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I Believe to Know: Scientific (Fake) Documentary and the Impasses of Scientific Knowledge

Abstract

This text discusses three documentary films (a fake documentary, an episode of a scientific documentary series and a documentary on flat-Earthers) to discuss the limits of knowledge and belief for scientific discourse, and how psychoanalysis enters this debate by insisting in the presence of a subject (a subject of the signifier, not the psychological subjectivity). This, in turn, reflects on a political task for documentary cinema: to assume a subjective position, insofar as they are not films that are true or manipulative, but films about the structural place of Truth, and as such, they reflect on the gap between knowledge and belief.

Keywords

Psychoanalysis, Documentary, Knowledge, Belief, Science

Introduction: What are Documentaries About?

The relationship of documentary cinema to Truth is not only troubling, but it is *the* trouble of documentary theory. In order to discuss documentaries, we have to accept a basic assumption: *there is a place for Truth*, so Truth exists, no matter how far we want to insist, in a postmodern fashion, on the unreachability of Truth, the inexistence of ‘The Final Truth’ or how there is no Truth but *many truths*.

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Documentaries are *about* such place—or position, if you will. If we cannot accept this, we won't be able to say anything about documentaries, we won't be able to understand what a documentary is. Scientific documentaries, Nazi documentaries, indigenous documentaries, conspiracy theory documentaries or animated documentaries: they all talk *about* the Truth, they propose things to occupy a place or position which we call *the place/position of Truth*.

Now, of course, saying that documentaries are *about* the Truth is not the same than saying that documentaries *are* true: "Although [a nonfiction] makes assertions or truth claims, they may not necessarily be true" (Plantinga 2010, 86).

I endorse a definition of documentary not based on what it shows, or what the content it shows is, but by their relation with what is outside them, the *discursive relationship* it creates with the viewer. Fiction films state information (in a science fiction, a character might explain how a time machine works), and this information is vital to understand the actions that evolve throughout the movie (after hearing the rules for time travel, we know what the protagonist can or cannot do). However, we do not consider this information as information *about* the world outside the film (we don't go to our car and hope to travel back in time).

A documentary is a film where the *specific* information presented tries to achieve effects in the world outside of it. It is a discursive relation very different from fiction, since documentaries struggle to occupy the place of Truth. This is why Bill Nichols (2017, 26) considered documentaries as part of the *discourses of sobriety*, those that directly intervene in the way we operate in the world: we watch them and read the world accordingly to what they purport to present.

Although we can find similarities between Nichol's "historical world" and what we, colloquially speaking, understand as "reality", those two concepts are very different in regards to the tricky psychoanalytic "Real" developed by Jacques Lacan, the most important psychoanalyst after Sigmund Freud. To grasp the implications of the Lacanian Real, we must consider the gap between the enunciated content (what we say when we say that *this is the Truth*) and the enunciation act (the *act of saying* what is the Truth).

In this paper, I want to expand Plantinga's insight with this psychoanalytic tool, in order to approach an impasse that we can find in our world so obsessed with scientific knowledge. First, I will compare a scientific documentary (TV series *Cosmos*, created by Carl Sagan, Ann Druyan & Steven Soter, 1980) and a fake documentary (short film *In Search of the Edge*, dir.

Scott Barrie, 1990). Right after, I will compare some of those insights with a documentary on conspiracy theories (*Behind the Curve*, dir. Daniel J. Clark, 2018), where we can see what is the difference between a knowledge and a belief, and especially, *a knowledge based on an avowed belief*. Psychoanalytic theory will help us to think documentary cinema as being something beyond ‘a film that tells the Truth’. If I were to put these questions in a theoretical paradigm within film studies, I think it is within what we can call Post-Post-Theory: after the attack psychoanalysis got from Post-Theory scholars,¹ some thinkers still bet for the psychoanalytic project, not in a cautious more humble position, but from a much more engaged psychoanalytic position.²

It is my contention that documentary films tell us something about the structural place of Truth, and as such, they reflect on the gap between knowledge and truth (the cord of the psychoanalytical approach to science), and between knowledge and belief (the cord of discrepancy between science and conspiracy theories). Between these gaps, there is the decision of assuming a subjective position, a political task that documentaries have done all the time.

