

The Parodic Nature of the Appropriation of Factual Codes and Conventions in Mockumentaries

*Both parody and satire depend on
the sophistication of the viewer,
and on some familiarity with the parodic target.*
Carl Plantinga

In 2001 Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight, classifying film scripts according to their relation with the factual discourse generated by a given text, created their own list of mock-documentaries.¹ If we look at some interesting examples of the genre produced outside the English-speaking world such as *Dark Side of the Moon*, *Year of the Devil*, *Czech Dream* and *First on the Moon* through the prism of the classification proposed by the Australian-New Zealand researchers then they can be placed probably more between Degree II (critique) and Degree III (deconstruction) of mockumentaries rather than belonging to Degree I (parody) although in a certain sense they all possess the features of a parody.

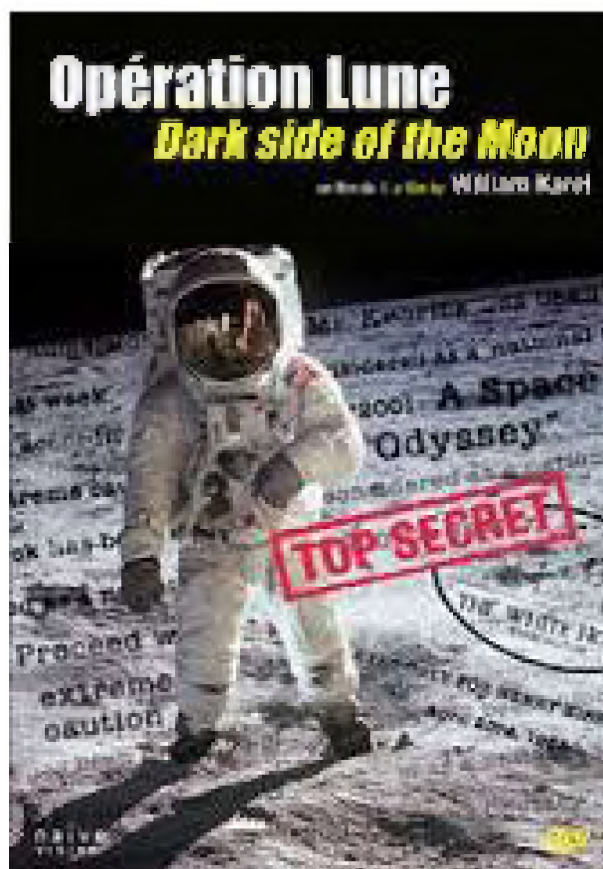
Dark Side of the Moon

William Karel's 2002 French film *Opération Lune*² (aka *Dark Side of the Moon/Kubrick, Nixon und der Mann im Mond*³) is one of the most intriguing and important mock-documentaries capable of deceiving even an experienced viewer; ostensibly it records discovering previously unknown, sensational facts about the historical US landing on the moon in July 1969.

The off-camera commentary defines space flights as a highly spectacular and prestigious and thus important aspect of the Cold War waged by the USA and the USSR. When in 1961 Yuri Gagarin became the first man in history to fly into outer space President John F. Kennedy proclaimed that sending a man to the moon should become one of the main goals of the American nation. This task was assigned to the German scientist Wernher von Braun, a former NSDAP member recruited by the Americans at the end of World War II. Having gained experience working on the production of V1 and V2 rockets von Braun became involved with NASA. In January 1967 the crew

of Apollo 1 died in a fire during a launch pad test. Three months later, cosmonaut Vladimir Komarov, commander of the first multi-man spaceflight, perished while returning to Earth. Yuri Gagarin died in a training plane crash, and in July that year a Soviet rocket exploded when its fuel tanks were being filled. The Americans gained a momentary advantage concealing the fact that space conquest rivalry was actually a cover-up for a more significant if less spectacular issue – the national defence system. The construction of spaceships was a part of a highly expensive missile programme. Supportive public opinion, however, was necessary to convince Congress about the need for high expenditure relating to the defence system. A flight to the moon, a peaceful enterprise, won universal support. Still, it was necessary to show what the immense sums of money had been spent on. Von Braun was the first to realize that an expedition to the moon must be a captivating show, which only Hollywood was able to produce. "Dream factory" professionals were asked to help. Briefly before the Apollo 11 launch entire Hollywood stopped working on other films and 700 technicians travelled to Cape Canaveral. Producer Jack Torrance of Paramount Pictures supervised the whole undertaking. Attention was paid to every single detail but something unpredictable that people should not be allowed to witness could always occur. Technical difficulties could have prevented the transmission of images presenting man's first steps on the moon. The White House was prepared also for this eventuality, and it was decided that an "emergency" studio-set version of the landing would be produced. According to the off-screen commentary President Nixon found it more important to have the astronauts seen walking on the moon than to have them actually doing it. This is why he chose to produce the world's most expensive film of all times: the staged landing of Apollo 11. If the astronauts had landed safely but could not transmit live coverage back to Earth due to unforeseen technical issues the whole extremely expensive undertaking would have been a sheer waste of time from the PR viewpoint. In the case of a failure of the Apollo programme photos were needed to show to the wavering audience. The President ordered Donald Rumsfeld to make Stanley Kubrick a proposal to direct the undertaking. Karel's film suggests that Neil Armstrong's famous moon walk either did not happen at all or, if it did take place, the TV audience of 2 billion watched a staging directed by Stanley Kubrick in the same Borehamwood soundstage (Great Britain) where he shot *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The filmmaker agreed to become involved because he owed a debt of gratitude to the authorities for being permitted to shoot some of the scenes of *Doctor Strangelove* (1964) in actual Pentagon locations. The film presents evidence backing the staged landing the-

sis, e.g. photos of a staked fluttering flag even though there is no wind on the moon, astronauts casting shadows in diverse directions and thus suggesting the application of several sources of lighting, no blast crater visible under the rocket's nozzle, a clearly seen and as if illuminated inscription on the spacecraft saying: "United States" even though the rest of the spaceship is hidden in deep shade, information about extreme temperature changes on the moon, which would cause considerable chemical transformations of the film's emulsion and mechanical damage of the camera itself, information that X-radiation would have blurred the film tape and that ultraviolet rays would have distorted colours perfect in the transmission, that with lunar gravity being different from its Earth counterpart the astronauts' weight would have been insufficient to leave the deep footprints on moon dust that we see in the photographs, that there should have been dust around the landers, that the temperature and radiation changes on the moon are deadly for men while the spacesuits worn by the astronauts could not have protected them, that in all the photographs made on the moon there was no flash, which according to experts should have been visible since the astronauts taking the photographs would have been reflected in the helmets of other crew members, etc. In addition to evidence of this kind presented by former KGB agent Dimitri Muffley (Soviet Intelligence suspected mystification and discovered its shortcomings) the thesis' credibility is boosted by testimony of people familiar with the truth about the staging, such as Kubrick's widow, who seems to confirm the revelations unearthed by the film, her brother (Kubrick's executive producer), Nixon's secretary Eva Kendall, Hollywood producer Jack Torrance, Marla Vargas (sister of the cosmonaut Buzz Aldrin), Rabbi W.A. Koenigsberg, David Bowman of the Houston Space Centre, and Ambrose Chapel, an ex-CIA agent and currently a pastor, who refused to participate in the undertaking but was forced to keep it secret. With each successive piece of evidence and eye-witness comment the film becomes increasingly credible, especially considering that Christiane Kubrick is joined by American political experts and public figures: astronauts Jeffrey Hoffman and David Scott, and NASA supervisor Farouk El-Baz. After some time, however, the more attentive viewer starts to pick up signals questioning or subverting the factual status of *Dark Side of the Moon*. The very moment when this happens – as is usually the case with mockumentaries – depends on the individual viewer. Suspicions certainly appear about 30 minutes into the film – if not earlier – when we hear that Nixon became afraid that the witnesses would talk and wanted to halt the whole operation but it was already too late and the machinery had been set in motion. According to the commentary, an assassination



list appeared on the President's desk. It is also hard to believe in a hunt for members of the film crew producing the moon hoax and their killings, or to treat seriously the suggestion that a heart attack was not necessarily the cause of Kubrick's death. This is highly far-fetched and this is exactly how it is supposed to be because *Dark Side of the Moon* is a mystification, a mock-documentary to be precise, which – as I have already mentioned – if included on the Roscoe and Hight list would be probably classified as belonging to Degree III. William Karel, the director, is a Tunisian-born French filmmaker known as a serious version of Michael Moore, author of political and historical documentaries dealing with sensitive subjects. Karel supposedly likes to recall François Truffaut's words that a documentary is a thousand times more of a lie than fiction, where things are clear from the very beginning. Advertised by official CBS material as a subtle mixture of fact, fiction and hypotheses, *Dark Side of the Moon* applies documentary testimonies, archival film material and extensive interviews, mixing them together perfectly at the editing stage. Consequently, for quite some time the final result convinces us that we are witnessing the unveiling of truth – concealed for many years – about the first moon landing directed by Kubrick in a soundstage. We become less certain about the film's status (or at least we should do so) when we learn the truth about the numerous murders contracted by the US authorities to eliminate witness-

