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CHAPTER 10

Baltic Narratives About the Soviet Past: The Documentary Cinema of Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen and Giedrė Žickytė

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Introduction

Paradigmatic shifts in journalism and non-fiction cinema occurred in the West in the 1960s and 1970s due to the liberal spirit and creative forces of the time, as well as technological innovations. These gave rise to new movements described as "new journalism" (an expanded form of classical "literary journalism," encompassing narrative journalism, creative non-fiction, the non-fiction novel, literary non-fiction, literary reportage, and many other movements[1]), and a new type of non-fiction filmmaking (best represented by the "*cinema vérité*" and "direct cinema" movements). Jane Chapman suggests observational documentaries of the 1960s and 1970s

[1] For more details, see John C. Hartsock, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 3.

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"can be viewed as a form of journalism" and even "a form of visual journalism, which involves a quest for the real facts or information behind the headlines."[2] At this time, Western filmmakers of different nationalities and backgrounds engaged in personal, poetic, reflexive, and experimental creative practices while telling stories about ordinary people, drawing attention to social issues and using personal narratives to explore themes that contrasted with the didactic television documentaries that had prevailed for decades.[3] These films foregrounded the filmmaker's involvement in the creative process and captured actual events and emotions with a level of subjectivity and artistry that went beyond the mere presentation of facts. In the 1960s and 1970s documentarists in the Baltic states could not enjoy the same creative freedom as their counterparts in Western countries, because their cultural space was cut off from the processes of the outside world and permeated by censorship in the Soviet Union. However, Lithuanians Almantas Grikevičius, Robertas Verba, and Henrikas Šablevičius; Latvians Uldis Brauns, Aivars Freimanis, and Ivars Seleckis; and Estonians Mark Soosaar and Andres Sööt developed the Baltic poetic documentary cinema tradition by creating their influential films.[4] Their works were characterized by an ethnographer's sensibility with minimal verbal expression and were rich in metaphors. The visual language they employed, moreover, to tell the stories of the everyday routines of ordinary people, did not correspond to the lives of the ideal Soviet person.[5] They avoided addressing the topics promoted by Soviet nomenclature and the use of authoritative voice-over narration, filmic features which prevailed in non-fiction films under communism. This creative strategy was

[2] Jane Chapman, *Issues in Contemporary Documentary* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 19.

[3] Among the films with innovative creative approach were: *Chronique d'un été* (*Chronicle of a Summer*, Jean Rouch, Edgar Morin, 1961, France), *Le Joli Mai* (*The Lovely Month of May*, Chris Marker, Pierre Lhomme, 1963, France), *Titicut Follies* (Frederick Wiseman, 1967, USA), *In the Year of the Pig* (Emile de Antonio, 1968, USA).

[4] Among the most prominent films are: *Laikas eina per miestą* (*Time Walks Through the City*, Almantas Grikevičius, 1966); *Šimtamečių godos* (*The Dreams of the Centenarians*, Robertas Verba, 1969); *Kelionė ūkų lankomis* (*A Trip Across Misty Meadows*, Henrikas Šablevičius, 1973); *235 000 000* (Uldis Brauns, 1967); *Kuldīga Frescoes* (*Kuldīgas freskas*, 1966) and *Lomi* (*Catch*, 1969, both directed by Aivars Freimanis, cinematographer Ivars Seleckis); *Kihnu naine* (*Woman from Kihnu*, Mark Soosaar, 1974), *Ruhnu* (*Ruhnu*, Andres Sööt, 1965).

[5] A documentary film *Laika tilti (Bridges of Time*, co-production of all three Baltic states) by Latvian director Kristīne Briede and Lithuanian director Audrius Stonys was released in 2018 about this generation of filmmakers.

chosen very purposefully by younger filmmakers to nurture a documentary discourse alternative to the one developed by their established colleagues producing ideologically sound Soviet documentaries. These are best represented by the genre of "soviet chronicles," films in the genre of TV reportage, produced in the studios of the Soviet Republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the period from the 1940s to the 1980s, about the important events in the political and social life in these republics, their most prominent people, and their achievements. Creative non-fiction practices in the Baltic states continued to flourish in the 1980s and 1990s (during significant political changes in the Soviet Union and after its collapse), maintaining the tradition of "poetic documentaries." The filmmakers also developed personal essayistic narratives as well as investigative and observational approaches for depicting the social and political reality they lived in (for instance, films by Šarūnas Bartas, Algimantas Maceina, Juris Podnieks, Laila Pakalniņa, and Edmundas Zubavičius). Film festivals in the West took notice of this nonconformist creative documentary practice, which at that time, according to Moritz de Hadeln, the director of the Berlin International Film Festival, was "clearly the best in this field in the whole Soviet Union. It matches the quality of the best of the Western schools."[6] He also recognized that Baltic filmmakers had "strong personalities and a style, a vision and a specific sensitivity."[7] Creative non-fiction films produced in the Baltic states in the 1990s, during the period when Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia had just regained their independence and were restoring their statehoods, began reflecting on these crucial historic events as well as on the individual and collective traumas of living under a totalitarian regime. These narratives undoubtedly broadened the small nations' view of a dramatic era and added new narratives to Europe's historical and cultural memory.

The Baltic documentarians who began their careers in the new millennium were influenced by global trends and matured in an environment that was culturally and socially diverse and guided by the neoliberal market economy, in which film was perceived as art as well as a creative industrial commodity. Therefore, it was clear to them that "consumer entertainment

[6] Moritz de Hadeln, "Preface," in *Les Documentaires Des Republiques Sovietiques Baltes: Une Retrospective / Die Dokumentarfilme Der Baltischen Sowjetrepubliken: Eine Retrospektive / Documentary Films of the Baltic Soviet Republics: A Retrospective*, ed. Erika de Hadeln, Moritz de Hadeln, and Hans-Joachim Schlegel (Nyon, 1987), 14.

[7] de Hadeln, "Preface," 14.

was an important aspect of the business of filmmaking, even in documentary,"[8] especially when films needed intermediaries (broadcasters, distributors, sales agents) to secure production budgets and audiences. These paradigmatic shifts gradually blurred the visible boundaries between fiction, documentary, experimental, and even animated film genres, expanding the notion of "truth" and "sobriety" in non-fiction media by offering more nuanced, subtle, and multi-layered perspectives on the world. Another important development that affected the documentary milieu (especially in Europe) was the steadily growing number of women directors and producers of feature documentary films, influencing their thematic and stylistic diversity.

In this chapter, we examine the creative non-fiction films of two renowned Baltic documentary filmmakers—Lithuanian director Giedrė Žickytė and Latvian director Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen—both of whom have journalistic and film training and are recognized for their distinctive visual style and captivating well-crafted narratives about life under the communist regime, as well as the Soviet legacy in Baltic societies. Both started their cinematic careers after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[9] Their films are successfully screened at international festivals, on TV channels, and on streaming platforms. They are appreciated by viewers in their home countries and abroad, especially by those who have not lived in a totalitarian system but are curious about it.