Between two edges

In Search of the Edge (ISE) starts with the story of Andrea Barnes, an adventurer who set on to explore the South Pole, and disappeared in this endeavor (during the end credits, it is revealed that she didn’t exist). Several experts are interviewed in this film, all of them offering proofs that Earth is flat. Their generic identifiers read as: “Dr. Leo Ferrari. University Professor”, “George Vanderkuur. Scientist” and “George Tinkess. Retired teacher.”

The film argues that the geocentric model (Sun orbits Earth) is better fit to explain astrophysics than the heliocentric model (Earth orbits Sun). To support this claim, our visual perception and “common sense” are enough evidence. Dr. Ferrari endorses Ptolemy’s model, the geocentric one, because it “went unchallenged for 1200 years”, as it is based in our visual perception: when we look at the horizon, the Earth seems flat (at this point, the film shows the point of view of a pilot from a plane). For *ISE*, our perception of

¹ The place to engage with this discussion is the collective work edited by Bordwell & Carroll 1996.

² Some of those scholars are Slavoj Žižek, Joan Copjec, Todd McGowan, Sheila Kunkle and Matthew Flisfedder. See McGowan 2003 for a detailed explanation of such renewed psychoanalytic position.

the world is more important than any representation or model we may construct (as the globe we have in our classrooms): those models distract us from what our perception shows to be true.



Fig. 1. Animation in *In Search of the Edge* (1990)
Source: *In Search of the Edge* (dir. Scott Barrie, 1990)

ISE seems to be mocking the flat Earth theory and the way scientific discoveries are presented in documentaries. While we laugh at the identifiers over talking heads in *ISE*, we take them as true in a “serious” documentary. We also deposit some blind trust in animations of things the documentary camera cannot show us that easily, be it the curvature of the Earth or bacteria in a drop of water.

On a different side of the spectrum, we have another edge. In the *The Edge of Forever*, the 10th episode of TV series *Cosmos*, Carl Sagan comments on the age of the Universe, and how this affects the nature of time and space. In one scene, Sagan introduces the problem between the spatial dimension and its representation. When we draw a square on a sheet of paper, we have a two-dimensional figure in a two-dimensional support, but when we draw a cube on a sheet of paper, this three-dimensional figure has a “penalty” for being drawn in two dimensions: not all vertexes in the drawing of a cube are square, as they are in a cube in the third dimension.

If we upgrade once more, we can think of a cube in the fourth dimension, called a tesseract. "We can only think about it, not imagine it", Sagan tells us, because we can only imagine it in our three-dimensional world, and as the cube drawn in a sheet of paper, we have to pay a penalty for constructing a four-dimensional figure in a three-dimensional support: not all vertexes in our three-dimensional tesseract are square.

Nonetheless, this inability to imagine a tesseract is not the limit of our knowledge, but the point of departure for the act of thinking. To quote Sagan: "while we cannot imagine the world of four dimensions, we can certainly think about it."³ Then, he continues to wonder how a creature with no power to "see" the whole world can "think" about it beyond its perception. If a two-dimensional creature walks in a straight line continuously, and ends up in the same place it departed, it is because the plane where it walked is not infinite, but spherical. Even though *it cannot see* the sphere (cannot see the third dimension, nor even imagine it with its limited senses), *it can think about it*.

While explaining this, Sagan walks in a spherical model of our planet, an animation not far from those in *ISE*: representations are not a problem or an obstacle to what our senses give us. In the *Cosmos* episode, representations are the point of departure to understand our world. In *ISE*, representations are a problem that has indoctrinated us during centuries, which we mistakenly take as true. In *Cosmos*, representations are what enable us to escape from the trap of our senses. Even though both documentaries use animations, interviews and speculations about what we cannot see (the sphericity or flatness of our planet), we can see two positions: the representation of an object fools us, our perceptions don't (we can call it a pre-Modern approach, exemplified in *ISE*) vs. the representation of an object enables us to grasp a dimension of the object that is beyond our perceptions (we can call it a positivist approach, exemplified in *Cosmos*).

