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1. Using this label to identify a tradition, as opposed to an approach to performance, was probably an infelicitous choice on my part.

2. I gave evidence of Butt's criticism in my original article (Ravasio 2019, 200).

3. Thanks to Andrew Kania for helpful comments on a draft of this piece.

### **SportsCenter: The Documentary? A Response to Pratt**

Henry John Pratt's (2018) "Are You Ready for Some Football? A Monday Night *Documentary*?" identifies a question that three prominent documentary theorists (Gregory Currie, Noël Carroll, and Carl Plantinga) have failed to address: why are live sports broadcasts (LSBs) not considered documentaries, since they represent themselves as documenting real-life events and informing viewers about the real world? While acknowledging that Currie, Carroll, and Plantinga are all generally referring to films when discussing documentaries, Pratt correctly argues that their proposed definitions nonetheless fail to provide a basis for excluding broadcasts like *Monday Night Football* from the documentary category. Given that ordinary-language use of the term *documentary* does exclude LSBs, however, Pratt argues that a corrective is needed.

I grant Pratt's claims that accounts of documentary should reflect ordinary-language use, that ordinary people do not consider LSBs to be documentaries, and that the documentary accounts mentioned above would therefore benefit from a proposal that provides a basis to exclude LSBs. Yet, I disagree with his proposed addendum that documentaries must be accounts. Instead, I argue below, a better addendum is that documentaries must not be live productions. This proposal more successfully fulfills Pratt's goal of modifying existing documentary theories to match current ordinary-language differentiation between LSBs and documentaries.

Pratt rightly notes that Currie's theory (that documentaries are indexical records of events) and Carroll's theory (that documentaries are films of presumptive assertion) entail categorizing LSBs as documentaries. But Pratt oversteps when he claims that "live sports broadcasts count, for Plantinga, as prototypical documentaries" (2018, 215). Plantinga, in fact, says nothing about LSBs

and makes clear that he thinks of documentary as a subcategory of film, stating that "the category 'documentary' embodies a wide range of films in the various moving-image media" (2005, 105). And since LSBs are plainly not films in any ordinary sense of the term, we have no reason to think Plantinga would count LSBs as documentaries. Regardless, Pratt is correct that Plantinga's account fails to offer a basis on which to exclude LSBs from the documentary prototype.

Since Pratt treats the three aforementioned critics' documentary theories as equally valid and my discussion focuses on comparing Pratt's proposal for a documentary addendum with mine, in the interest of space and simplicity I will use "PCC" as a generic placeholder for any of the documentary theories of Plantinga, Carroll, and Currie and will say that a work is a documentary if it fulfills PCC criteria.

To solve the problem that PCC fails to exclude LSBs, Pratt proposes distinguishing LSBs from documentaries by requiring that, in addition to PCC's other criteria, documentaries be primarily accounts. Pratt defines "account" based on a complex definition of works of history as accounts of past events; he modifies the definition to include present and future events (2018, 223n6). Briefly, in Pratt's view, an account uses evidence to provide a synthesized argument or narrative that explains the significance of events in terms of any involved agents' intentions.<sup>1</sup> To say a documentary is *primarily* an account means that providing an account is "among the chief goals" of "the filmmakers" (219).

Although Pratt's proposal calls attention to important issues, I argue that it has three significant problems: it fails to properly exclude LSBs from the documentary category, it excludes a well-recognized genre of documentary, and it fails to exclude other nondocumentaries that are not LSBs. In what follows, I first explain each of these criticisms and then argue that the proposed added criterion "documentaries are not live productions" retains the advantages of Pratt's proposal (and offers an additional benefit) while avoiding its problems.

As just mentioned, Pratt's proposal fails to properly exclude LSBs from the category of documentary. Although Pratt acknowledges both that a work's creators can have several "chief goals" (219) and that LSBs in many ways do provide accounts through such methods as play-by-play

commentary (220), he argues that LSBs “are primarily if not exclusively intended to be trace or testimonial records of the events depicted—documents of the game that they broadcast” (220). It is hard to square this claim with the actual production and distribution practices of LSBs. The central feature of LSBs—live broadcasting of games—in no way serves the goal of creating a testimonial record of the event, which could be recorded without being broadcast, or vice versa. On the other hand, LSBs expend considerable resources toward the goal of providing quality accounts. As Pratt himself notes, “common practices” for LSBs “include the use of computer graphics to represent or diagram certain plays” (214). LSBs also employ expensive on-screen talent to offer commentary on and analysis of game events, a practice whose history dates back to the 1920s and has been a staple of the genre ever since (Lindsay 2017). Indeed, broadcast commentators are prominently featured in the advertising and promotion of such broadcasts as a reason to watch LSBs. For example, a 2018 ESPN press release promoting *Monday Night Football* includes claims that commentator Joe Tessitore’s “knowledge and insight will quickly make him one of the most respected analysts in football” and that commentator Lisa Salters is “a versatile and accomplished reporter with more than two decades of experience” (Hofheimer 2018). The press release makes no claims that games are accurately recorded and documented or that the camerawork will bring viewers the clearest angles on the action. These facts suggest that providing accounts is indeed among LSBs’ chief goals.

