**Documentary adaptation of non-fiction literature**

Summary of a doctoral dissertation by Karol Starnawski

The theoretical framework for this dissertation is built around various adaptation forms of non-fiction literary works in Polish documentary cinema. The topic itself is strongly related to my directing experience so far. I have made two documentary films that are both, to some extent, based on non-fiction books. The first one – *Shadows of the Empire* – is an extension of some plot from a book by a reporter Tomasz Grzywaczewski *Limits to your dreams*. *On unrecognized states.* The second one – *Grandpa's Orchard* – that I have been working on as part of my Ph.D., draws some elements of the story from a book by Witold Szabłowski *Righteous Traitors. Neighbors from Volhynia*. In both cases, the book authors became scriptwriters. The mentioned professional experiences made me reflect on this type of documentary cinema-making, in which the author of a non-fiction book that is the foundation for a documentary film, becomes a co-creator of the film. These reflections helped me formulate some research questions for my theoretical framework. Why do documentary filmmakers turn to non-fiction literature? What are the mechanisms and ways of transforming literary matter into film matter? How do documentary filmmakers treat literary material? Why do they need it? When does literary material help them, and when may it become a burden? What do they do with a literary piece, how do they process it? Who is a non-fiction writer for a documentary filmmaker? A partner, a rival, or a stranger? I narrowed my considerations down to Polish examples of documentary adaptations of non-fiction writing, as I considered that it is in Poland that this type of documentary cinema-making is most fully carried out and developed.

In the first chapter, I focus on providing the historical context for the development of both forms of art. Looking back at the paths of documentary directors, as well as non-fiction writers, I try to identify the similarities as well as the differences between documentary film and non-fiction literature. In this chapter, I put forward a thesis that today's cooperation between non-fiction writers and documentary filmmakers has been determined by certain circumstances of the past, thanks to which the artists from both disciplines understand each other quite well. Both film and literary documentaries have advanced as forms of art to almost become on par with fiction and feature. Also, writers and filmmakers both have been placing human protagonists at the very center of their stories. I draw attention to the fact that through the prism of human fate, "non-fiction" film and literary artists try to tell a more universal story about Poland, or the world.

In the next part dealing with the works of a Polish reporter Hanna Krall, I look at how significant an impact she had as a writer on the Polish documentary cinema of the 1970s. Two Polish documentary filmmakers, Marcel Łoziński and Wojciech Wiszniewski, made films based on Krall's literary pieces.   
I conduct a comparative analysis of Krall's texts with the works of the aforesaid documentary filmmakers while attempting to find answers to my research questions.

Next, I focus on contemporary documentary films (since 2000) based on non-fiction books. To gather the material necessary to write this part of the thesis, for over a year I interviewed many writers and documentary filmmakers who had made films together. I recorded conversations with these artists as a foundation for writing this chapter. I asked them my research questions, which made it possible for me to attempt to define the process of transformation of the non-fiction literary matter into that of film and documentary. I devoted a considerable part of this chapter to the characteristics of the cooperation between two authors: a director and a non-fiction writer. I tried to find an answer to how to build a partner relationship in such a cooperation, as it is exposed to many disputes.

In the last two chapters, I analyze my own documentary experience in making *Shadows of the Empire* and *Grandpa's Orchard*. When describing my struggles with the documentary matter, I tried to confront them with the conclusions I drew from conversations with other filmmakers and writers.  
I asked myself the same research questions and tried to answer them. Particularly in the case of *Grandpa's Orchard*, I describe each stage of the work in depth – from cooperation with Witold Szabłowski, the author of the book who also became the author of the script, to the detailed presentation of the process of adapting individual elements from the book, such as: characters, locations, dramatic structure, and the form of the story.

I conclude that the process of the documentary adaptation of non-fiction literature is a phenomenon on its own and requires an individual approach. It is not possible to adapt literature into a documentary following the models from feature cinema. I explain based on my own works, as well as the works of other documentary filmmakers, that it is neither possible nor desirable to directly translate non-fiction literary matter into documentary matter. This is due to the peculiarities of the documentary genre. Typically, documentary filmmakers pick some elements from non-fiction. They may take some plot and try to develop it, to look once again at the characters, but already in slightly different circumstances that directors create on set.