

Between Fact and Fiction

Documentary telenovela, or docusoap Polish style

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The Polish documentary telenovela was influenced by the advent of the then new hybrid genre, docusoap, in the European television market, a genre which became increasingly successful and popular from the 1990s onwards. The first two telenovelas (*Szpital Dzieciątka Jezus* /Nano Dragović and Grzegorz Siedlecki, TVP2, 1999/ and *Pierwszy krzyk* /Wojciech Szumowski, TVP1, 1999/) both created by Stanisław Krzemiński, answered a demand for the docusoap in Poland. Stanisław Krzemiński, who in 1998 consulted for the German docusoap *Flughafen* (ZDF), said: *For years my natural habitat as a producer was a documentary film-making, and because a docusoap was gaining in prominence across Europe, I began preparations to do one such form* ¹.

Ideas related to a twenty-nine-episode series had been discussed as early as 1996, with the production beginning in 1998 when Nina Terentiew, then the director of the TVP2, took on the risk of financing the project. In this respect the Polish beginnings are different to the United Kingdom, the docusoap's cradle, where broadcasters have encouraged the production companies to develop this genre. The Polish series *Szpital Dzieciątka Jezus* may have been influenced in its development by British docusoaps such as *Children's Hospital* (BBC1, 1996), or *Great Ormond Street Hospital* (BBC1, 1996), both of which followed the experiences of staff and patients in well known children's hospitals. Knowing that such programmes had been successful with UK audiences, Grzegorz Siedlecki and his colleagues approached the production of their docusoaps with an optimistic caution: *We have made three episodes in the first instance, recalls Siedlecki: The producers knew the docusoap was popular in the West, but it was unclear if the genre will become popular [in Poland] too, even if we used the 'secure' motifs. So e.g. we showed the hospital and a kidney transplantation that a wife gave to her husband* ².

When work on the series was completed, the producers announced on their website: *Documentary telenovela – this is a yet unknown genre for the Polish spectators* ³. Andrzej Fidyk, then director of the document division of Polish Television, became the godfather of the documentary telenovela. *While participating in international conferences, it was my impression that the world went bonkers about the new genre. We had decided to make our own docusoap, said Fidyk* ⁴.

We can also guess that *Pierwszy Krzyk* was inspired by the 1998 docusoap *Liverpool Mums* (C5 Bazal), about Liverpool's maternity hospital, or the similarly themed German *Gubertsstation* (Arte, 1999). Szumowski insisted, however, that *Pierwszy Krzyk* is not a straightforward imitation: *We have chosen the place and theme purposefully, because giving birth always ignites emotions. We were right – when the baby's situation was insecure, or when the mother had to go to a shelter*

for single mothers, the phones were ringing like crazy – people wanted to help. BBC only had its first series about birth-giving two years after us ⁵.

Docusoap has contributed to transforming the landscape of contemporary television. First emerging in the UK during the mid-1990s, the genre was taken on in other countries, becoming very popular in, for example, Germany. There is broad agreement that the term ‘docusoap’ was first used by M. McFadyean to describe the hybrid nature of the British-Australian series *Sylvania Waters* (ABC-BBC, Paul Watson, 1992) ⁶. Elsewhere, McFadyean wrote: *The series appeals to us with a charm of a soap opera, the irony of a satire, and with the documentary’s brutality of everyday life. We could call it docusoap* ⁷. Docusoap is one of the border genres ⁸, emerging as a by-product of the media market situation in Europe. Public television needed to be revitalised to successfully compete with commercial broadcasters. Although not popular, documentary filmmaking was valued by broadcasters as a means of fulfilling their public mission. To survive, it had to reinvent itself as did the prime time fiction and entertainment. One way of gaining viewership was to offer so called “mirror television”, focused on the reproduction of reality. In the BBC, factual multi-episode series, which were depicting histories of “ordinary people” in entertaining ways, were well received and inoffensive. They borrowed their style and dramaturgy tricks from fiction films and series. British producers saw huge potential in popular, fact-based entertainment.

The docusoap forms have been variously described as borderline, hybrid, factual, or docufictional. Each term is justified, because each encompasses diverse examples, even if at times they partially overlap. What unifies these forms is that they can be characterised by temporality, instability, elements of playfulness and auto-depreciation – the elements characteristic for the post-documentary era, when the audiences are taught to receive new factual forms, while not forgetting about relativity, causality, and opportunism of a truth. Although viewers are engaged in increasingly complex readings of documentaries and other factual forms, we may encounter some for whom seeing is believing. These viewers are interested in fact-based genres, which by definition do not offer anything else but entertainment.

According to Margaret Lünenborg, docusoap emerged thanks to a combination of technical, social, and economic factors surrounding media. Video-recording equipment has become increasingly affordable, leading to a growth in the popularity of home video-making and the use of webcams. These dynamics lead to a blurring of the private/public division in media discourses ⁹. Economic conditions, according to Lünenborg, could be named *new economy of the document*, depicting *global non-fictional industry, and its constant instability* ¹⁰. Hachmeister builds on Lünenborg’s work, arguing that whilst documentary films were initially considered a niche genre, more recently they have become a globally attractive marketing product, yet to be internationally standardised. While ideas, concepts, and formats of documentary are explored and acculturated, structures and histories seem to remain rooted in national and linguistic contexts. Lünenborg also notices that viewers’ changing expectations stimulate the emergence of new documentary forms. Consequently, documentary films needed new formats and rhythms to fit well into routines of serial television ¹¹, as differences between reality and the spectacle, and stories and non-fictional films and television ¹² seemed to disappear. In the popular imagination, documentaries became part of the border genres, and these in turn are

subject to the first law of the “post-documentary” era *Entertain!*¹³ Since the mid-1990s there has been an increase in the use of the documentary discourse in ways that depart from classical documentary aims; the genre is now used for the entertainment¹⁴.

Docusoap refers to a television series that mixes observational documentary filmmaking with elements of a soap opera. Here is the recipe for the docusoap according to the producer Andrew Bethell: *Take any aspect of British life – It could be shopping, parking, traveling, eating, pet-care or clubbing. Find a contained location where a manageable cast of characters will engage in these activities or, more importantly, interact with the Great British Public. Keep an eye out for the one or two characters who will become your “stars”... It is not essential, but in the first few episodes you will need at least one shouting match and the commentary, “unfortunately all did not go well for Tracy...” That is about it*¹⁵.

Dorothy Hobson called docusoap a child of the soap opera¹⁶. Soap opera offered the reality of documentary genre characterised by the *mundane*. This contrasted with traditional documentary genre, which presented reality as special and exquisite, exploring the lives of unusual and interesting people, always with a pedagogical twist. Docusoap depends on “usual” and historically and globally unimportant events and phenomena, looking at small histories and uncharacteristic people without achievement or merit. Digging out these small histories requires a great deal of creativity, with more active interventions as routes to access than would be accepted in traditional documentary filmmaking. Jeremy Mills, who co-produced *Airport* (BBC1, 1996) and *Driving School* (BBC1, 1997) (both named by Richard Kilborn as the golden standard of the future docusoap¹⁷), said the following about the function of the protagonist in the docusoap: *The series was structured around characters who didn't have big stories to tell, but rather around big characters with small stories to tell... In the past we'd thought you really had to have a really big story to hold the audience's attention, but now we realized the opposite: quite light individual stories could be worked into an entertaining narrative mix*¹⁸. And here's his comment on the editing of both series: *It is not observational in the traditional sense... It is more interfering and anticipatory... You have to be able to predict the character's response to a particular situation, and you have to come up with the appropriate trigger questions, – question you will have to ask to get those wonderful one-liners that make [the film] funny, or explain the narrative*¹⁹.

