

Mockumentaries and TV series. An analytical approach to the genre and its trends in Uruguayan TV fiction*

*Falso documental y series de televisión. El género y sus vertientes en la ficción televisiva uruguaya**

Dra. Rosario Sánchez-Vilela

Universidad Católica del Uruguay, Montevideo, Uruguay
rsanchez@ucu.edu.uy

Abstract

This article addresses television genres, particularly the relationship between fiction and nonfiction. Indeed, this work studies the false documentary as a genre and its manifestations in Uruguayan television fiction. To do so, conceptual categories will be defined following the framework provided by the genre theory in order to address the false documentary and define its identity. By analysing different ways through which fictional and documentary forms are articulated in recent Uruguayan productions has led us to identify three variants: In one of them the documentary is just inlay in the fictional world; in another one, the documentary genre fulfills informative and educational functions, and, finally, the actual mockumentary form, in which the key feature is that both fictionalization and authentication oscillate and coexist simultaneously. In four cases identified as mockumentaries, both expressive and content features come together in an awkward mood shared by Uruguayan examples of this genre

Keywords: genre, communicative pact, mockumentary, Uruguayan fiction.

Resumen

Este artículo estudia los géneros televisivos, específicamente las relaciones entre ficción y no ficción. En particular, este trabajo analiza el falso documental como género y sus manifestaciones en la ficción televisiva uruguaya. Para ello, se definen desde la perspectiva de la teoría del *genre* las categorías conceptuales para abordar el falso documental y delimitar su identidad. El análisis de distintas formas de articulación entre lo ficcional y lo documental en realizaciones uruguayas recientes permitió identificar tres variantes: una en la cual lo documental es mera incrustación en el mundo ficcional; otra en la que cumple una función informativa y educativa; y, por último, aquella propia del *mockumentary*, en la que lo esencial es la oscilación y coexistencia de ficcionalización y autenticación. En los cuatro casos identificados como *mockumentary* los rasgos expresivos y de contenido confluyen en un humor incómodo que atraviesa los falsos documentales uruguayos.

Palabras clave: *genre*, pacto comunicativo, *mockumentary*, ficción televisiva uruguaya.

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1. Introduction

This article deals with the subject of television genres, paying particular emphasis on the relationship between fiction and non-fiction; this implies a complex relationship with several different approaches and variants. The category chosen for this study is the false documentary or *mockumentary* and the perspective adopted here is to treat it under the theory of *genre*, a theory coined in the wake of literary analysis. From that particular body of theory, the study considers the conceptual categories with which to approach the *mockumentary* and outline the identity of the genre which, in turn, consists of its historicity, first in cinema, then on the small screen.

This study is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis of the history of the genre. Therefore, from varying mediums, we selected examples of the *mockumentary's* discourse, properties, and characteristics defining its identity and the communicative pact it offers the audience. Such identification allowed us to build and propose a model or matrix of analysis in the second phase of the methodology.

Following that frame, we analyzed the different ways in which fiction and documentary articulate in Uruguayan audiovisual productions between 2012 and 2018 and examples were chosen based on the defining traits of a *mockumentary*. The analysis connects these characteristics with the context of local audiovisual production and formulates hypotheses that explain how the genre was adopted into Uruguayan television fiction.

2. The Mockumentary as a Genre: Configuration of the Communicative Pact

2.1 The theoretical perspective from which to approach the genre: historicity, institutionality, and dynamism

The genre of television shows can be defined using a plethora of varying criteria. A taxonomy centered on the target audience can lead to define a program as a children's show, for example; another focused on purpose could define a show as an educational one. The genre theory is a more complex

and elaborate approach and stems from literary review; it provides conceptual tools based upon a wider and more general scope. Criteria takes into consideration features inherent to the discourse of these shows, and puts more emphasis on the relationship between discursive properties and the reality the shows address.