es of the mystification; this truth is spewed by such figures as Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms, astronaut Buzz Aldrin, assistant to Kissinger Lawrence Eagleburger, General Alexander Haig, former Deputy Director of the CIA Vernon Walters, Christine Kubrick and Jan Harlan. But do these persons really convey the revelations? A more thorough analysis of the film indicates that they do not. Concrete – frequently shocking – information is delivered by a voice-over or fictitious characters played by actors. Take this example: off-screen commentary about Kubrick's close relations with NASA is immediately followed by added – as if to confirm – remarks by Christine Kubrick and Jan Harlan, even though they only discuss a special Zeiss lens originally designed for a NASA satellite programme, which – we learn from another source – was lent to Kubrick (presumably in recognition of his *Space Odyssey*) for shooting *Barry Lyndon* (1975). Eve Kendall, Nixon's secretary, recounts that someone from Nixon's circle asked: *What if we film the first steps on the Moon in a studio?* but Kendall is a fictitious character portrayed by Barbara Rogers. Kendall's statement is followed by a cut and Rumsfeld saying: *I talked to the President and Kissinger supported me...* We never find out what exactly Rumsfeld told the President, but we get the impression that he initiated the whole mystification. Another sentence spoken by him is just as enigmatic: *I thought this was the right thing to do because we have to do something to show that we are still the United States of America...* General Vernon Walters says that he warned the President: *It is very dangerous to lie in the United States*, but we cannot tell what lie he had in mind. From astronaut Buzz Aldrin we learn only that: *There were some unusual things that happened*, such as: *President Nixon had prepared some remarks for a speech to give if we could not leave the moon and come back*. The off-camera commentary mentions Aldrin's depression after he returned from the mission. His wife, Lois, says that he became an alcoholic, at loss what to do with himself, and his sister, Marla Vargas (a fictitious character portrayed by Jacquelyn Toman), embellishes the story by recalling how Aldrin used to get drunk every day. Meanwhile, the viewer's imagination provoked by the meticulously edited footage links these comments with the mystification into a cause-and-effect chain. This also happens when astronaut David Scott proclaims: *This was a great film*, presumably talking about *Space Odyssey* while the viewer gets the impression that he meant the moon mystification. When the voiceover informs us that Nixon was overcome by panic leading to his condemnable decision, we see Rumsfeld claiming: *It is not something I wanna do (...) and (...) so I left*, but naturally he does not tell us what precisely he was not involved in. Haig, meanwhile, claims he

told Nixon: *This is going to turn into the biggest scandal that this country has ever seen. Those of us who worked with Nixon know not to take seriously everything he said when he was under stress*. This time not only do we not learn what words it was impossible to treat seriously, but also who uttered them. The situation repeats itself when Kissinger proclaims in front of the camera: *He said some awful things, but they were never done*. A pastor, a former CIA agent, who did not want to participate and was forced to vanish, assume a new identity – that of Ambrose Chapel – and promise he would keep the hoax secret, introduces us to an atmosphere of crime, plots and a conspiracy of silence but turns out to be a fictitious character performed by John Rogers. Paramount Pictures producer Jack Torrance (another fictitious character portrayed by David Winger) describes the production details of *the world's most expensive film*. We find out from David Bowman of the Houston Space Centre (enacted by Tad Brown) that Armstrong's famous sentence about the giant leap for mankind was actually written by someone else and that astronauts used to joke about it; the deadly threat posed by special forces to film crew members is mentioned by Rabbi W.A. Koenigsberg (a fictitious character played by Binem Oreg). As in every mock-documentary the closing credits offer a last chance to recognise the fictitious status of the film, with the disoriented viewers learning that the characters they assumed were authentic are actually portrayed by actors and that it was they, and only they, who made the most sensational, "expository" statements.

Distinct features of mockumentaries include the signals that the director sends from time to time to the audience (before explaining everything in the end credits), suggesting the fabricated character of the film. *Dark Side of the Moon* has its share of them, such as the names of fictitious *personae dramatis*. Eve Kendall is a character in *North by Northwest* (1959), Marla Vargas – in *The Barefoot Countess* (1954), Jack Torrance – in *The Shining* (1980), David Bowman – in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Ambrose Chapel is the name of the spy headquarters in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), Dimitri Muffley combines the names of two presidents from *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), and W.A. Koenigsberg is a play on the name of Woody Allen (W.A.), Koenigsberg being Allen's true surname. If these names failed to make audiences suspicious the grotesque story about the hunt for the film crew and their assassinations should certainly do the trick. Mention is due to the rabbi's excellent story recalling how for ten years he hid one of the production designers and taught him Yiddish: *One night he was set on by some hooligans in the Bronx. When they found out he was a Jew, they forced him to do a few alterations to their suits. Then they beat him up and left him for dead. He spent six months in a coma in Mount*

Sinai hospital. And one morning he died. Equally noteworthy is the off-camera information about the film crew escaping to Vietnam and the US government airdropping thousands (!) of armed soldiers and secret agents to catch and eliminate them, along with the hilarious recollections of alleged Vietnamese peasants (subtitled into English) about the agents arriving in their village: *For secret agents they weren't very discreet. They had no respect for anything. We found empty beer cans and McDonald's wrappers everywhere (...) Amateurs, real amateurs. One of them killed himself cleaning his revolver. We kept the body for the kids to play with (...). They were only interested in one thing: girls. It was a real obsession with them (...). They spent their whole time smoking grass. And it wasn't just mineral water they were drinking. They completely destroyed the village's atmosphere. A real disaster. Twenty years later, you can still see their traces (we see an old man drinking vodka straight from a bottle) And all for nothing! They never found anyone. A woman says: (...) They tried to pass themselves off as Vietnamese peasants. Their disguises and accents were perfect. But we identified them in 30 seconds (...) their commanding officer was black!* The end credits reveal that the Vietnamese peasants were probably residents of China and Laos, because the film features fragments of documentaries about the population of those two countries. The hints become stronger as the film draws to a close. The voice-over states that Nixon sent numerous armed forces to hunt down the filmmakers and ... dress up their murders to look like accidents. When Chapel says that several crewmembers died in accidents we see a man lying in a street, with a dozen or so Santas leaning over him, and when we hear that one of the assistant directors drowned in his pool we see two men throwing a dog into a lake. We also learn that a dismembered body of one of the filmmakers was found in Patagonia, with the police claiming it was suicide.

Another evident and thus remarkably funny signal is the fact that the already discussed proof of the moon landing hoax theory (the fluttering flag, the shadows, the absence of dust, the unexpectedly well preserved footprints, etc.), quoted in all publications and documentaries on the topic, features also evidence added by Karel – an image showing a photo of Kubrick shooting 2001: A Space Odyssey accidentally left on the fake moon surface. Finally – as I have already mentioned – we also find out that Dimitri Muffley, the former KGB agent discussing the evidence, is a fictitious character portrayed by Bernard Kirschhoff. Interestingly, although the film seems to support the thesis that the Apollo 11 landing on the moon was a trick (and many viewers interpreted it in this way), universally known and widely discussed proof is automatically ridiculed and deprecated by the fact that it was presented by a fictitious character. This is why the film can be catego-

rized as a first – and second-degree mock documentary according to the Roscoe and Hight classification. In a concealed manner it supports the myth of man on the moon, introducing only slight anxiety about its connections with reality and simultaneously deriding the codes and conventions of the documentary, challenging its authority, and inspiring concern about such other factual forms as daily news programmes.