What is important for the new forms and genres of “reality television”, including docusoap, is sensation, and the use of emotive elements. Elisabeth Klaus and Stephanie Lücke²⁰ have described the staging strategies typical for the reality TV, using docusoap as the umbrella term for diverse types of programmes, a practice typical for many German academics. Therefore we can also relate their description to the docusoap and to the documentary telenovela, as it is sometimes understood in more narrow terms. The main characteristics of docusoap are: personalization (the importance of a protagonist in delivering the narration/story); emotionality (reinforces the previous, and further engages viewers in the storyline); intimization (filming chosen elements of the protagonist's private life to uncover their character and motives; stimulates voyeuristic desires in viewers, and at the same time satisfies them); stereotyping (showing only selected aspects of protagonist's character); dramatization (artificially created moments of tension, additionally reinforced by-

motional tone). Consequently, documentary telenovela often crosses the boundaries of private life and exposes intimate behaviour, something not often shown before the era of “reality television”.

In the past protagonists could be part of the reportage, summarising or analysing a certain situation, focusing on “hot” topics of the contemporary world. That is why certain current social issues are shown through the prism of the protagonist’s life, and why filmmakers sometimes showed moments of emotional strain and tension, irritation, bitterness, or sadness. As is seen, for example, in the 1960-1970s series *Polska zza siódmej miedzy* (Maciej Szumowski), where we watch dramatic scenes featuring a hysterically screaming woman throwing herself under the incoming tractor. In times of difficulty, Szumowski was trying to show life without propagandist camouflage or auto-censorship. He cared about the truthfulness and authenticity of the message, occasionally using emotionally fuelled scenes.

Many years later, on the wave of political transformations, and in effect of the new modes of representation, intimacy, growing older, anger, repulsion, aggression, pain, bitterness, poverty, and disempowerment of the individual, found their place in the documentaries of Ewa Borzęcka (*Trzynastka*, 1996; *Arizona*, 1997; *Oni*, 1999; *Damsko-męskie sprawy*, 2001; *U Danusi*, 2002) and Marcin Koszałka (*Takiego pięknego syna urodziłam*, 1999; *Jakoś to będzie*, 2004). Each film offered the protagonists a chance to “play it out” in front of the camera in the form of an “emotional striptease”. Although not necessary for purposes of conveying the intended message, this dynamic gave way to an uncontrolled flow of words and gestures. This provoked doubt and controversy, with many viewers and commentators reading Borzęcka and Koszałka’s documentaries as exhibitionist and voyeuristic, manipulative and abusive. The Polish documentary telenovela emerged along with documentaries that broke many taboos.

This is not to say that Polish viewers were not acquainted with the televised form of serialised reality television. We can consider 1977-1978 *Dzień po dniu: Kędzierzyn Koźle* and *Dzień po dniu: Puławy* by Jerzy Śladkowski and Stanisław Krzemiński to be the precursors of the documentary telenovela in Poland. These series had a typical docusoap structure: the same protagonists followed for weeks, and their adventures were showed in the episodic series. Stanisław Krzemiński, who after years returned to this form with the *Szpital Dzieciątka Jezus* said: *similar ideas circulated among the documentary filmmakers, although our documentarians didn’t know about the existence of “The Family” or “The American Family”*²¹. Naturally, nobody used the term docusoap or documentary telenovela in the context of *Dzień po dniu*, but these films were very close to these genres. Shooting of the six-episodes of season one took two and a half months; the second season took three months. *It was the luxury of the situation we had back then [during communism]. TVP didn’t have a competition. Nobody looked at the economic factors as scrupulously as it is done today. Of course, the series was polluted by the specificity of the public television of the time; the commentary was often detached from the reality, it was not possible to rise certain topics like lack of work, depression, etc. However, in the one about Kędzierzyn Koźle we managed to trick the censorship. We made the headline: “Editors have received the letter. I live in Kędzierzyn Koźle, and I want to escape from here, there’s nothing to do, no prospects for life”. Of course we wrote it, but it was also true that we used to receive similar letters. And*

we used it as the formal introduction. The propagandist elements were those showing that one can find their place in a similar town, that there were fascinating people living there. But our trick also revealed certain climate to the extent, it was possible back then ²².

The first Polish docusoap focuses on the action taking place at Szpital im. Dzieciątka Jezus (Baby Jesus Hospital), the first Medical University Hospital in Warsaw. From October to November 1998, filmmakers were researching the hospital by conducting hundreds of interviews with patients and doctors. Then, having chosen the protagonists, the team filmed for eight weeks. The show aired in February 1999. The actors are the real people: doctors and nurses, patients with real health problems, stress, victories and losses. The camera follows them at home, on their way to the hospital, in the hospital. It observes the patients preparing for treatments, operations, and routine screenings. The protagonists included Marek, who was operated several times after an accident; haemophiliac Roman; Mr Stanisław who had palate cancer; and a seventeen-year-old girl who gave birth to a child she initially did not want, but who subsequently embraced maternity under the influence of the hospital's friendly atmosphere. There were several reasons to choose the hospital as the place of action. Firstly, because the genre relies on emotions, and these are in the abundance in hospitals – suffering, fear, sadness of illness and the joy of recovery. Also because the events shown may become part of everyone's life, so the programme works like a mirror, allowing easy identification. It is rumoured that Grzegorz Siedlecki also wanted to show his gratitude to doctors, who helped him when he was in a critical situation. Nano Dragović, on the other hand, was rumoured to have intentions of helping people to believe and not loose hope; and to know what to expect from doctors and hospitals. Stanisław Krzemiński said: *Hospital is a good place for a dramaturgy. There are two places interesting to me: either hospital, or private funeral home. There is an abundance of emotions in the latter case, but it is an untouchable topic in our culture.* The producers looked for a location near Warsaw, and have spoken with at least twenty directors of hospitals. They have visited eight, and finally chosen the Szpital im. Dzieciątka Jezus, as it was there where the staff fully understood the intentions of the filmmakers. They trusted the producers that the intention was not to show gore, but to focus on the human fate and the hard work of the hospital's staff. Krzemiński said: *They took a risk, but the open mind of the hospital's director was decisive. Others were unconvinced, as it was something new, and they had to trust total strangers* ²³. After the filming started, the team followed all new patients, choosing those they found most interesting who were also keen on the project. The producer expressed his regret they hadn't had enough means to have several teams following different protagonists, as was the case in *Great Ormond Street Hospital*. As we read on the producer's website: *The camera watches the hospital's patients and doctors – their emotions and life developments are the true topic of the film. In our series we care about the psychological, not sensational, aspects of each story. We mustn't shock people with the tragedies. The true fabric of films is made of "being together" rather than of waiting for the drama to happen. The hospital is a backdrop, and not an agent, of the presented human fate. We have patients undergoing transplantations, we meet girls undergoing complicated spine operations, and together with their parents, we unite in joyful celebrations of the doctor's*

wedding, and dread about the future of the abandoned newborn baby. We are together with our protagonists in their houses, and then we travel with them to the hospital²⁴. Different opinions appeared in the newspapers. Film critic, Tadeusz Sobolewski wrote: *In the case of "Szpital...", the plot is the one of the illness and recovery. Szpital... at times resembles some documentaries of Kieślowski. (...) The aim is not to peep at life, but to find its order and make sense of it, to build the relation with the protagonists. In the Polish School of Documentary, there was always an idea behind the snippets of reality. Here, the situation is similar. Apart of the dramatic tension – each moment brings another endangerment of life – film offers hope and serenity*²⁵.