³ This difference between *imagining it* and *thinking about it* is an analogy for the difference between *showing* and *proving* for mathematicians. Showing is granted on our perceptions (we show things for the perceptions of others), while proving is based on propositions inferred by deduction. For Torres and Falcón (1995), this is the basis for mathematical proofs: we cannot *show* something that does not exist, but with a mathematical proof, we can *prove* that it does not exist: "It is only through proof that we know that which cannot be shown" (260).



Fig. 2. Animation in “The Edge of Forever”, *Cosmos* (1980)
 Source: *Cosmos* (created by Carl Sagan, Ann Druyan & Steven Soter, 1980)

The second approach, which characterizes modern science, looks for “better” representations that capture “most” of the object, even when it admits that a perfect representation doesn’t exist⁴. The problem with this way to proceed is that it doesn’t question the gap opened *because* of the representation, a gap opened because a belief; i.e, modern science functions insofar as we forget that we believe in it.

Science, Knowledge and Belief

This belief that science tries to get away with was a main concern for Jacques Lacan. In one of his famous écrits, *Science and Truth*, published in 1965, Lacan (2006a) determines that, for psychoanalysis, there is a fundamental split in the subject of the Cartesian cogito: the one between knowledge (*savoir*) and truth (*vérité*).⁵ This split is the reason psychoanalysis is a product of

⁴ This is certainly similar to the Kantian difference between noumena and phenomena; a pair that has important differences to the Lacanian structure and semblance. To such discussion, see Žižek (2012, 281-283).

⁵ It is important to consider a difference in French which is not easily grasped in English. It would take a long footnote to explain the implications, for Lacanian psychoanalysis, of the differences between *savoir* and *connaissance*, both words usually translated into English as *knowledge*. For the purposes of this text, let’s think of *connaissance* as the

Modernity: it is the consequence of the place the subject comes to occupy in science after Descartes.

This splitting opens the gap between the subject of the statement and the subject of the enunciation: science knows many things from statements, has a lot of *savoir* (knowledge in the statements), on the basis it excludes the *vérité* (truth of the enunciation). Thus, there is the object (what exists out there, in reality), the knowledge of the object (*savoir* in the statements, this is what science procures), and the subject as the surplus of this knowledge itself (*vérité* of the enunciation, this is what science tries to get rid of, what psychoanalysis works with). For Lacan, science can respond to what an object is, since the point of science is *to know more* about the object; but during this process, the subject is sutured, precluded, suppressed:⁶ “[...] the logical form given [scientific] knowledge includes a mode of communication which sutures the subject it implies” (Lacan 2006a, 744).

In *Seminar XVI* (Lacan 2006b, 280), Lacan kept pointing to how this structural suppression of the subject enables science to exist. The leap from our pre-Modern world to the Modern, scientific world leaves an assumption untouched: we conceive the knowledge (*savoir*) of science as if *already* ordered in some place. This place is the consequence of the Cartesian cogito: the moment we decide to not doubt the fact that we are doubting, we establish a place that psychoanalysis names as *sujet supposé savoir*, the subject supposed to know.

The *sujet supposé savoir* is represented in the famous saying by Einstein “God does not play dice with the universe”: we might not know (yet) all the laws God used to create the universe, but science wouldn’t exist if we wouldn’t believe that *there are such laws*. For this reason, science is not atheist enough: it still believes that God does not deceive us, that the rules are already established in some place, be that place “God” or “the yet-unknown by science” (Lacan 2006b, 281). When scientists say that Nature does not fool us, that we can gain more certainty through science, they are still insisting in a positivist *belief* in a non-deceiving God, a not lacking Other. It doesn’t matter how much we know, but that most primarily, that we believe that we can know, that we believe we can access knowledge.

knowledge of something specific (I have knowledge of who Lacan was: a French psychoanalyst of the 20th century) and *savoir* as a corpus of knowledge (the knowledge of science, the knowledge of physics).