Dark Side of the Moon is a masterfully assembled manipulation combining interviews and statements by authentic people taken out of context with stagings featuring actors portraying fictitious characters. The closing credits are followed by final interpretation directives. The so-called bloopers, i.e. mistakes made by cast members and jokes caused by the absurd nature of the dialogue include the twice repeated statement by an alleged KGB agent: *We soon realised the whole thing was a hoax...* along with a declaration by Walters, who is dubbed throughout the entire film: *Listen to me now and believe me because I'm going to tell you the truth...*; earlier, the sentence ended with the words (naturally, spoken by the actor dubbing Walters): *This could mean people's lives*, while the post-credits version has: *I want you to believe me because this is the truth (...) I never had any relationship with that woman.* At the end we also see a relaxed Rumsfeld saying: *You told me this was a high-class programme* and a laughing Helms also stating that he thought this was a serious programme. Does this mean that they agreed to have their statements used in the film and reacted with laughter? Intuition and experience gained in the course of the film tell us that these sentences too were taken out of context and do not concern *Dark Side of the Moon*. This may be confirmed by words unambiguously signalling at the end of the film that this is a parody of documentaries: *Any resemblance to actual living persons is purely coincidental. No goy was mistreated during the filming.* The director verified this in an interview for the Arte TV channel⁴ (although perhaps also in this case we should adopt a cautious attitude). When asked how he came up with the idea of shooting a documentary that does not reflect reality Karel answered: *I have just completed a film about Hollywood that does not correspond to (Hollywood's) reality. Together with an Arte France editor in charge of documentaries we were thinking about making a documenteur, to use Agnes Varda's term (a play on words – documentaire – documentary, and the similarly sounding menteur – lying, as in: fictitious). In this way we intended to contribute something amusing to the otherwise serious Arte programme line-up. This had to be an entertaining, funny film. First and foremost, we assumed that one should not believe everything the media are trying to sell, because it is always possible to persuade witnesses to give false testimony, forge archival materials, and completely distort the message of a documentary by using fake subtitles or dubbing. We wanted to present historical sub-*

ject matter but one that would be universally topical. Since the theme could not be awkward, murder and war were strictly out of the question. This is when we thought about photos of man's first steps on the Moon. This particular issue matched our requirements: the photos' authenticity has been discussed for the last thirty years. Jean-Luc Godard's statement declaring on a TF1 news programme: These live broadcasts are fake, provided an impulse. Sceptics can cite all types of proof: Aldrin became an alcoholic, Nixon was not there when the rocket was launched, and the astronauts travelled thousands of kilometres to spend only three hours on the moon. All very strange, so...

In the same interview Karel also put an end to all speculations about well-known people being aware of their involvement in his prank. Asked how he managed to convince the film's protagonists to participate, he answered: *Not a single one was in on the joke. The idea was to say that the interviews had a completely different purpose. This is why we did not let any of the witnesses into the secret. Only seven actors were involved and actually given lines to learn. They played some of the witnesses. (For example, the character of Nixon's adviser was taken from the film All the President's Men). Due to twisting the testimony of authentic figures we needed only one "false" witness, Nixon's secretary, to make the whole story logical and credible. We told the "real" witnesses that we were making a film about Kubrick, his film, the moon or NASA, and asked them totally vague questions. Christine Kubrick appeared in the film convinced that it was to tell the story of her husband and in good faith related Kubrick's contacts with NASA, which allowed him to borrow a military lens to shoot Barry Lyndon. Farouk El-Baz was convinced that he was going to take part in a film about behind-the-scenes of the U.S.–Soviet space race. Nixon's advisors were filmed in different places and for the purpose of other films, and their statements were taken out of the original context. Karel – as many authors of mockumentaries before him – was charged with attacking the media and questioning our attitude towards photographs. Without moon landing photos it would be impossible to fully render the event. In addition, the cinema exerts an influence upon news programmes. Many authentic historical events were captured on camera already after they actually took place: raising the American flag atop Mount Suribachi during the Battle of Iwo Jima, capturing the Reichstag, Americans landing in Somalia (shot two or three times). And during the Gulf and Afghanistan wars we did not see... a single authentic photo. I considered showing the role played by a photo, or its lack, in constructing an event to be an intriguing undertaking... But my film should not give the impression of being malicious... Nowhere did we actually say that Armstrong had not walked on the moon. The film only set forth a hypothesis claiming that the USA prepared itself for an eventuality that man's first steps on the Moon could not be photographed. When does the viewer begin to*

doubt? When do we let him know that he is dealing with a joke? This is not really clear. Hence we included a parodical collection of stylistic giveaways at the film's end in case anyone still believed it.

The director also formulated a summary: *Manoeuvring carefully between lies and truth, the film combines facts with total fabrication. We used all possible ingredients: "captured" archival film material, fake documents, and authentic interviews taken out of their original context or transformed by narration or dubbing, and staged interviews featuring actors, whose answers adhered to the screenplay...*

In keeping with the spirit of the mock-documentary theory a certain group of viewers took the film seriously even though it indicates its fictitious character on numerous occasions in an evident and amusing way and, as follows from the interview, despite the director's concern not to leave any doubts about its status. This reaction is demonstrated by comments on several Internet forums, both Polish and foreign, with some disoriented viewers asking for help in finding further information about the film, and others confessing how they were fooled by the joke when they saw the film for the first time and describing how pleasant it was to watch it more carefully for the second time. The Polish website of the Planete TV channel⁵ became the arena of a rather amusing discussion that simultaneously says quite a lot about the reception of mockumentaries. One viewer expressed his outrage caused by an article by Tadeusz Sobolewski, which he found shocking; in the last sentence the journalist aptly defined the mock-documentary message of the film (without, however, using the genre's name): *In the earlier Operation Luna, supposedly made for fun, he achieved a paradoxical effect. He had not only aroused distrust towards American propaganda but also towards films revealing behind-the-scenes goings-on of major politics, which put the chaos of reality into order by using one obsessive key.*⁶ And here is how the viewer reacted: *If the discussed documentary really is an intentional hoax then William Karel deliberately offended viewers all over the world, jeopardized the TV channels that decided to show the film, and intentionally endangered the independent foreign policy of the French state. I expect the Board of TV Planete in France to condemn this unprecedented media hoax and to apologise to Polish TV viewers for moral losses. I appeal to members of this forum – see this scandalous film for yourself...* The forum's administrator, who correctly interpreted the film's intentions but failed to completely decipher all its elements, especially the signals sent by the director, replied as follows: *The director did not intend to conduct an investigation about the moon landing but to prove that TV is a remarkably powerful medium. Contemporary technology makes it possible to manipulate other people's words and images in almost any way you want. Karel deliberately does not reveal which*

fragments of the film were falsified by means of editing and which were not. In this way the viewer can experience for himself how difficult it is to distinguish the effects of a good editor's work from an original recording. There would not be so much confusion surrounding *Operacja Księżyc*⁷ if its author had decided to include a few words of explanation at its end. On the other hand, perhaps the director did not plan to reveal the truth so that those who have already seen this "mock-documentary" would not give away to first-timers which fragments of the film are real. Please note that TVP1 scheduled Karel's film for 1 April, April Fool's Day. The *Planete* premiere of the film was also held on 1 April. The viewer replied: Thank you (...) for the explanation, which I find satisfactory although I have to note that the Nazi regime already long ago proved the power of media's impingement, and an attempt at confirming this fact by using such a concocted film is pathetic. I would also like to add another aspect of the issue, which I find important, that is, the concern about the Polish viewer. The Polish viewer is more demanding and critical and reacts to the media in a more serious and engagée manner... As far as I know, films and dialogues fabricated in this way are used in Poland by radio and TV stations to produce amusing entertainment and not documentary films (...). I propose to call William Karel and other producers of his ilk media terrorists. The administrator's response is just as amusing: We agree with your opinion. Viewers in various countries should not be treated in the same way. This is precisely why *Planete* networks were divided in 2004. Ever since then the channel broadcast in Poland is prepared by a Polish staff. We showed *Dark Side of the Moon* when the schedule was still set up for several European countries (including Poland) in France. After the forum's participants discussed at length assorted political matters, the same outraged viewer returned to the film: It was my intention to protest against showing cinematic jokes as documentaries. The fact that during the narrator's account of US soldiers assassinating four secret agents, who worked with Kubrick on the moon landing production, information that: "assistant director Jim Gow was drowned in his swimming pool" is followed by a scene of a dog being thrown into a large lake shows the way in which the director makes fun of the viewer. The problem is that watching this brief scene you get the impression that a man is being tossed into water. Not one of my friends who also watched the film saw a dog. Myself included. Only when examining this scene frame after frame (!)/my emphasis -B.K.-K/⁸) you can clearly perceive the outline of a dog.

