

**Seeing with Feeling. Filmed Revolutions  
of Others, from an Empathic towards an  
Involved Spectatorship of Documentaries**

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# Seeing with Feeling

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Empathic towards an Involved  
Spectatorship of Documentaries*

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*In memory of Viorica Bucur*



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## INTRODUCTION

## Stating the Question

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- *What would you like this film to do?*
- *Well, I'd like the film to organize Americans to stop U.S. intervention in Latin America.*
- Pamela Yates, 1985<sup>1</sup>

A film – to stop the U.S. intervention? It simply sounds like an overconfident statement to make. When the above-quoted interview was taken, the American filmmaker Pamela Yates had recently released her documentary about resistance in Guatemala, **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE** (1983),<sup>2</sup> and she had grandiose plans with it.

Two years prior, at the beginning of the 1980s, the same Pamela Yates and her partners from the independent studio *Skyline Pictures* won a commission from CBS to do a television report in Guatemala, precisely at the time when the Latin American country was going through an unprecedented turmoil: Guatemalan

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<sup>1</sup> Yates, in an interview with Rosenthal (Autumn 1985), first published in *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 39:1. Here cited from Rosenthal (1988), 151.

<sup>2</sup> **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE.** Directors: Pamela Yates, Newton Thomas Segel. USA, 1983.

principal guerrilla organizations unified their military command under Guatemalan Revolutionary Unity (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca or URNG). URNG tried to boycott the General Elections and declared that reforms were not possible in Guatemala without revolutionary changes and that they were about to undertake a “popular revolutionary war”.<sup>3</sup> In order to prevent the guerrilla’s plan, the growing state armed forces started a counterinsurgency and, between 1982 and 1985, one hundred fifty thousand people lost their lives in Guatemala, up to 90 percent of them being unarmed civilians.<sup>4</sup> Out of all losses of lives and human rights abuses, less than five percent are today attributed to the guerrillas. The heavily armed governmental counterinsurgency is today almost entirely held responsible for the crimes in Guatemala, and this, revolutions historian Jeff Goodwin put it, “would not have been possible without external assistance – mainly but not exclusively from the United States”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Degenhardt (1983/1991), 121.

<sup>4</sup> Goodwin (2001), 198.

<sup>5</sup> Goodwin (2001), 203. In order to support his argument, Goodwin refers here to the comprehensive Report published by the Human Rights Office of the Catholic Church: between 1960s and 1996 (the signing of the peace accord ) the total number of human victims was two hundred thousands



**Figure 0.1 Pamela Yates recording sound for *WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE* (1983). Scene included in *GRANITO: HOW TO NAIL A DICTATOR* (2011).**

It is right from the midmost of this unrest that Pamela Yates and the *Skyline* colleagues delivered, for American network CBS, two TV reports about the situation in Guatemala. The reports, containing balanced statements, were not how the filmmakers thought the Guatemalan story should be told in the United States,

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(ninety percent unarmed civilians); the guerrillas were held responsible for less than five percent all human rights abuses.

and “the Skyline group found it of a little value”.<sup>6</sup> Pam Yates and her team returned to Guatemala to do the documentary film they thought was urgent to be done. The outcome of this last journey is **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE**, a film which gives a very intimate look at the culture of resistance. **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE** documents the communities that went on with their struggle, even under ceaseless bombardment coming from the Guatemalan, U.S.-backed military government. The film was shot with the American public in mind and. In order to make the historical background as clear as possible for the large American audience that the filmmakers hoped to reach, the film introduced two re-enacted sequences, about the U.S. economical interests and intervention in Guatemala and the American intervention in the 1954 coup.<sup>7</sup> The docu-drama parts received a lot of criticism, but **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE** did

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<sup>6</sup> Barnouw (1993), 301–302.

<sup>7</sup> In 1997, CIA commenced declassifying a dramatic contingent of documents which chronicle the CIA involvement in the 1954 coup in Guatemala, to be found on the websites of the National Security Archive (<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB4/>) and the CIA (<http://www.foia.cia.gov/collection/guatemala>).

achieve an extensive theatrical release and “the guerrilla sequences proved spell-binding”.<sup>8</sup>

There was however something else at stake, other than the theatrical success, that determined Pamela Yates and Tom Siegel to film in both difficult and dangerous conditions. It was something else that made them risk their own lives in order for this documentary to be made. The menace was a serious one: if the Guatemalan government had known that the American crew was filming the guerrillas, the director stated somewhere, “we would have been declared enemies of the state and either killed or expelled”.<sup>9</sup> It is not even solely the security of the filmmakers that was at issue in the making of the film: Yates dedicated the documentary film to “the thousands of Latin Americans who risked their lives in order that we might tell their story”.<sup>10</sup> We do not know today if the people who showed their faces in the film, or those who granted interviews, suffered governmental repercussions. There is no information available on what happened

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<sup>8</sup> Barnouw (1993), 302.

<sup>9</sup> Yates, in interview with Rosenthal (1988), 546 .

<sup>10</sup> As it appears on the end credits of **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE**.

to those Guatemalans, many more, who facilitated the making of the documentary.

Hence, what precisely made Yates want to go back to Guatemala and do a documentary film, different from the two TV reports she did beforehand?<sup>11</sup> The answer is *empathy*, in her own words:

We hope that when people come out after the film is over they will have had an emotionally compelling experience that makes them think or feel that the people of Central America and the people of the United States have more in common with each other (...).<sup>12</sup>

So what motivated Pam Yates to do the Guatemala film and several others in Latin America, what determined her team to spend money, risk their lives and consciously jeopardize the lives of the people who allowed themselves to be filmed, was them all being of the opinion that there is something within the frames of the documentary, in the filmic means of the genre, which will make distant spectators identify, or empathise with the people in

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<sup>11</sup> Yates believed the TV reports were “filmed slide shows”, as she put it in the interview with Alan Rosenthal (1988), 545.

<sup>12</sup> Yates, in interview with Rosenthal (1988), 551.

the film. The filmmakers assumed that this film-generated empathy is effective enough to bring along some form of altruistic conduct: on Yates' particular agenda, we should remember here, the action desired was the mobilization of the American people to pressure their own government in order "to stop U.S. intervention in Latin America".

Pamela Yates is by all means not an isolated case of resistance documentary maker. There are numerous documentary films, made by people from within or from outside the conflict borders who, up until today, undertake similar risks; in their turn, people often endanger their own safety, and that of their families, only to be characters in such films, since they all share the common belief: documentary moving images have the capacity to generate empathy, and consequently trigger action, which might eventually attract humanitarian aid or produce outcomes such as sanctions or military intervention.

Scholars of revolutions agree on few things, but there seems to be consensus on the fact that, in order to succeed, revolutions must benefit from good international relationships or

assistance<sup>13</sup>: revolutionary success has, more often than not, “depended on foreign support for the opposition coming at crucial times, or on the withdrawal of foreign support for the ruler”.<sup>14</sup> It is equally relevant that many revolutions did not succeed, or had been reversed, only because of lack of foreign intervention to back them. Hence revolutionary documentaries produced for a foreign audience may be seen as yet another tool to achieve this purpose.<sup>15</sup>

For all the serious implications listed above, one might presuppose it is only self-evident that the empathy-generating capacity of documentary films has already been properly investigated. Moreover, since so much has already been written, in a variety of disciplines, on the subject of empathy, one might go on in presupposing that the problem was seriously taken under scrutiny in the context of film studies. This is not, however, the case. There is a very limited amount of existent work on the subject of filmic empathy, and almost no research engaging with the topic in the context of non-fiction moving image.

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<sup>13</sup> Sharp (1993/2012), Goldstone (2014).

<sup>14</sup> Goldstone (2014), 19.