To involve the audience in the "aesthetics of experience"[10] of daily life during communism and after its fall, these two filmmakers employ different creative non-fictional narrative techniques. For example, in the documentaries *Mans mīļākais karš* (*My Favorite War*, 2020, Norway/Latvia) and *Bekons, sviests un mana mamma* (*My Mother's Farm*, 2008, Latvia/

[8] Patricia Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

[9] Burkovska-Jacobsen lives and works in Latvia and Norway. She left Latvia after graduating from high school in 1990. She first studied TV and video production, then completed an undergraduate course in film directing in Lillehammer. She became a freelance filmmaker and co-owns the production company Bivrost Film, which creates content for the Norwegian, Latvian, and EU market. Žickytė graduated from Vilnius University in 2002 with a degree in journalism. In 2004, she completed postgraduate studies in TV and film directing at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theater. In 2007, she completed her master's degree in visual arts at the Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts. She is a member of the European Film Academy. In 2014, she founded the Moonmakers production studio.

[10] The term was coined by John C. Hartsock and explained in *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*.

Norway), Burkovska-Jacobsen uses various cinematic materials (animation, voice-over narration, newspaper clippings, family archive footage) to develop narratives that focus on her personal experiences and her family's life during the oppressive regime and after its fall, offering insights into history through a personal lens. These films are microhistorical, as the autobiographical perspective places personal memory at the center of historical investigation.[11] Burkovska-Jacobsen grew up in Soviet Latvia and spent part of her young adulthood there. This fact explains her choice to talk about the Soviet era and major political changes in the 1980s and 1990s from a personal perspective. Meanwhile, Žickytė was a child when Lithuania and other Baltic states regained their independence in 1990. In *Šuolis* (*The Jump*, 2020, Lithuania/ Latvia/ France), *Meistras ir Tatjana* (*Master and Tatyana*, 2015, Lithuania), *and Kaip mes žaidėme revoliuciją* (*How We Played the Revolution*, 2012, Lithuania), she uses a different strategy to talk about the same historical period and life during that time. She tells her stories from the point of view of the protagonists of her films—bright, talented, and nonconformist figures (mainly Lithuanian artists of the late Soviet era) whose creative practices and lifestyle were an expression of their resistance to the regime. In these films, montage plays an essential role in constructing the narrative from various archival materials (television footage, videotapes of independent cameramen, photographs, personal notes of the characters) alongside the filmed memories of artists, cultural workers, and people from the inner circle of the main characters, which are supplemented by the comments of experts.

Although in originating from small countries, these films may be liminal and marginal, from an epistemological point of view they are valuable and play an important role in refreshing national and European collective memory by creating emotive and personal narratives about totalitarian regimes in Europe and communicating them to people who did not directly experience the actual events and situations. With this research, we seek to answer the following questions: (1) How does the intersection of the subjective, analytical, and critical approaches in the films contribute to the aesthetic experience of everyday life in the Soviet period? (2) How do the cinematic approaches and narratives in the films differ from traditional reportage-style documentaries, which Bill Nichols categorizes as "the

[11] Efrén Cuevas, *Filming History from Below: Microhistorical Documentaries* (New York: Columbia University Press/Wallflower, 2022), 36.

expository,"[12] and other Baltic documentaries, which fall into the category of creative non-fiction film? Sheila Curran Bernard and Philip Gerard's theoretical concepts of creative non-fiction as well as Efrén Cuevas's work on microhistorical documentaries serve as the foundation for our research.[13]

"Creative Non-fiction" and "Documentary"

Before we analyze the selected sample films, the key terms of this chapter, namely "non-fiction" and "documentary," will be briefly discussed. According to Bernard, audiovisual non-fiction lies "on a spectrum between journalism and art, encompassing some of both."[14] Aufderheide identifies entertainment as an additional component on the spectrum.[15] More broadly, documentary film has been considered alongside other "discourses of sobriety," such as science, economics, politics, and religion.[16] This situates non-fiction narratives within an expansive discursive field, highlighting different perspectives on their rightful place. As Gerard rightly observes: "On the face of it, the term nonfiction does not make much sense. No other genre suffers under this metaphysical definition by negation."[17] The term "non-fiction" is frequently used in documentary film theory alongside "documentary," though distinctions exist in the usage of these terms. It was British filmmaker John Grierson who originated "documentary" as a term for non-fiction film; he also coined the phrase "creative treatment of actuality," a frequently used (though contested) description of documentary film practice.[18] In some instances,

[12] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

[13] For more details, see Philip Gerard, *Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life* (Cincinnati: Story Press Books, 1996) and 2nd ed. (Long Grove: Waveland Press Inc., 2018); Sheila Curran Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling: Creative Nonfiction on Screen*, 3rd ed. (Waltham: Focal Press, 2010); 4th ed. (Waltham: Focal Press, 2016); 5th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2023); Cuevas, *Filming History from Below*.

[14] Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling*, 5th ed., 5.

[15] Patricia Aufderheide, "The Changing Documentary Marketplace," *Cinéaste* 30, no. 3 (2005): 24.

[16] Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 3–4.

[17] Philip Gerard, *Creative Nonfiction*, 2nd ed., 3.

[18] John Grierson, "The Documentary Producer (1933)," in *Documentary Film Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*, ed. Jonathan Kahana (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 216.

"documentary" is negatively contrasted with non-fiction films or series that are genuinely captivating, suggesting that documentaries tend to prioritize the presentation of a subject and the articulation of an argument, often to provide information in a manner similar to educational films.[19] Bernard suggests that the problem may lie in different perceptions of what it means to tell stories and specifically documentary stories, and how non-fiction-based narratives differ from narrative or feature films. While not all non-fiction films are narrative driven, acknowledging that many non-fiction films are part of narrative cinema broadens the discourse on creativity, enriching the conversation.[20] These discussions illustrate the particular importance of the term "creativity," which functions as a tool for storytelling, especially when it refers to real events.

Debates surrounding terminology in non-fiction cinema and the issue of creativity reflect similar discussions in non-fiction writing, where terms like "creative non-fiction" and "literary journalism" are intertwined. Gerard supports Lee Gutkind's choice of the term "creative non-fiction," which was developed to attract interest from those involved in both creative writing and journalism, highlighting it as a relatively new term.[21] Conversely, John C. Hartsock favors the term "literary journalism" (and "narra-descriptive journalism"), which follows its historical usage in the early twentieth century in the USA and its recognition as "new journalism" during the 1960s and 1970s. Hartsock underscores the coexistence of other terms, such as creative non-fiction and the impossibility of establishing a unified terminology.[22]

In this chapter, we will adhere to the term "creative non-fiction" to describe a broader domain to which cinematic non-fiction also belongs. However, "documentary" will be used interchangeably with non-fiction, as the theorists referenced in this article use both terms. Consequently, concepts such as "narrative," "creativity," and "storytelling" resonate strongly with non-fiction works created in other forms of non-fiction expression. We follow Sheila Curran Bernard's arguments that creative non-fiction films rely heavily on the creative "*arrangement* and *selection* of

[19] Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling*, 5th ed., 1.