Feuer's (1992) discussion of the topic and Mitell's (2004) exhaustive review both indicate the limits ingrained to approaches stemming from literature. However, re-reading Tzvetan Todorov (1996) and Gerard Genette (1986), among others¹, led to reassess some other theoretical categories well-established in literary theory to better understand television genres. In his work *The Origin of Genres*, Todorov (1996) proposes a theoretical argument which transcends the literary field when we look carefully at it. Institutionality, historicity, and dynamism all articulate in a theory of the origin of genres that constitutes a useful explicative tool to study television genres. This particular theoretical perspective is what is used in this study of the *mockumentary*. In the following pages, this paper will delve deeper into the three central theoretical categories at play in this study: historicity, institutionality, and dynamism.

As a manner in which to organize these works of creation into types of texts, genre implies the configuration of a set of repeated features or traits defining a particular identity:

In a given society the recurrence of certain discursive properties is institutionalized, and individual texts are produced and perceived in relation to the norm constituted by that codification. Any genre, whether literary or not, is nothing other than the codification of discursive properties. (Todorov, 1996, p.52).

A work of television or literary product does not in and of itself constitute a genre. Its structure or configuration depends on the repetition over time of a set of constants in such a manner as to build a model that functions as a reference that can either be honored in parameters and reproduction, or ignored. These are the aspects of historicity and institutionality in a genre. However, it is a system in permanent transformation in which the codification that identifies a genre is under constant challenge and can splinter into many variants.

It is in this fashion that historicity has two aspects: a diachronic aspect in which the genre is institutionalized, and a dynamic aspect. As Todorov highlights (1996), genres should be understood as “principles of dynamic production” (p.55) or, in the words of Shaeffer (1986), for “every text in gestation the generic model is *material* on which you can work” (p.197). The transformation of a genre occurs in its historicity, and through a dialectic gaming of the institutionalized genre system in every historic moment. Therefore, genre is conceptualized as a dynamic principle: its very nature is the tension between the stability of institutionalized models and change (Sánchez-Vilela, 2016, p. 506).

The appearance of new literary, cinematographic, or television genres, as well as the phenomenon of neo-television (Eco, 1986), which we identify as a hybridization, are an expression of the dynamic nature of genres as explained by its theory (Genette, 1986). Recent Uruguayan audiovisual production is an example of the combination of elements that come out of a system of genres that exists in the horizon of the creators of these programs, but it also lies in the horizon of audience expectations of a specific historical and cultural moment.

2.2 The Communicative Pact of the Mockumentary

The notion of a reading contract or a communicative pact originates in a line of theory development analyzed by the reader and informed by the processes of reading itself.² Eliseo Verón (1985) proposed an approach to researching communication media under that very framework. However, his formulation of the concept of a reading contract does not begin with taking into consideration the difference in genre, rather it considers the types of medium. Although each medium can generate specific discursive properties that have an effect on the generic identity of the text, this study adopts a rather different position, one that considers the difference in genre within the same type of medium, such as television, implying a uniformity in its discursive features. That uniformity has prompted such a medium to be classified as an undifferentiated flow (Williams, 1974).

The two central communicative pacts are authentication and fictionalization, both built-up in the

historicity and institutionality of genres. This core distinction between fiction and non-fiction harkens back to the Aristotelian tradition that understands genre as a form of mimesis that informs the world it inhabits (Aristotle, 1948). Consequently, genres adopt different forms of representing reality, understood as that which lies outside of the text and has an identity one can reference. In other words, genres can either match or not reality. In the first case, it requires to correspond something that happens or has happened: it indicates a sense of “it is there” or “it has been” in the way indicated by Barthes (1982) regarding photography. In Plantinga’s words (2014): “... non-fiction affirms a belief in certain objects, entities, the state of things, events, or situations that really occurred or existed in the real world as they were portrayed” (p.43). Any text following such a pattern constitutes a contract of authentication, and matches to documentary-type discourse.