<sup>15</sup> Sharp (1993/2012), 78–79.

The recent revolutionary movements in the Arab World and Ukraine, and the large documentary production emerging from these parts of the world, beg the question: what are the means and mechanisms within the frames of the non-fiction films, which are charged with stimulating empathy – this bond between distant people(s) – and what is the relationship between thus experienced empathic distress and our moral attitude? This is the inquiry in the current work, undertaken in the context of *resistance documentary* – non-fiction films emerging from revolutionary situations.

## Revolutions and Resistance Documentaries

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*Shot rapidly in January in 1961, during the first period of alert..., it aims at communicating, if not the experience, at least the vibrations, the rhythms of a revolution that will one day perhaps be held to be the decisive moment of a whole era of contemporary history.*

– Chris Marker, in the *Preface* to the script for **CUBA Sí!**<sup>16</sup>

Revolutions are the events that had an utmost influence in shaping the history of the world, its modern borders and the geopolitics, as we know them, with some global wars perhaps being more important in this respect. We cannot understand the world, the way it is now, without understanding revolutions in Iran, Cuba and Philippine. And the documentary films made in the heart of those events are a great tool towards our incisive comprehension.

The term *resistance*, or *revolutionary documentary*, is used in this work to define the variety of the non-fiction film genre which emerges from revolutionary situations, filmed in one or more of the stages of the revolutionary process. Resistance documentaries

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<sup>16</sup> Chris Marker (1961), cited in Chanan (2004), 193.

are emergency products, often clandestinely produced by filmmakers from within the uprising border, or – as it is the case in countries with no film school or no documentary tradition – by, or with the help of international crews. With various degrees of ideological distance, these films document the perspective of the resistance movement, and are produced with a foreign audience in mind. In this respect they differ from agit-props<sup>17</sup> and third-cinema films,<sup>18</sup> which have a different function: they openly aim to mobilize the people directly concerned with the revolution into partaking, in some way, in the resistance movement.

The making of the early documentaries from this variety of films does not coincide with the beginnings of cinema, as they emerged much later, in the context of the expansion of 16mm film equipment in the 1950s. It is true that this type of equipment was already largely used in the Second World War, but it is only in the

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<sup>17</sup> Agit-props have their origins in kino-trains, or agit-trains (and even agit-boats). Like the name says, trains were traveling throughout the Soviet Union starting in 1918 and continuing all the way into the 1920s. The agit-trains were mobile film laboratories, having on board an equally mobile cinema, sometimes even a theatre. They had a function: keeping people united in the ongoing struggle. Descriptions to be found in Barnouw (1993), 51–54 and Karmen (1949/1996), 61–65.

<sup>18</sup> A film qualified as third-cinema if it aims to turn the spectator into an active participant in the liberation struggle.

post-war years that their growing use in medical, governmental, educational institutions and televisions lead to the extension of the 16mm network, and therefore reduced the overall costs of production. As a direct outcome, filmmaking became increasingly available for documentary makers who now could finally work outside studios, or independent from any other sort of established institutions.<sup>19</sup>

With production costs reduced, complemented by the new development of synchronized sound recording techniques, film equipment became much easier to transport and manoeuvre in difficult settings and hasty circumstances. Filmic means, in their turn, were now liberated from the agenda of production studios, and in no imperative need of governmental money. Starting with the uprisings in Central and South America, documentary film teams became independent witnesses, and sometimes participants in the movements, thus creating resistance, or revolutionary documentaries (the two terms are going to be interchangeably used here to describe the same category of films).

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<sup>19</sup> Ericson (2009), Aitken (2013).

Two perspectives distinguish our overall understanding of both revolutions and the films documenting them. One of the two perspectives is heroic, describing by and large the rise of the crowds triumphantly rejoicing at the collapse of the unjust leaders, bringing in new world orders that are “concerned with both liberation and freedom”.<sup>20</sup> The second perspective we have on revolutions, less epic, stresses on the chaos in society, brought along by angered or hysteric mobs. And therefore it is not rare that, in attempting to define revolutions, historians and social scientists first wonder about their moral nature. Jeff Goodwin, theoretician of revolutionary movements, raises the question in the preface of his book *No Other Way Out*: “I was once told that before I could write sensibly about revolutions, I would need to decide for myself whether they were good or just”.<sup>21</sup> A similar question occurs to the documentary film scholar: what is the moral nature of revolutionary movements? Which films should be studied in the first place, and which is the required distance *vis-à-vis* the storylines happening on the screen?

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<sup>20</sup> Arendt (1963), 25.

<sup>21</sup> Goodwin (2001), xvii.

This first moral dilemma appears to get its answer directly from the recent history of revolutions: if revolutions are the overthrowing of rulers by mobilized masses in order to create entirely new political and social orders, in the name of freedom and liberty, then the Khmer Rouge taking of power under Pol Pot qualifies as a successful revolution, even in the heroic understanding of the term, and most historians agree to that. Yet, in less than four years, between the 17th of April 1975, when the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, took Phnom Penh, and the 7th of January 1979, when Pol Pot stepped back, about 1.7 million Cambodians lost their lives because of starvation, overwork or execution. This means the perishing of just about 1 in 4 citizens in the country, turning it into one of the most horrific and absurd crimes against humanity in the modern world.<sup>22</sup> In all that time, the socialist world, including the western elite, persisted in applauding the successful Cambodian revolution. The same goes for the Iranian Revolution – if we apply even the more narrow definitions available, the Iranian one, too, qualifies as a successful revolution. Not only successful revolutions lead to social and

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<sup>22</sup>According to the Cambodian Information Centre:  
[http://www.cambodia.org/khmer\\_rouge/](http://www.cambodia.org/khmer_rouge/).

political misfortunes; failed ones, and non-revolutions, do too: the attempt at overthrowing the Syrian Assad-Family dictatorship generated the events that turned Syria into the country with 2.47 million refugees, close to becoming the largest population of refugees in the world.<sup>23</sup> The paramilitary FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia), known today for kidnappings and narcotics-trafficking, emerged in the 1960s with a Marxist program, and turned into the group which nowadays, as Goodwin points out, earns “as much as \$400 to \$600 million annually by taxing coca growers and traffickers in southern Columbia”.<sup>24</sup>

After all the above, there is no way left in which revolutions could be solely understood as fundamentally heroic or merely morally good, and the history of revolutions, over and over again, shows us both its facets. The geologist studies earthquakes, but not because he likes to see the world crack, and social scientist and historians analyse revolutions, but not because they necessarily want to see the world upside down; in a similar fashion, no

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<sup>23</sup> According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR), at the time of the writing this position is still held by Afghanistan: <http://www.unhcr.org.uk/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Goodwin (2001), 241.

ideology affected the choices of non-fiction examples in the current work. What brings them under the same category is that they were all being made in a revolutionary context, partaking to various extents in the resistance movements in a particular geopolitical context; they are films which came into existence in order to be shown outside that revolutionary setting.

But to better define resistance documentaries, we should first properly look at what revolutionary situations actually are. It will become apparent how specific features of revolutionary situations influence the ways in which the films documenting them are made.

There is only partial agreement about how to define revolutionary situations. In a symbolic manner, they have been described by historians and social scientists as “traffic jams”,<sup>25</sup> “great volcanoes of the social sciences, erupting to produce a broad social changes”,<sup>26</sup> or even “earthquakes”<sup>27</sup> of societies in an “unstable equilibrium”:

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<sup>25</sup> Tilly (1993), 7.

<sup>26</sup> Johnston (2011), 135.

<sup>27</sup> Goldstone (2014), 15.