[20] Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling*, 5th ed., 1–2.

[21] For more details, see Lee Gutkind, "Creative Nonfiction: A Movement, Not a Moment," *Creative Nonfiction*, no. 29 (2006): 6–18; and Gerard, *Creative Nonfiction*, 6–7.

[22] Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 3.

the content: on whom and what they focus; what they leave out; how they convey content visually and aurally; and how they are structured."[23]

Documentary films are subjective, regardless of how balanced the narrative is or how neutral and honest the filmmakers strive to be. The filmmaker chooses which stories to tell and how to tell them, which materials to include, and which to leave unused. Subjectivity is not the opposite of objectivity since all forms of communication are inherently subjective.[24] The positioning of the filmmaker within the narrative raises even more questions. First-person films foreground this discussion, as the filmmaker's presence is explicitly revealed.[25] According to Bernard, regardless of how explicit or implicit the filmmaker's presence may be, these films require compelling and nuanced storytelling while maintaining credibility through believable and truthful content.[26] Films can often be categorized as either plot driven or character driven: in a character-driven film, the action of the film emerges from the goals and aspirations of the characters, while in a plot-driven film, the characters are secondary to the events that constitute the plot.[27] When considering the five hallmarks of what makes non-fiction creative, Bernard uses categories proposed by Gerard, and this versatile set of tools is highly relevant in documentary filmmaking and valuable for further analysis of the films discussed.[28] These five elements for crafting creative non-fiction go beyond plot-driven approaches: (1) from a storytelling perspective, a narrative must present both an apparent and more profound subject; (2) the story is freed from timeliness—it does not have to follow a topical story immediately, but it can grow and gain significance over time; (3) the narrative should tell a compelling story; (4) it also incorporates the filmmaker's reflections, thus allowing for intriguing connections between subjects and characters, all from a distinctive storytelling perspective; (5) it must be well-crafted as a piece of writing.

[23] Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling*, 5th ed., 3.

[24] Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling*, 5th ed., 5.

[25] The active involvement of the filmmaker in the narrative construction had become more prominent by the 1990s, and the subjective self-inscription was considered a particular filter. This shift has been attributed to the changing cultural and social environment in the West since the 1960s and technological advancements. In Latvia and Lithuania, during the Soviet period's centralized film production system, personal expression in non-fiction filmmaking was the exception rather than the norm. Only in the early 1990s did first-person narratives become more widespread.

[26] Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling*, 5th ed., 5.

[27] Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling*, 5th ed., 31.

[28] Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling*, 5th ed., 7–9.

Bill Nichols elaborates on the documentarist's position within the narrative based on the modes of representing reality.[29] According to him, the reflexive, participatory, and performative approaches (modes) involve an explicit presence of the filmmaker, either by establishing a discursive position on filmmaking or by actively engaging in the film's narrative. The participatory mode centers on the dynamic relationship between the filmmaker and the subject, where the filming process involves interviews or other types of close engagement. This approach is frequently combined with archival footage, providing a framework to explore historical topics in depth. On the other hand, the performative mode emphasizes the filmmaker's personal, expressive engagement with the subject, prioritizing emotional resonance and the viewer's response over objective representation. It aims to evoke feelings and reactions, moving away from strict neutrality. The positioning of the filmmaker within the narrative has been further advanced and contested by Stella Bruzzi, who argues that documentaries are "performative acts, inherently fluid and unstable, and informed by issues of performance and performativity."[30] However, this position's insistence that every documentary should be perceived as an act of performance can be problematic, especially when considering films narrated from the explicit (including first-person) position of the filmmaker. In such cases, performativity would lose its function as a defining quality of these very personal films, as performativity is perceived as an overall condition of documentary cinema, following Bruzzi's argument.[31]

In the films discussed in this chapter, the narrative device of recounting events after a significant passage of time—thereby introducing a temporal and emotional distance—emerges as a particularly prominent element. Interpreting these works through the lens of microhistorical documentary practice adds an additional layer of contextual depth to their storytelling. Efrén Cuevas further elucidates the distinctive qualities of such films:

> these documentaries are characterized by a reduced scale of observation, focusing on specific individuals, families, or social groups, generally of an ordinary or marginal nature, far removed from the big figures and events of

[29] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 99–138.

[30] Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

[31] Veerle Ros et al., "Toward a Cognitive Definition of First-Person Documentary," in *Cognitive Theory and Documentary Film*, ed. Catalin Brylla and Mette Kramer (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 226.

> public history. However, the objective behind this reduced scale is not to conduct a strictly ethnographic or observational study located in the present of the filmmaker but to explore the past and to place the "micro" analysis in relation to relevant macrohistorical contexts, thereby making these documentaries historiographically representative in their own right.[32]

Cuevas' analysis is based on a microhistorical approach to historiography located in the notion of "history from below," which originated in the 1960s questioning of well-established traditions of historical inquiry. A growing field, the rise of microhistory coincided with the shift in documentary filmmaking in the 1970s and 1980s and the emergence of new approaches to storytelling. With these new approaches, filmmakers questioned the omniscience characteristic of the expository documentary mode, employing self-reflexive techniques such as filming themselves and, in so doing, breaking away from the objectivist stance most often associated with documentary film.[33]

Historical, Political, and Cultural Context

It is essential to provide some contextual information about life in the Baltic states during Russia's occupation, as this period is reflected in the cinematic works of Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen and Giedrė Žickytė. Dramatic upheavals and euphoria marked the lives of the Baltic peoples in the twentieth century. The modern democratic Baltic states were established after World War I in 1918. World War II, however, marked a tragic decade for the Baltic nations, during which, in addition to mass deportations, killings, and emigration, they endured Soviet, German, and then renewed Soviet occupation and were subjected to foreign regimes from 1940 to 1990. A characteristic feature of Stalin's system was terror, used primarily by the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) and its secret police, which were responsible for arrests, detentions, and surveillance. The arrests and deportations initially targeted political leaders, high-ranking civil servants, military and police officers, and other social groups deemed unnecessary or threatening to the new regime. However, terror soon permeated society at large, and anyone could potentially be labelled

[32] Cuevas, *Filming History from Below*, 31.