Nichols (2013) affirms: “The documentary tradition heavily relies on being able to convey to us the effect of authenticity. It is a powerful impression. It began with the raw cinematographic image and the appearance of movement: no matter how poor the image and how different from the thing photographed” (p.15). The tradition Nichols refers to corresponds to the notions of institutionality and historicity in which this study relies. On that basis, the pact of authentication is configured, that “powerful impression” of authenticity which documentary has developed, and which television has as well but in different ways. The news, talent shows, reality television, all move along the axis of the authentication tradition, even when they include fictional features. The distinction between both domains (documentary and fiction) implies that the documentary, as with text, “implies the assumption that the sound and image are proof and treated as such, rather than elements of a story” (Nichols, 1997, pp. 50-51).

On the contrary, fictional discourses grant to envision a world ruled by its own rules: it demands internal recognition without needing external verification. Deception prevails in this form of communication relationship and fiction is the proposed reading contract. In between both reading contracts, there are diverse combinations and gray areas, but, at the end, the reader will attempt to figure out what pact the work under scrutiny offers

him or her: there is no reading deal without the audience's recognition.

The distinction between fiction and non-fiction, and the debate on where the documentary fits in the latter, has been a subject of exhaustive analysis by Carlos Plantinga (2014, pp. 29-51) as he toured through authors such as John Grierson and his definition of the documentary as "the creative treatment of reality" (p.32); Jean-Louis Comolli, who "equates the manipulation of film material to the fictional trend" (p.32), or Frederick Wiseman, who assimilates edition in documentary filmmaking as a form of fictionalizing material. These views, as Plantinga posits, assume the impossibility of imagining any discourse that isn't fiction therefore rendering us unable to tell the difference between movies like *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *Harlan County, USA* (1976). Rather than the previous, the author proposes that one must consider fiction and non-fiction of conventional use for different purposes, "they fulfill a specific social function, and are seen by viewers who address a different set of expectations and conventions" (p.34). Along those same lines, Bill Nichols (2013) points out that fiction and documentary "are made with different assumptions about purpose" and that although "the border between these two domains is very fluid, it is still perceivable" (p.13).

The reading contract behind the *mockumentary* implies a communicational relationship that deals with the recognition of documentary hallmark traits and those marks ingrained into fiction, to foster a thoughtful distance regarding the entities addressed by the audiovisual text. The *mockumentary* collapses the rules of both fiction and documentary genres to create a new one. Nonetheless, in order to exist, both must be included in the genre system because, as Todorov indicates, "the norm is invisible – it is not alive – without its transgressions" (Todorov, 1996, p. 49).

The core axis in the make-up of the *mockumentary* throughout its history has been the flexible relationship and blurred lines between fiction and non-fiction: "The *mockumentary* is not subject to hard definitions, rather it accepts a variety of texts whose direct relationship to the documentary form can be exceedingly strong or relatively weak; however, it is recognizable as an example of that genre" (Wallace, 2018, p. 7).

3. Methodology

The first stage in designing the study was rebuilding the constitutionality of the genre, an institutionality built in its historicity. A study of its history (section 4) lays bare evidence of the many variants, and, at the same time identifies the repertoire of constant features that form the identity of the genre and therefore, its reading pact. The tour of the genre's history is consequently a response to a theoretical-methodological need to identify and propose a model or matrix to analyse the false documentary. Organized into two dimensions (section 4.2), the matrix was the analytical tool used to study the relationship between fiction and non-fiction in Uruguayan television productions between 2012 and 2018. The timeframe was defined by the moment the form broke into Uruguayan television shows that articulate fiction and non-fiction with a certain level of consistency.

To design the corpus, we selected cases in which discursive features of both fiction and non-fiction were identified. Finally, seven TV shows – five of them produced by free-to-air television, and two web series – were identified and analyzed to explore how fictional and documentary features were articulated: *Rotos y Descocidos*, *Paleodetectives*, *Guía 19172*, *Rec*, *El Mundo de los Videos* and the web series *Escuela de Canotaje* and *Uruguay Desconocida*. The last four are false documentaries.