Why am I writing all this? I am concerned with the fact that films of this kind not only offend the viewer and are detrimental to the whole category of documentaries, but also ridicule the foreign policy of France as obsessively anti-American. In this situation, even the best documentary criticising Big Brother overseas can arouse distrust. Another viewer reacted as follows: After more or less

ten minutes it became obvious that we are dealing with a joke, irony and satire. The objective? First, the pretentiousness of politicians, the foolishness of the media, the pursuit of sensational conspiracy theories, and the lack of ordinary common sense and a critical assessment of what the mass media are selling us. The film was great fun... The outraged viewer did not give up and quoted his teenage nephew: "The film cannot be classified into any category. If you insist, it can be treated as political satire or farce featuring qualities of therapeutic treatment aimed at people afflicted with a severe case of the Big Brother syndrome. Good mood after viewing the film testifies to its considerable therapeutic assets". And what about the dog? Here's the rub. He [the nephew] could not understand why a dog was given the part of a man. According to him, a dog playing the role of a man is already grotesque and spoils the film's harmony. One more comment on the same forum: When watching a science fiction film, on 1 April to boot, you should keep your distance. Moreover, as far as I remember the film did not claim that the moon landing never happened; it mentioned that the recording equipment did a bad job and that it was necessary to shoot the film in a studio during the "London session", which I do not find so improbable. This is the way in which the Polish Television website advertised the film: *Previously unknown, sensational facts about the historical U.S. landing on the moon in July 1969. Eminent American political experts: Henry Kissinger, Donald Rumsfeld, Lawrence Eagleburger, General Alexander Haig and Richard Helms reveal the truth concealed for many years ...* and quoted (without explanations and a critical commentary) the earlier cited fragment of the film's screenplay about the Cold War circumstances of developing the moon hoax.⁹ A description of the film prepared by an organiser of one of the festivals showing it promoted it as: *Shocking French documentary revealing the most concealed secrets of the American space programme. It turns out that the scenes of Apollo 11 landing on the moon, which we all know from, i.a. film newsreels, were staged in a studio and directed by none other than Stanley Kubrick himself (!). Statements by Henry Kissinger, Donald Rumsfeld and astronaut Buzz Aldrin add credibility to Karel's revelation.*¹⁰ These quotes are rather evocative because within the context of an earlier analysis of the film they tell us about problems with the reception and interpretation of a mockumentary and are among the first records of a Polish audience (ordinary viewers and people somehow connected with the film industry) confronting this cinematic form. Foreign forums, even though audiences in, e.g. the US and the UK are considerably more familiar with the discussed genre, also featured comments full of approval for the more humane face of Henry Kissinger, the relaxed stance of Buzz Aldrin, Alexander Haig and Kubrick's widow, and admiration that a man as busy as Rumsfeld found time to participate in such a film, along with the question: what inspired

Rumsfeld to appear, and even assumptions that White House personalities became involved in the joke to distract attention from a hoax of a much higher calibre. The latter suggestion was actually mentioned on the website of the Grimme Preise award, which the film received in 2003.

Dark Side of the Moon was clearly inspired by *Capricorn One*, Peter Hyams' 1978 Mars landing hoax film. With the flight date approaching NASA specialists realise that the spaceship's life-support system does not guarantee success and prefer staging the landing to cancelling the mission. Just before the ship's launch its crew becomes removed from *Capricorn One* and taken to a desert military base, where they are informed that they will have to stage the Mars footage. The astronauts initially refuse, but the authorities threaten their families if they do not cooperate. While the empty ship continues its flight to Mars the astronauts spend several months filming the "Mars landing". The conspiracy involves only a few NASA members, until technicians notice that the television transmission signal was sent from a near-by destination and spread the news to journalists. The technicians mysteriously disappear and the journalists find themselves in trouble. When the crew's return is expected, the real (empty) spacecraft is destroyed by fire during re-entry, officially plunging the whole world into deep mourning for the three heroes. The astronauts are killed since they are no longer needed and know too much. *Conspiracy Theory: Did We Land on the Moon?* – John Moffet's 2001 American documentary may have been the second source of inspiration for Karel. *Dark Side of the Moon* essentially appears to be a spin-off of the Moffet production. Both films are constructed in a highly similar way – they use interviews and archival footage and propose the same arguments and evidence of the staged Moon landing of Apollo 11; in Karel's film they are presented by a fictitious former KGB agent, but Moffet's picture features authentic characters – photography and sound experts, scientists and Bill Kaysing, the "king of conspiracy theories" specialising in tracking down evidence supporting the moon hoax theory. Both films expand the motif of staging man's first steps on the moon, but Karel focuses on Kubrick, the alleged director of this enterprise, and on the landing's studio-set staging, while Moffet is only interested in evidence of the hoax itself, which the film claims took place in a secret military base in the Nevada desert. Although Moffet allowed himself to make a joke by bringing in Mitch Pileggi, the *X-Files* star, as his narrator, he decisively defined his film's status by opening it with the following caption: *The following program deals with a controversial subject. The theories expressed are not the only possible interpretation. Viewers are invited to make a judgment based on all available information.*

Year of the Devil and Czech Dream

While in certain countries (e.g. the USA, the United Kingdom, New Zealand) the mockumentary is already a well-known and appreciated sub-genre, in many other ones it is taking its first steps albeit with films that can be classified as superior examples of this cinematic form. Among them is the excellent Czech *Rok dábla* (*Year of the Devil*, 2002) directed by Petr Zelenka. In the tradition of a majority of mockumentaries its classification proved a tough task for the reviewers. Some attempted to describe it as *docusfiction where, as the plot advances and absurd events start to accumulate, the viewer loses grasp of what is real and what is fiction... it makes genre classification difficult, freely referring to various cinematic styles, from the documentary and the music movie to the comedy. Its strength certainly lies in the creation of the presented world*; ¹¹ this depiction reveals the film's mock-documentary character. *Year of the Devil* initially produces the impression of a music documentary or, more precisely, a documentary biography of the Czech singer, composer and poet Jaromír Nohavica, featuring elements typical for motion pictures of this kind, such as footage from rehearsals and fragments of concerts. It applies absurd statements and weird occurrences to point out that its status is not entirely factual and we should not treat seriously everything we learn about Nohavica; the fact that he took part in the film and mocked his own ups and downs tells us more about him than the film's plot and the information it contains. Besides Nohavica, the film's list of authentic characters includes his friend, guitar player and composer Karel Plihal, the folk band Czechomor and Jaz Coleman, the English rock musician. The Dutch documentary maker Jan Holman (played by Czech filmmaker and distributor Jan Prent), however, is a fictitious character. The film tells the story of Holman, a recovering alcoholic, arriving in the Czech Republic to shoot a documentary about a detox hospital. This is where he meets Nohavica and his guardian angel Plihal and abandons his original plan by setting out on tour with the musicians. Zelenka, mixing a fictitious character with authentic ones, resorted to a solution similar to Karel's *Dark Side of the Moon*, the difference being that while Karel assembled various filmed quotes featuring well-known people and took them out of context, in Zelenka's film authentic characters actually agreed to join the proceedings. The film maintained the Nohavica myth, endowing it with an ambiguous character and simultaneously slightly mocking biographical documentaries of this sort. Some critics correctly classified the film by putting it upon the same level as the quintessential mockumentary *This Is Spinal Tap*, but at the same time calling it a fake documentary ¹².



Cesky sen (Czech Dream)

Cesky sen (Czech Dream) from 2004 is an extraordinary film within the mock-documentary context. Before developing their *first Czech reality-show film* or *first Czech documentary hypercomedy*, Vit Klusak and Filip Remunda created a mock-situation of sorts, a far-flung hoax intended to ridicule the post-communist country's consumerism, expose the mechanisms of advertising and susceptibility to the latest kind of propaganda and manipulation, showcase the power of the media and, simultaneously, reveal possible (and applied) documentary practices. Klusak and Remunda, at the time students at the Prague film school, hired ad specialists (many unaware what they became involved in) to arrange a two-week promotional campaign of *Cesky Sen*, a fictional hypermarket. They created a logo, TV and radio advertisements, 200 000 leaflets promoting products of the *Cesky Sen* brand, posters, ads in newspapers and magazines, 400 illuminated billboards, an jingle and a website. On the day of the "grand opening", however, the estimated 4 000 potential clients, who came to a meadow in the Letnany district saw only a colourful hypermarket façade painted on canvas. The idea was inspired by a happening devised by Peter Lorenc who in 1996 handed out several thousand posters advertising a non-existing GIGADIGA hypermarket. The opening was held on an empty meadow, where Lorenc placed a banner with the inscription: *It's better to go on a woodland walk*. At first glance, *Czech Dream* is an account of the successive stages of preparing a major provocation, all the way to the grand "non-opening" of the hypermarket,

while simultaneously bringing the audience closer to the event's social background and the views and mood (also political) of the Czechs, proposing a sociological observation, and presenting "behind-the-scenes" of a major advertising campaign. But there is more... An experienced mockumentary audience derives pleasure from participating in a game consisting of searching for and interpreting signals made by the directors to confirm the film's fictitious status. In *Czech Dream* the game is – so to speak – dual. The majority of descriptions, reviews and comments consider it to be a documentary account of a major hoax and only the expression: *hard-to-classify documentary* reveals that their authors, overwhelmed by the scope of the "mock-situation" itself, have doubts and are uncertain about the film's status. Viewers acquainted with the directors' intention will enjoy spotting signals addressed during the advertising campaign to potential clients, which at the very least should have stirred up certain misgivings (the hypermarket's name, its logo with a comic strip balloon, anti-advertising slogans: *Don't go there, Don't hurry, Don't spend money, Don't queue up, Don't shove* and the remarkably low prices, i.e. a digital camera for less than 1 \$). Members of the audience perceive them as signals not only because the film's directors reveal the technical details of the entire undertaking, of which potential clients were unaware (the directors' new image, the simultaneous casting for a documentary of families regularly spending their free time in hypermarkets), but predominantly because the audience is from the very outset informed that eve-