[33] See Chapter 1 "Microhistory and Documentary Film" in Cuevas, *Filming History from Below*, 14–40.

an "enemy of the people," with the corresponding dire consequences.[34] The Baltic states experienced two major waves of deportations (in 1941 and 1949), during which tens of thousands of residents were simultaneously sent to Gulag camps in distant regions of the Soviet Union.[35]

During the civic movements towards independence in the late 1980s, the memoirs of Gulag survivors and political prisoners played an instrumental role in forming a new national memory and the post-Soviet identity of the Baltic nations.[36] Despite the genocide of the local citizens, the Soviet regime was not labelled as an occupying criminal regime in the Baltic states until the late 1980s. These historic themes and the suppression of creativity, spiritual life, and inner freedom during the Soviet occupation are reflected in the films examined in this chapter, as these events, directly and indirectly, influenced the filmmakers and the people around them.

Restoration of independence enabled the reevaluation, reflection, and mediation of the traumatic memories of the recent past. In the 1990s, films began to emerge in the Baltic countries that explored historical themes, with directors from various generations addressing experiences such as those of deportees, soldiers on both sides of the front line, and dissidents, as well as the tragic fate of Jewish communities, the final front of World War II in Western Latvia, and other significant topics. The new millennium was marked by the growth of history "consumption" and "commodification," predominantly mediated in film and TV. This new tendency in the non-fiction domain is remarkable in the Baltic countries and is addressed by different generations of filmmakers, as has been

[34] Andres Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 130–31.

[35] The first wave of deportations was linked to the regime change and the removal of individuals deemed undesirable by the occupying authorities. In 1949, however, a quota was established to deport 30,000 families (resulting in the deportation of approximately 95,000 people in March) from the Baltic states, primarily to facilitate land reforms and expedite the implementation of collectivization. Lithuania suffered the most from these post-war deportations. (Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States*, 145–46.)

[36] Violeta Davoliūtė and Tomas Balkelis, "Introduction," in *Maps of Memory: Trauma, Identity and Exile in Deportation Memoirs from the Baltic States,* ed. Violeta Davoliūtė and Tomas Balkelis (Vilnius: Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, 2012), 10.

discussed by regional film researchers (Inga Pērkone,[37] Renata Šukaitytė,[38] Zane Balčus,[39] and Mikonis-Railienė et al.[40]). The generation of filmmakers whose families had been affected by deportations, arrests, or persecutions (e.g., Dzintra Geka, Pēteris Krilovs) had a particular interest in history. At the same time, we can observe that historical themes deeply interested members of the generation that was in its formative years during the independence movements (e.g., Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen, Ivo Kalpenieks, Askolds Saulītis, Vytautas V. Landsbergis, Algimantas Maceina), when such narratives began to circulate and were openly discussed. In contrast, younger filmmakers (e.g., Giedrė Beinoriūtė, Kārlis Lesiņš, Aistė Stonytė, Giedrė Žickytė) researched the past in archives and collected the stories of people who had experienced the recent past and shared their knowledge with their audience.

These films often provide a context which can seem too general and familiar to national audiences but is deliberately presented like that, having an international audience as its focus. This trend reflects, among other things, an effort to raise awareness about the Soviet occupation and subsequent repressions—an issue that Russia has continued to deny or ignore since the collapse of the Soviet Union.[41] This international engagement

[37] Inga Pērkone, "Tu, lielā vakara saule!" Esejas par modernismu Latvijas filmās (Riga: Neputns, 2013); Inga Pērkone, "Aizturēto asaru eposs: Dzintras Gekas esejas par genocīdu," Kino Raksti, June 14, 2023, https://www.kinoraksti.lv/domas/latvijas-filma/aizturetoasaru-eposs-dzintras-gekas-esejas-par-genocidu-1113.

[38] Renata Šukaitytė, "Contemporary Lithuanian Documentary Cinema: A Critical Overview of Main Film Directions," *Apertúra*, Fall (2021): 1–23; Renata Šukaitytė, "History in Lithuanian Women's Creative Documentaries: Critical and Personal Approach," *Panopticum*, no. 30 (2023): 118–37.

[39] Zane Balčus, "Dokumentālais kino—studijas, autori, tēmas un stili," in *Latvijas kinomāksla: Jaunie laiki, 1990–2020*, ed. Inga Pērkone and Dita Rietuma (Riga: Dienas Grāmata, Latvijas Kultūras akadēmija, 2021); Zane Balčus, "Filmmakers as Onscreen Characters in Recent Latvian Documentary Cinema," *Culture Crossroads* 18 (2021): 55–65; Zane Balčus, "Microhistories of the Crossroad Street films," *Panopticum*, no. 30 (2023): 51–61.

[40] Anna Mikonis-Railinė, Renata Šukaitytė, Mnatas Martišius, and Renata Stonytė, *Politinis lūžis ekrane: (po)komunistinė transformacija Lietuvos dokumentiniame kine, videokronikoje ir televizijoje* (Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2020).

[41] Eneken Laanes makes such an observation about the film *Tõrjutud mäletused* (*Memories Denied*, 2005), which features female experiences of deportation. This can be seen as a trend in many other films about the topic produced in Baltic countries. Eneken Laanes, "Trauma keelde tõlgitud: Kultuurideülesed mäluvormid eesti laagrija küüditamismälestustes," *Keel ja Kirjandus*, no. 4 (2017): 251–52, https://doi.org/10.54013/kk713a1.

serves as a step toward global recognition of the suffering endured by the Baltic countries, and it has been possible to make it even more visible after their accession to the European Union in 2004.

Targeting foreign audiences is also seen as part of the effort to develop the international market for the national films, the process which began with Latvia and Lithuania joining pan-European film funding mechanisms, developing international co-productions, and benefiting from the EU audiovisual market after accession.[42] The orientation toward Western practices and the need to acquire skills for integration into the European film market was discussed in the Baltic countries in the late 1980s when changes within the Soviet Union during Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* became apparent. Denmark was instrumental in integrating media, television, and film professionals from the Baltic states and other former Soviet bloc countries into the European industry, and various initiatives were launched to connect regional professionals with partners from European countries and beyond.[43]

The films by Burkovska-Jacobsen and Žickytė represent this international dimension, which is strongly present in Baltic documentary cinema. Most of their films are international co-productions. An international dimension is also apparent in the circulation of their films around international film festivals, which is part of the phenomenon of "the economy of prestige."[44] For example, Burkovska-Jacobsen's *My Favorite War* premiered at the prestigious Annecy International Animation Film Festival and received the main award at the Contrechamp competition. The film was shown at more than 40 festivals, distributed in cinemas and online. *My Mother's Farm* was also screened at several festivals. Meanwhile, Žickytė's *Jump* was widely screened at international film festivals and received the award of Best Documentary Feature at the Warsaw International Film Festival in 2020. It was also Lithuania's entry in the international feature

[42] Latvia has been a member of the Eurimages fund and the MEDIA Programme of the EU since 2002. Lithuania joined The MEDIA Programme in 2003 and in 2007 became a member of the Eurimages fund.

