characterize such popular genres as found footage (Niang, 2017). It is curious that none of the four films use this resource, at least as something prevailing, prioritizing the use of a more careful, focused and prepared image.

In certain parts of the films under study, the handheld camera is used in a very punctual way, especially in moments of climax and tension, emulating the lack of control felt by the characters in similar situations in fiction.

This self-conscious discarding of the handheld shot is very interesting, as it is one of the resources that blurs the line between fiction and documentary. This does not mean that the events are more or less fictional, but rather that they ignore this resource in order to give priority to a narrative more closely linked to fiction, but telling real events. The most curious case in this regard is *The Lovers and the Despot* (2016), since it is full of archival material that has been treated so that the footage is well defined.

4.2.2. Interviews

In all four films, the resource of the interview is used in a non-traditional way, introducing changes that enrich the narrative and provide greater depth to the content being expressed.

In *Kate Plays Christine* (2016), the actress talks constantly, describes the process she goes through, but also interviews other characters, which allows her to build a deeper vision of the character she is trying to play.

In *The Lovers & the Despot* (2016) the interviews are much closer to documentary and journalism. They follow that line, and the protagonist is the one who provides the deepest guiding line, because it is firsthand.

In *Tower* (2016) the interviews have a different aspect, since actors were hired to look like the real people in their youth, and to act out the interviews. This strategy is coupled with interviews without animation, which become more relevant towards the end.

American Animals (2018) also uses interviews, but subverts the resource in a similar way to *Tower* (2016), that is, taking previous testimonies of real people, and then placing them as dialogues for the actors. Thus, interviews with real people are gradually inserted, with their actors. This fact allows reflecting on the points of view, reality and memories, as another subject, apart from what is narrated by the film.

4.2.3. Direct observation

A relevant resource within the documentary is direct observation, which allows a first-hand understanding of the problems being dealt with, a resource that is extremely important for Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité.

It is precisely because of the rupture with this resource that the line between fiction and documentary is blurred, since in the four films there is no motivation to generate direct observation of the events that are told, although all the films deal with distant events, of a tragic nature, which can only be accessed through the memory of those who survive, either the main characters or third parties.

In this sense, the films work from the field of recreation, fictionalized events, representation and pointing out the fragility of perspective, memory and point of view, clear evidence that the paradigm of absolute truths has been replaced by the micro-narratives of postmodernity.

4.2.4. Long shots and single takes

Another resource of the documentary style is the use of sequence shots, or single shots, which are merged with the handheld shot, to give the impression of greater realism. The sequence shot is not used recurrently in any of the four films. The option they share is the direct cut, building through the shot/countershot and audiovisual language strategies linked to fiction.

There are passages in each film in which the willingness to use long shots is observed, but it is not a resource that stands out. Instead, it is used in specific moments, especially in moments of greater dramatic intensity, such as the end of *Kate Plays Christine* (2016), where she must recreate the suicide in front of cameras and the actress is overwhelmed by the complex feeling that such a dark and stressful event is causing her.

4.2.5. Voice-over documentary

The voice-over is a resource that is used in all cases, but in an unconventional way, as well as interviews. The four films advocate the rupture of the traditional interview, but still maintain the line of meaning that composes the voice-over, that is, the characters speak to the camera, tell the events, and the image recreates what is said.

The voice-over is what generates the narrative line in *Kate Plays Christine* (2016), *The Lovers & the Despot* (2016) and *Tower* (2016). In *American Animals* (2018), the interviews are important at the beginning and at the end, but as the conflict develops, they become sporadic, even disappearing for long segments.

4.2.6. Archival material

Nichols (1997) states that documentaries represent qualities and problems of the historical world, using all the means at their disposal, especially with interrelated sounds and images.

Alicino (2023) indicates that, through the documentary approach, it is possible to systematize the congruence between journalism, chronicle and narration, and from there develop denouncing discourses. It is in these circumstances that documents or archival material become living characters, which are externalized from their own contradictions.

Archival material is a documentary-style resource that is used to a greater or lesser extent in films, but it is elemental in *The Lovers & the Despot* (2016). This is precisely its strong point, and it even shows it off, as it narrates that some of Kim Jong-il's audio files were the ones that allowed the story of the protagonist couple to be taken seriously. This documentary has such a lush display of archival material, and so much variety, that it gives the impression that it was shot expressly for the film.

By contrast, *Kate Plays Christine* (2016) is virtually devoid of archival footage, with the exception of a couple of interviews of the real-life character. The rest is constructed based on testimonies of people who knew the journalist. Therefore, the film focuses more on generating interest in the actress's internal conflict.

Tower (2016) follows the same path, since there are no large amounts of archival material taken into account in the film, although it does include some audio excerpts, photographs and videos. In any case, its advantage lies in the use of the resource of animation, as this allows it to recreate the event and give greater credibility to the interviews.

American Animals (2018) completely dispenses with archival material, except for a single shot of the real characters when they are captured. It is this discarding that makes the film far from traditional documentary and close to fiction. It advocates for an absolute recreation of all real events, by professional actors.