⁶ Lacan characterized science as “une idéologie de la suppression du sujet” (Lacan 2001, 437).

Here, we are faced with the gap between a knowledge and a belief. A belief is the fundamental basis for any knowledge to exist. Before I can know something, I must believe in the means and ways that I gather such knowledge. To state a knowledge is, implicitly, to state a belief in such statement: as Lacan explained it in *Seminar IX* (1961, 75), to enunciate a thing (“it is going to rain”) is not different from enunciating an act of belief in such a thing (when I say “it is going to rain” I am basically saying “*I believe* it is going to rain”).

As such, belief comes before knowledge, and the consequence is that we don’t believe things directly, but believe through an Other who believes, a *subject supposed to believe*:

we do not have to believe IN IT in order to believe IT, to feel bound by some symbolic commitment. For that very reason, in the case of the imaginary “belief in,” belief is always displaced (it is never me who, in the first person singular, is ready to assume belief, there is always the need for the fiction of a “subject supposed to believe”), while in the case of the symbolic faith, the commitment in the first-person singular is performatively assumed (Žižek 2001, 109-110).

Following this Žižekian approach, we can characterize science as *a knowledge based on a disavowed belief*. Scientists certainly *know* a lot of things, but they don’t assume them *as beliefs*. The radical question then is: do we *know* what science tells us, or do we *believe* in science?⁷

This splitting between knowledge and belief is how Georg Cantor expressed his astonishment to Richard Dedekind (quoted in Noether & Cavailles 1937, 34) when they were discussing their work on set theory: *je le vois, mais je ne le crois pas* (*I see it, but I don’t believe it*, French in the original⁸). This is a scientific attitude *par excellence*. Think of the scientists at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in the documentary *Particle Fever* (dir. Mark Levinson, 2014): they are, perhaps, the best scientists in the world, they know so much stuff that they could build and operate the biggest

⁷ Remember the famous poster agent Fox Mulder had in his office, in *The X-Files* (created by Chris Carter, 1993): “I want to believe”, under the photo of a UFO. Scientific discourse presents something similar: the subject of the belief is suppressed, in order to know, so a proper re-writing of the poster would be “I believe to know”. First I have to believe in order to know.

⁸ The fact that in a letter written in German, *that* particular phrase was written in another language, is very indicative of the subjective displacement that the astonishment of the discovery provoked in Cantor. I owe Carlos Gómez Camarena (Universidad Iberoamericana) this important remark.

machine ever created by mankind, the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), a machine accused of being able to provoke the Apocalypse, a belief the scientists mock in the documentary. Nonetheless, they bite their nails, cover their faces, hang each other's hands and "ask" the bars in their screens to rise when they turn on the machine, as if these gestures could have any effect in the functioning of the LHC. They know very well what they are doing, but they don't seem to believe it. Science is authentic knowledge, but disavowed belief.

What would be an assumed belief? In a true belief, I assume my knowledge as grounded in nothing else than in my singular position, in nothing else than *the fact that I believe*. This is what science cannot do, because it necessitates the structural role of a universe that doesn't play dice with us, that there is no evil genius confusing us. Science can only function supported in the (disavowed) belief that the universe has laws we can discover if we have the right tools. Curiously, there is an evil brother of science which does believe in an evil genius: conspiracy theories.

Behind Conspiracy Theories

The popularity of conspiracy theories can be accounted for in terms of our excitement at discovering the Other of the Other: behind the most banal things or the most traumatic events in history, behind governments of all the political spectrum, there are 'men behind the curtain' who move the strings for their own benefit. When we *believe in* a conspiracy theory, we position ourselves as exempted from the dupe staged by this Other of the Other: not only can we see 'who is really moving the strings', but we are also in a position of exception from its power.