The webseries were included in the understanding that, with the advent of the Internet, television today has detached itself from the artifact and now circulates through multiple screens. This has given rise to new formats such as web series, either being streamed or Video on Demand, as well as the subsequent transformation of our relationship with audiences. All these are questions that feed today's debate on television, how it is evidenced in the several different editions of TV Morfosis (Orozco, 2015, 2017). It is an ongoing debate and its scope exceeds this article's goal. Lastly, the analysis provided herein concentrates on the four *mockumentaries* identified during that time period. Additionally, we also interviewed the filmmakers to explore their motivations and their references.

4. Building the model

The reconstruction of the historicity of the false documentary leads to Orson Welles' 1938 adaptation of the H. G. Wells novel *The War of the Worlds* (1898). The storytelling strategy deployed in the radio adaptation was that of a fake news anchor reporting on the invasion of Earth by Martians, reporting events that interrupted a concert that was also part of the fictional narrative. Listeners tuned in to the radio program, recognized the reader's pact of authentication, and panicked when they missed any evident fictional markers of the radio program.

However, it is cinema that builds the fundamentals of the *mockumentary*. Once again, Orson Welles and his movie *Citizen Kane* (1941) stands out. With the images of the deceased Kane, a character closely inspired by the actual media mogul, William Randolph Hearst, we follow a fake news report, the style of which was regularly on display in cinemas with investigative journalism –using interviews and witness testimony– on the life of Kane and the meaning of the word “Rosebud” uttered on his deathbed (López, 2016).

Other films are also acknowledged in building up the features for the genre: *David Holzman's Diary* (1967), by Jim McBride, critically reflects on the practice of making documentaries; *Take the Money and Run* (1969), in which Woody Allen adapts the documentary to tell the failures of his character and parodies movies of more or less heroic delinquents; *No Lies* (1972), by Mitchel Block, who, using the interview format, proposes a critical view of the “cinema direct”, uses a handheld camera, and employs no added sound. They all introduce the anti-hero, gray and fringe lead characters, absurd comedy, parody, and critical thinking on cinema and media.

Lastly, there are another three key works representing the full range of features defining the constitutionality of the genre: *The Rutles: all you need is cash* (1978) which uses the focused parody and critique of the *rockumentary*³; *Zelig* (Allen, 1983), which used expressive resources typical of documentaries, such as aging the image of the picture and inserting interviews to tell a fake story, and lastly, *The Blair Witch Project* (1997), which incorporated suspense and horror by exacerbating the aesthetic of hand held footage.

4.1 The False Documentary and Television Series

On television, one of the most well known proponents of the *mockumentary* took place in 1957 at the BBC: during regular programming of *Panorama*, the newscast show broadcasted a report on the exceptional nature of a particular crop of spaghetti, documented with the image of trees from which hung strands of spaghetti, and interviews of farmers who “cultivated” it, particularly endorsed by the credibility of the show's anchor, Richard Dimbleby. The prank, which some viewers unfamiliar with Italian cuisine believed to be true and which still others added truly incredible details, was ultimately revealed to be what it was, a joke.

Mockumentary's features were inspired by cinema. On television, additional variants were created and shaped. Seriality, one of television's key features, adapted the false documentary into the logic of television formats, in fragmented storytelling, and managing audience expectations and habits of consumption (programmed into linear television, as well as self-managed in online viewing).

One of the most emblematic examples of the genre on television is a miniseries that launched both political fiction and the *mockumentary* on TV: *Tanner '88* (HBO, 1988), directed by Robert Altman. The series portrays a candidate for primary elections in the United States of the same year the show was first aired (De la Torre, 2016, p.414). Jack Tanner is a minor politician of the Democratic Party facing off against actual candidates competing in the real-life election race (Jesse Jackson, Michael Dukakis). Among the hallmark traits of the genre is the discourse used over the course of the campaign, as well as the improvised speech recorded on camera in Tanner's hotel room. The footage is taken without the candidate's supposed knowledge that he is being recorded and is imperfect, including objects getting in the way of the audience's view of Tanner as he paces about the room. The footage is used to portray the candidate's authentic nature. The fiction itself narrates the entire campaign process (images and camera angles have the look of a newscast footage) seen from the perspective of different players and with the intervention of public figures in real government at the time. In 2004, the sequel *Tanner on Tanner* picks up the character again, with his daughter, but uses comedy. Along

these lines of the false political documentary, Wallace's study (2018, p.127) on *The Thick of It* (2005) indicates some of the offshoots into *comedy verité* and the *performance* of authenticity.