A second problem is anticipated in Pratt’s article: that the identification of “a significant class of documentaries that are not primarily accounts” would be “damaging to [Pratt’s] view” (2018, 221). While Pratt dismisses several candidates for such a class, he overlooks one well-recognized documentary genre whose members are not primarily accounts: poetic documentaries. Bill Nichols’s *Introduction to Documentary*, the standard textbook in the field, describes poetic documentaries such as *Rain* (1929) and *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982) as emphasizing “visual associations, tonal or rhythmic qualities, descriptive passages, and formal organization” (2010, 31).<sup>2</sup> Poetic documentaries do not offer accounts, in Pratt’s sense; *Rain*, for example, consists of artistically arranged shots of rain falling on ponds, buildings, and other objects, accompa-

nied by music but no words. But even if one thinks that *Rain* does offer an account (for example, that it implicitly argues that people fail to consider how ordinary events like rain can be beautiful), *Rain* and other poetic documentaries are clearly not *primarily* accounts (that is, providing accounts is not among their main goals) because they intentionally forego innumerable opportunities to provide clearer, better supported, and more explicit explanations of the events they portray. In *Rain*, for example, the simple addition of a title card saying something like “We rarely consider how ordinary events like rain can be beautiful” would significantly increase the film’s explanatory power, and its absence suggests that providing such an account is not one of its primary goals.<sup>3</sup> Pratt might grant that poetic documentaries such as *Rain* do not provide accounts but argue that they, like *actualités*, should not be considered documentaries. Yet, unlike the *actualités* he mentions, poetic documentaries are not “ancestors of our contemporary documentary category” that are “now relatively uncommon” (2018, 221) but a well-established part of the documentary tradition.

Last, I argue that Pratt’s proposal is an unsatisfactory corrective to PCC documentary theories because, as even Pratt acknowledges, many works that are not considered documentaries according to ordinary-language usage otherwise appear to meet Pratt’s criteria for documentary status. Pratt supports the claim that LSBs are not documentaries by noting that neither people nor television schedules classify LSBs as documentaries and that lists of recognized sports documentaries are segregated from lists of famous LSBs (2018, 217–218). Pratt also notes that such sources do not classify as documentaries many other types of works, such as sports highlight shows, nonsports news, reality television, and true-crime television (221). Since Pratt holds that ordinary-language classification is enough to exclude LSBs from the documentary category, he must consider these other works (as well as talk shows and political debates) nondocumentaries as well. The problem is that these other nondocumentary works meet both PCC documentary criteria and Pratt’s proposed addendum of offering accounts. Pratt’s response to this dilemma is to assert that there must be some other unspecified criteria that make such works nondocumentaries and that identifying such criteria is outside the scope of his article. Although his failure to exclude such works does not itself

invalidate his proposal, it qualifies as a major weakness that my own proposal avoids.

To address Pratt's initial concern that PCC classifies LSBs as documentaries, I propose the addendum that documentaries are not live productions. Pratt considers and correctly rejects the view that LSBs' nature as live *broadcasts* (that is, works that are broadcast as their represented events occur) excludes them from the documentary category. As he argues, if the only distinction between LSBs and documentaries is that the former are broadcast live, then a broadcasting delay of hours, weeks, or years could change a program from LSB into a documentary even if the work was otherwise identical, which violates our conventional understanding of these terms. I therefore propose that the documentary category should exclude not just live broadcasts but the broader category of *live productions*, which I define as works for which the majority of production decisions about the assemblage of the formal material constituting the works are made as the works are being recorded, whether or not those works are broadcast live.<sup>4</sup> In other words, live productions are performed or enacted (at least in part) as they are recorded and, in contrast to most films and television shows, undergo minimal postproduction changes before their mass dissemination.<sup>5</sup> For a one-hour live production of a basketball game or nightly news show, recording is started, production decisions are made in real time, and production is essentially completed at the end of the hour. Relevant production decisions might include which cameras' images to record or transmit, how to move cameras and frame shots, which microphones to activate or mute, and which prerecorded clips to show. Although the final record of such a work may not be broadcast immediately, the work is produced live in the sense that decisions are made in real time as the work is recorded.

The addendum that documentaries must not be live productions avoids the above-mentioned problems with Pratt's proposal that documentaries must be primarily accounts. First, while Pratt's proposal fails to properly distinguish between LSBs and documentaries (because LSBs actually do have a primary goal of providing accounts), my proposal clearly excludes LSBs from the documentary category because LSBs are live productions (even if they are not broadcast live).