The documentary *Behind the Curve* (dir. Daniel J. Clark, 2018) revolves around several people who call themselves flat-Earthers: people who actively believe the Earth is flat. In the first scene, Mark Sargent, one of the main characters, points from a beach to the skyscrapers of Seattle, several miles far away. If the Earth was a sphere, he claims, the curvature would make it impossible to see those buildings: therefore, it must be flat. He tells us that a scientist will throw math and physics at him, and that after hearing that, he would dismiss it by pointing to Seattle again: "That's it, a picture says a thousand words", he sentences.



Fig. 3. Mark Sargent showing his Earth model in *Behind the Curve* (2018)
 Source: *Behind the Curve* (dir. Daniel J. Clark, 2018)

Sargent and other characters seem to be travelers from Medieval times, not because of their belief in a flat Earth, but because they believe their senses won't betray them, they believe that representations fool us in a way that our perceptions (Seattle's skyscrapers that we can see) wouldn't do. Neither him nor the rest of the flat-Earthers interviewed can point to a reason for why "the powers that should not be" (as Patricia Steere, another flat-Earther in the film, calls them) want to keep us believing in "the globe", vaccines, GMO food, "the transsexual push in media" and even dinosaurs.

These other beliefs orbiting around the flat Earth conspiracy (anti-vaccine, anti-LGBT, anti-dinosaurs, anti-animal meat, anti-NASA, anti-evolution) are not organized and homogeneous (not all flat-Earthers are anti-LGBT, some of them believe the Jews are behind the globe model, others believe the Masons, the Rockefeller family, Satanists or the Vatican). What they share is that it doesn't matter *who* is behind: the structural bond that knots them is that *there must be someone* who controls.

Carlos Pereda (2001) has summarized several features of conspiracy theories: from the inability to express why the "powers that should not be" would prefer to create a story so complicated, to the necessity for a clear "friend or foe" matrix. The main point is that conspiracy theories believe in a simple, well-articulated world of necessary and obvious causes and effects.

If we have a simple cause-effect world, we can see why conspiracy theories are easily used in favor of a political agenda that doesn't tackle problems but offers an almighty solution. Žižek uses Nazism to explain such popular-

ity: Nazism was so popular, not because of its political program but because it is, essentially, a reaction, a violent *passage a l'acte* to defend the traditional "values" of Nation, Family, Society and Order from the threat Communism represented. Structurally speaking, the Nazi project is a violent reaction to keep things as they are (Žižek 2008, 209).

Nazism is inherently violent not only because of the extremity of its actions, but because it is a never-ending project whose violence will always be needed, for *there always has to be a group we can all blame*, "the powers that should not be", a not-lacking Other of the Other: it could be the Jews, the gypsies, the homosexuals or the Communists. It doesn't matter who, all it matters is that there must be someone whom we can all participate in its destruction.

This is exactly what leaders like Donald Trump (and similar other violent rightist movements offer, in many parts of the world): he doesn't have a public political program, his obsessions with Mexicans stealing jobs and committing crimes in the US, the Chinese government spreading Covid-19 from a lab, the Democratic Party illegally conspiring against him, have all the same matrix: *there is someone* moving the strings against 'good old Americans', like himself, allegedly. That is why some scientists interviewed in *Behind the Curve* are worried of conspiracy theories being mocked as a curiosity: they can certainly achieve power to deny climate change, to stop the little steps taken in human rights, and put us on the verge of Third World War.

So, what can science do against conspiracy theorists as flat Earthers? As those scientists in the documentary recognize, the problem is not doubting itself, for conspiracy theory is the evil brother of science: both are more akin than the latter would like to admit. In the film, Dr. Lamar Glover claims:

These folks [flat Earthers] are potential scientists gone completely wrong. Their natural inquisitiveness and rejection of norms could be beneficial to science if they were just scientifically-literate. [...] So, every flat-Earther shouldn't be held with contempt, but serve as a reminder of a scientist that could've been, someone that fell through the cracks. And we, as ambassadors of science, are called upon to do more.