Anita Piotrowska in "Tygodnik Powszechny" praised the series' lack of pedagogical ambitions, and the unwillingness to exploit difficult issues. However, she critiqued the avoidance of problematic topics, well known from our own experiences, and widely reported on newspaper front pages. But she also explained that these series do not hold any intentions of revealing the truth, hence the lack of attention to such issues as patient's dissatisfaction, bribery, and the everlasting shortage of supplies. For her: *The true value of the series like "Szpital Dześciątka Jezus" stems not from their documentary validity, but from abandoning the staging, also emotional one. And most importantly, our [viewers] "role" in such shows is not only that of a voyeur. In hospital, when we partake in the painful experiences together with protagonists, we encounter that which is not present in our everyday lives, that which is pushed aside as a taboo. [That which is] not always fitting well into the advertised world of people always beautiful, always healthy, and happy. When watching the "Szpital..." we are dislocated into the world, which we would rather avoid*²⁶.

Mirosław Pęczak criticised the dialogues as artificial, but admitted that the film's value lies in our ability to see patient's nervousness before the operation, or a crying mother at the sight of her daughter with spine problems. We do not doubt these emotions²⁷. Still, Katarzyna Jabłońska from "Więź" criticised the series for unnecessary naturalism, evident in, for example, a long shot of a cut through a protagonist's hand. *[Why to do it] when it is possible to show the doctor's difficulty in operating, patient's excruciating pain, and the overall dramaturgy of the happening without gore; why to show all this? It is enough to recall "Szpital" by Krzysztof Kieślowski*²⁸. Wiesław Godzic, writing few years later than the original airing of the series, senses a lack of good taste and possible legal infringements during scenes like the therapeutic session of the teenage girl who was awaiting kidney transplant²⁹.

Between 1998-1999 when the first episodes of the *Szpital...* were already edited, Andrzej Fidyk as the producer began working on the *Pierwszy krzyk* (aired September 05, 1999). *Pierwszy krzyk*, based on the original idea of Wojciech Szumowski, told a story of several families expecting children. Produced for TVP 1, it is mainly located in the hospital, but the team has also assisted some of the families at their homes, creating household diaries just before giving birth. The series shows the tragic histories of unwanted new-borns and babies rejected by their parents, as well as stories about children who were much welcomed into loving families. Before Andrzej Fidyk proposed Szumowski do this series, Fidyk and the hospital's director pondered the possibility that the filmmakers may cross the line. The team was assisting protagonists in the pre-natal care school, during consulta-

tions with doctors, at family visits and meetings, or while decorating the baby's room, and finally during the delivery. It was for the first time ever that a Polish director entered the room during one of the most intimate experiences of human life³⁰. *We know that this will be an interesting topic to our viewers. There is no other experience, perhaps except of death, that would be common to all people. It was important that the series remains engaging to the viewers*³¹, said Wojciech Szumowski.

He also added that the series was a challenge to him, as it is not easy to recall real stories from one episode to another. *Pierwszy krzyk* was shot in the Szpital im. R. Czerwiakowskiego (Siemiradzki Street, Krakow), referred to by local residents as the "Siemiradzkiego Hospital". *The title came to my mind when I overheard the doctor's explanation in some of the material we have had just shot. [Doctor said:] "First scream is the first breath of a child, who catches the air and unknots the lungs, previously tighten up in the mother's womb". I thought it was fascinating – catching the breath as catching the life – said the director.* The moment of birth is usually very emotional and joyous for parents, and Szumowski's team tried to film it in a considerate manner. It can be said that the decision to make the series was influenced by foreign productions, and a wish to respond to the challenges of global media trends. According to promotional materials, Polish Television was very aware that "documentary series", as it was called, is a fashionable genre gaining international consumers, and often winning over feature films and entertainment programmes. But among the commentators, *Pierwszy krzyk* raised mixed reactions. The same aspects and characteristics of the series, especially the approach to ethics, led to it being both condemned and prized. In retrospect, Tadeusz Pikulski called it a brave attempt at educating men and doctors. He wrote: *Birth-giving was so far an extremely intimate event. Now we could appreciate it in full beauty. A taboo was broken, the act of birth giving was desacralized; it was pure physiognomy that we dealt with. On the other hand, the film showed a birth of a human being as a wonderful moment. I think many misogynists became more respectful of women, when they watched in what hardship they came into this world*³². Agnieszka Wrzesień and Katarzyna T. Nowak wrote in "Przekrój" that *For the team, "Pierwszy krzyk" was a lesson of respect and humbleness, respect for another person, their right to intimacy, to pain, but also to joy and happiness*³³. The series was also praised by Anita Piotrowska: *Our Polish experiments with documentary soap genre are fortunately uplifting: while watching "Pierwszy krzyk" or "Szpital Dzieciątka Jezus" it is hard not to notice how the filmmakers try (perhaps even too much) to keep the boundaries, how they try to discourage away the voyeurism and engage in participatory positions. They particularly care about befriending the viewers with protagonists (...). Each birth is a pretext to show not only different familial situations, but also attitudes and reactions. The series does not sentimentalise the act of birth giving: it is actually quite literal, even brutal*³⁴.

But Katarzyna Jabłońska had mixed feelings about the commentary at the beginning of each episode – "our film is a story about the miracle of birth" – and its inadequacy in being able to show reality. *They (...) manage to show many touching moments, but do they capture the miracle of birth? Can we even film the miracle? And even more so – can one speak about it in the chosen convention of a telenovela? (...) How to shoot intimacy without destroying it – camera and the team are*

*always intruders in the situations like this. Protagonist are not comfortable with the [filming team's] presence, even if they previously agreed to it. And the issue is not even that we can clearly see this on the screen, but that it disturbs the occurrence of the miracle (only on the screen?), and certainly destroys the intimacy*³⁵.

The series was, of course, a hot topic of debate among obstetricians, with many being pro as well as many against it. Szumowski said: *we tore the curtain down, behind which this special moment was hidden: a moment when biology and metaphysics become one*³⁶.