Imagine a ball sitting at the bottom of a large depression; if a small force moves the ball in any direction, it simply falls back into the depression, returning to its former state (...). Yet consider what happens if the ball is not sitting in a depression, but resting on top of the hill. In the absence of any force the ball remains in place, but small force pushing the ball now leads it to roll off the hill and head into a new direction. This is an unstable equilibrium – a small disturbance leads to an ever larger departure from the prior condition. This is exactly what happens to a society in a revolution.<sup>28</sup>

When the discussion moves towards a less metaphorical and more exact lexis, defining revolutions gets complicated. Are they sudden, rapid transformations, or involve changes over a long time span? And what kinds of changes are necessary for one to talk of a revolution? Do they, by necessity, imply violent confrontation of armed forces? Is a non-violent, but yet radical change, a revolution? Are revolutions ultimately the fight of the poor against the rich, and always trigger redistribution of wealth? Or are the grounds that determine revolutions far more diverse? Are all revolutions social events, or is there room for other types of revolutions, like the anti-colonial model? Are they defined by the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

ideological change – or do they actually need an ideology altogether? And what about insurrections and terrorist actions? When do they “transform” into revolutions? There is not always agreement concerning the above. Many theoreticians however, like Skocpol, Tilly and Johnston, agree on a state-centred definition of revolution, where the revolutionary movement seeks control of the state, replacing the existent structure, and not just institutions or policies. The state itself is not a fixed concept, but rather one which suffers great changes throughout time, and as it changes, so do revolutions, and the kinds of documentary films emerging from revolutionary contexts change with them.

States have armies to defend them – so for a long time, theories which placed the state in the centre of the definition of revolution argued that one of their fundamental features must be violence: the intelligent way in which the state uses its armed forces determines the success of the revolution. This hypothesis is two-folded, the other side being that, once the revolutionary movement succeeds, the reformation and consolidation of the army of the new revolutionary state is essential for the lasting

victory.<sup>29</sup> In 1963, Hannah Arendt strongly maintained that violence, alongside war, is intrinsically related to revolution. Revolutions indeed used to be predominantly violent, and violence was a visual constant in the narrative of resistance documentaries, up to a later point in time. Yet, non-violent revolutions predominated in recent years. The Zapatistas resistance movement in Mexico is one instance of non-violent revolution, and the films documenting it had to invent novel visual ways to show the struggle. Like the means for peaceful revolutions, films documenting them are also at the beginning, and their innovative visual means do not escape criticism: “But as far as war goes, what we see on screen is peasants taking control of a few towns and ranches, (...) and then being unable to return home to their villages”,<sup>30</sup> a reviewer wrote about **A PLACE CALLED CHIAPAS**, Nettie Wild’s documentary on the Zapatista movement in Mexico. “There is a voice-over about a paramilitary reaction later”, the

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<sup>29</sup> Chorley (1943).

<sup>30</sup> Konecky [undated archive], cited from *CultureVulture*, available online at: <http://culturevulture.net/film/a-place-called-chiapas>.

reviewer adds, “when 45 people are killed. Tragic, but not much of a war”.<sup>31</sup>

Another reason lying in the background of revolutionary movements, is seen by many “an uneven economic development”.<sup>32</sup> Economic burden plays a role in revolutions, however places struggling with the deepest poverty, like instances of famine in recent history, did not lead to revolutionary situations. Revolutions do often have in their background economic crises or wars, and the two are indeed strongly interconnected, since wars lead to the weakening of states. It is the case of the war the former Soviet Union fought in Afghanistan, which contributed to the worsening of economic conditions of the large population, and eventually lead to the weakening of the Soviet Union. But even if economic deprivation plays an important role in this respect, this doesn’t happen in its extreme cases, and Goldstone’s conclusion, about what degree of economic deprivation facilitate revolutionary crises, might surprise many: “revolutions occur more often in middle-income countries than in the very poorest nations”.<sup>33</sup> In

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Skocpol (1979), 23.

<sup>33</sup> Goldstone (2014), 10.

conclusion, there must be other triggers, beyond the realm of poverty, which motivate the organizing of resistance movements that filmmakers document.

Resistance movements start to coagulate when many people in the society become angry and frustrated,<sup>34</sup> when they think they are treated unfair<sup>35</sup> and they believe to be part of a numerous, united, righteous group.<sup>36</sup> So it is not essentially extreme poverty that leads the furious peoples to revolt, but rather various forms of injustice or inequality which lead to a larger amount of the population to join rebellious groups in order to call attention on their unfair situation and raise demands. We talk about a revolutionary situation when, according to Tilly, out of those groups grow “contenders, or coalitions of contenders, advancing exclusive alternative claims to the control of the government which is currently exerted by the members of the polity”,<sup>37</sup> or exercised by “the state, or some segment of it”.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Gurr, 1970.

<sup>35</sup> Goodwin, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Tilly (1973), 200.

Are revolutions brief instances, or long-lasting processes? How long should the filming process last for the revolution to be properly documented? Where does the film narrative begin, and when do filmmakers know the filming process can safely approach its end?

For Arendt, we speak of a revolution when “the course of the history suddenly begins anew”,<sup>39</sup> it is the idea behind the year zero, in Revolutionary France or Cambodia. In her very influential work on social revolutions, Theda Skocpol argued that revolutions are momentous, “*rapid*, basic transformations of a society’s class structures”.<sup>40</sup> Yet, Mao Zedong prepared the Chinese Revolution for almost 20 years. Some definitions stress on how revolutions occur, the context that leads to the mass mobilisations and their beginnings, while others emphasize the outcomes. The revolution can start as a less radical movement, one that seeks partial reforms and not a downfall in the state structures. When the existing power does not want to, or cannot fulfil these reform claims, the reform

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<sup>38</sup> Tilly (1993), 10. Other reasons, like demographic growth, can also be found behind revolutionary situations. An interpretation of the phenomenon to be found in Goldstone (1997), 102–120.

<sup>39</sup> Arendt (1963), 21.

<sup>40</sup> Skocpol (1979), 4, emphasis added.

movement breaks into a resistance one. We speak about a revolutionary outcome when power is transferred “from those who held it before the start of multiple suzerainty to a new ruling coalition – which may of course include some elements of the old ruling coalition”.<sup>41</sup> And even for those, very few revolutionary contexts, which have clear revolutionary outcomes, there are historians who would still insist in labelling them as “doubtful” or “marginal” outcomes.<sup>42</sup>

For those historians studying revolutions, research is rather focused on the successful ones. The current work, however, in analysing the films of resistance movements, brings under scrutiny documentaries from contexts which many historians might qualify

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<sup>41</sup> Tilly (1993), 14.

<sup>42</sup> Interesting examples are the events in 1989–1991 in Eastern Europe were, whether or not the term revolution should be used, still constitutes a subject of debate, from the international academic contexts concerned with revolutions until the political sphere in the respective countries. Tilly insists for a distinction between what revolutionary situations, outcomes are, as opposed to the entire process. According to Tilly, Romania had a revolutionary situation, but with a doubtful revolutionary outcome, which cannot, *à la rigueur* be called revolution. Albania, on the other hand, with a „marginal revolutionary situation”, had a more radical revolutionary outcome – according to Tilly (1993), 235.

as “failed revolutions”<sup>43</sup> or “revolutions in the process”, or even “non-revolutions”,<sup>44</sup> “revolutions that never took place”<sup>45</sup> – until today.

Evaluation of the success of the revolutions is difficult in itself, since this type of conflict generates outcomes which neither could have been previously envisaged, nor expected and, as Skocpol put it in her influential book: “Revolutions have invariably given rise to outcomes neither fully foreseen nor intended by – nor perfectly serving the interests of – any of the particular groups involved”.<sup>46</sup> This curious shift in political realities brings about shifts in perspective, and renders it difficult for the documentary maker to get an ideological stand towards both the events and the people that are being filmed. This is probably why a widespread approach to resistance documentaries is the filmed diary where, in

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<sup>43</sup> This is how Lipski describes radical movements which fail to take power. Lipski (1976), 508.