This puts science in front of the challenge of engaging in a subjective position, in order to fight against conspiracy theories and their pernicious effects. This is the act of engaging in a Universal Truth: not a Truth that will always be the same for everyone, but the Truth I can see from my singular, subjective position. It is not enough to repeat what science has proved, for flat Earthers will dismiss it as non-sense, as something created by "the powers that should not be". A scientist should not obfuscate her/his subjective investment in knowledge: the very fact that, to know, first we have to believe.

To Believe Before Seeing

In the ancient astronauts' conspiracy theory, advocates believe aliens visited ancient civilizations in our planet (Egyptians, Mayans, Aztecs, Greeks) and inherited advanced knowledge which made possible the splendor we know today they lived. The TV series *Ancient Aliens* (produced by Prometheus Entertainment, 2009) is famous for promoting such theory with a strange logic: since archeologists cannot prove that aliens *did not* visit Earth, then we must accept the ancient astronauts' theory as equally valid to explain "problematic evidence"⁹. The issue, as with flat-Earthers, is not the idea that ancient civilizations were visited by aliens (who could *prove that wrong?*); the problem is that they believe the evidence they present is only seen as problematic because we haven't considered the ancient astronaut's theory, not because our current theories have flaws.

This shows the different status of evidence for a scientific and a conspiracy theory: in the former, theories are constructed through evidence and premises we can infer from that evidence; in the latter, the evidence is the proof of the theory. In other words, we need to believe in the theory *before* we can see the evidence as evidence.

I characterized science as a knowledge based on a disavowed belief. Conspiracy theories can be characterized as *a knowledge based on an avowed belief*. Thus, the difference is not between "true" knowledge of science vs. "wrong" knowledge of conspiracy theories, but on declaring or not declaring the subjective position. When Dr. Glover says that, as scientists, they are "called upon to do more", he is referring to be more subjectively invested, to adopt a subjective position of responsibility to science and the public, to abandon this idea of a scientist locked down in a laboratory looking 'objectively' at the experiments.

This subjective investment is the point upon which psychoanalysis can do more for scientific discourse. Psychoanalysis can inform science of its stubborn attachment to deny its disavowed belief, fundamental for science to exist.

In science, I can look at another theory and recognize it as better fit to explain certain phenomena, since I can look at things 'objectively'. That is not possible for a community of a Universal Truth, where transference is not denied, and Truth is understood only from a Singular perspective (a symbolic faith is assumed, as the above-mentioned quote by Žižek stated). I cannot see the proof that God exists and then start to believe in God: proofs of

⁹ Problematic, of course, for the standards of the conspiracy theorist.

God's existence are only such *because* I believe in God. I can't see society's problems objectively, and then choose a political affiliation: society's problems crystalize as such *because* I have a political affiliation. I cannot see artistic movements as decadent and then proclaim a new movement for this *zeitgeist*: I can only see the decadence of an artistic tendency *because* I already ascribe a specific movement. This is the Žižekian parallax view of pure difference:¹⁰ the difference is not first objectively drawn, and then we choose sides, but *we can only see the difference when we are already engaged in one of the positions opened before us*.

The subjective investment in knowledge is, in plain terms, to leave behind the idea that there is knowledge beyond our subjectivity: there is no knowledge that has not *passed through* subjectivity, which is not the same as saying that there is no objective knowledge. Even an anti-psychoanalysis advocate like Noël Carroll would agree in that.¹¹ We confront again the difference between a knowledge and a belief: when we have knowledge of something, we try to obscure our belief, we suppress our subjective investment in this knowledge (that is why science is a disavowed belief); on the contrary, authentic belief is *to know in belief*: we not only know, but we believe.