In 2000, eight documentary telenovelas were made, and production was kept at the same level over the next few years³⁷. Aside from documentary telenovelas, other docusoap-like series were made. They differed, however, in that there was no singular narrative between episodes of the series, with each episode showing different stories and different protagonists. However, they shared similar life situations or professions, or lived in similar areas, thus these series are often mistaken for telenovelas (*Komornicy, Single, Granice, Trzeba żyć*). Since 2005 (when there was no new telenovelas aired), the production began to fade (2006: 3, 2007: 3, 2008: 1, 2009 and 2010: 0, 2011: 1). Most of the orders came from public television channels 1 and 2, and they were often aired during evening prime time slots. These series ranged from five episodes (*Oddam życie za pracę*) to just over 170 (*Kochaj mnie*). In terms of themes and topics, some filmmakers used a docusoap repertoire of health-hospitals, an approach that had been tried and tested in Germany and the UK (apart of *Szpital Dzieciątka Jezus* and *Pierwszy krzyk* from 1999, in 2000 were made: *Centrum nadziei, Klinika cudów, Pamiętnik rodzinny, Pierwszy krzyk*; in 2004 – *To nie jest koniec świata*; in 2008 – *Szpital odzyskanej nadziei* and in 2011 – *Operacja życie*). These were stylized on, for example, *The Doctor* (BBC1, 1990), *Children's Hospital* (BBC 1, 1996), *Great Ormond Street Hospital* (BBC1, 1996), *Liverpool Mums* (C5 Bazal, 1998) and *Geburtsstation* (Arte, SFB, 1999). There were also veterinary-themed telenovelas (*Lecznica pod św. Franciszkiem*, 2000; *Klinika małych stworzeń*, 2004), inspired by series much loved by Britons such as *Animal Hospital* (BBC 1, 1995) or *Vets in Practice* (BBC 1, 1997-2002). In 2001 *Nauka jazdy* was made, this was a Polish version of the popular in the UK series *Driving School* (BBC1, 1997)³⁸, a series that became exported to many other countries (Germany, *Die Fahrschule*, SAT.1, or Norway, *Klar, ferdig, kjør*, TV Norge, 1999). Filmmakers were inspired by ongoing issues, as much as by actual events and social problems, and were interested in issues on universal and local scales. There were quite a few series focused on children and youth. *Kochaj mnie* (2001) was about children in orphanages; *Przedszkolandia* (2002) was about children from nursery no. 334 in Bielany, Warsaw; *Adopcje* (2003) about children for whom the most important moment in life was to find new parents, and the adults who decided to adopt a child; *S.O.S.! Dzieciom* (2007) was about children in pathological situations. A series of films was devoted to the themes of emigration: *Zielona karta* (2002), *Chicago* (2002), *Bitwa o Anglię* (2004) and *Wyjechani* (2007). There are two documentary telenovelas made about the army: *Kawaleria powietrzna* (2000) is about Polish Air Forces, and *Babilon.pl* (2004) is about Polish troops in Iraq. Also the police and community service officers became topics of some series: *Prawdziwe psy* (2001) was about Warsaw Metropolitan Police, and *Aniolki* (2001) about community service officers, while *Akademia Policyjna* (2006) was about

a group of young women trying to get into the police academy. Jurisprudence is also a topic of *Gorzka miłość* (2006), which tells the story of women rearing children in the prison. Dealing with alcoholism is shown in *Ja, alkoholik* (2003). Being single and lonely are the themes of *Nieparzyści* (2000), which tells the story of people using matching bureaus, and *Kochankowie z internet* (2006) is about people looking for a partner on the internet. Girls dreaming about a “big world” and a media career are featured in *Modelki* (2000) and *Ballada o lekkim zabarwieniu erotycznym* (2003). Countryside is a theme of *Złote lany* (2000), and the *Delegacja* (2003) is a telenovela set just before Poland joined the EU, about Polish peasants visiting countryside in other EU countries. Unemployment is the theme of *Serce z węgla* (2002) about miners being made redundant; *Oddam życie za pracę* (2002) about unemployed people in a small town in the north-west Poland; and finally the telenovela *Młode rekiny* (2004) focuses on young people who open their own businesses while still in school or higher education. On the other hand, there was *Zupełnie zwyczajne życie* (2007) about people looking for a job and raising children as single parents. The world that does not exist anymore was captured in *U nas w Pekinie* (2004) about the inhabitants of Warsaw’s building at Złota Street 83; and *Jarmark Europa* (2004) about the famous Warsaw market situated in the no longer existing football stadium. Probably the only documentary telenovela that shows the present day but also tells something about the past is the *Dusza kresowa* (2004) about people relocated from Kresy [parts of the contemporary Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine] to the west of Poland after WWII. One telenovela touched upon the theme of natural disasters: *Powodzianie* (2001) is about the victims of the floods in July 2001. Among the telenovelas with distinctly lighter themes we can note *Czirliderki* (2001), about K-12 group of girls from Pruszków cheerleading sports teams (a still rather unusual and young a phenomena in Poland); *Ach jak przyjemnie* (2002) about a group of young people on a sailing course; *Noc poślubna, ale kino* (2002) about amateur filmmakers trying to do a film about a wedding night. Between 1999-2004, that is during the period of greatest popularity of documentary telenovelas, the most popular were: *Pierwszy krzyk*, *Złote lany*, *Przedszkolandia*, *Prawdziwe psy*, *Kochaj mnie*.

Some telenovelas, as fiction series often do, popularize socially important issues. For example *Operacja życie*, initiated by the Polish Federation of Patients “Dialtransplant”, was there to encourage people to donate their organs. The series was made under the patronage of the Ministry of Health, and was filmed on the 45 anniversary of the first successful transplant operation.

The above-mentioned documentary telenovelas rehearse the same relative canon of the docusoap characteristics³⁹. These are: 1) close links to documentary films; 2) use of soap opera structures; 3) focus on main protagonists’ 4) entertainment principle; 5) importance of place; 6) contrast. In the first case, the series gives a strong sense of “being there”, due to the concrete locations, spontaneous and not scripted dialogues, and authentic people. The use of a voice-over commentary is also interesting here, with the commentary often provided by well-known actors (Krystyna Janda, Franciszek Pieczka, Janusz Gajos, Marian Kociniak, Andrzej Zaorski) and lectors known from other documentary films (e.g. Jolanta Niewiadomska and Krystyna Czubówna).

In the second case, telenovelas are most often situated in one place, which becomes more and more familiar to viewers as the plot develops; docusoaps introduce

the protagonists in such a way so as to facilitate the viewers' identifications (as it is the case in the fiction soap operas). The story is usually "packed" into a 30 min episodes, using familiar tactics of ending on cliff-hangers (suspending tension and the curiosity), and suggesting new developments in episodes to come⁴⁰. Most documentary telenovelas have introductions, as regular series have, familiarising spectators with the main themes and issues, sometimes reminding them of previous events, sometimes creating specific mood. Moreover, documentary telenovelas use episodic narration, with three or more plots woven in each episode, creating the impression of a lively and vibrant community. This facilitates the exchange of perspectives and places, and helps to control the flow of narrative events (especially useful in diversifying narration, hiding weak plots, controlling the pace). The films use strategies of creating tension known from full feature films – eavesdropping, intervening in relations between protagonists. Finally, music is also used to build the atmosphere and also as an element characterizing and differentiating one docsoap from another.

The third case is about choosing strong characters and personalities that naturally sense what is being expected from them, and will play it for the camera. They should be seeking attention, be interactive, and be easy in sharing emotions, and personal opinions; they are expected to deliver a form of performance.

The fourth element, entertainment principle, is perhaps not as strong in the case of documentary telenovelas, as it is in the case of docusoaps. This is due to telenovela's topics being more serious and socially conscious; still, most telenovelas do not aspire to offer any new insights into the functioning mechanisms of world order – they do provide entertainment, or satisfy the curiosity and voyeurism of viewers. Although focusing on experiences and feelings of people (e.g. at the work place), the films avoid topics such as gender discrimination, mobbing, or poor working conditions. Films do not aim at uncovering institutional and organizational shortcomings, but instead to show a series of relatively innocent stories rooted in everyday experiences of ordinary people. 'Problematic' issues seem to be incidental and do not form part of a wider argument or critique. Telenovelas focus on individual cases, which enliven the workplace, rather than highlight problems. Documentary filmmakers are first of all interested in the same issues that attract tabloid journalists.

The fifth element, the importance of place, is significant for it enables the selection of a group of telegenic personalities. A relatively confined location becomes a backdrop against which a group of people ("people like you and me") can be assembled and filmed while interacting with others; sometimes the interaction is also with the filmmakers, whose role, amongst others, is to be protagonist's trustee and confidant. Location is the starting point or decoration for a series of sequences focused on protagonists and, if relatively fixed, creates forms of identifications (which is similar to what happens when watching soap operas) for viewers.