rything was undertaken with the film in mind, and views the whole enterprise through this prism, which subconsciously influences the reception of the hoax and the attitude towards its victims (*how could they have fallen for it!*). The film entertains its viewers, who feel compassion for, but also superiority to the future victims of the joke, and harbour the impression that they play in the same team as the directors. I believe that the film also includes certain mock-documentary qualities encouraging reflection on the capabilities of the documentarians and the viewers' susceptibility to possible documentary manipulations, caused if not by belief in the factual accuracy of a documentary then by instinctive trust in it. Signals informing about the film's actual state are not overly exposed and the hoaxes and prevarications are not explicit. We are dealing rather with the directors' manipulations or perhaps merely interventions consisting of selective footage in the manner of Michael Moore's documentary method, which in this particular case boils down to manipulation. In any case, such moments may seem suspicious to the more careful viewers, e.g. the fact that a film ridiculing consumerism and exposing advertising mechanisms also becomes involved in ad barter relations. Two minutes of the end credits are dedicated to showcasing logos of companies backing the production. The whole sequence about a shopping trip of the Kudrnov family, winners of the casting for the alleged documentary: *Hypermarket with a Human Face*, is unquestionably an advertisement of the Tesco chain. During the directors' transformation into managers, set in a Hugo Boss salon where they hire suits, a salesman turns to the camera and says that the time has come to fulfil the mutually beneficial agreement and show the Hugo Boss logo for ten seconds; he then rearranges a lapel, the camera zooms on the logo and the filmmakers count the remaining time. In a scene of shooting the advertisement involving a man changing his clothes, an employee of the ad agency organising the campaign points to the Mark/BBDO logo on his cap and the camera zooms in. When posing for ad photos in an atelier, Remunda and Klusak are clearly mocking the whole situation by making exaggerated moves, faking a relaxed and cool mood, and smiling in a studied, artificial way. This sequence is for a moment interrupted by a series of photos of well-known people with equally premeditated expressions and smiles, i.e. Vaclav Havel with wife Dagmar, Karel Gott, Helena Vondračková, and Vaclav Klaus. In this way, the film directors are compared to people who play act in front of the camera, strike a pose and pretend to be someone else, and not to expository documentary makers or journalists, usually on the other side of the camera. The excessively long scene of the conflict between the directors and the ad agency people also looks suspiciously artificial, as if it were to present a

single sentence uttered by an ad agent, thus creating the impression of the directors winking knowingly at the audience (sending a signal). One of the filmmakers wants the posters to include a sentence claiming that on opening day no one shall leave empty-handed. An agent objects, adding that he refuses to lie. After a heated discussion the agent finally declares: *Perhaps for you filmmakers cheating people is business as usual, but in the ad industry we don't lie. You may find this surprising but we don't.* One of the directors then asks him to repeat this statement. The agent looks straight into the camera and says: *I repeat. Even if you documentary makers lie in your films, we don't do it in advertisements.* The filmmakers once again question the status of their film and the work of documentarians in general in a scene with a furious fisherman who found out that there is no hypermarket. When asked what the whole story has taught him, he replies: *Never trust filmmakers.* Similar moments indicating the authors' intervention are numerous. The entire motion picture is interrupted – as is the practice of many TV stations – by advertisements, but the ones shown here promote the opening of Cesky Sen. From the casting footage of families, supervised by consumer behaviour specialist Dr Jitka Vysekalova, we are shown only interviews whose participants expressed their enthusiastic attitude towards supermarkets and spending free time in them (*I love supermarkets. I find them a source of great joy. You can really relax in a hypermarket*). In one of the scenes a woman says: *This is not a dream, this is reality, this is Harmony.* When the director asks: *What did you say?* and wants her to repeat the sentence, she once again recites her (?) reflection.

In a scene shot after the Kudrnov family left the supermarket, the director asks one of the women to sing something in front of the camera. She immediately agrees and performs together with her daughter an old folk song, in broken English but in tune:

*Hey, ho, nobody's home
meat or drink nor money have I none
Everybody will be happy
Hey, ho, nobody's home.*¹³

We then hear a replay, this time with a professionally arranged orchestral backup and accompanied by a magnificent sunset. During an earlier conversation with the filmmakers the same woman declared: *Our lives are short, let's live them the best way we can.* Curiously, the hypermarket's anthem¹⁴ features both a reference to the lyrics of her song (*a když nemá ani halir/if you have no money*) and to her statement (*život trvá jen chvíli/life is but a moment*). In one of the casting scenes, a mother of a teenager admits that she took her daughter on a six-kilometre excursion last weekend, but the girl did not enjoy herself at all; to cheer her up, in the evening they went shopping at Tesco (!) and this made her very happy. One of the directors then

asks the daughter to describe how she felt at the store after that exhausting walk. The girl replies: *It was... I don't know... as if it had been raining all day long and then I suddenly saw that the Sun came out. It was cool, fun and pleasant.* Strangely, the teenager's sentence turns out to have far-reaching consequences for the whole film. The fictitious hypermarket's anthem mentions, i.a. shopping that can brighten up a cloudy day (*Jak mohou ruže kvést, když je pošmurný den...*). After the Kudrnov family leaves Tesco and all push their full carts towards the parking lot, one of the women suddenly cries: *Look, the Sun is setting.* Klusak and Remunda decided to arrange their grand "opening" on 31 May 2003, the day of a solar eclipse. In one of the scenes the directors are driving a car at dawn (we see the Sun rising) and the radio's presenter is heard saying: *Today we shall witness a solar eclipse. The rising Sun will be unable to shine. On the contrary, it will be more of a shrinking crescent* (an amusing association with the scene of casting the families, when a woman asked what name she would choose for the new hypermarket answers: "Horn of plenty"). The announcer then goes on to say: *You should not look at this fascinating phenomenon for too long. Get up in the morning and put on your special eyeglasses.* And we see both directors in their Hugo Boss suits looking at the sky through darkened pieces of glass, while in the background resounds the hypermarket's anthem about rose-tinted spectacles (*Tak přijd se radovat jak dite/ spousta veci omami te/cely svet mužeš mít. Chce to jenom trochu chtít/chce to jenom nelenosit/zaparkovat, vzít si košík, neproměskat velký den/přišel k nám váš český sen*). Later, a woman who came three hours before the opening explains that she never participates in this kind of events but her husband woke her up to see the eclipse, so she came incidentally. Weather on the grand "opening" day was beautiful and sunny (as emphasised by those who gathered on the Letnany meadow), but rain poured when the hoax came to light and it turned out that there is no hypermarket. Not one is in sight when across the wet windshields of a car driving away the camera shows the increasingly distant façade of the Cesky Sen hypermarket. We get the impression that the day is coming to a close, although in reality the scene could have been (and probably was) shot on a completely different day. Moreover, at the end of the film newspaper headlines express outrage at the hoax, men replace street posters advertising the hypermarket with advertisements of cigarettes and credit cards, and the last scene is... a sunset; this time it seems to refer not to the feelings of the would-be clients, but to the second game that the directors were playing with the audience. All the elements fit together as in a jigsaw puzzle. Mention is due, however, to one more signal sent by the directors, albeit not in this particular film. They had prepared two trailers ("bloodless" and

"bloody"), of which the latter certainly appears to be staged not only because the scenes it contains are not featured in the finished film. It shows how after would-be clients found out about the hoax the crowd set off in pursuit after the escaping directors, who managed to jump into a car. Two brawny men, however, step in front of a crowd composed of predominantly senior citizens, one of them taking a baseball bat out of his car's trunk and bashing it against the front windscreen of the filmmakers' vehicle. Then the "bald one" drags them out of the car, start shoving, beating and kicking them, and tears the Hugo Boss suits into shreds while a miniskirt-wearing woman enthusiastically batters them with her handbag, presumably spewing obscenities, while the oldsters shout and shake their fists. The filmmakers finally manage to break free and, covered in blood, run in slow motion in the camera's direction. The overall intention is to create the impression of an authentic end to the whole story, although the directors assure that no blows were dealt. Interestingly, the DVD release of *Czech Dream* featured 32 minutes of bonus footage missing from the final cut, while the film's official website includes photos of bloodied directors in ripped clothes next to photos actually inserted in the film. Finally, press material prepared by the distributor for journalists included photos exclusively from the "bloody" trailer.