As we have already pointed out, the swing between fiction and reality, whether it is a deception or a documentary note of what has happened or is happening, defines the communicative pact, the type of communicative relationship between television text and its audience. Series such as *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000) deal with that ambiguity: Larry David is the main character and played by Larry David himself. The same is true of Larry David's wife in the series, from whom he later divorces in the show as well as in real life. The comedians coming in and out in each episode are well-known personages who play themselves. Additionally, the camera is perceived constantly as it follows Larry's movements. The series was a fundamental influence on Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant (De la Torre, 2016, p. 486) when making the British series *The Office* (2001). The sitcom was perhaps the culminating point for establishing the genre given the audience ratings it reached (De la Torre; 2016 p. 487). Its influence on American television (the 2005 version of the series) finally cemented its place in the recognizable genre system of producers and creators.

4.2 The Genre's Identity: Institutionalization

In its historicity, the *mockumentary* was identified as a narrative deception, using expressive rhetorical tools essential to the documentary but to tell a fictional tale. It can be defined as a fictitious text adopting the rhetoric of the documentary throughout the course of its own development. In this sense, it is in a different category from texts that employ documentary images, but only fragmentarily during a specific moment of the narrative.

The *mockumentary* appropriated the codes of the documentary to make itself a new genre. During the history of the genre, traits and characteristics were described and indicated that made their own mark. In other words, these features now constitute the invariant pattern and give the model a shape, they define its identity in the genre system. What follows is an operationalization for the analysis of specific televised fiction split into two types of traits, expressive and content:

Expressive traits	Features of content
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The story is narrated giving the illusion of being in the moment of recording a live event and, therefore, subject to the unforeseen event or random chance; • The camera follows the characters' movements, their presence is regular and at the same time registers the precarious nature, either real or simulated, of the film-making process; • The use of rhetoric modality (eye level) that break the fourth wall in place of cinematographic modality (Allen, 1992, p.113); • The use of interviews filmed in medium shots, as talking-heads; • The use of off-camera voice; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-hero characters in two senses of the word: they are imperfect, but they also tend to be marginal characters, devoid of any sense of exceptionality; • Narrated situations are ordinary, quotidian, minimalist, and of no grandeur or relevance; • Humor in many aspects: parody, satire, absurd, and combinations; • Critical-reflective intent: parody is the instrument of choice and tends to incorporate mass media as the object of satire; • Flexibility regarding topics.

Expressive traits	Features of content
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging images, either black-and-white or colored that, at times, simulates archival footage, and other times, are included into fictional discourse; • Sound: ambient sound is recorded on camera, the use of silence, and the absence of a soundtrack. 	

5. The False Documentary in Fictional Uruguayan Television

Free-to-air Uruguayan television consists of three private television companies (Saeta, Montecarlo, and Teledoce) and two public stations (a national channel, TNU, and the other focused on the capital, Tevé Ciudad). Each private TV company is related to a paid television network: TCC, Montecable, and Nuevo Siglo respectively. Combined, news and entertainment represent around 70% of the national-based production aired on Uruguayan TV, while fiction has a minimum weight on the whole domestic programming (0.6%). The total hours of fiction here analyzed combined in their correspondent years on air are between 8 to 10 hours a year (Orozco & Vassallo, 2016).

In the history of televised fiction in Uruguay there are noticeably two significant moments where production capacity is concentrated: the first is between 1999 and 2004 (seven shows), and the second between 2009 and 2012 (fifteen shows). Both seemed to herald the possibility of an audiovisual industry linked to television, they demonstrated a certain level of established capacity and continuity in the will and desire of some actors to produce, at the same time legal reforms were pushing to establishing screen quotas for national fictional production⁴. However, the drive to produce ultimately remained limited to those two moments. From 2014 to 2018, only six shows were aired: *Paleodetectives*, *Los Aristonautas*, *Rotos y Descosidos*, *El Mundo de los Videos*, *Feridos*, *Todos Detrás de Momo*, publicly funded and aired on public television, and a few web series as well (Sánchez-Vilela, 2017, p.379).