<sup>44</sup> Skocpol (1994/1997), 130.

<sup>45</sup> Lipski (1976), 508. Such “negative cases” got little attention from historians and social scientists, greatly contrasting with the extensive research dedicated to “successful” cases. Goodwin (2001) is one of the few discussing such cases where, despite revolutionary movements which managed to mobilize massive number of people, sometimes for an long time span, eventually failing to change the social order.

<sup>46</sup> Skocpol (1979), 18.

a self-reflexive manner, the ideological concerns and shifts in perspective are straightforwardly personalized and reflected upon.

The documentary maker cannot usually anticipate the ending of the revolutionary situation, for it to coincide with the end of the film, and the ideological dilemmas to be solved, since the historical outcomes do not occur rapidly. On the contrary, they sometimes require decades to have their effects felt. Jack Goldstone estimates an average of *ten to twelve years* necessary “from the fall of the old regime before the features of the stable new revolutionary regime are clear”.<sup>47</sup> In time, the leaders of the resistance movement can seek to take the power, or in time turn into unarmed political parties, and even participate in the government, as it is the case of Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional, or FMLN) in El Salvador. Jeff Goodwin identified another category, “the reformist revolutionary movement”, where the resistance or its leaders seek state power, but do not wish to

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<sup>47</sup> Goldstone (2014), 36.

change the existent state structures, order and institutions, or at most reform them very little.<sup>48</sup>

But the replacing of an old regime with a new one through a revolutionary movement is, in Goldstone's terms, just "a revolutionary honeymoon". Tilly also stresses on the long time span necessary for the unfold of revolutions. For him, an accurate definition of revolutions encompasses both revolutionary situations and outcomes, and an excessively narrow definition of such a diverse process will naturally prove to be inaccurately exclusive.<sup>49</sup> Following Tilly, we can define a complete, successful revolution as a process lasting

from a sundering of sovereignty and hegemony through a period of struggle to re-establishment of sovereignty and hegemony under new management. The course of struggle and change from the opening to the termination of multiple sovereignty constitutes the revolutionary process.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Goodwin, 2001.

<sup>49</sup> Tilly (1978), 190–200.

<sup>50</sup> Tilly, (1993), 9.

Tilly also adds to his understanding of the process that, for a revolution to be successful, “the new regime has to hold power for a significant period”.<sup>51</sup>

It seems now reasonable to agree that revolutionary movements, even if they might appear momentous sparks in time, are actually not rapid and short, but almost with no exception, no matter if ultimately successful or failed, *processes* which last extensive periods of time, aiming at the complete change of the existing state order. What is rapid, unpredictable, violent, and often short, are the various revolutionary episodes in the chain that marks the long, complicated revolutionary process. In the revolutionary process radical events unfold with high speed, as opposed to settle societies ran by stable, uncontested regimes, where changes, even small, happen within a long time-span. This is the reason why revolutionary, non-fiction films, regardless which stage of the process they document, require promptness in the production process and swiftness in post-production and distribution.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 0.2 Last images recorded by Swedish-Argentinian cameraman Leonardo Henricksen, before being shot dead on June 29, 1973, in an attempt of military coup. Footage included in BATTLE OF CHILE, Part I (1975).**

“Challengers change, rulers change, claims change, commitment of citizens to the claims changes, and capacity of rulers to suppress challengers changes”,<sup>52</sup> and alongside all of the above, the scripts of documentary films, which are subject to improvisation – change

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<sup>52</sup> Tilly (1993), 11.

as well. These films are *emergency products*, which do not properly fit in commissioning editor's agenda; as they require rapid production decisions, there is often no buffer time for budget rising.

Revolutionary documentaries frequently require concealed filming. This is the reason why a tremendous number of these films are independent, low or no budget self-produced pieces, which get commissioned only in the editing stage, or secure festival or television distribution just after the film is completed. The filmmakers often require great access, and a trusting relationship with members of the resistance movement, no matter which stage of the revolutionary process they mainly document: the rise of guerrillas, a particular attack, some form of protest or foreign intervention, or the first presidential elections. The presidential or constitutional elections under the new order are the closing sequences of numerous of those documentaries.<sup>53</sup>

Some filmmakers however are not content with the outcomes and continue filming, sensing a new dramatic turn in the

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<sup>53</sup> **HAITI: DREAMS OF DEMOCRACY** **HAITI: DREAMS OF DEMOCRACY.** Directors: Johnathan Demme and Jo Menell. UK, 1987.

events,<sup>54</sup> or return to the country to do yet another film about a new stage of the revolutionary process.<sup>55</sup>



Figure 0.3 **First election in Libya after the fall of Muammar al-Gaddafi. Footage included in DIARY FROM A REVOLUTION (2012).**

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<sup>54</sup> **DIARY FROM A REVOLUTION.** Director: Nizar Najar. Norway | Libya, 2012.

<sup>55</sup> Deborah Shaffer's film **NICARAGUA: REPORT FROM THE FRONT**, documenting the revolutionary struggle of Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) under constant American threat made a big impact in the United States. In 1987, Shaffer went back to Nicaragua to document another stage of the revolutionary process in the film **FIRE FROM THE MOUNTAIN** (1987). This time, the combatants from the first documentary were leaders in the new regime.

Like any other creative artist, these filmmakers might indeed have motivations beyond political and militant ones, like fame, money, even spirit of adventure.<sup>56</sup> Whichever the reasons behind the production might be, the makers and the people appearing in the film, or those facilitating it at great risk, are doing their part because they assume, or they know from previous experience, that the film could have an impact, often an emotional one, on the outside world.

Foreign support to the revolutionary faction is proven to influence the success of the resistance movement, while support to the old structures can obliterate the chances of the revolution to succeed or to last. John Foran provides a comprehensive account of the failed revolutions in the Third World Countries and the relationship towards external powers.<sup>57</sup> The Aliende revolutionary movement in 1970 succeeded because, as Foran put it, “the U.S. underestimates threat”, only to be doomed to an abrupt failure some few years later, when the U.S. blockade and intervention lead to inflation and economical crises. Ultimately, the CIA-backed coup d’état in 1973 installed a dictatorship. Similar were the cases

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<sup>56</sup> **POINT AND SHOT.** Director: Marshall Curry. USA, 2014.

<sup>57</sup> Foran (1993), 227–267.

of Jamaica (1980) and Grenada (1983), where revolutions were reversed, and more recently in Syria, were rebels fought without success not only the regime, but alongside, the external support that the regime was receiving.

Not only the foreign support, offered either to the state power, or to the resistance movements, can influence the outcome of the revolution. When solely the external power simply retracts the support offered to a particular regime, the revolutionary movement increases its chances. It was in these sorts of circumstances, with the US withdrawal of support for Marcos in the Philippines in the 1986, that the People's Power movement achieved the downfall of the regime; same goes for the coup which ended the Duvalier family-regime in Haiti in the same year.<sup>58</sup> In both cases, films about the revolutions were made over a longer period of time, thus documenting the fact that changes were only partial (the military, for instance, kept hold on power in both countries) and few social reforms happened.

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<sup>58</sup> Foran (1997), 252. Foreign support is of course not the only element, which makes a revolution succeed or last. Economic crises, which can generate burdening increase in taxes, or less compensation for the army, is definitely a decisive factor.