The last element, that of contrasts, is the basic rule of constructing documentary telenovelas. If a conflict or hard to solve problem does not emerge from the story itself (that is what often happens), filmmakers will introduce tensions by generating small skirmishes. This is done, for example, by selecting clashing personalities who get in conflict when confronted with each other (similarly to the talk show programs). In this way filmmakers can plan an awkward situation to provoke anger, tears, arguments, and other emotions. When the stories are weak, quiet and argu-

mentative people are paired, aggressive and calm, windbag and clam, arrogant and nice, or assertive and timid, open and reserved.

Richard Kilborn argues⁴¹ that docusoaps are light-hearted and at the “lighter” end of the documentary spectrum. From the beginning, the genre did not pretend to have any aspirations about understanding the world. Instead we see the opinions and experiences of nice or arrogant people, with all their funny anecdotes, or sometimes hardly believable real histories. The protagonists know that they will not become part of the critique of organizations and institutions to which they belong, or of the places where they live. This means the organizations that decided to partake in docusoaps had not been afraid of being exposed. Kilborn notes that, in the past, institutions were suspicious of documentary filmmakers. Now those seeking media attention actively look for the filmmakers, which proves the typical “indistinctiveness” of the genre, as it is perceived to be free advertising, rather than something to avoid.

These characteristics are also typical for the Polish documentary telenovela, perhaps with the exception of the light-hearted tone, which is only typical to some titles, with the rest being centred on drama, illness and misfortune. Because docusoaps are numerous and diverse, it is hard to find any particular differences between a docusoap and a documentary telenovela. If we relate mostly to the UK commentators of the genre, it seems that the major difference lies in the topics with Polish producers focusing on more serious ones. Brian Winston appreciates British docusoaps for not treating ordinary people as victims or as a “social problem”, thus breaking with the traditional seriousness of documentaries mostly by using the humour found in the stories that are told. Breton and Cohen⁴² argue that the docusoaps discovered humour, making the films lighter, nicer and more interesting to watch. In Polish documentary telenovelas the opposite is the case. They are dominated by serious themes that seem to be an inventory of social problems and misfortunes whilst also celebrating banality.

Kilborn argues that there is more identification with docusoaps’ protagonists (as it is in the case of soap operas), which constitutes one of the basic characteristics of the genre. In the instance of the documentary telenovela, the identification occurs only among a specific group of viewers; others, who do not belong to this specific social group perform more of a comparison between themselves and protagonists (to the protagonist’s disadvantage). This relates to how protagonists are presented in some documentary telenovela: the use of humour is often perceived to be a patronising sneer rather than anything else. British people also started their adventure with docusoaps via the serious issues of human or animal health and well being, but then came a focus on life in the opera house, airport, driving school, holiday cruise, hotel, and so on. In Poland there are also more light-hearted productions, enough to mention *Ach, jak przyjemnie*, *Kresowa dusza*, *Akademia policyjna*, *Nauka jazdy*, *Czirliderki*, *Delegacja* and to some degree *Złote lany*, *Pierwszy krzyk* and *Klinika cudów*. Still, the prevailing themes are: unemployment, alcoholism, illnesses, loneliness, war, criminality, rough beginnings of adult life, bringing up children behind prison bars, and all the problems that can be seen through the prism of police inspectors, army recruits, emigrants, immigrants, or victims of natural disasters. Even those films that are meant to be easy and entertaining (e.g. *Modelki*, *Ballada o lekkim zabarwieniu erotycznym*, *Noc posłubna, ale kino* or *Kochankowie*

z Internetu) all proved rather depressing and gloomy. This is due to the pessimistic (not to mention, easy) social diagnosis, the mix of the characters, and the often humiliating way in which they are portrayed.

Docusoap is more attached to the banal frivolity of everyday life, and does not hold educational and informative ambitions. Most often it shows the world well known to the spectators – It does not interpret, only portrays life with the camera lens (and comments on the scene with a voice-over). Breton and Cohen write that docusoap rejects teleological searching for meaning, and satisfies itself with gossip and banality. Dovey⁴³ goes further claiming that docusoaps are flat and shallow in comparison with documentaries, but also in their own soap-opera-like composition. Kilborn further insists that docusoaps concentrate on people and interactions between them, only accidentally helping us understand the backstage functioning of professions, and featured organizations; docusoaps very rarely engage analytically and critically with reality, as is the case with traditional investigative documentary films⁴⁴. Documentary telenovela occasionally pretends to be a socially minded series, but it hardly ever goes beyond the banal and mundane. It only is informative when it shows socially excluded, marginalized and stigmatized people, but even then information is not full or correct, if mostly sensational. Overall the Polish documentary telenovelas are more closely related to British soap operas (which often engage with social issues, leaving the impression that social service is one of its main functions), then to the British docusoaps (which avoid serious content with the aim of increasing their attractiveness to spectators).

There were no heated debates among Polish documentary filmmakers and broadcasters about the dangers of documentary telenovela and the reality TV genres. The producers stressed the positive aspects, of course. Wojciech Szumowski claimed in 1999 that documentary telenovela is gaining popularity across the globe, because the (mis)fortunes of ordinary people are increasingly seen as more interesting than the fiction, and that the development of this genre is a way of gaining the balance in the world dominated by fiction. Andrzej Fidyk, on the other hand, said: *The genre proves that there is nothing better for the cinematic plot than a possibility of registering the flow of time. Long has the cinema searched for the way to capture the flow of time differently than via the use of retrospectives. In the case of the documentary telenovela, the camera lenses solve [the problem]. Simply put, everything is happening in the real time. That our protagonists have a concrete addresses, and that the spectators can even find the characters and talk with them about what happened – this gives the sense of participating in the events that are happening on the screen. The connection with the reality show could be obvious, but is incorrect, because the characters in those programmes are isolated from the reality in the controlled environment. Our protagonists remain in their own environment, and we just film their everyday life. To put it short: a piece of real life*⁴⁵. However, some documentary filmmakers who did not venture into the new territory were rather critical of the genre. Marcel Łoziński in 2004 said: *In most of the documentary telenovelas the commentary describing what we are seeing, what we saw, or what we will see in a moment, is simply unbearable. This is an infantile and shallow way of seeing and telling stories*⁴⁶. And years later, in 2011, when asked about the power of contemporary documentaries, he replied: *People are fed up with fairy-tales, telenovelas, all those fake documentaries and sensationalism. I have*

a feeling that they search more often for their own reflection, their fears and problems, and all that is inside them ⁴⁷.

Even though there are some prominent names among directors of documentary telenovelas, the series made by them had no chance of becoming landmark achievements, as this is their generic destination. The genre was invented for infotainment and not for the scrutiny of reality, a terrain of traditionally understood documentary filmmaking. Also, the primary criticisms of documentary telenovelas levelled by reviewers and academics, are what also sets them apart and gives them their canonical and distinctive characteristics. For example, the life events of real people are presented (sometimes provoked) in the fictional telenovela format, with a few snappy plots used to keep viewers' attention. The protagonists are one-dimensional, and clearly outlined problems provoke simple and sharp emotions, often honed in on by the narrator.

Nonetheless, some Polish commentators saw in the documentary telenovela an antidote to the overwhelming fictionalisation of life ⁴⁸. Others were pondering the development possibilities of the new genre. Marcin Niemojewski wrote: *Perhaps peeing at the reality in the actual time, following the human life in all its aspects, is the chance and the opportunity for this medium to find its own formula, just like the ambitious novel, or the charming radio programme* ⁴⁹. Others offered a "manual" of how to use documentary telenovelas: *Back in the past, we smuggled moral anxieties in socialist realism formulas, and journalistic analysis in the form of the stand up comedy. Today the important social observations are dressed up in the telenovela's costume. And as always... one simply needs to read between the lines* ⁵⁰. However, most voices remained critical. In 1999 Mirosław Pęczak wrote: *Invented in Britain, the documentary soap (documentary telenovela) is not for connoisseurs. It aims at less sophisticated consumers of the television's provision. In Poland, these could be fans of "Esmeralda"* ⁵¹.