[43] Among the initiatives were the Balticum Film & TV Festival (1990), the establishment of the Baltic Media Center (1994), and the setting up of the Baltic Sea Forum for Documentaries, a pitching platform (1997), which became a significant event for connecting the creative ideas of filmmakers, among those from Baltic countries, with potential funders from the West. Balčus, "Dokumentālais kino," 233–34.

[44] James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

film category of the Academy Awards. *Master and Tatyana* won the SKY ARTE Award at the 2015 Trieste International Film Festival. *How We Played the Revolution* has been screened at international film festivals and is available on Dafilms, IndieFlix, and other VoD platforms.

Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen: Filming Autobiography

In her films *My Mother's Farm* and *My Favorite War*, director Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen uses first-person narration and her own voice to create autobiographical narratives, encompassing the time from World War II to the second decade of the twenty-first century. In the genre of microhistorical documentary films with an autobiographical perspective, to which these films belong, the interconnectedness of personal memory and public history is foregrounded. Personal memory becomes the foundation for an exploration of history, forming a specific connection between lived memory and public history.[45] These films underscore the central role of family in the authors' self-construction and how the specific historical situations and traumas are reflected in the family dynamics. They strongly connect to Cuevas's assertion that autobiographical documentaries—particularly those created through interaction with family members and as part of public discourse—contribute to the shaping of collective memory. In this social dimension of autobiography, the family provides a fundamental context for socialization,[46] which the films of Burkovska-Jacobsen vividly depict.

The possibility of creating autobiographical films has been debated by film and literary scholars. Literary scholar Philippe Lejeune has argued that autobiographical narrative encompasses an "autobiographical pact"—a unity among the author, the central character, and the narrator.[47] The possibility that a filmmaker might occupy both sides of the camera, simultaneously capturing and analyzing themselves, has been regarded with some skepticism, especially by literary scholars. Elizabeth Bruss expressed that the autobiographical pact "seems to be shattered by film; the autobiographical self decomposes, schisms, into almost mutually exclusive elements of the person filmed (entirely visible; recorded and projected) and

[45] Cuevas, *Filming History from Below*, 35–36.

[46] Cuevas, *Filming History from Below*, 37.

[47] Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 4.

the person filming (entirely hidden; behind the camera eye)."[48] However, the film's potential for creating new realities has been recognized by other scholars, notably those from film studies. From the point of view of literary and film scholar Rachel Gabara, filmic autobiography "troubles our conventional notions of coherent identity and provides us with new forms in which to explore and represent fragmented identity."[49]

Michael Renov suggested that autobiography challenges the very notion of documentary. Traditionally based on facts and verifiable knowledge, documentary loses its foundation when an autobiographical perspective is adopted as the narrative strategy, as this introduces the distinct subjectivity of the filmmaker and the partial, contingent nature of self-knowledge, both displayed in autobiographical films.[50] This debate about the potential of autobiographical subjectivity in documentary films is even more relevant when contextualized within changing practices in Baltic documentary filmmaking in the early 1990s, when autobiography and other forms of personal expression become evident in documentary cinema. Thus, the autobiographical form challenged the objectivist paradigm of the documentary.

The autobiographical framework is explicit in both films, but it is more prominent in the animated documentary *My Favorite War*. This is a distinctly introspective film in which the director Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen uses World War II as a narrative beacon to recount her own story and that of her family over several decades. The film adopts the subjective mode of animated documentary, where objectivity is challenged by creating unexpected combinations of visual and aural representation, exploring larger social issues through the personal expression of the filmmaker.[51] The director skillfully combines animated imagery with documentary footage, where animated sequences occupy the main visual space. The film includes

[48] Elizabeth W. Bruss, "Eye for I: Making and Unmaking Autobiography in Film," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, edited by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 297.

[49] Rachel Gabara, "Mixing Impossible Genres: David Achkar and African Autobiographical Documentary (2003)," in *Documentary Film Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*, ed. Jonathan Kahana (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 927–28. Gabara's article discusses the debate on autobiography in cinema.

[50] Michael Renov, "First-person Films: Some Thesis on Self-Inscription," in *Rethinking Documentary: New Perspectives, New Practices*, ed. Thomas Austin and Wilma de Jong (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008), 41–42.

[51] Annabelle Honess Roe, *Animated Documentary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 19.

some archival materials to illustrate specific historical moments or elements of popular culture, but primarily relies on visualizing the Soviet past in animation, using representations modelled on factual materials, actual historical figures, and different visual attributes (e.g., flags, school uniforms).

Burkovska-Jacobsen is the narrator of the film, exploring in the first-person her experiences growing up and forming her own identity during the Soviet era. *My Favorite War* starts with an ironic voice over (in which she recounts how she grew up in a country where all her choices had already been made for her, and the country had pronounced itself the happiest in the world) that sets the overall tone of the film. Throughout the film, she shows the contradictions between this self-proclamation and the actual feelings of the people living there. The film's narrative shows the span of the development of the director's personality and shifting beliefs in the Soviet system: beginning from being a believer in the system (she genuinely desires to join the ranks of the Little Octobrists and Pioneers[52] in order to better integrate into the school and social life around it), to becoming someone who questions it (and so becomes aware of discrepancies between the slogans and real life), to finally having her voice in making changes during the *perestroika* period in the late 1980s. Through personal reflections, visualized with animation, archival footage, and documentary scenes, the film incorporates common tropes associated with Soviet life, such as Pioneer symbols, parades, commemorative portraits, civil defense training (an integral part of the Cold War era), and other iconographic imagery and scenarios. Notable among these is the experience of queuing for goods in stores that were almost always empty. Karl Schlögel notes that the experience of waiting in line was a defining social theme that influenced the attitudes and everyday lives of entire generations of Soviet citizens. He suggests that queuing served as a formative ritual, shaping individuals to fit the expectations of Soviet society.[53] The film accurately illustrates the ideological indoctrination of the Soviet era, especially as it was implemented in education to shape young Soviet citizens.

[52] Little Octobrists (for school children up to 9 years of age) and Pioneers (from 9 to 14 years old) were Soviet communist youth organizations serving as the first steps to joining the Komsomol, an organization for young people (14–28 years old) that was spreading Communist ideology and preparing members of the Communist Party.

[53] Karl Schlögel, *The Soviet Century: Archaeology of a Lost World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 532–33.