First on the Moon

The Russian mockumentary is still in its infancy. Aleksei Fedorchenko's 2005 *Perviy na Lune* (First on the Moon), awarded in Sochi¹⁵ and Venice¹⁶ and written by Alexandr Goronovsky and Ramil Yamalayev, is probably one of the first Russian examples of the genre. The fact that local reviewers came up with various neologisms to describe the film, which did not match any categories familiar to them, demonstrates that it was a total novelty in Russian cinematography. Local promotion material described it as *documentary drama* (a post-modern hoax), and critics wrote about a pseudo-documentary,¹⁷ a documentary farce,¹⁸ and a documentary look-alike.¹⁹ Polish material also called it a science-fiction quasi-documentary, while Western reviewers applied the term: mock-documentary, already adopted in many countries. In a documentary style the film tells the story of an alleged Soviet space project from the 1930s, culminating with a flight to the moon in 1938 and contemplating the absurdities and tragedies, which had to follow a clash between Stalinist mentality and scientific progress. Its protagonists had a chance to enjoy worldwide fame but instead became victims of Stalin's dictatorship. The plot begins in Chile, where the Soviet spaceship landed after returning from the moon, and follows Soviet astronaut Ivan Kharlamov (Boris Vlasov) travelling from Chile

across the Pacific Ocean and China to Mongolia, until he is captured by the NKVD and sent to a psychiatric hospital, from which he eventually manages to escape and, changing his identity in Zelig fashion, to stay on the run from the secret police. Fedorchenko mixes various footage ranging from authentic period film newsreels (sports parade in the Red Square) and fragments of Vasili Zhuravlyov's 1936 sci-f film *Kosmicheskii reys: Fantistechaskaya novella* (The Space Voyage), to scenes meticulously shot to resemble period newsreels, imitating NKVD operational materials with suitably distorted picture and sound and subtitles made to look old. The interspersed contemporary scenes shot in colour apply the form of a documentary investigation as they follow the ups and downs of people involved in the programme (i.a. Ivan Kharlamov, female athlete Nadezhda Svetlaya and circus dwarf Mikhail Roshchin). Fedorchenko declared: *Viewers should discover the game's rule on they own and decide whether they want to participate in it or not.*²⁰ As all mockumentaries, also this one finally reveals its actual status in the closing credits, according to which actors portrayed all the characters. Sometimes, the film is amusing (information about shooting archival footage with the aid of hidden, several-centimetre cameras, a dwarf joining the spaceship crew because the size of the spaceship was undetermined, words spoken by a guardian of the NKVD archives: *Since everything included here was filmed it really took place*, or nostalgic. Fedorchenko said: *The element of irony is very small, perhaps about 5 percent. The rest is something of a homage to the generation of our fathers and grandfathers, including their honesty and genuine belief in ideas.*²¹ The funny and self-reflective film has the qualities of a mock-documentary, but the director protests against this term and several others used to describe his work: *We didn't aim for mystification, but for a fantasy drama. Terms like "post-modernism" and "mock-documentary" are not what we intended. Perhaps the genre is documentary fantasy.*²² The director distances himself from the film's associations with Viktor Pelevin's space novel *Omon Ra*, because it was not his purpose to bring down myths but to recreate the grotesque and tragic character of the past and to symbolically commemorate people who fell victim to a policy intent on proving the greatness of the USSR at any cost. Fedorchenko regarded the heroism of volunteers taking part in the secret programme and put through gruelling training just to become superfluous and destroyed by the system as very important and quite a challenge. The director reportedly spent half a year watching old film newsreels to create an exact replica of the visual documentary styles of the 1930s. Thanks to the mastery of cinematographer Anatoly Lesnikov and production designer Nikolay Pavlov the film makes a great job of "imitating" old newsreels, even though 90% of it is actually

footage shot today. Kovalov noted: *Fedorchenko does not imitate the arbitrary "flow of life"; instead, he imitates the normative aesthetics of officious film-journals – educational, instructional, and other types of applied films intended for use in "official work". He reproduces precisely this method of staging... it is distinctively "an imitation of an imitation". (...) He creates a genuinely monumental image of a unified aesthetics. It is important to remember that in a commissioned film, shots of an official parade are different from shots of a sports parade; that the political leadership was to be filmed in one way and ordinary citizens in another; and that in different periods of Soviet power these norms changed.*²³

The film starts with the following caption: *Status of the film material does not meet the accepted standards of quality, but it has been included in the film due to its uniqueness.* This announcement suggests that we shall be dealing with archival footage of considerable significance, although genuine period material constitutes 10% of the whole film and is composed of widely known photographs that do not bring anything new to the film but boost its credibility. Although Fedorchenko protests against his film being described as a mockumentary it certainly has a mock-documentary dimension to it and thus can be analysed and interpreted as such. The director constructed the film using elements typical for a documentary: iconography, black-and-white archival newsreels and period film material (secret NKVD footage) as well as present-day "talking heads" commentary (shot in colour). Some 90% are look-alikes, which the director – as in every mockumentary – indirectly suggests to us from time to time, and the "talking heads" are actually actors, although obviously we do not find out until the final credits. In this case, laughable statements made by some of the characters should be recognised as hints about the real status of *First on the Moon*. Allegedly discussing the filmed events, their comments actually concern something completely different, are taken out of their original context, and when introduced into that of the film sound outright absurd. *First on the Moon* begins with a large close-up, which viewers misled by the title may identify as the surface of the moon. As the camera pulls back, however, it turns out that this is the Earth, with someone digging with a hoe. Black-and-white footage, as if from an old newsreel, shows Chilean peasants who, naturally in their native language, describe – the commentary suggests – a huge meteorite. *We immediately called the police* – says one of them – *but what can our police do? When my wife was robbed, they arrived two months later.* Since the closing credits feature information that material from the site where the "Chilean orb" fell is property of a Chilean natural science museum, the footage may actually be genuine; more, the peasants may be really discussing a meteorite, but the audience usually does not know

what the film's various non-Russian speaking witnesses are saying, because their comments are drowned out by a Russian translator. Comic image-commentary juxtapositions also act as a signal, e.g. the black-and-white "newsreel" *Soyuzkinozhurnal* nr. 54 noyabr 1936 titled: *Continuing Tsiolkovsky's Work*. The off-screen narrator speaks about Young Pioneers repeating Tsiolkovsky's experiment with a special centrifuge, and we see them putting a goose into a pot placed on a bicycle wheel, covering the pot with a lid and turning the wheel; finally, once the task is accomplished, they raise their arms in a Pioneers' greeting. Another scene shows thoughtful older men in white overalls, probably scientists, surrounded by metal skulls, ribs and spines. One of them in earnest explains the goal of their research: the creation of a Soviet man with metal bones, which will protect him in a collision with a car. Another example – an alleged Secret Service instruction film: *The Technique of Applying the SK-29 Camera for Secret Observation*, with the caption: *For professional use only*. The voice-over informs us: *Cameras are used for obtaining materials compromising the subject* and the black-and-white footage shows a girl standing by a bed and a man... shaving her legs. In the same absurd instruction film a soldier takes a small camera out of a briefcase, with the commentary explaining: *You can hide the SK-29 camera anywhere you want, in a briefcase, in a woman's purse, on the street and in a room*. A caption appears: *Unfold the shoulder strap*. An off-screen directive instructs: *The camera may be used without a stand in assorted situations*. Caption: *Keep your distance*. We see a woman and right behind her – a spy with a briefcase filming her. In another allegedly secret NKVD material in Fedorchenko's film the off-camera commentary informs us: *Subject under observation – Ivan Kharlamov*, and we see Kharlamov (or rather the actor portraying him) walking up to a street stall, buying matches, entering a room, lying down on a bed, walking up to a window and looking out of it while smoking a cigarette. The comical nature of the whole situation is the effect of a juxtaposition of serious off-screen commentary with the completely insignificant nature of situations from the life of the observed subject filmed by the secret, hidden camera and the very fact that such trivial material was preserved in the archive.