Conclusions: The Real of Images

Through the documentaries discussed in this paper, we can see two positions regarding the way we must interact with the world: 1) for flat-Earthers, the representation of an object fools us, we must trust our senses, what is in front of us, since "a picture can say a thousand words" (this is *connaissance*, an Imaginary knowledge); 2) for science, the representation of an object enables us to grasp a dimension of the object that is beyond our perception, a dimension we cannot see but we can think about (this is *savoir*, a Symbolic knowledge).

In our contemporary landscape, we can discern two antagonistic positions as well: on one hand, the scientific positivist approach that erects the Discourse of Science to a proto-religion, the one we see in cognitivism and

¹⁰ See Žižek 2012, 612-613.

¹¹ Remember his discussion about objectivity in documentaries: "It is objective because it can be intersubjectively evaluated against standards of argument and evidence shared by practitioners of a specific arena of discourse" (Carroll 1996, p. 231). Isn't this what Lacan (2006a, 744) meant when he stated that, in science, knowledge is communicated, i.e., science is knowledge beyond subjective positions?

neurosciences informing our education policies, health measurements and even publicity ('neuromarketing', 'data-driven' businesses)¹²; on the other hand, a pseudo-liberal postmodern attitude of 'no Final Truths', 'there are many truths', and so on, found among some activism of identity politics enchanted by 'alternative truths', up to the point of having Nazi hippies these days (see Evans, 2020).

Against these two positions, perhaps we should risk the idea of talking again about an ethics of Universal Truths that are only discernible from a Singular point of view. This is what documentaries, at their best, can do.

The cliché that documentary and fiction boundaries 'are confused' in today's cinematic landscape is playing the liberal game of 'all stories are valid'. We should utterly deny this position: not all stories are equally valid, and documentary is still a category we use because it is a film that fights to take the place of Truth. We cannot contend the existence of documentary cinema if a documentary is "just" exposing a story, without pointing towards the place of Truth (at least to question it, to show how arbitrarily it is created).

A documentary is not a documentary because it makes true statements, but we take their statements as true because it is a documentary, because we recognize documentaries as films about the Truth, films that say something about Truth: "A documentary that makes assertions about the actual world is no less a documentary if some (or all) of the assertions are false" (Plantinga 1996, 321). Distinctions between fiction and documentary do not depend on the nature of the images, but "on a kind of social contract, an implicit, unspoken agreement between the text's producer(s) and the discursive community to view the film as nonfiction" (Plantinga 2010, 40).

It is curious to think of Plantinga as a Post-Theory writer¹³, even though his position is very similar to that of Lacan's understanding of discursivity: "Through the instrument of language a number of stable relations are established, inside which something that is much larger and goes much further than actual utterances [*énonciations*] can, of course, be inscribed" (Lacan 2007, 13).

Therefore, for Lacan, discourse is not a speech that says *something*, but a *relation* established between those who speak. This is what Plantinga is referring to: even if everything a documentary says is false, it is nonetheless a film *about the truth*. A documentary establishes a discursive relation between itself and the viewer that is profoundly different from fiction: in contrast to them, documentaries are struggling to occupy the place of the Truth, no matter if they don't present the "true reality".

¹² See the important critique from Jan De Vos (2020) to such stance.

¹³ Again, refer to Bordwell & Carroll 1996.

A psychoanalytic reading of documentary cinema is not looking for images of the real. We can only discern the “real reality” when we have an interested view: the subjective position of Truth that enunciates it. Perhaps a documentary theory that includes psychoanalysis will instead look for the Real of images, the *vérité* of the images in audiovisual discourse. A Lacanian theory of documentary is not looking for the inapprehensible Real beyond the Symbolic cinematic language, the Real that we cannot show with our camera, but it is looking for the Real we grasped *because* we are shooting with our camera, the gaze that conformed the image recorded in the camera. This Real, the distortion caused in reality because of the very fact of enunciating it, is the *vérité* of a subject that cannot be integrated in any knowledge, the subject who believes to know.

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