In *My Mother's Farm*, the Soviet past is subtly woven into the narrative through small details, background visuals, and references, presenting it as something the director's mother wished to escape from. The contrasts between past and present emerge not so much visually as they do textually, particularly through stories of the mother's farmer neighbors and their paths to their current situations. During the Soviet era, the director's mother worked in the district's agriculture administration in town but always wanted to return to the countryside where she had spent her childhood. She finally achieved this in the late 1980s, during a period of change, when her daughter—the director—was old enough to live independently in the city while attending high school. The trope of the countryside is vivid in both films, and it reflects the image of Latvian identity, which, since the second half of the nineteenth century, has included a strong sense of belonging to the rural environment and the importance for someone to have their own piece of land.[54] The farm life of the director's childhood in *My Favorite War* and her mother's longing for her own piece of land in *My Mother's Farm* reconstitute that identity.

Conversely, in *My Mother's Farm*, animation is not used, but instead the narrative is constructed from footage the director had shot since the 1990s, public archival footage, newspaper clippings, advertising, and still images. Private archival materials, which are usually classified as marginal, are especially prominent in the microhistorical documentary context,[55] and that is the case in this film. The film traces the story of the director's mother, Tāle Kalna, capturing her life through the period of transition from the collapse of the Soviet Union to her chosen path to be a farmer in newly independent Latvia. It thus serves as an important record of neoliberal transformations in the country and is illustrated by the footage shot by the director over nearly two decades.

Initially, the mother's enthusiasm and determination to overcome any obstacle to her running her farm were strong. However, over time, this determination was tempered by the harsh reality when conditions were becoming increasingly difficult, and her advancing age made it hard for

[54] Even though after World War I and the founding of independent Latvia in 1918 a large part of the population lived in the cities, this image persisted in the interwar period. Andrejs Plakans, "History, the Remembered Past and Master Narratives," in *The Soviet Past in the Post-Socialist Present: Methodology and Ethics in Russian, Baltic and Central European Oral History and Memory Studies*, ed. Melanie Ilic and Dalia Leinarte (New York: Routledge, 2016), 136.

[55] Cuevas, *Filming History from Below*, 44.

her to fully engage in farming. These events reflect the broader challenges Latvian agriculture faced at the beginning of the renewed independence period and the economic difficulties it brought. Despite these challenges, the film's focus is not on comparing the two time periods but rather on the mother's character, revealing a motivated and energetic woman who cares not only for her own well-being but also for that of those around her. She aims to improve the quality of life for her community, resulting in changes such as a bus route finally running along her remote country road and cultural performers visiting the local community center.

The films touch upon yet another significant theme common to many families of the people from Baltic countries—the repressions of the Soviet regime.[56] The director's grandfather, her mother's father, experienced exile and, upon his return to Latvia from Siberia, continued to feel its effects, including limited opportunities to pursue his preferred occupation. The director and her mother's perspectives belong to the relatively underexplored area of "secondary" or "collateral" repression of trauma, as they are channeling the feelings and experiences of living alongside an individual who was a direct victim of repression. These secondary victims also felt the consequences of repression, and in telling their story, the film contributes to understanding the effects of repression from a multigenerational perspective, something important for understanding the moral conflicts and dilemmas faced by family members or close relatives.[57] Burkovska-Jacobsen addresses these conflicts and dilemmas, particularly in the film *My Favorite War*, where she recounts her grandfather's struggles to organize his own art exhibit; his requests were always met with rejection. Harmonious family relationships and open dialogue were not possible as her grandfather and father held different views—the former being a victim of the system, and the latter its supporter. Furthermore, contrary to her beliefs, her mother had to join the Communist Party to keep her job,

[56] We are following here the growing consensus for the adoption of a wider meaning for the term "repression," which moves beyond earlier accepted narrow definitions of communist "terror" that had primarily focused on the elite purges, mass arrests, non-judicial executions, imprisonment, forced deportation, and relocation, to include practices commonly used by communist regimes—sustained police surveillance, loss of educational and employment opportunities, confiscation of property, and eviction. Kelly Hignett and Melanie Ilic, "Introduction," in *Women's Experiences of Repression in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, Kelly Hignett, Melanie Ilic, Dalia Leinarte and Corina Snitar (New York: Routledge, 2018), 3–4.

[57] Hignett and Ilic, "Introduction," 3–4.

a move which increased tension in the family. As a child, to avoid any potential consequences, the director herself had to learn to remain silent and self-muzzling, which made it a challenge to find friends with whom to speak freely.

In both films, the director employs a circular narrative structure where the beginning and ending mirror each other, returning to a similar situation that is imbued with new meaning and knowledge gained through the film. This approach demonstrates the transformations that have taken place over the years in the country. The opening scene of *My Mother's Farm* features the director's mother at a train station, returning to Latvia after spending the winter with her daughter's family in Norway. By the film's end, this same scene is enriched with the viewer's deeper understanding of the mother's life journey. In *My Favorite War*, the first scene depicts the director's vivid childhood memory of a trip to the seaside with her parents, illustrating the state's closed borders: at that time, residents were forbidden from freely walking along the western coastline, as the regime sought to prevent any escape attempts. By the film's end, the director walks along the same beach with her children, wading into the water—a powerful representation of the changes she has experienced over her lifetime. The sea, symbolizing both literal and metaphorical borders, reflects former Soviet-imposed restrictions while also suggesting the changed perspective. In the film's final documentary sequence, the calm, bright blue water and the distant Baltic Sea horizon evoke what Anna Mrozewicz describes as a "horizon of hope," depicting the possibilities of crossing borders, connecting to others as if uniting the characters with other parts of the world, which was not possible during the Soviet period.[58]

Although autobiography typically appears to be a narrative constrained by the progressive trajectory of a story from birth to a later moment in life, Burkovska-Jacobsen's films, like many film autobiographies, offer reflections and meditations that diverge from linear narration and provide multiple and even conflicting ideas about the self.[59] She connects different time periods, various reflections about herself and her family, and contrasting views, thus presenting multilayered and emotional narratives about the past from the point of view of the present. Together, the two films provide

[58] Anna Mrozewicz, "A transnational regioscape in the making: The Baltic Sea in Christian Petzold's *Barbara* and Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen's *My Favorite War*," *Folia Scandinavica* 34 (2023): 133, https://doi.org/10.14746/fsp-2023.34.10.

[59] Renov, "First-person Films," 45–46.

a comprehensive portrayal of Burkovska-Jacobsen's life and that of her family across the eras: the first Latvian independence, the Soviet period, and restored independence, offering through a personal lens an emotive view of the broader collective experiences in the region during these times.