An even more interesting signal comes from a fragment supposedly shot at the Film Archive in Moscow, where an old curator of the NKVD archive, walking among shelves full of film cans, says: *Since everything included here was filmed, it had actually taken place*. Next, black-and-white footage pretends to be archival material from the 1930s and shows Ivan Sergeyevich Kharlamov; the off-screen narrator informs us that Kharlamov was wounded when suppressing a rebellion in Turkistan, but we see him in an idyllic scene, delightedly posing for the camera while sitting on a

camel. At this stage, there comes to mind a question: why do these presumed remnants of old newsreels focus on Kharlamov (clearly the only person the camera follows) already before he became a renowned, accomplished engineer? And if this is confidential material shot by the Secret Services, planning to recruit him, then why did Kharlamov (and only he) react to the camera's presence (look in its direction, wave)? In addition, the opinion voiced by the archivist is complemented by a statement made by a man bedridden in hospital, probably a former agent, who says: *You are asking strange questions, comrade director. There was nothing of this sort. My memory is good but I don't remember anything*. Both declarations sound especially interesting in the context of one of the film's last scenes, with soldiers burning numerous film reels taken out of cans, probably property of the archive shown earlier. Another hint are the fake smiles of the persons posing for the camera. One of the metal bone scientists is artificially and nervously laughing directly at the camera, although his colleagues seem not to notice this, absorbed by their urgent activities. Since what they are saying is ridiculous and their occupation is absurd, this man's conduct questions their gravity, producing the impression that he is unable to help laughing and slip into the appointed role as earnestly as his colleagues. Amusing doubts can also be inspired by the film's iconography. The colour footage displays an old book with Chinese writing and prints supposedly presenting the construction of a spaceship. The off-camera commentary discusses spaceship constructors from, i.a. the eleventh century, a treatise on this subject dating back to 1320, and nineteenth-century Russia, where battle missiles and submarines were designed. The documents, prints and old encyclopaedias on display may all be authentic but they do not necessarily show what the commentary is suggesting. The same holds true for some of the possibly genuine newsreel fragments accompanied by not automatically true commentaries, e.g. a fragment of a newsreel with couples dancing at some sort of a ball (perhaps on New Year's Eve) features commentary claiming that the ball celebrated Kharlamov's accomplishments. Typically for a mock-documentary the film also contains fabricated newspaper cuttings with headlines matching the film's topic, e.g.: *The last of the astronauts passed away in his workshop before the production of our film wrapped up*. We see young people putting a spaceship into a chest. *The project was terminated, people disappeared. Now it turns out that there was nothing. But there was a rocket*. We see some kind of a black-and-white chronicle, with street traffic and a paperboy. Narration: *In March 1938 news about the fall of a fireball in Chile was in all the papers*. We are shown people reading newspapers on a tram and old press headlines: *"Herald Express": Passengers of "Fortuna" airliner saw*

a fire ball; "El Mecerio": *El Sol cayo Sobre Chile. Ovnis o pruebas militares?* (The Sun fell over Chile), "L'Echo de Paris": *Meteorite? Comete? Martiens?*, "Il Buonsenso": *La Sfera Cilena – I Dei sono ritoranti in Cile?* (Chilean globe. The gods returned to Chile?), "Daily Express": *The Chilean Ball – a League of Nations Special commission investigation*. A headline: *The secret of the Chilean globe revealed*. Narration: *A shepherd found debris of foreign aircraft in the mountains*. Caption: *Chile. 200 kilometres north of the town of Olyagua. The area where the "Chilean globe" fell*. Off-screen commentary: *The Chilean globe fell on 24 March 1938. Suprun's rocket took off a week before on 16 March. Our production crew went to Chile. We watch the trip: And we found it. A tiny part of the dashboard of the very first Soviet spaceship. Local peasants sold the rest for 125 dollars*. The film also contains look-alike elements introducing mystery, conspiracy and secrecy, e.g. frames from supposed NKVD footage with German officers (actors in costumes, we learn later) observing candidates for the secret mission diving into water. When the director asks Fattakhov: *How did the Germans come about?*, he replies that he does not know, because this was a secret project. No further comments, because the planted suggestion is supposed to stir the viewers' imagination. Successive takes illustrating the secret project show water being poured on the candidates (as in old psychiatric hospitals) and then soldiers leading a... piglet with implanted electrodes. Next, *Material no. 9*: a piglet in a spacesuit is placed into a rocket and launched. The animal then lands with a parachute and two soldiers pose with it for a photograph.

Apart from the mock-documentary-style film newsreels in Sergey Livnev's *Serp i molot* (Sickle and Hammer; 1994), the list of Fedorchenko's significant predecessors includes Vitali Mansky's project *Chastniye kroniki. Monolog* (Private Chronicles. Monologue; 1999) – a compilation of amateur video films the director received from people from every former Soviet republic, telling the story of a fictitious protagonist born on the day before Yuri Gagarin's space flight (11 April 1961); his death coincides with the end of the Soviet era.

Polish mock-documentary parodies

The Polish cinema as yet has not featured such spectacular mock-documentaries as the examples discussed above. Nonetheless, one of the first films in which certain (Degree I) mockumentary elements can be found is Krzysztof Gradowski's 11-minute TV film: *Déjà vu czyli skąd my to znamy* (Déjà Vu or Where Have We Seen This, 1978), realised at Studio Miniatur Filmowych, a parody of popular educational films and programmes shown at the time as part of so-called school series. Just like a full-blown mock-documentary it ridicules the documentary style, statements of so-

called ordinary people caught on camera, TV comments by experts, professionals and specialists, scientific jargon and empty rhetoric, scientific discourse, etc. The film begins with thank-you's listing the people who helped with its production, but this time gratitude is expressed in an absurd way, mocking the custom adopted by many directors. The voice-over says: *From the Author. I consider it to be a pleasant duty to thank Prof. Jerzy Borówa, Ph.D., for his sympathetic attitude to the film's project presented to him at the Magnolia restaurant. The screenplay was based on the theses of his fundamental work: Rewarding Positive Adjustments* (a black-and-white photograph with an autograph below it. The man in the photo moves, takes his glasses off, smokes a cigarette and then freezes in a new pose). *I also want to publicly express my gratitude to Assistant Professor Jan Pracz for his acceptance of the three-dimensional method assumed during the film's production. Thanks to his kind consent we have obtained a complete perspective illusion, which will require the viewer to maintain absolute discipline of looking at the left side of the frame with the left eye and, respectively, at its right side with the right eye* (the man in the photograph is smoking a pipe and reading a book). *I would like to thank the management of the Division of Assignments at the Department of Resources of the Ministry of Imitated Illusions for letting me study the practical benefits of optimistic perception* (the man in the photo is drinking alcohol). *Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Director Kuliszka who by withholding special care and an atmosphere of particular sympathy for my modest undertakings decisively contributed to the film's creation in its present shape and dimensions*. Intertitle with caption: *Case 1 and the sound of some sort of an off-camera psychiatric examination: Man aged 48, railway worker, does not admit to any hereditary dispositions. As a child often used to skip school to go to the movies. Masturbates since 14. While hypnotised confessed to an on-and-off sexual relationship with a seamstress living nearby. Previously sought the aid of an herbalist*. We hear the patient's account (dubbed by Krzysztof Kowalewski): *This is what happened. I'll describe it in chronological order. I was crossing the street in no particular hurry because I was already late. I'm walking, it's cold, and I'm thinking to myself: "Good thing I'm wearing a warm padded jacket"*. Now, a doctor's office, with a model of the human brain standing on the desk. A staged visit of the patient follows, shot in black-and-white. The railway worker on one side, the stone-faced professor (portrayed by Jan Himilbach) on the other, taking notes and tapping his pencil against the table-top. When the patient starts talking we watch the discussed events in colour: *I came closer and saw Africa on the Kaiser-panorama poster. "I'm going to take a look at it", I'm thinking to myself, because I am a fan of all things exotic. To my surprise the pictures show me walking through the snow, but with whom and where?*

Something wasn't right. "Oh well, I can still afford to pay 6 zlotys for the ticket", I thought to myself and went inside. Poor decision, but I wanted to see what was going to happen next. I sit down, arrange the device, and guess what I see? My entire life right in front of my eyes. First, the town house in 16 Koźła Street, where I was born. More, I grew up there. Then my wedding photo. I got married in Łódź and, honestly, it was great fun, but only the wedding. I'm still looking at the photos: now I'm in a steam engine, laughing, at work, not really looking like myself. Later I'm shown being rewarded for putting a freight train from Elk on a side track because otherwise it would have massacred the 386 passenger train from Toruń. Never mind. But then I see myself looking into the camera in front of the Kaiser-kamera place, and this got me really annoyed because a moment later I was once again walking through the snow, and so on, the same thing over and over again. It is not about the six zlotys; I wonder what's wrong with me. Back in the professor's room: There is absolutely no need to worry. From a scientific point of view the case is banal. Here is a chart. The professor reaches for a chart with a brain diagram. The whole screen becomes filled with an animated colourful diagram featuring circled areas captioned with mysterious abbreviations. To simplify matters, let us assume there are three consciousness zones. It is your sub-consciousness that transmits certain images. The shapes and colours reflected by the Kaiser-kamera are then presented by the consciousness as reality. Stratton discussed this phenomenon already a long time ago. Diagrams and drawings with animated arrows describe Stratton's experiment. After each bath he used to recall the image preceding it for the purpose of marking the cleanliness scale. See, you should always look ahead to a bright future. Titlecard with caption: Case 2. Voiceover: Former model, aged 35, currently a teen fashion designer. Complains that people closest to her fail to understand her. Speaks of herself as a man. Since her stay in Paris, which she visited as a correspondent of the "Młoda moda" weekly, has been involved in flagellation and horseback riding, uses Old Spice cosmetics and a Kharkov electric razor. Has a neglected personality inventory. At the same time, the professor and the woman (Lucyna Winnicka) are arguing. Professor: Please calm down. Try to imagine that it was I who came to you and not the other way round. I'm listening. Woman: I've always liked fruit drops. I used to enjoy 20 to 35 decagrams a day. Three months ago a doctor forbade me to eat sweets due to hyperacidity. Ever since then I've been dreaming the same thing over and over again. The woman's fantasy world is now presented in colour. I dream that I am completely alone. An envoy of the president of New Heartburn usually appears more or less an hour before dawn. He asks me to come in (castle, women in men's clothes). They hypnotise me and offer the position of Minister of Confectionery. I agree and accept gifts (piles of gifts). Then the doctor appears in the form of a hideous insect. The professor has dozed off.