Figure 4 **Forensic excavations in Guatemala; footage included in GRANITO: HOW TO NAIL A DICTATOR (2011).**

Yet another type of revolution, the “democratizing” one, happens when, like in the Libyan case, or more recently Ukraine, the masses “seek to overturn an authoritarian regime that has grown corrupt, ineffective and illegitimate, and replace it with a more accountable and representative regime”.<sup>59</sup> According to Goldstone, these types of revolutions unfortunately tend to lead to “either frequent shifts in leaderships or recurrent authoritarian tendencies”.<sup>60</sup> In the case

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<sup>59</sup> Goldstone (2014), 37.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 38.

of the Libyan democratizing revolution, international intervention decisively contributed to the fall of the regime, but soon the country tumbled into bloody civil war. The Libyan case is yet another example that international support can decisively influence the course of the revolution, but it does not go without grave consequences when this support is partial or only momentary. After a successful revolution, a new state order should be created, since states do not exist in a vacuum but, in Goodwin's words, in "the international state systems"<sup>61</sup>: international support can contribute to the consolidation of the order and autonomous structures in countries coming out of a successful revolution. International support, in short, is not the only factor contributing to the destiny of the revolutionary movements, but it is beyond doubt a key factor, which explains the large production of Revolutionary Documentaries. My current work challenges the assumptions about the effect these films might have on the viewer's affect. It investigates a particular kind of response, namely the empathic one, and its potential relationship to action.

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<sup>61</sup> Goodwin (2001), 14.

## Filmic Empathy: An Interdisciplinary Approach

Film studies were not opened to interdisciplinary approach until very recently, as opposed to research taking place in psychology, where for a long time now, film has been used as a tool for experiments and argumentations. Film-based experiments (film stimuli) are traditionally used instruments for studying empathy in the laboratory, thus asserting clearly the agreed-upon belief that empathy with the moving-image character *is* empathy.

Experienced researchers often support their theories with video recordings and films. Already in the 1980s, when the idea that empathy is a multidimensional phenomenon was just acquiring credibility, experiments were designed around dramatic film stimuli in order to prove just that: emotional and cognitive stimuli interact into generating a single, complex empathy process. The groundbreaking findings of Mark Davis et al. in the field of empathy included an experiment which presupposed showing to 144 male students clips from the films **BRIAN'S SONG** and **WHO'S**

**AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF**.<sup>62</sup> Martin Hoffman uses fiction film examples to support his hypotheses. An account about viewing **STEEL MAGNOLIAS** describes both how imagining to be the other triggers empathy, and how this empathy can subsequently be susceptible to egoistic drift, when the viewer focuses more on his on painful experience.<sup>63</sup> Psychologist Daniel Batson, whose life-long work is dedicated to the relationship between empathy and altruism, explains one reason why films can be subject of enquiry for the study of empathy:

We believe that each of these works (i.e. **A RAISIN IN THE SUN**, **THE ELEPHANT MAN**, **RAIN MAN**, **LONGTIME COMPANION**), and many similar ones, seek to improve attitudes toward a stigmatized group – a racial or cultural minority, people with some social stigma, disability or disease. The strategy used is to induce the audience to feel empathy for one or a few members of the stigmatized group.<sup>64</sup>

Some of the more sceptical film scholars might still wonder if such a thing exists altogether: empathy with characters in the moving

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<sup>62</sup> Davis et al. (1987). “Emotional Reaction to Dramatic Film Stimuli: The Influence of Cognitive and Emotional Empathy”, in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Vol. 52(1): 126–133.

<sup>63</sup> Hoffman (2000), 57.

<sup>64</sup> Batson (1997), 105.

image, or what I refer to here as filmic empathy. In order to understand the nature of the relationship we have with people in films, we should first recall what we know from experience: that watching a film is not mere looking, but it implies paying attention. And empathy is very much an involuntary process or, as Hoffman put it: “if one pays attention to the victim, one should respond automatically with empathic distress”.<sup>65</sup> This is why almost every single movie spectator, adult or child, finds it difficult to avoid empathising with victims in films. This is not only the case with documentary films, but is valid even for fiction films, where it is common knowledge that the people we see are actors and ‘pretend’. The spectatorship of film presupposes paying attention, which does not leave room for avoiding empathy. It is nevertheless true that it would be possible for the spectator to avoid some complex empathic modes, like identification with the people on the screen, by thinking distracting thoughts, but as will be shown in chapter 3, several less complex modes of triggering empathy are involuntary and automatic.

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<sup>65</sup> Hoffman (2000), 289.

The victim does not need to be physically present for the empathy to be generated in the viewers, and there are several reasons why that is: humans are able to form images, represent people and events, and imagine themselves in another's place – and represented people and events can evoke affect.<sup>66</sup> It must be admitted that there are differences of intensity, determined by the fact that the distress is represented in moving images and not experienced first hand, but these very limitations are not related to the victim's physical absence, but to the viewer's imagination and its limitations.

We thus may commence from the safe premise that, through specific filmic mechanisms, corresponding to various psychological modes of triggering empathy, non-fiction moving images have the potential to arouse empathic feelings in the viewer.

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<sup>66</sup> Fiske (1982), Hoffman (1985).

## Where to Look for Answers? Methodology and Outline of the Work

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Empathy has never been central to film scholarship and, to this day, almost entirely absent from non-fiction studies.<sup>67</sup> Under various names, however (like sympathy or identification), it has been occasionally employed, starting from the works of the earliest film theorists until now, to explain a variety of aspects in spectatorship theory. Various facets of the same phenomenon were interchangeably called character engagement or identification, perspective taking or simulation, partial illusion or vectorial convergence, emotional contagion or mirroring – to name just a few of the approaches towards the complex phenomenon that compounds empathy, which will be detailed later in this work.

The discussion is complicated for at least three main reasons. The first problem with empathy is a terminological one: in

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<sup>67</sup> One of these very few attempts to analyse the empathic phenomenon in non-fiction comes from Christine Brinckmann (2005/2014), 193–221. She pleads for a simulation explanation for filmic empathy, and her contribution is, nevertheless, a rare encounter.

psychological studies, the limited nomenclature available forced researchers to alternately employ only sympathy or empathy to describe a wide range of psychological phenomena. The direct effect on empathy inquiry in film studies was that scholars ended up using the confusing vocabulary. This was supplemented with notions or words from the vernacular (most notably identification), but thus scholars continued referring to aspects of, as will be showed in chapter 3, is the same wide-ranging process.

This led to a second, more sensitive problem: the tendency in film studies to isolate, to increasingly tighten parts of this single empathic process in the attempt to condense it to one essential, fundamental feature – simply resulting in an artificial reduction. So even if opinions on the filmic empathy, what it means and what it does, are diverse, there tends to be a common denominator, namely that the tendency was an increasing attempt at making definitions more and more punctual, narrowing the sense.

In psychological studies, however, starting mid-1980s, empathy theoreticians found it ever more useful to approach this approximately defined phenomenon not (just) in terms of outcomes, but in terms of the process, emphasizing on the relationship between the observer's feelings and the victim's feelings, where the observer will have "feelings that are more

congruent with another's situation than with his own situation".<sup>68</sup> Recent influential research-based theories in psychology show that, contrary to previous beliefs, empathy is, above all, a very complex and multilayered phenomenon, and a comprehensive definition, an "organisational model"<sup>69</sup> of empathy, cannot ignore any of its facets.<sup>70</sup> The further predicament with the research of empathy in film is that it happened too far-removed from psychology – like overall the studies of film reception, until very recently, for that matter. I argue that empathy is essential for the understanding of non-fiction film spectatorship, but it is not possible to properly grasp it without adding to the existent body of work the findings from psychological experiment-based theory: hypotheses confirmed with real measurements on real people.

Drawing on recent works of psychology scholars, mainly Martin Hoffman, Mark Davis and Daniel Batson, and reviewing experiments and laboratory measures, the current work brings empathy-related constructs and processes within the frameworks of a single theory. Departing from here, various means specific to

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<sup>68</sup> Hoffman (2000), 30.