Giedrė Žickytė: Stories of Resistance and Nonconformity

Giedrė Žickytė's *How We Played the Revolution* and her other documentaries, namely *Master and Tatyana* and *The Jump*, obviously fit into the category of creative non-fiction if we look at the scheme that Gerard proposed for identifying creative non-fiction writing,[60] and which Bernard adapted to define creative documentary film.[61] They have the essential characteristics outlined by the filmmakers mentioned above: they have an apparent subject (life in a totalitarian system and tactics to rebel against it), they narratively combine the recent past and the present (in a manner free from "journalistic" timeliness, that is, the story grows and gains significance gradually, not immediately), they tell a compelling story (with charismatic characters, a clear plot, well-developed dialogues, and a storyline), and they are reflexive and showcase the director's artistry. All three films focus on the late Soviet era (the 1970s–1980s), but they look at that time from the perspective of current life. Another element that connects the films is the personality type of the main characters: bright, courageous, and nonconformist people, whose creative practices, brave acts, and transgressive lifestyles express their resistance to the oppressive regime. We can describe *How We Played the Revolution, Master and Tatyana* and *The Jump* as "montage cinema" or "archive-based documentary" because in each the narrative form is constructed from archival material (such as TV footage, video shots, personal records of characters, photos, clippings from newspapers) along with on-camera recollections of the characters and people from their inner circle as well of cultural and political figures who lived at the time. Archival materials are used for the purposes Bernard describes as prevalent in creative non-fiction: as "evidence of the past," as an augmentation of "a filmmaker's exploration of the present," and even

[60] Gerard, *Creative Nonfiction*, 2nd ed., 7–11.
[61] Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling* (Focal Press, 2010) and further editions.

to create a humorous effect.[62] Expert commentaries are also integrated into the narrative, but they have no didactic function; instead, they serve to develop an immersive and compelling narrative.

With her film *How We Played the Revolution*, Žickytė became known as a talented storyteller of intriguing tales who is capable of establishing a great bond with Lithuanian and foreign audiences of all ages. As Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė stated, we can consider this work "exceptional, because it brings to light previously unseen footage from personal archives" adding "one should consider it attractive to the younger generation, because it uses a simplified cinematic language and a playful form to tell the same story that their parents have repeatedly rhapsodized, in which the latter are not only unconditional patriots but also 'rocking' young people (…)."[63]

Employing the phenomenon of the cult rock band Antis and its leader Algirdas Kaušpėdas, the film playfully reveals the course of Lithuania's Singing Revolution and its achievements in the late 1980s—Lithuania's independence and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The band's grotesque theatrical performances at Roko maršas (The Rock March, a rock music festival held in the years 1987–1989), easy-to-remember melodies, and witty lyrics criticizing the Soviet system attracted both young and old audiences as well as the provincial and the urban population. When the Sąjūdis reform movement of Lithuania[64] invited the band's leader to join their initiative in 1988, Antis became a phenomenon and an instrument of

[62] Sheila Curran Bernard, and Kenn Rabin, *Archival Storytelling: A Filmmaker's Guide to Finding, Using, and Licensing Third-Party Visuals and Music* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1–2.

[63] Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė, "Kaip mes žaidėme revoliuciją: Praryta antis, arba Kaip mes kuriame / atsimename istoriją," *Kinas*, December 1, 2011, https://www.zurnalaskinas.lt/musu-kinas/2011-12-01/Kaip-mes-zaideme-revoliucija 2011.

[64] Founded in June 1988, the Lithuanian Reform Movement Sąjūdis began as a public movement and soon developed into a political organization under the leadership of musicologist and professor Vytautas Landsbergis. Active members of Sąjūdis were primarily from the intelligentsia, including writers, philosophers, economists, and journalists. They raised civic and political awareness by publishing independent newspapers and organizing public discussions and mass events on painful and controversial historical and political issues that were kept under wraps during the Soviet occupation. The organization played a decisive role in the Lithuanian people's struggle for independence, which began amid Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* policies. For further details, see the information provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania: https://mfa.lt/en/news/928/sajudis-20-years-on-lithuania-today-2008-issue-12-p.13-15:28618.

soft power. By focusing on the involvement of Antis and Kaušpėdas in political transformations and revolution, the film shows that the line between politics and art can be rather thin. It is no coincidence that the film opens with a fragment of The Rock March of 1988, in which we see the performers of Antis and members of Sąjūdis on stage together, singing the national anthem and holding Lithuania's interwar tricolor flags in their hands. According to Gintautas Mažeikis, "the Rock Marches demonstrated not only a revival and a singing revolution, but also the rise of subcultures," "fluctuations, ruptures and mimicry"—a process necessary for the revision, critique, and creative interpretation of the colonial condition.[65] These transformations that the rock music and other youth subcultures generated in the late 1990s reinforced and complemented the activities of Sąjūdis from 1988 to 1991.

Žickytė constructed the narrative of the Singing Revolution from carefully selected archival footage with a strong emotional charge, representing the economic stagnation, the political farce, and the chaotic "*perestroika*" reform; the vacuum in social and cultural life and the musical subcultures that filled the void; and the civic movements and the political events that they triggered, which brought Lithuanian society into a new era. The dynamic puzzle of archival images includes comments and reminiscences by active members of the Sąjūdis movement, organizers of The Rock March, architect and Antis band leader Kaušpėdas, and his wife Audronė Kaušpėdienė, who was involved in the band's organizational work. What also accelerates the narrative are records of Antis's live performances and clips of their music.

The film's narrator and commentator on the historic transformations is the philosopher Leonidas Donskis, a neutral observer of the events of the time, whose calm narrative manner, reminiscent of someone reading a fairy tale, allows the viewer to be deeply immersed into the history of Antis and the epoch. We observe Donskis sitting in a car driving around Vilnius and listen to his insights into the cultural and political context of the time as well as the relationship between the artist and the audience, which he called "a silent conversation" made possible by peoples' ability "to comprehend ambiguities" and "to be able to read the language of puns." Kaušpėdas was proficient at playing games of ambiguity with the audience, which were difficult for the Soviet political bosses to grasp, and this made

[65] Gintauts Mažeikis, "Pogulaginė sąmonė ir atžangos dialektika," *Darbai ir dienos* 65 (2016): 68, https://doi.org/10.7220/2335-8769.65.3.

him and his colleagues even more passionate. At the end of the film, the director shows the transformation of the protagonist from the critic of the "intelligentsia grimace" during the Soviet era, the "flag bearer" of Sąjūdis, to a passive capitalist consumer in a free and autonomous Lithuania. *How We Played the Revolution* is a reflexive type of creative documentary with a playful structure that encourages viewers to create an individual relationship with history, politics, and heroes. It is one of Lithuania's most famous historical and political documentaries.