Jerzy Uszyński (2001) criticised the genre's escapism, simulated reality, oversimplification, and repetitiveness of situations. He noted that the primary objective of the documentaries (to discover the truth) is lost, and the telenovelas became affirmative counselling tools, confirming our (spectators) idea of the world ⁵². A few years later (in 2003) Wiesław Godzic said: *In documentary telenovelas I am irritated by the constant play on the lowest instincts. Filmmakers find it difficult to move from the voyeurism to reflection about the society* ⁵³. His detachment came from the colliding raw material of reality with the wish to interpret it: *In the genre, the authors clearly suggest that the presence of the "real elements" is enough to claim the truthfulness for the whole film* ⁵⁴. In 2005 Małgorzata Hendrykowska wrote in a similar tone, accusing the telenovela of not trusting the "real" people, constantly stimulating and suggesting them in terms of how to play their own roles. Protagonists are objectified, and reduced to "curiosities" as heroes of the animal world – vulture or boa snake. *In the documentary telenovela, so-called real life in all its richness becomes a spectacle, especially where we deal with pain and (psychic) suffering. How many of those telenovelas aired in the recent years overcame the boundaries of "showing" the world, to benefit the deeper interpretation of the surrounding and rather complex reality?* ⁵⁵ Mirosław Przyłipiak condemned all Polish documentary telenovelas for being arbitral: *As my criterion of judgment I take the thing most important in documentary filmmaking, that is the respect for*

the observed reality. It is manifested in openness and an ability to listen to it. The respect's antitype lies in an arbitral and instrumental approach to the reality, when one uses it only to "prove" previously assumed truth ⁵⁶.

However, he was more positive about the clear pedagogical tendency in documentary telenovelas: *They usually touch upon important topics, contain significant messages* ⁵⁷. Godzic noticed the worrying mechanisms in telenovela. He argues that it forces tears not to make the viewer rethink the organisation of the social order, but *To suggest that there exists the higher instance that is able to solve everything in a logical, clear and effective manner; while the spectators remain passively consuming words and images. Why not to give oneself to its [higher instance] enslavement? This is the logical consequence of how documentary telenovelas are narrated* ⁵⁸. Małgorzata Hendrykowska called the documentary telenovela the notebook organised in a way as to prove the a priori assumed thesis. *There is no space for silence, discretion, mystery, suggestion – each feeling needs to be exposed, each thought needs to be commented upon. (...) Telenovela's conclusion is its starting point, and the rest is the mere illustration of the imagined and pre-conceived model of the reality. In other words, documentary telenovela offers ready-made conclusions, shallow schemas in which protagonists, events, and observations are allocated according to the pre-existing key. To use the popular term "interactive", one could say that it is the classic documentary film that is interactive, if we compare it with the telenovela's pulp. The shape of the telenovela is an effect of the rushed shooting, and in consequence, of the shallow production, poor editing, and selfishness of protagonists who sense that they can help their own case by filming* ⁵⁹.

The weakness of the documentary telenovela stems from its genetic characteristics and, as such, can be excused to some degree. Documentary material, which mixes aesthetics with informational aspects, while made to entertain and please, does not provide too much reflection about society, nor does it perform deeper analysis of the filmed reality. Instead, it is a platform for ready-made interpretations that confirm the worldview served by the popular media and infotainment. But the critique concerns not only these issues; there was a strong reaction concerning the ethical side of documentary telenovelas. As in the case of many other "reality TV" programmes, the most controversial are the filmmakers' tactics to solicit protagonists' reactions, and the voyeuristic role of the spectator. *Why would one want to peep at the life of one's own neighbours is unclear, at least morally. Nonetheless the fact is that spectators are more and more inclined to watch and identify with the protagonists of the documentary series. Real people – their troubles, life challenges, true tears and true laughter – that is what is fascinating in "Pierwszy krzyk", "Szpital Dzieciątka Jezus", "Kawaleria powietrzna" – wrote one of the reviewers in 2000* ⁶⁰.

Director's interventions and the staging used in documentary telenovelas should not really surprise anyone, as they are known to be used also in documentaries, although not to such an extent. Wojciech Szumowski said: *I do use some cinematic tricks that pretend to transmission – that is the convention. The spectators need not to realise that, they ought not to realise that. That's my role, to choose certain aesthetics. But where I put the camera, where I point it, how I film – that is fist of all a matter of morality, and not only aesthetics* ⁶¹. As the classic example of manipulation, Stanisław Krzemiński recalls the situation when, upon the sign, parents

are told to call their ill child in the hospital, because we know that this will provoke the child's reaction. *Editing, on the other hand, is about "squeezing" rather simple but gripping story from the shootings, and about adding to it the soap-opera like characteristics, by e.g. cutting protagonists' expressions short to get the maximum content from the simple form. People have, that is, the tendency to narrate long stories where only they know all the meanders, associations, and contexts, and so the viewers could find it incomprehensible* ⁶².

It is hard to tell what reaction could we get if people were informed that the village showed in *Złote lany* has a completely different name, that the couples from *Nieparzyści* were fake, and that Joanna Naturalny from *Ballada o lekkim zabarwieniu erotycznym*, who in the last episode of the series, in front of the eyes of millions declared that she is to divorce her husband, still lives with him and now says it was only for the purpose of the film. Questions and doubts related to the staging and provocation emerged among reviewers and commentators. Agnieszka Zwiefka wrote about *Nieparzyści*: *We do not entirely trust camera's eye, which already at the very beginning catches the protagonists' looks at each other, although their relationship is still to happen. How do the filmmakers know that these people will form a relationship later?* ⁶³ Others discarded the artificiality of many scenes and dialogues, peeping at the staged intimate life. Still, perhaps it is not about manipulations, but about the quality of the effect. It is so, because the crossing of the ethical boundaries in documentary telenovelas has always proved aesthetically poor. This also concerns highlighted disastrous and unethical, to my mind, manipulation of spectatorship (but backlashing mostly the protagonists) to pretend there is social concern and interest in grave social problems. Poor social simulations in some documentary telenovelas, through the choice of the topic and declarations (*Nieparzyści*, *Serce z węgla*, *Ballada o lekkim zabarwieniu erotycznym*, *U nas na Pekinie*), can be observed in the inadequate techniques used for filming. This incompatibility of the subject, form and style is not only a constraint of the genre, but also a consequence of the director's lack of control over the priorities. The alternatives are: to choose the educational-informative ambition, which drives us towards serious and challenging topics and issues, or to give in to the entertaining imperative that prefers techniques that weaken seriousness. There is a certain margin of choice here, as there is in the choice of protagonists and their portrayal. Some filmmakers could not decide if they wanted to show how young and naive girls from the province are exploited and abused by some doggy types, or if they wanted to "entertain" viewers by showing how stupid and primitive they are, who see a better life possibility in selling the beauty of their daughters (while in the background topless girls are fighting in custard).