Professor! the woman cries, he wakes up and says: Oh well, take a teddy bear from a child and he will dream about a bear (reaches for a chart). Compensatory delusions, a somewhat infantile reaction, but entirely proper. We are shown diagrams and charts with animated arrows. The professor's voiceover explains the determination of the subject matter of dreams: At the stage of non-rapid eye movement sleep your appetite for fruit drops selectively activates the cerebral cortex and cortical centres of the brain, in this way creating dreams. Their subject matter, regarded as reprehensible and repressed in a given culture, easily matches the accepted norms of another culture. This is why I think you should leave for some time and, so to speak, just look around. The slightly disappointed woman smiles with a sceptical look. Titlecard with caption: Case 3. Voiceover: Patient aged 27, delivery driver. Claims that as a child he took part in games played with a turkey. Has been drinking exclusively rectified spirit ever since a young boy. As a school student was tempted by – as he described it – chemical experiments. Together with a storeman of the enterprise employing him sentenced to two years in prison for setting fire to a warehouse. Pills received from the prison doctor did not help. Animated chart presents a Hans Kuliszka experiment, drawings and arrows. Examined with the Roschach test and put through the Kuliszka experiment, expressed readiness to change his surname, profession and remuneration. The professor requests: Please take off your glasses. Chewing on a match, the patient (dubbed by Stefan Friedman) takes off his shades and says: My wife and mother-in-law forced me to make this appointment. The point is that I was on a business trip with my colleague to Częstochowa and as usual we stayed at the Dworcowy hotel. We entered the room, the window curtains were drawn, and just to fool about I told my friend: "Want to bet that there's a firefighter on the roof of the home across the street?". He replied: "Yeah, right", opened the curtains and there really was a fireman, asleep, by the way. A colour film shows a firefighter sleeping on the roof of the house across the street. I also would like to mention that I haven't seen the fireman before nor knew him, so I couldn't be in league with him, because as soon as Kazeł realized that he lost the bet he accused me of plotting the whole thing with the fireman. And my wife sent me here because this is not the first time that something like this happened. Professor: Great. You know what, the thing is that you experience déjà vu in its pure form with no unnecessary components. The professor clambers on his knees onto the desk while the patient is glad that his affliction is unique. The professor, up to now uptight, bored and drowsy, finally stirs: I am going to build a theory based on your case. An animated chart presents Wrangel's curve, omitting Prof. Białkowski's points. Professor's voiceover: We shall give Prof. Białkowski something to talk about. We shall deform Wrangel's curve and raise the threshold of possibility. The railway worker

walks through the snow. The same voice, which previously read the author's thank-you letter, now says: *In other words, we can allow ourselves to enjoy a moment of happiness. Yet another blank spot has disappeared from the map of the extensive field of knowledge about the world and life of man. A clear and concrete explanation of the phenomenon of déjà vu is another step taken on the path to an increasingly complete comprehension of man's conscious and socially shaped existence. Our accomplishments once again confirm that obstinacy and, most of all, competence are decisive for success in each domain of creative investigation.*

From beginning to end, the film's amusingly absurd plot is the reason why its construction resembles that of a typical educational production with experts, diagrams, discussions of concrete examples illustrating scientific theories, etc. The ensuing parody challenges the viewers' trusts in films of this kind and habitual belief in their "veracity". It also questions their status of "serious cinematic form" which as it turns out, can incorporate an absurd topic while keeping all ingredients intact.

One of the first films recalled in this context²⁴ is Marek Piwowski's *Egzekucja długów, ludzi...* (Execution of Debts, Men..., 2001), a parody of investigative TV shows with a journalist interviewing the witnesses and participants of a given event and from time to time offering his own commentary. The film is dedicated to an old-age pensioner-victim of a bank swindle orchestrated by an alleged businessman. The pensioner recounts the events on camera, with the film crew following him to the bank and shooting his conversation with the imposter. Although everything about the film appears to be rather realistic, Degree III mockumentariness is "spoilt" at the very beginning for the sake of Degree I mockumentariness when the director sends a single, but important signal to the audience by casting himself as the journalist. Naturally, those unfamiliar with Marek Piwowski might treat the film as a journalistic account for much longer. Fans of sophisticated Degree III mock-documentaries, however, regret that the part did not go to someone entirely unknown or, on the contrary, to a celebrated journalist specialising in such broadcasts, especially since the film progresses in an interesting direction by describing the illegal operations of mysterious banks and ways of collecting debts. The "journalist" talks to a gangster – a debt enforcer, who wants to protect his privacy but nonetheless matches our media-shaped belief of how a criminal should look. The film becomes increasingly absurd due to its increasingly fictitious appearance (allusions to the staging applied in factual programmes), and ends with acts of violence caught on camera. Or perhaps this is only our imagination (we witness the practice of evoking the pursuit of sensational news and references to the "accidental" filming of "live" events).

Endnotes

- ¹ See: B. Kosińska-Krippner, *Mock-documentary a dokumentalne fałszerstwa*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 2006 no. 54-55.
- ² Planete channel broadcast the film in 2005 as: *Operacja księżyc*. During the Fantastic KINO.LATO Festival at the Kino.Lab cinema in Warsaw (1 July – 2 September 2006) the film was shown as: *Operacja Luna*.
- ³ Producer: Point du Jour Production and Arte France.
- ⁴ The interview was published on Arte's website: <http://arte-tv.com/de>.
- ⁵ <http://www.planete.p/cgi-bin/pla/forum/topic/1-52-51/1>.
- ⁶ T. Sobolewski, *Kosmiczna manipulacja*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 1 April 2005, p. 17.
- ⁷ Planete used this title.
- ⁸ Other viewers, including the author of this text, noticed the dog already on the first occasion with no need to watch the film frame by frame.
- ⁹ <http://www.tvp.pl/View?Cat=1874&id=199905>.
- ¹⁰ Fantastic KINO.LATO Festival 1 July 2006 – 2 September 2006, KINO.LAB in Warsaw.
- ¹¹ Quotation from press material supplied by Vivarto, the film's distributor.
- ¹² T. Jopkiewicz, *Na druga stronę*, <http://film.onet.pl/9713,24721,1>. The Stopklata portal also called *Year of the Devil* a false documentary.
- ¹³ The song, one of whose versions dates back to 1609, is known as: *Hey, ho, Nobody Home, Rose, Rose, or Peace Round*. The most popular variants of this particular verse are the following:
Hey, ho, nobody's Home
meat nor drink nor money have I none
Still I will be very, very merry
or
Hey, ho, nobody's home
meat nor drink nor money have I none
Yet I will be merry
- ¹⁴ Music Hynek Schneider, words Tomas Hanak.
- ¹⁵ Best debut and critics' award at the Kinotavr festival 2005.
- ¹⁶ Horizons Documentary Prize at the 62nd Venice International Film Festival in 2005.
- ¹⁷ Term used by Oleg Kovalov
- ¹⁸ Russian term used by Viktor Matizen: *asmeshka nad dokumentom* (English: mockery of the document).
- ¹⁹ Russian term used by Andrey Plakov: *poddel'naia dokumentalistika* (English: counterfeit documentary film), in: A. Plakov, *Pervye na lune*, "Kommersant" 10 July 2005.
- ²⁰ V. Matizen, *My ne poliruem vremia*, "Novye izvestiya", 6 June 2005.
- ²¹ Quotation after: T. Birchenough, *Inspired Lunacy*, "The Moscow Times", 30 September 2005.
- ²² Ibidem.
- ²³ O. Kovalov, *Aleksei Fedorchenko: First on the Moon (Pervye na lune)* 2005, "KinoKultura. New Russian Cinema", 14 January 2006 <http://www.kinokultura.com/2006/11r-firstmoon1.shtml>.
- ²⁴ W. Godzic, *Telewizja i jej gatunki po "Wielkim Bracie"*, Kraków 2004, pp. 193-194.