Second, my proposal does not exclude well-established documentary genres, such as poetic

documentaries, which are not live productions. One potential objection to my proposal is that it would exclude a different documentary genre, so-called "Slow TV," which was introduced in 2009 with the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation's 7.5-hour real-time broadcast of a train journey from Bergen to Oslo (Irving 2017).<sup>6</sup> Pratt describes the same producers' "*Hurtigruten Minute by Minute*, a 134-hour live chronicle of a cruise," as a documentary and claims that an advantage of his proposal is its ability to include such works, which represent "an event in progress" (2018, 220).<sup>7</sup> Although Slow TV programs are live productions in the sense I am proposing, they are not a well-defined category nor are they generally considered documentaries.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the length of Slow TV programs invites intermittent or inattentive viewing practices and exhibition requirements that are quite different from those historically associated with documentaries. Finally, they do not neatly fit within the documentary concept as it has developed historically. Grierson, who coined the term in the 1930s to label a subset of nonfiction films, explicitly distinguished between simple recordings of the real world and the "arrangements, rearrangements, and creative shapings of it" that he called documentaries ([1932] 1998, 83). Slow TV programs feature uninterrupted broadcasts of such events as vehicle trips, fireplace fires, and people knitting (Heller 2014) but do not provide creative shapings of reality in the documentary tradition (nor, incidentally, explanatory accounts in Pratt's sense).

Third, my proposal avoids Pratt's failure to account for nondocumentary works that otherwise meet his proposed documentary criteria by explaining that people ordinarily do not consider productions such as sports highlight shows, non-sports news, talk shows, and political debates documentaries because they are typically produced live.<sup>9</sup>

A final problem my proposal avoids is that, while Pratt claims that reality television and true crime shows have equally good claims to nondocumentary status as LSBs (2018, 221), many documentary scholars actually consider such works to be documentaries (albeit sometimes hybrid cases for reasons that include reality shows' artificially constructed situations and true crime shows' extensive use of re-creations).<sup>10</sup> My proposal, in contrast, is open to classifying works in these categories as documentaries, as is consistent with

current documentary scholarship, and may help explain why highly edited reality shows (such as *Big Brother*) are more often discussed as documentaries than reality television talent competitions (such as *The Voice*) that are frequently produced live.<sup>11,12</sup>

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1. See Pratt (2018, 219) for his formal definition.

2. Nichols (2010) uses the term "modes" rather than "genres."

3. Although an anonymous referee disagrees, I would also argue that observational documentaries, such as Wiseman's *High School*, do not offer accounts in Pratt's sense, following Plantinga's observation that these works focus more on presenting their pro-filmic scenes than on asserting propositions.

4. Live broadcasts are live productions that are transmitted as they are recorded. Note that for live productions, the production decisions that are primarily made live involve assembling the work's formal elements; I do not mean to suggest that the entire production process, including scriptwriting, must be done in a live or improvised manner.

5. I require that only some aspects of live production be performed as the work is recorded, as live shows commonly incorporate previously recorded material.

6. Thanks to an anonymous referee for bringing this category of programming to my attention.

7. Pratt describes this program as offering "an account of an event in progress" (2018, 220), but it is not obvious how this work offers an account in Pratt's sense.

8. The Reddit discussion group for Slow TV describes it as "longform videos meant to be played for ambience" ("Slow TV" n.d.), an academic article as "long, uninterrupted broadcasts of relatively mundane activities" (Irving 2017, 238), and a popular magazine as "not scripted or heavily edited" and "more concerned with movement than with tension, contrast, or character" (Heller 2014). Slow TV is not currently included in academic discussions of documentary or relevant reference books. A few articles argue that Slow TV should be recognized as a documentary category but none demonstrate that it currently has that status.

9. I do not claim that people are aware of the live-production basis for this practice.

10. Nichols (2010) discusses reality television as a type of performative documentary; also see Mast (2009). Reality television is itself a broad and varied category, and not all types of reality shows are typically discussed as documentaries—for example, musical talent shows are often excluded.

11. My proposal does not require inclusion of these categories and thus is not threatened by arguments that these forms are not documentaries.

12. I would like to thank Rafael De Clercq and Andrea Sauchelli for helpful comments on a draft of this article.

#### Coordinating the Defense: A Reply to Frome

~~Jonathan Frome presents significant and thoughtful challenges to the view I lay out in "Are You Ready for Some Football: A Monday Night Documentary?" I am grateful to have the existence of a sensitive reader confirmed, and for the opportunity to respond. Frome also proposes his own solution to the problem, which I believe is subject to its own difficulties while at the same time failing to be explanatorily fundamental.~~

~~It will be useful before getting into the thick of things to draw attention to a few central parts of my theory. I argue that live sports broadcasts (henceforth, following Frome, LSBs) are not documentaries. I propose that the best way to eliminate LSBs from the category is to require that documentaries are primarily accounts. To paraphrase, the chief goal (or among the chief goals) of the filmmakers is to (1) identify, explain, and interpret the significance of the events the documentary depicts, (2) examine the mental states~~