4.2.7. Character follow-up

Kate Plays Christine (2016) uses the resource of character follow-up to elaborate its narrative, and this is what is relevant in this story, as it allows to maintain an emotional connection with the actress, while discovering the inner life of the journalist who is the main character in that event. In fact, she mentions that she wants to achieve empathy, so that the film is not only seen as an object of yellowish interest.

American Animals (2018) makes also a follow-up of the characters, while they plan the robbery, but this is done more from a fictional dynamic, and precisely in this segment all the interviews disappear. What is relevant here is that the director begins to play with points of view and perception, since the interviews had established that the facts were unclear and everyone had different versions of how they happened.

Tower (2016) generates a narrative support based on the different points of view of those who suffered the event and follows them, to the point of showing real people in the present day and elaborating emotional scenes focused on telling how they led their lives after the tragic event.

The Lovers & the Despot (2016) is also a film that is based on character follow-up and the memories of the main character, and it is precisely this that allows the events to have connection and meaning from beginning to end.

4.3. Timeline manipulation

Timeline manipulation is a technique that allows altering the chronological sequence of events in order to create an impact on the audience, or to convey a richer experience. In all areas, this manipulation should be carried out with transparency, especially when working with sensitive material, or stories linked to reality, since the best way would be to maintain the integrity of the facts.

4.3.1. Flashback

All four documentaries refer to stories from the past, and it is noticeable that, especially in the interviews, there is a recurring return to those moments, using memory to bring those facts into the present.

Kate Plays Christine (2016) is a film that does not have much material to draw on to go into the past, so it only uses two archival interviews, which the actress can draw on to build her character.

On the opposite side, *The Lovers & the Despot* (2016) has a lot of archival material to draw on in order to establish the narrative. While the characters are interviewed, the images follow one after the other to establish meaning.

The same path runs through *Tower* (2016), as it is built on interviews that allow to generate narrative lines that show images of what happened in the tragic event. *American Animals* (2018) also carries that line, especially at the beginning, and establishes the sense of the whole film, so, once the interviews give information and the conflict is exposed, the film takes a course that no longer needs to constantly resort to them.

4.3.2. Parallel editing

Tower (2016) works with parallel editing, as it is not focused on showing only one version of the story, but rather uses several points of view to recreate it. Thus, there are several events that occur simultaneously, and all of them have their excerpt and their importance. Some events are introduced at the beginning, such as the children on bicycles or the pregnant woman, leaving the stories open to be explored later, while other plots also move forward. The film completely dismisses the killer's point of view, presenting him as an anonymous character who is not meant to be assimilated or understood.

American Animals (2018), being the most fiction-oriented film, it features several parallel editing sequences, especially during the robbery, where multiple parties involved are followed by the cameras as the event unfolds. This approach is also used in complicated moments of the robbery planning.

Meanwhile, *Kate Plays Christine* (2016) and *The Lovers & the Despot* (2016) use sequential editing.

4.4. Interaction with the audience

The interaction with the audience has to do with their involvement in order to provide moments of thinking. There are different resources that appeal to this circumstance that enriches the cinematographic experience and allows audiences to have an active participation.

4.4.1. Use of metafictional elements

The film that allows to generate greater self-awareness of its cinematographic nature is *Tower* (2016), since the resource of animation is evidenced as something necessary to access a visual recreation of the events, but it is extremely evident and notorious as a resource itself. Anyway, the film is aware of its nature, so it plays with outlandish color and black and white animation, which generates an approach to reality, and at the same time breaks it to show the effect and maximize it.

American Animals (2018) uses metafictional elements by inserting real interviews and the actors, within their roles. In reality, the film would work well without the resource of the interview, but it is an authorial decision to include this layer of reality. This is precisely what adds self-conscious elements that establish a dialogue with the audience when they are shown, especially towards the end, when the theme of perception and memory is challenged.

Kate Plays Christine (2016) plays with the line of what is real and what is fictional from different perspectives. Recreation and dramatization of events have already been discussed, but here it is noteworthy to point out the fact of the very making of the film based on metafiction, since it becomes an experiential portrait of the process of acting creation, although it is not known to what extent this is real or not.

Finally, *The Lovers & the Despot* (2016) does not use metafictional resources because it does not need them. In this story, the real events are so out of the ordinary that they are in themselves a relevant finding that has no need for stylistic exacerbation of any kind.

4.4.2. Use of rhetorical questions and opportunities for the audience thinking

Towards the end of *Kate Plays Christine* (2016), a very tense scene is presented, and it directly involves the audience. In it, the actress recreates the moment of suicide while she is broadcasting news on a television channel. At a crucial moment, she pulls out a gun and points it at herself. At this moment, the actress challenges this complex action directly to the director, practically looking at the camera. This is not only directed at the director, but also at the audience: why do they want to see it? An uncomfortable silence is created that seems to call for thinking. Finally, the actress decides to carry out the recreation of the suicide, highlighting the morbidity present in both the creators and the audience. Interestingly, there are moments when this sequence seems forced, but the film so skillfully plays with the boundaries between fiction and reality that it prompts an alternative thinking about how far the director is willing to go, at the expense of this actress and the message meant to be conveyed.