Both fiction and documentary features are articulated in these TV shows: at times, the documentary aspect is a form of incrustation or inlay in fiction, weakly integrated in the story being told; at other times, fiction frames documentary features containing educational purposes.

Rotos y Descosidos (2016) falls in the first category with a nine-episode run and a rating of 0.8% according to Kantar Ibope. With characteristics of a *sitcom*, the story revolves around Majo, a television producer forced by her boss to leave a news program to produce a documentary show on love. In the fictional story, Majo's comings and goings and those of her work colleagues at the network are interspersed with insertions of documentary excerpts: interviews of couples that tell their own love stories, usually in a fixed shot and excluding the questions from the interviewer. The documentary does not play a part in the story: the couples' testimonies are simply excerpts embedded in the fictional story and are weak in the whole plot. These fragments are what move the series away from the dynamics and aesthetic essential to a *mockumentary*, while including television as a topic and a scenario for the story does align with some of the features of content that characterize the genre.

Paleodetectives (2015) and *Guía 19172* (2016) are two very different cases illustrating a second form of articulating fiction and documentary. *Paleodetectives* combines documentary style and the building up of a fictional world closed in on itself; in other words, it needs no external validation nor does it need to match to what is real. The fictional universe in the series is built on the foundation of a system of characters: a group of children that band together to found the World Organization of Curious Children (OMNC) which, in each episode,

proposes a mystery about prehistoric animals once living on national territory that they must solve. Another three characters – the biologist, the paleontologist, and the biochemical physicist – lead the research to solve the enigma, as though they were detectives assigned to clearing a case. Each episode covers a detective-like storytelling plot in which documentary discourse is inserted, and then in turn contains the information the creators wish to share with the audience (Sánchez, 2016, p. 504). The series earned a rating of 1.2% according to Kantar Ibope and was broadcast on public television, as was *Guía 19172*.

In fact, *Guía 19172* aired nine episodes and earned a 0.8% rating. The production focused on topics linked to the legalization, regulation, consumption, sale, and production of marijuana. The name of the show refers to the law number. The fictional features come from the definition of the fake documentary: an outline that situates the documentary as the thesis the main character has to turn in, some situations recreating the newsmaking process, or obstacles in producing that content. However, it ultimately fails to constitute a fictional universe, and the documentary and education purposes prevail in the overall narrative.

The cases described above illustrate the variety of ways that fiction and non-fiction are articulated in Uruguayan productions, but in those shows we fail to see the expressive traits and model content of the *mockumentary* (4.2). This study only addresses the most significant features regarding how well they fit the constitutionality of the genre, in other words, the “standard” is readily recognizable in those shows. These are two web series and two mini series in which the majority of the elements described in the model apply.

Between 2014 and 2015 two comedic false documentary web series were produced; *Escuela de Canotaje* and *Uruguay Desconocido*. Each consisted of six episodes and were both aired on Canal M, an Internet channel linked to the news portal Montevideo.com. *Escuela de Canotaje* tells the story of a struggling women’s canoeing club determined to compete in the Rio 2016 Olympics. The documentary cues are incarnated in the character leading the club, a character that often breaks the fourth wall and tells the camera about their aim to record the entire process. The rhetoric is prevalent in all

six episodes addressing the difficulties in achieving the goal of making into the Olympic Committee. This particular *mockumentary* is set squarely in the category of comedy, and does not develop the more critical aspect of the genre.

The fictional story behind *Uruguay Desconocido* takes a young character, a media worker, whose intention is to develop a sharp journalistic show, with evident allusion to local news productions. However, his arrogance and incompetence lead him into ridiculous, awkward, and uncomfortable situations with the people he interviews. The location in which the story develops, Canal M, is also a real network, the very channel that airs the web series under scrutiny. The parodic nature of the genre is what is most evident and prevalent in this production. The journalist’s transgressive claims, the family ties between the network’s workers and its owner, can be interpreted as a satire on journalism and media, another trait that characterizes the *mockumentary*.