Additionally, in the context of the documentary telenovela, an often-raised issue was the exploitation of protagonists. Some filmmakers felt relieved from the duty of taking care of their protagonists, because of the agreement and general keen attitudes of the participants. Others, understanding the dangers of the genre, tried to form their own rules that would prevent them from the aesthetics and ethical issues of *Big Brother*. The least dubious series were those where one could feel the filmmakers' respect to the topic, but mostly to the protagonists. This is manifested mainly by the ability to know when to turn the camera off, and what not to include when editing. I think the best and most interesting documentary telenovelas are ex-

actly those, where such respect is clearly manifested, where the filmmakers do not ridicule or put down their protagonists. That there is a margin of freedom in the “soapy” documentary is best proven by the successful documentary telenovelas like *Dusza kresowa* (2004) and *Ja, alkoholik* (2003). In *Dusza kresowa*, Ewa Straburzyńska (who also made one of the worst telenovelas *Nieparzyści*, 2000) took the challenge of finding the answer to the question of what happens to the person cut off from their roots, and displaced. She made the series about the true kresowiaci [people who after the WWII were relocated from the east, contemporary Belarus and Ukraine, to the other parts of Poland] and their families and family background. She showed that the family that was relocated and displaced does not stop identifying with the old regions, and does not stop longing for them. In this case, the author did not choose media-oriented people as protagonists, and did not look down on them; she may not have shown everything that she witnessed during filming. Similarly Jacek Bławut in *Ja, alkoholik*, who showed alcohol-addicted people who did not give up trying to return to normal life. He also treated them respectfully. *I will never show everything. One must know the boundaries and stick to them all the time*, he said⁶⁴. For example, he shot a carousal but did not show it in the film. *One cannot go below certain artistic level*⁶⁵.

The documentary telenovelas managed somehow to capture the image of the Polish reality at the brink of the new century, however distorted, tendentious and non-representative. Jerzy Uszyński argues that telenovelas created a sociographic map of Poland⁶⁶; there are people from metropolitan cities and small villages, from different regions, of both genders, and of all ages. There are representatives of many professions too, but in many cases the choice of protagonists is dictated by the mechanics of the genre. The most often chosen social and professional groups were those who not only satisfied the curiosity of viewers, but also could easily deliver: 1) emotions (people in hospitals, shelters, animals in vet hospitals, unemployed or victims of the natural disasters); 2) strong scenes as in the fiction films, with the element of sensation (army, police, prison, reformatory); 3) other strong emotions (modelling, sex work). Accountants or teachers did not have many chances to become protagonists of documentary telenovelas. However, from the groups that did not straightforwardly guarantee numerous elements described above (clients of the dating services, people looking for love over the internet, inhabitants of the soon to be demolished block of flats), only those people who were strongly oriented towards the media were chosen. These people would be open and chatty, or would be some sort of “attraction” on their own (e.g. quarrelsome, or life ambitions and aspirations beyond their actual possibilities, or people with a specific “deficit”). The picture of Polish society that we gain (with its intellectual level, morale, mentality, and customs) is rather scary, and is a consequence of the one-sidedness in representation. This depiction is partially real, as it lacks the counter-balance, complexity and multiplicity, with which we deal in our everyday lives. Certain social groups (communities as well as specific personalities) are clearly not within a range of filmmakers’ interests (apart of the hospital telenovela, which of course, is of interests to everybody).

In the history of the Polish documentary telenovela, certain series stand out. Jacek Bławut and Wojciech Maciejewski’s *Kawaleria powietrzna* (2000) is about a group of recruits who on the 6th October, 1999, formed the 25 Air Force Brigades.

The film became very popular due to the unintended attention received from the people shocked by the life conditions of the soldiers. Even though the officers who agreed on filming knew and saliently accepted certain forms of abuse, after the airing of the first three episodes the case became of interest to the prosecution. According to “Gazeta Wyborcza”⁶⁷, it was noted that officers abuse and humiliate recruits. *We have received many telephones from the army representatives, all resentful of the film. We have to watch all episodes now, to see to what extent the plot is real or fictionally staged*, said one of the army prosecutors⁶⁸. It was the first case in Poland, when the prosecutor tried to establish the percentage of the staging in the documentary telenovela. Also the army Bishop Sławoj Leszek Głódź protested against the film in the open letter to the parliamentary commission for the national defence. Additionally the director of the socio-educational department of the Ministry of the National Defence was critical about the series: *I watched three episodes and I am disgusted. Such imaginary does not help the Polish Army. Is it real? Nonsense. Three junior sergeants swear, creating the image of the whole army. I think it is staged. Somebody is trying hard to transpose the American traditions into Polish soil*⁶⁹. Filmmakers consequently refuted accusations about manipulation and staging, and were accusing the military hierarchs for not being in touch with the everyday army reality. The good thing, according to the documentary filmmaker Bolesław Sulik, was that the film provoked discussion, as the worst-case scenario would be to stop showing it⁷⁰.

On the other hand, the series *Kochaj mnie* (TVP 2, 2002) by Athena Sawidis and Grzegorz Siedlecki, gained its own life beyond the TV screen. The film was about children from an orphanage, and quickly became some sort of intervention programme. It provoked many emotions (which is the aim of the documentary telenovela), but also concrete decisions about the help that was offered to children, including adoption of some of them. There were many telephones after each episode, and there was even a special number shown during the emission, where more information about the adoption of the shown children was available. Also the “Przyjaciółka” Foundation was involved in helping the children. There was also a webpage, updated once a week, with episode descriptions, telephone numbers, and other information about adoption. The cinematographic criteria gave place to the utilitarian character of the series.

Most media attention, however, received the 22 episodes of Irena and Jerzy Morawski’s documentary telenovela *Ballada o lekkim zabarwieniu erotycznym* (2003, TVP 1). It told the story of young girls recruited as the attractions of the provincial discos, where they presented lingerie, or fought in oil, custard, foam, or pasta noodles, while being regularly humiliated verbally. The series not only provoked discussion, or sensational coverage in tabloid newspapers, but also the relevant controlling body fined Polish Television for propagating negative ideas and showing situations that put the protagonists in physical and mental danger. TVP was accused of promoting exploitation, demoralising the youth, and showing procurement as the normal behaviour.

It is worth mentioning one more telenovela, due to its context of origin. What was a natural and spontaneous reaction to *Kochaj mnie*, in the case of the *Zupełnie zwyczajne życie* (TVP 3 Lublin, 2007) was pre-planned. The series was part of the of the big research project “@lterEgo”, financed the EU EQUAL framework. It

aimed at diminishing the obstacles faced by single parents in becoming active on the job market. The telenovela's aim was to register the life of the chosen group of the programme's beneficiaries – their life on the job market. The documentary telenovela was a so-called good practice, developed during the project. Interestingly, the project members wrote: *There are two things, in relation to the impact on the production process, differentiating documentary telenovela from other productions. The social factor of the phenomena is very important, and the impact that such media form has. Due to the method of filmmaking as well as due to its impact, we need to account for the institutionalisation of the telenovela. It becomes a real part of the protagonist life, mediates between the protagonist and the viewer, organises their lives, also beyond the moments of filming. It is due too the specific work co-ordination. The choice of protagonists is the most important part of the production process. In the case of "Zupełnie zwyczajne życie" the process of recruiting characters was subdued to the recruitment of the beneficiaries of the whole project. The researchers used own database: knew the participants' motivation, ability to change, communication skills, and intellectual abilities of the potential protagonists* ⁷¹. From the very beginning, the research plan was to recruit participants that would be attractive for the project and for the camera. Documentary telenovela belongs to the continuum of reality and fiction, and each incarnation, depending on the factors mentioned earlier, is situated closer or further away from the core of the infotainment.