The Lovers & the Despot (2016) uses the always functional resource of showing in text the resolution of some events, or how some characters who appeared in the film ended up. The curious thing here is that, the ending precisely connects with a complex political reality that is lived at the international level at present day in North Korea, and the film takes a side, by condemning this type of political guidelines.

Tower (2016) has an emotional resolution, with the pregnant woman speaking to the camera, already in the present day, stating that she forgives the murderer and establishing the nature of the film, which was necessary so that those who lived that day could express themselves and externalize their pain.

American Animals (2018) also provides silences for the audience's reflection, especially towards the end, once the police trap them and they are apprehended. All the interviewees are left in silence, and an authentic image is shown of the characters getting into a police van. Once this has been resolved, they go over an issue that had

remained latent throughout the footage, which was the lies that were woven between them and the views they had about what they did and how they did it. Then a final thought is generated from the woman who was most affected by the robbery.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Narrative forms do not focus only on fiction or documentary, instead they generate nuances that integrate different aspects of hybridization (Renov, 2012). The films under analysis make it possible to observe and reflect on the way in which reality is shown in current cinematography, without intending to distinguish between the genres of fiction and documentary, but rather to try to undermine those boundaries and seek ways of connection that improve the visual and narrative proposals.

This is a trend adopted by several filmmakers today, added to the connotations of post-modernity that suggest disruption, breaking of narratives and a generic mixture that splits realities and starts from there in its search for meaning. But, within this, it is also appropriate to point out that not everything that comes from these slogans is worthy of being pointed out as a novel exponent of the rupture of fiction and nonfiction genres.

The films presented in this paper are a reflection of the fact that a work of this nature must have a self-consciousness of generic breakdown, all for the sake of a general purpose, not for the sake of being a simple exercise in style. Each of the works enters and contaminates the great genres (Orellana, 2003) with a purpose: To suggest a thinking about the representations in today's world, which besides exposing diverse, complex and difficult realities, some more committed to history, and others more personal, but which apart from generating a sense of historical restructuring through the resources of one and another genre, also motivates the discussion about the cinematographic artifact itself, starting from the narrative and image dilemmas that generate deeper layers of meaning, which are gradually inserted to provide greater questioning among the audiences.

The above becomes an eloquent exercise. It leaves aside the debate on whether it is more or less feasible to be more or less real, or to skip or not different resources, but on how to compose a story to be valid among all the current audiovisual conglomerate. The meaning should be deep at all levels for audiences that are increasingly more difficult to surprise, reaffirming what Martínez-Cano et al. (2020) point out.

The combination of fiction and documentary elements in the analyzed films demonstrates significant innovation in cinematic narrative. For example, the films use techniques such as timeline manipulation and direct interaction with the audience to construct a narrative that challenges traditional perceptions of reality. This is seen in how films alternate between fictional and real scenes, creating an immersive experience that engages the audience in a reflective journey.

Filmmakers, nowadays, use genre hybridization to explore and depict complex social and cultural issues. In the films under analysis, fictional elements are integrated into documentaries to highlight particular aspects of reality that might not be as evident in a strictly documentary format. For example, *American Animals* (2018) performed a

recreation of events by using actors to offer a deeper and more emotional interpretation of the events, which helps the audience to connect emotionally with the issues being presented.

The mixture of fiction and documentary also has a notable impact on audience perception. The films under analysis show that this hybridization can influence how audiences interpret and process the information being presented. By combining real elements with fictional narratives, filmmakers can guide the audience towards a more nuanced understanding of the events and issues being presented. This is reflected in the emotional and cognitive response of the audience, who are more engaged and reflective of the hybrid representations.

Furthermore, it is pertinent to point out that the methodological approach used in this research can be useful to the scientific community for the analysis of generic and narrative conventions, as it proposes a profound reflection on current cinematographic representation, and updates and expands existing methodologies by integrating an interdisciplinary approach that blurs the boundaries between fiction and documentary productions.

In addition to the above, the research is innovative because it is not limited to categorizing films according to predefined genres, but explores how each work self-constructs and contaminates those genres with a narrative and reflexive purpose. Moreover, the proposed methodology invites other researchers to replicate and reinterpret the analysis in different cinematic and cultural contexts, thus fostering a broad dialogue on the evolution of contemporary cinema and its implications for the representation of reality.

On the other hand, the limitations of the research have to do with providing an exposure of genre hybridization in contemporary cinema with only four films, which is not representative of all existing hybrid productions. In addition, the selected films may be influenced by specific cultural and geographical contexts, limiting the generalization of the findings to other regions and cultures.

Finally, the prospects of this study indicate that, for future research, it would be beneficial to expand the sample of films analyzed to include a wider variety of genres and cultural contexts. In addition, comparative studies between different regions of the world could provide a more global view of how genre hybridization is developing in cinema. It would also be useful to investigate how different audiences perceive and respond to these hybrid films to better understand their impact in various sociocultural contexts.

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