<sup>69</sup> Davis (1994).

<sup>70</sup> Hoffman (1984, 1987, 2000), Davis (1994), Batson (1995, 1997).

the documentary genre, which contribute to the stimulating of empathy, will be identified.

For the very basic mode of empathic arousal, mimicry, most research employs electromyographic procedures (EMG). They assess the emotionally-produced movements of the facial muscles by measuring facial data which is not visible to the naked eye: skin conductance, activities of lips, wrinkles, folds. More complex empathic modes of arousal employ equally complex heart rate measurements, completed by questionnaires, often on a large group of subjects monitored for a long period of time. This, too, will be detailed later in this work (chapters 3 and 5.1). At this point it must be said that, complicated and expensive as they are, these methods are out of the range of film scholars, the solution therefore being to integrate results delivered by psychological theories in a more rigorous study of filmic empathy.

Part I of the current work deals with some of the conceptual approaches to the vastly debated and not agreed-upon notion of “empathy”, and their influence on theories of film spectatorship. By the end of this first part, a unified theory of filmic empathy should allow for a better understanding of the apparatus, specific to moving images, which is able to trigger empathy in the non-fiction spectator.

Various theories of empathy, from both film studies and psychology, are employed here for identifying means and mechanisms of triggering empathy in documentary film. The applicability of the theoretical findings will be tested with revolutionary documentary examples in Part II of this work. Part III investigates the final step of the empathic process, its tendency to action, primarily in the context of emergent forms of documentary, namely transmedia platforms.

Incorporating empirical findings from other academic fields might seem like a very modern approach to film studies, but there is a history to it, which will be assessed in chapter 1. In chapter 2, I first revise the understanding of the empathy phenomenon in relevant fiction film studies (since in the field of documentary, as stated above, it is almost entirely absent). After pointing out the problematic juncture of empathy in film theory, it becomes evident why the findings should not be discharged altogether (or the questions previously raised by film scholars, dismissed) but rather the methodology needs to be brought under scrutiny. I evaluate the understanding of various contributing to the complex process that filmic empathy is, like mimicry and identification, and primarily from the works of film cognitivist scholars (notably Noël Carroll's). Their writings cannot be

overlooked in the broader theory of non-fiction spectatorship, and in chapter 3 these contributions will be merged with psychological findings on the topic. At the end of Part I, an (not exhaustive) inventory of filmic means and mechanisms charged with stimulating empathy in the non-fiction film spectator will be assembled. The findings will be tested in the second Part of the work.

The focus of Part III is action. If empathy did keep some theoreticians busy, what comes after the empathic process went entirely unexplored. We might empathise with distant people in documentary films, and we might understand some ways of how it happens – and so what if we do? Resistance documentaries are emergency products, and behind the production process there is almost always a function: to attract international assistance, leading to diplomatic, humanitarian or military aid. Often, the films themselves become another tool for the resistance movement. Whatever reaction might follow the empathic process, this constitutes part of the reasons, and sometimes *the reason*, motivating the production. Part III investigates the assumption that documentary films have the potential to generate altruistic behaviour. Many of the revolutionary documentaries even end up with direct messages addressed to the spectators on the final

credits, telephone numbers and addresses of NGOs, urging action. Is the supposition of those documentary makers and characters justified? Is empathy is indeed tendency to action?

However, seeing a film in the cinema venue, or in the comfort of one's own apartment, brings along what in psychological terms is translated in "pluralistic ignorance" and "diffusion of responsibility",<sup>71</sup> in other words, since so many viewers peacefully leave the cinema venue, this was "probably not an emergency" or, in the case of television broadcasting, so many others saw the film, that "somebody else is doing something by now" – spectators tell themselves. Film scholar Torben Grodal also argued for the film's incapacity of stimulating that part of the brain charged with action. Torben Grodal's convincing theory of the PECMA flow model (perception, emotion, cognition, and motor action), solidly based on experimental research, went largely uncontested since he first announced it in 1996. According to Grodal, that part of the brain responsible for action, the motor cortex, is fully activated with only video games (and real life) and not narrative films.

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<sup>71</sup> Hoffman (2000), 33.

Part III of the work is thus an addition to the PECMA flow theory. I argue that, while not disagreeing with Torben Grodal, a new category has been recently emerging in the documentary field, cross platform documentary, or transmedia documentary, which can activate that part of the brain which Grodal only attributed to gaming. Transmedia revolutionary documentaries might also enable the empathy-triggered helping behaviour, and the last chapter, an analysis of transmedia platforms, investigates if these new forms of non-fiction audio-visual products have the property of activating the innate brain area charged with action.

Many documentary makers openly made revolutionary films for their expected empathic effect but however, as documentary scholar Alan Rosenthal put it, “one hopes that this kind of films will bring about change, though what documentary does is absolutely undocumented”.<sup>72</sup> There is a rupture between the filmmaking production side and its public, and the success of a certain documentary might traditionally be measured in the quality of the reviews or the festively success – but that does not say

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<sup>72</sup> Rosenthal (1988), 542–553.

much about which of the initial aims the documentary makers actually achieved, and even less about what could have been done otherwise. The current work aims to shed some light on the relationship between revolutionary documentary films, their empathic spectators, and the tendency they might have towards moral behaviour.



## **PART I: FILMIC EMPATHY**

# 1 Theoretical Grounds for an Interdisciplinary Approach

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*The foundations of sympathy shaped a central line in the cinema as we know it.*

– James Chandler<sup>73</sup>

Empathy is not an easy concept to grasp. Considerations about its significance and its function, in film theory or elsewhere, constantly shifted the approaches in defining it, as much as debates on whether it has a cognitive component (or affective, or both) influenced the methodologies used. The choice of definition it

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<sup>73</sup> Chandler (2014), xvii. In his compendium-like work *An Archeology of Sympathy. The Sentimental Mode in Literature and Cinema*, James Chandler acknowledges the influence of Adam Smith’s theory on the development of cinema. Chandler’s work maps up the “sentimental mode” all the way throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century until the day, from Adam Smith to the Cohen brothers. Chandler’s key concept in this monumental work is sympathy, understood as “what connects one sensorium (i.e. sensibility, mobility, point of view) with another by enabling us to face one another, adopt one another’s point of view, and modify passion into sentiment by means of virtual circulation”.

essentially affected what researchers chose to measure in the first place, and consequently their findings.

Amidst all divergences, empathy is the one concept most frequently employed to account for our selfless, altruistic, prosocial behaviour. The capacity to let aside self-centred concerns and entertain the perspective of another individual is clearly central to documentary viewing, enabling a connection to be established between a film spectator and a documentary character,<sup>74</sup> an otherwise remote, anonymous person. This link is what allows, at least for the short time of the film viewing, the sharing of emotions, thoughts and goals with a very distant individual. Empathy also renders possible some of the most altruistic human pursuits, allowing us occasions for “true nobility of purpose”, contrary to old sceptical warnings from political philosophy that “omnium contra omnes”, “every man is enemy to every man”.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Documentary character* is the terming almost exclusively used in the praxis today. It passed from the practical field to film criticism, and it is now increasingly being used by theoreticians. It will be more extensively explained in chapter 3.2.2 of the current work:: *The Other: Documentary Character*.

<sup>75</sup> Hobbes (1651/2012), 192–193. Hobbes famously continues here with the contemptuous “vitaque hominum solitaria, indigo, bruta & brevis” (“And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short”).