While discussing docusoaps and documentary telenovelas, it is worth mentioning the other hybrid forms are emerging at the borders. I am thinking of the celebrity docusoap, which has two versions. In the first case, the spectators can peep at the family life of the celebrity person in their house (for example *The Osbournes* /MTV, 2001/ featuring rock star Ozzy Osbourne). The second version of the celebrity docusoap is about mixing the docusoap with elements of celebrity. For example, rather than watching ordinary people trying to get a driving licence like in *Driving School*, we watch the celebrity personalities doing it, as in the case of the *Celebrity Driving School* (BBC 1, 2003). An interesting hybrid docusoap is also one about animals. The narration reminds us a little of the old school Disney documentary features about animals; with the exception that now it is told in the episodic manner, exposing its serialized character. The example is the British *Meerkat Manor* ⁷². In the UK and Germany, there is even a form called a pseudo docusoap, which in Poland is called para-documentary series (but also documentary telenovela, even if not having much in common with the telenovela). It is the scenario-based production, played by the first-time-behind-the-camera non-professional actors. Polsat series are good examples: *Trudne sprawy* (2011), *Dlaczego ja?* (2010) and *Pamiętniki z wakacji* (2011), as well as the German series: *Verdachtsfälle* (RTL, 2009), *X-Diarries – love, sun & fun* (RTL 2, 2010), *Familien im Brennpunkt* (RTL, 2011), *Family Stories* (RTL 2, 2011) and *Berlin – Tag & Nacht* (RTL 2, 2011).

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- ¹⁸ Ibidem.
- ¹⁹ Ibidem.
- ²⁰ E. Klaus, S. Lücke, *Reality Tv – Definition und Merkmale einer erfolgreichen Genrefamilie am Beispiel von Relity Soap and Doku Soap*, "Medien&Kommunikation", Jahrgang 2/2003, no. 51, pp. 195-212.
- ²¹ Private interview, 14.11.2006.
- ²² Ibidem.
- ²³ Ibidem.
- ²⁴ Ibidem.
- ²⁵ Quoted after: T. Pikulski, *Prywatna historia telewizji publicznej*, Muza S.A., Warszawa 2002, p. 423.
- ²⁶ A. Piotrowska, *Jak sfilmować czyjeś łzy*, "Tygodnik Powszechny" 19-26.12.1999, no. 51-52.
- ²⁷ M. Pęczak, *Kamera w brzuchu*, "Polityka" 01.05.1999, no. 18.
- ²⁸ K. Jabłońska, *Na żywo*, "Więź", November 1999.
- ²⁹ See: W. Godzic, *Telewizja i jej gatunki po "Wielkim Bracie"*, Universitas, Kraków 2004, p. 207.
- ³⁰ Gaining an access to the maternity hospital (previously not even accessible by fathers), is an outcome of the transformations occurring in Poland during the 1990s. Especially the campaign "Human Birth Giving" ("Rodzić po ludzku"), by many hailed as one of the most successful campaigns of the decade, had much to do with changes in the conditions of birth giving in maternity hospitals.
- ³¹ A. Wrzesień, K. T. Nowak, *Człowiek się rodzi*, "Przekrój" 1999, no. 51-51.
- ³² T. Pikulski, op. cit. p.424.
- ³³ A. Wrzesień, K. T. Nowak, op. cit.
- ³⁴ A. Piotrowska, op. cit.
- ³⁵ K. Jabłońska, op. cit.
- ³⁶ A. Wrzesień, K. T. Nowak, op. cit.
- ³⁷ It is worth mentioning that in the UK during the peak period of docusoap's popularity, as much as 75 series were produced only in 1998.
- ³⁸ The *Driving School* episode aired on the July 15, 1997, reached the whopping 12,45 million of spectators (i.e. 53% of all spectatorship).
- ³⁹ Here I partially relate to characteristics presented by Richard Kilborn, op. cit.
- ⁴⁰ In the soap opera, it is a trailer.
- ⁴¹ R. Kilborn, op. cit.
- ⁴² S. Brenton, R. Cohen, *Shooting People. Adventures in Reality TV*, Verso, London 2003, p. 34.
- ⁴³ J. Dovey, *Freakshow: First Person Media and Factual Television*, Pluto Press, London – Sterling, 2000.
- ⁴⁴ J. Izod, R. Kilborn, M. Hibberd, *From Grierson to the Docu-Soap. Breaking the Boundaries*, University of Luton Press 2000, p. 112.
- ⁴⁵ Quoted after: J. Cobus, op. cit.
- ⁴⁶ A. Uszyńska, *Być dokumentalistą. Rozmowa z M. Łozińskim i J. Bławutem*, "Zeszyty Telewizyjne" 2004, no. 3, p. 94.
- ⁴⁷ Source: Tomasz Baranski/PAP Life.
- ⁴⁸ See: A. Zwiefka, *Transmisja z cudzego życia*, "Wprost" 23.04.2000, no. 17, pp. 112-114.

- ⁴⁹ M. Niemojewski, *Serce z węgla*, "Wizja Publiczna" 2001, no. 11.
- ⁵⁰ P. Legutko, *Dokument mydłem pachnący*, "Nowe Państwo" 2003, no. 11.
- ⁵¹ M. Pęczak, op. cit.
- ⁵² See: J. Uszyński, *Potrzebny kawał życia i proza realistyczna sprzed półtora wieku*, "Wizja Publiczna" 2001, no. 4.
- ⁵³ After: J. Romanowicz, *Sensacja na uwięzi*, "Newsweek" 05.10.2003, no. 40.
- ⁵⁴ W. Godzic, op. cit., p. 208.
- ⁵⁵ M. Hendrykowska, *Telenowela dokumentalna*, in: *Klucze do rzeczywistości. Szkice i rozmowy o polskim filmie dokumentalnym po roku 1989*, ed. M. Hendrykowska, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2005, p. 103.
- ⁵⁶ M. Przyłipiak, *Poetyka kina dokumentalnego*, Gdańsk – Słupsk 2004, p. 319.
- ⁵⁷ M. Przyłipiak, *Najnowsze tendencje dokumentalizmu TV*, "Zeszyty telewizyjne" 2003, no. 1, p. 35.
- ⁵⁸ W. Godzic, op. cit., p. 213.
- ⁵⁹ M. Hendrykowska, op. cit., pp. 98-99.
- ⁶⁰ I. Smoczyńska, *Marzyciele i podglądacze*, "Kino" 2000, no. 7/8, p. 31.
- ⁶¹ A. Zwiefka, op. cit., p. 212.
- ⁶² Author's interview with Stanisław Krzemiński 14.11.2006.
- ⁶³ A. Zwiefka, op. cit., pp. 112-114.
- ⁶⁴ Quoted after: J. Romanowicz, op. cit.
- ⁶⁵ Ibidem.
- ⁶⁶ J. Uszyński, *Telewizyjny pejzaż genologiczny*, Warszawa 2004, p. 94.
- ⁶⁷ Ibidem.
- ⁶⁸ Ibidem.
- ⁶⁹ Ibidem.
- ⁷⁰ J. Grabarski, *Kawaleria przeklinająca*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 08.02.2000, no. 32.
- ⁷¹ *Recepta na zmianę. Katalog dobrych praktyk*. Publikacja Krajowych Sieci Tematycznych Inicjatywy Wspólnotowej EQUAL (temat G), Warszawa 2008, p. 141.
- ⁷² Produced by Southern Star Entertainment, UK, 2005; Animal Planet producer – Mark Wild, series producer – Lucinda Axelsson, series editor – Caroline Hawkins.