Žickytė demonstrates her strong relationship to the subject she is researching, which is also reflected in the interviews for the films. Her parents were young in the last decade of communism. She was born in 1980 and, therefore, could not personally experience this dramatic period, whose legacy she nonetheless feels. That is why she tells stories that took place in the recent past but are closely linked to her present. She tells her audience about events and situations in which she and her family were involved as observers and participants. She made her documentary film about Antis and the Lithuanian struggle for freedom because her parents are architects from Kaunas and were friends with band members, who are also architects. The director knew these people and grew up listening to the band's music. Meanwhile, her film about the acclaimed Lithuanian photographer Vitas Luckus and his wife Tatyana was inspired by one of her professors at Vilnius University, Skirmantas Valiulis, who gave her the task of interviewing a foreign friend of the photographer, who had released the first ever album of Luckus's works in the Netherlands in 1993. Thus, Žickytė's films contain a subtly articulated personal vision, a fusion of the subjective and objective narrative styles that Alistair Fox[66] and Scott MacDonald[67] ascribe to personal cinema. She lets the viewers experience what the characters in her films went through and helps to create the meaning of these experiences.

With her films *Master and Tatyana* and *The Jump*, Žickytė further develops microhistories, in which the personal memories (of the film's characters and the memories of others about them) are demonstrated to play a significant role in the collective memory of the Soviet past. According to Cuevas, most microhistorical documentaries bridge cinema and

[66] Alistair Fox, *Jane Campion: Authorship and Personal Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

[67] Scott MacDonald, *American Ethnographic Film and Personal Documentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

professional written history. They "examine the past" from their author's perspective (aiming to not just disseminate preexisting knowledge), and "show the places" and "the protagonists of their stories" through archival footage and photos, and/or direct interviewing and close observation, all of which "provide access to the past with a powerful emotional charge."[68] However, these films are the result of a thorough research process in archives and fieldwork. For example, *Master and Tatyana* tells the story of the unusual life of one of the most talented and innovative Lithuanian and Soviet photographers of the time, Vitas Luckus (1943–1987), and his partner Tatyana (Luckienė-Aldag), who was his muse and model. After Luckus's tragic death, Luckienė-Aldag left for the United States, taking his photographic archive with her. This film brings Tatyana back to the Lithuanian and world art scene after over thirty years and broadens access to this impressive photographic heritage. To make this film, the director travelled to the state of Maryland to film Tatyana and gather her reflections, memories, and Luckus's works, which, throughout the film, are shown and examined with a magnifying glass. Žickytė collected information about her film's protagonists and their daily lives at the time through interviews with the couple's friends, as well as with Luckus's Lithuanian and foreign colleagues, to convey to the audience the price a talented nonconformist artist had to pay under communism. He was never allowed to travel outside the USSR, was regularly interrogated and persecuted by the KGB, and was denied a solo exhibition.[69] To create a sense of Luckus's artistic uniqueness and dramatic life under an oppressive regime, Žickytė worked carefully in the Lithuanian audiovisual archives, selecting footage that reflected social and cultural life in Vilnius in the 1970s and 1980s.

Simas Kudirka (1930–2023)—the main character of *The Jump*—was less well known to the Lithuanian public than Luckus, but his name frequently appeared in the news in the USA in the 1970s. He was a Lithuanian-Soviet sailor who, on November 23, 1970, made a desperate leap from a Soviet fishing vessel anchored off the coast of Martha's Vineyard across calm waters onto an American boat and asked for political asylum. There are some similarities between these two characters. Both refused to join the Communist Party and cooperate with the KGB to gain benefits and as a result, both suffered greatly. However, in *The Jump*, the

[68] Cuevas, *Filming History from Below*, 6.

[69] It was only in 2013 (during the production of this film) that Vitas Luckus's retrospective solo exhibition was held at the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius.

director employs slightly different materials and techniques for storytelling than in the previously discussed film. We observe the reconstruction of the actual jump and the subsequent events (his return to the Soviets, his beating, arrest, and imprisonment) via reenactments of all of these events by Kudirka and the memories of the American sailors involved. The story was developed based on rich archival materials collected from various American TV channels, newspapers, and fragments of the Hollywood television drama *The Defection of Simas Kudirka* (directed by David Lowell Rich, 1978) based on this story, as well as commentary from American politicians and political analysts, the Lithuanian diaspora, and other witnesses to the event. Despite his years in the Russian Gulag, Kudirka managed to realize his dream—to obtain asylum in the USA with his family—thanks to his mother's efforts, American civil society, and the commitment of American politicians. However, Žickytė's non-fiction does not resemble the Hollywood drama of a poor Soviet man who managed to realize his dream in the USA. Kudirka's experience was different. Therefore, the last episodes show him in a home in a Lithuanian province, where he and his wife spent the last years of their lives in independent Lithuania, his long-held dream. In this film, as in the previous one, the director uses historical knowledge and archival sources to support her arguments about the events and their participants and the fundamental problems of those who lived in the Soviet era.

Conclusion

The films of Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen and Giedrė Žickytė tell the stories of people whose lives, shaped by specific historical circumstances, have become witnesses of their times. Their creative non-fiction is important for the sense of life during the Cold War era that they provide to those who did not live through or remember this period. These filmmakers empathetically and attentively interpret the complex everyday realities of the era through profound and emotive cinematic narratives and characters. Our research on the films of the two directors reveals that they fit into the creative non-fiction category outlined by Gerard and Bernard. Their films have the same apparent subject (living under a totalitarian regime and struggling against it), they combine the recent past and present in the narrative, and they tell compelling microhistories (with engaging social actors, informative dialogue and monologues, and fragmentary storylines) in a reflexive way. Despite these similarities, each documentarian uses a

slightly different creative non-fiction narrative technique; for example, Burkovska-Jacobsen uses animation, which is not used in Žickytė's films. Although each narrative focuses on a particular individual, the films address the broader historical, political, social, economic, and cultural context that shapes these individuals' lives. These films are not reportage-like ("expository" as Bill Nichols calls it) historical documentaries, in which the filmmaker's perspective is well articulated and authoritative. They do not recount historical events in a classical TV documentary style but observe and reflect on them based on data gathered through research and the memories and experiences of their film characters, themselves, and the people around them. This perspective adds depth and meaning to the film and allows the filmmakers to tell their stories through a carefully chosen interpretive lens. Their point of view may not always be overtly stated but is sometimes woven into the film through the tone of voice, facial expressions and gestures of the characters, or cinematic techniques such as editing, the use of archive materials, and sequencing—creating a carefully crafted narrative. The films examine history on a micro level and place these individuals' stories in a broader macro-historical context.

To summarize, the films by Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen and Giedrė Žickytė discussed in this chapter represent a paradigmatic shift in non-fiction cinema, which sees the abandonment of the reportage style in favor of a poetic, reflective, and critical style that engages with contemporary issues and historical events and reflects on a broader theme of humanity. The new generation of filmmakers, including those mentioned above, creatively mixes observational and poetic styles and employs personal perspectives, experimental narrative techniques, and rich visual language to express, revive, discuss, reinterpret, and reassess national and global history from their subjective, contemporary perspective.

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