By the time film studies joined academia, about 30 to 40 years ago, research on empathy had already been on-going for some time in many other fields. Theology, philosophy, aesthetics, among others, all had already tried to see what it is and what it means, why it happens and how it develops, and there is extensive scholarly literature available, stating which assumptions were made about empathy, when and by whom.<sup>76</sup>

But what exactly is empathy? Is it a cognitive process? Or solely an affective one, “where emotions of one person call out

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<sup>76</sup> A detailed overview of historical understanding of sympathy and empathy is to be found in Davis (1994). Comprehensive historical distinctions between empathy and sympathy are in Wispé (1991). See also Amy Caplan and Peter Goldie (2011). An analyses of the contribution of empathy less given attention to from Husserl, Heidegger and a new approach on the hermeneutic of empathy makes Lou Agosta (2010), an interesting approach to the understanding of empathy in the context of philosophy, especially hermeneutics and phenomenology. For engagement with other minds and simulation theory see Gregrie Currie (2004). Empathy in theological context, and the notion of divine efficacious empathy is to be found in Edward Farley (1996). For empathy proposed as fundament for the ethics of caring see Michael Slote (2007, 2010). For intercultural empathy and its role in geopolitical conflicts, in immigration tensions, catastrophes, and also a historical overview of the concept, outside the constraining of the word, see Carolyn Calloway-Thomas (2010).

emotional responses in others”?<sup>77</sup> Or both? Does it parallel the emotions of the observed, or diverges from them? Is it voluntary, imagination-based, or entirely involuntary? Is it just a basic match of emotions, or does it engender distress when witnessing somebody else in distress? Does it generate feelings of concern and compassion when witnessing somebody else suffering? Is it, then, a prosocial, or altruistic response? Does it prompt the desire to help? Experiment-based contemporary theory in modern psychology shows that all of the above are true – and this led to the need for a more all-encompassing model. Empathy is no longer understood as a single paradigm, but as “a set of constructs having to do with the response of an individual to the experience of another”.<sup>78</sup> Thus, the contemporary direction in various fields of psychology (developmental, social, clinical, forensic) approached a more complex, multi-layered model, encompassing interconnected constructs, which had hitherto been studied separately: antecedents, processes, intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes.

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<sup>77</sup> Stotland et al. (1978), 11. Stotland distinguishes differences between affective and cognitive process, however acknowledges instances in which both might be related .

<sup>78</sup> Davis (2004), 20.

Since the study of empathy and related issues is, by all means, not the domain of aesthetics alone, but central to modern psychology, it is here where an interdisciplinary approach should start. Measurements commencing as early as the 1960s, and a large body of theoretical work, opened a new perspective in the study of this psychological phenomenon and brought the various findings under one single, unified approach to empathy. Martin Hoffman, psychology theoretician whose life-long work famously contributed to the multidimensional approach or organizational model,<sup>79</sup> defines empathy as “an affective response more appropriated to another’s situation than one’s own”.<sup>80</sup> One feels distressed on observing someone in actual distress – and several prosocial motives derive from this empathic distress: “sympathetic distress, empathic anger, empathic feeling of injustice, and guilt over inaction”.<sup>81</sup>

Following Hoffman and Davis, it can be safely stated that there is not one, but there are various empathic modes which trigger empathy. Some are basic, involuntary, automatic, where the visual

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<sup>79</sup> Hoffman (2000).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 29.

component plays a key role: mimicry, classical conditioning and direct association. And there are others, complex modes of empathic arousal, which involve imagination and a complex cognitive process: mediated association and role-taking (Fig. 1.1). All these modes and the corresponding implications for documentary viewing will be discussed in chapter 3. Beforehand, however, some preliminary remarks should be made on the history of both of these components of the empathic process, with important implications for film viewing. Firstly, it is interesting to note that both the visual and the imaginative modes of the empathic process have been accurately described long before the word empathy itself was invented.

At least since the moral philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century stated that one will not remain indifferent to the misery of another human being,<sup>82</sup> empathy and sympathy have always been

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<sup>82</sup> David Hume and Adam Smith both wrote extensively on “the source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of others, that it is by changing places in fancy with the sufferer, that we come either to conceive or to be affected by what he feels” (Smith, 1759/2009). However, concerns about the phenomenon can be traced in antiquity. Aristotle saw sympathy “most naturally felt towards individuals most resembling ourselves; our equals in age, education, morals, dignity, and those of the same nation or blood; for the evils that have happened to persons similarly circumstanced, are the

important concepts for comprehending how we ethically respond to other people's misfortunes.<sup>83</sup> And even if empathy always meant many different things to many people, vision and imagination were both important components in understanding this phenomenon. It is true that sympathy and empathy are today interchangeably used, but they emerged from different traditions: 18<sup>th</sup> century English Moral Philosophy and 20<sup>th</sup> century German Aesthetics. We should briefly look at both of them. One of the first accounts on the phenomenon comes from David Hume, who argued that morality is not governed by reason alone. Hume gave *sympathy* an important role in evaluating humans' emotional response to somebody else's fortune or misfortune, since "all human creatures are related to us by resemblance.

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most likely to fall on ourselves; and it may be held a general rule, that the sufferings apprehended in our own persons, will always be the surest to excite our compassion" in Aristotle, *Rhetoric, Book II, Chapter 8*, in "A new Translation of Aristotle's Rethoric" (1823), 290.

<sup>83</sup> Empathy and sympathy are interchangeably used today. An overview on the two traditions, 18<sup>th</sup> century moral philosophy and German aesthetic at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which generate the two concepts, to be found in Wispé (1986) and Davis (1994).

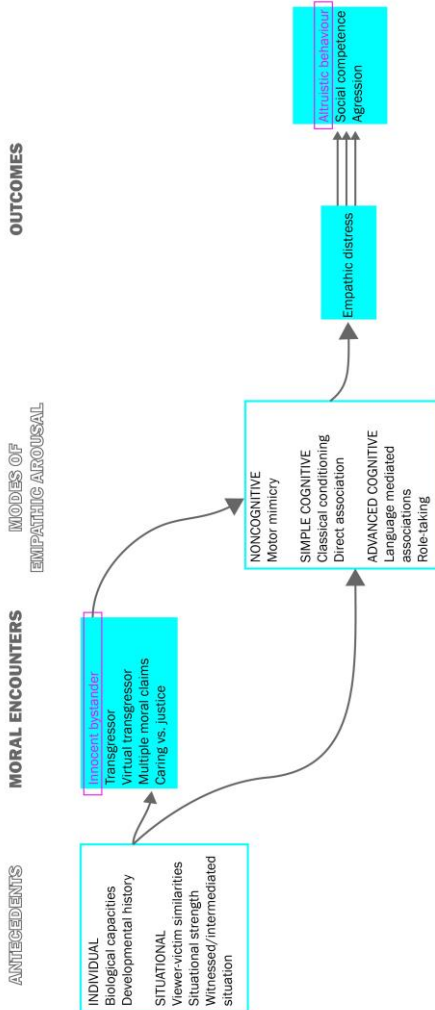


Figure 1.1 Empathy as a process. Following the models put forward by Hoffman and Davis, modified by me from Mark Davis' Organisational Model, in Davis (1994), 13.

Their persons, therefore, their interests, their passions, their pains and pleasures must strike upon us in a lively manner, and produce an emotion similar to the original one”.<sup>84</sup> The mechanism that allows the sharing of emotions with another, real person, constitutes for Hume the starting point for explaining what makes spectatorship altogether possible. He claims that, without *sympathy* with the person constructed in the ‘tragedy’, and without a constant ability to adapt one’s emotions according to those of the observed, the mere act of spectatorship would not be possible:

A spectator of a tragedy passes thro’ a long train of grief, terror, indignation, and other affections, which the poet represents in the persons he introduces. As many tragedies end happily, and no excellent one can be compos’d without some reverses of fortune, the spectator must sympathize with all these changes, and receive the fictitious joy as well as every other passion.<sup>85</sup>

Drawing on Hume, Adam Smith (1759/2009) makes the human ability to sympathize, to have a “fellow feeling for the misery of others”,<sup>86</sup> one of the key arguments in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

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<sup>84</sup> Hume (1738/1964), 155.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>86</sup> Smith (1759/2009), 8.