The type of humor in both shows could be defined as the most awkward and uncomfortable one. Unfolded situations seem to go nowhere, there are no punchlines to jokes, rather the humor arises from discomfort. The precariousness of the production, far from being hidden, is put on display as an aesthetic feature. The television shows out of Rio de la Plata, *Cha cha cha*, *Peter Capusotto y sus videos* seem to have an influence on these productions⁵.

The two productions that are clearly far more representative of the genre are the two miniseries mentioned earlier: *REC*, *Una serie casera* (2012), with nine episodes, and *El Mundo de los Videos* (2017), with five, both produced by the same writers and directors. The first earned a 1% rating according to Kantar Ibope data, and the second, aired on Tevé Ciudad, has no ratings information given that at the time there was no way of measuring viewership of the channel. In *REC*, using a handheld camera, a teenager named Sebastián records the goings-on of his family at home, his outings with friends, and his day-to-day life as he experiences it. Each episode switches up stories that take place in these two areas of family and friendship. The aesthetic of the fiction simulates that of a home video, as well as the apparent irrelevant nature of all the circumstances he catches on camera. As one of the producers indicates, it is an aesthetic and narrative

option born under financial struggles: "The series begins with the idea that we want to do something and we know we don't even have a *mango*⁶, what can we do with a *mango*? A home video". At the same time, they acknowledge being influenced by television series such as *The Office*: "From here we try to rob the semi documentary style where the camera also takes part in the story, and the natural tone of the performances that exploit the tension found in awkward moments. We want to take ordinary life to the television screen in the most authentic way possible"⁷.

El Mundo de los Videos initially presents itself as a documentary about a group of people linked to a local video club that tries its hardest to survive, but this is a fictional story. One of the most expressive features of the fiction refers to perceiving the constant presence of the camera, there are even moments where the characters interact with the people behind the camera and extort them for being witnesses of one action or another. At other times, the characters just look right into the camera, likewise confirming its presence and made to feel awkward by it; at one point, a character runs through the streets attempting to escape the camera. The slight instability and movement of the camera, the way it moves from one face to another, are all the hallmark traits of a *mockumentary*. The absence of music during narration, emphasizing the idea that the only thing you hear is real ambience, is one of the expressive resources used in the miniseries (music is only incorporated at the end of each episode).

Additionally to the way of storytelling, there are other features intrinsic to the fake documentary regarding content. Under a style of ensemble cast, characters are anti-heroes: anonymous, borderline, with no particularly outstanding qualities that set them apart. Even characters that appear to have a modicum of bad will in them (such as Willy, the owner of the video club), really don't represent anything beyond cheap mediocrity. The situations the characters go through are laced with dark humor and acerbic wit. However there are moments when the humor is not readily encapsulated in that definition; it is more of a laugh born out of the awkwardness of the situation: a situation that doesn't require a punch line or a joke, rather the contemplation of a situation that hovers between absurd and ridiculous. Under such circumstances, the way

sound is managed is essential: silence is part of the structure of the awkwardness portrayed in the scene. The ordinary or quotidian nature of life at the video club and of its characters takes on a slow pace, at times exasperating, a feeling replicated in the somewhat pitiful lives of the characters themselves.

6. Conclusions

Uruguayan television fiction in recent years has explored, in one way or another, its relationship with the documentary genre. Three variants were identified: one in which documentary-like discourse is a mere addition in a fictional world; a second in which the documentary embodies informative and educational purposes, and lastly, the *mockumentary* in which the oscillation between fictionalization and authentication and their co-existence is essential.

As it has already been pointed out, genre is defined by its institutionality and, as such, built by those that create material: producers and audience. Following Todorov (1996), "genres exist as an institution and it is why they act as «horizons of expectation» for readers, as «writing models» for authors" (p. 53) and, under such frame, form the basis of a communicative or reading pact. The fake documentary itself is a good example of that. It is built in relation to the genres that have been historically established, but the key is the receiver: the genre functions precisely because the spectator is familiar with the rules (Corner, 1997; 2002) and can recognize the resources that imply a false contract of authentication and identify those cues in a pact of fictionalization. Along the lines of the latter, we can state that genre is the result of a co-construction.

In the four cases of *mockumentaries* analyzed in this study, there are two overriding fundamental aspects to content: the choice of anti-hero characters, the recurrence of awkwardness, and discomfort as a comedic tool. In the expressive dimension, these Uruguayan shows explored the presence of the camera to provide a sense or feeling of authenticity, the rhetoric, utilizing a medium shot typical of an interview, and in the way the production deals with sound and silence. All of the previous qualities and techniques function in service of generat-

ing those awkward, funny, moments that permeate Uruguayan *mockumentaries*.

The reasons explaining the trend are unclear. We suggest the following tentative interpretations. All the productions are created by young producers and filmmakers in which one can recognize several television influences they share. This is one way in which one could explain the frequent appearance of the fake documentary and odd humor, a humor stemming from awkwardness and discomfort. The financing behind these productions is precarious. Public funding they can apply for has forced them to manage a small budget: therefore, the *mockumentary* is an instrument with which to dissimulate the lack of resources. The precarious nature of the production is far from hidden, rather it is put on display as an aesthetic feature.

One must also take into consideration the prestige and legitimization of cinema over television, particularly so in the documentary form within the landscape of domestic audiovisual production. The prestige of the documentary is evident in a myriad of ways: independent production companies generally tend to focus on these types of productions, and there are opportunities providing a more dynamic environment and that legitimize projects in this area, enterprises such as DocMontevideo, a Latin American, televised meet for documentalists held once every year in Montevideo since 2009. Opportunities for national fictionalized television seem as yet uncertain, public funds promoting them have historically been scarce, and only quite recently available in specific calls to bid for funds. In late 2016, a fund was created called SeriesUY, specifically targeting projects for fictional television, a competitive fund.

In this adverse and uncertain context, producers of television fiction have been forced to experiment with genres and handle the scarceness of resources. Although it isn't the only one, the fake documentary has been one way of dealing with it. In any case, these fictional productions are created in relation to a current system of genres and are subject to specific production conditions. They express the tension between the constitutionality of the genre, and its dynamic nature.

Notes

1 Being cautious in transferring concepts to the field of mass communication media, the framework applied to this analysis comes from the theory of genre proposed by Tzvetan Todorov, Jean-Marie Schaeffer, Gerard Genette, Osvald Ducrot, or Christian Doelker with a backdrop developed and re-reading Aristotle's Poetics..

2 Several authors on the aesthetic of reception, such as Wolfgang Iser (1987), have highlighted this focus. Umberto Eco (1979) also points out a paradigmatic shift.

3 The made-for-TV movie follows the events of the fictitious band *The Rutles*, which parodies *The Beatles*. The immediate precursor is *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) with *The Beatles* as the leads.

4 Since 2010, the drafting of a media law heated up public debate in Uruguay. In its early draft, the bill required that 60% of television programming must be produced domestically and that included at least two hours per week of new television material. The bill was passed in December 2014, but later some of the articles were contested and deemed unconstitutional. The requirements of airing TV material domestically produced was ultimately erased from the regulation.

5 Personal interview to Gaston Armango, one of the screenwriters and directors, March 2016.

6 Colloquial expression from Rio de la Plata indicating having no money.

7 Statements from Maías Ganz (*El País*, 09/08/2012). Ganz made further, similar, comments in personal interviews conducted in November 2017.

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- About the author:

Rosario Sánchez Vilela has a PhD in Political Science (UDELAR), a Master in Social Communication (UCU), and she is Full Professor and Head of the Department of Communication at the Catholic University of Uruguay. Member of the Uruguayan National Researcher's System Level II. She is the national chair for the Iberian-American Observatory of Television Fiction (Obitel).

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