And with this claim Smith commences the first chapter, *Of Sympathy*:

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner.<sup>87</sup>

The two attributes, that sympathy has a visual component and that our fellow-feeling requires some degree of imagination, are what matters here. For Smith, the mere *seeing* could suffice in generating sympathy, but a somewhat imperfect, elementary one – thus anticipating the various modes of empathic arousal, which laboratory experiments were to demonstrate more than 200 years later. There are indeed various modes of arousing empathy, some basic, available through, for example, mimicry, and some more complex, requiring a cognitive component. Adam Smith seems to have had identified what we call today the empathic mode of *mimicry*, understood as the imitation of the facial or bodily

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 13.

expression of the other, hence resulting in some match in emotions.<sup>88</sup> Smith's observations were particularly modern and, up until today, still topics of debate in film studies. He had foreseen that "the fellow feeling" is, at times, different, in type and intensity, with that of the observed sufferer. Smith noted that at other instances, the viewer's own imagination shifts the nature of the emotions thus experienced, generating a different type of emotion than that of the victim:

By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them (...) and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels.<sup>89</sup>

Later on, Smith uses thus understood sympathy (as imagination-based) for explaining some notions about spectatorship, since "fellow-feeling" is one of the emotional instances that makes the bond between spectator and "the person principally concerned"<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Smith (1759/2009), 8.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 18.

possible. The emotional distress is to be contextualized by what we call today a cognitive component, not just mere feeling, but also by an understanding of the particular set of circumstances that concern the character, the situation he finds himself into. For Smith, this sympathizing from the side of the spectator is not merely an automatic course of action, but intentional, maybe even effortful endeavour of the spectator, who must try, “as much as he can to put himself in the situation of the other”.<sup>91</sup> However, imagination will be necessary to a lesser extent when some degree of familiarity comes into play. ‘Familiarity’ is not to be understood here in the larger sense, when the situational data of the sufferer is in some way known to the observer. Universally recognizable states of affairs (like a disappointment in love, in Smith’s example), will thus more probably trigger a greater degree of sympathy than the merely visually-induced sympathy the spectator experiences when witnessing instances of pain. This observation, crucial for studying documentary spectatorship as well, has today a name in psychology: familiarity bias, which will be brought up again in chapters 3 and 5.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. James Chandler proposed a syntagm for Smith’s observation: “mimetic imagination”. Chandler (2013), 126–142.

One last important (and empirically-confirmed) aspect in Smith's understanding of (what he referred to as) sympathy: his remark on the relationship between the physical pain, sympathy and the excitement felt at the approach of a possibly hazardous climax, are held responsible, in film theory, for contributing to suspense. While acknowledging the triggering of sympathy in the observer at the sight of pain, Smith sees it inferior in intensity as opposed to the situational, imagination-requiring one. The instance when it is still significant is when it is associated with menace or hazard: "Pain never calls forth any very lively sympathy unless it is accompanied with danger. We sympathize with the fear, though not with the agony of the sufferer".<sup>92</sup>

A great deal of sympathy's dimension of mimicry (imitation of emotion already described by Adam Smith), is to be found in the writings of psychologist Edward B. Titchener, the first to employ the term *empathy* in English, in 1909, in his *Elementary Psychology of the Thought Processes*, where he translated it from the German *Einfühlung*. The coining of the word is usually attributed to Theodor Lipps, but the employment of *Einfühlung*

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 26.

and attempts to understand the psychological bases of the phenomena can be traced in German aesthetics before Lipps' writings.

Robert Vischer tried to explore the psychological grounds for people's reception of art, in his doctoral theses on emotional projection, *Über das optische Formgefühl (On the Optical Sense of Form)*, published in 1873. Vischer distinguishes between *Zufühlung*, *Nachfühlung* and *Einfühlung*, and employs the third to account only for the viewer's projection onto the form of the object, yet only partially accountable for "the symbolism of form".<sup>93</sup> In the following years, the concept of *Einfühlung* went through continuous elaborations, the most famous of them being that of Theodor Lipps. Lipps attempted a more scientific psychological theory of empathy than his predecessor Vischer, who appealed to dream interpretation in his explanation of the phenomenon. For Lipps, the natural, even unconscious inclination to imitate bodily gestures and facial expressions of observed targets leads to the recognition of the mental states of the other (a phenomenon classified today in psychology under the larger category of motor

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<sup>93</sup> Vischer (1873/1994), 92.

mimicry). Nowadays, Lipps is no longer properly read or republished, but he is however still credited, by and large, with introducing the concept into aesthetics. Some very similar observations about *mimicry* date, as I showed, at least as early as Smith's description of sympathy in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and the importance of the process for the understanding of spectatorship was already evident.

Moreover, when Lipps coined a word for it, and Titchener provided the translation into empathy for the American readers, several other hypotheses were being made about the same phenomena, at about the same time. And as much as there is no agreement about almost anything when it comes to empathy, there is no agreement about Lipps' contribution either. Lou Agosta refers to Lipps' popularity as being "one of the accidents of historical contingency"<sup>94</sup>:

Lipps might have been the Antonio Salieri to an entire group of would-be Mozarts, who, in any case, are better remembered today while Lipps is nearly forgotten and unread. This means that thinkers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Scheler, (Edith) Stein and Freud could not use the word empathy (*Einfühlung*) without invoking an approach which

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<sup>94</sup> Agosta (2010), 6.

was highly original in its time but is today regarded as idiosyncratic in its understanding of empathy.<sup>95</sup>

The seeds of discord were thus sown. And what followed is a tangled history of definitions and theories of empathy, with various writers conceiving it, as we said, as emotional sharing, cognitive understanding, emotional response – and the list is long. It is only in the 1960s that the first laboratory studies on empathy commenced to test and challenge the large body of theory, including film viewing-based experiments. Laboratory experiments became increasingly complex and heart rate and skin conductance were measured on subjects watching films and displaying physical pain. Empirical studies confirmed Smith's intuition, and the two aspects have largely gone uncontested: vision is an important component in triggering empathy, while more complex empathic process requires a certain degree of imagination. But how important is the mere *seeing* for the empathic process?

Only a few years later, in 1965, for the American neuroscientist Paul MacLean, empathy as 'Einfühlung', 'feeling

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<sup>95</sup> Agosta (2010), 6.

into', in the sense used by Lipps,<sup>96</sup> was not sufficient for grasping the intricacy of the empathic process. Something else was additionally necessary, something that he called "*seeing with feeling*" into the *situation* of the other.<sup>97</sup> According to MacLean, the unselfish desire to help another depends on empathy:

The capacity to identify one's own feelings and needs with those of another person or, as we shall say later, in considering empathy in the more dynamic sense of medicine, it is the ability to 'look inward' for obtaining insight required for foresight in promoting the welfare of others.<sup>98</sup>

Without underrating the role of education in acquiring empathic capacities, MacLean is the one who, very early in the day, radically argued for empathy being possible in man through vision, or rather due to the evolution of the brain structures related to vision capacities. In this context, the significance empathy has for film

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<sup>96</sup> Lipps (1906) argued for a sharing of emotions: seeing another person experiencing an emotion would foster the observer to automatically mimic some of them, thus experiencing to a lower extent some of that emotion.

<sup>97</sup> MacLean (1967), 374–382. MacLean first mentioned the relationship between empathy and the evolution of vision-related brain structures at a talk at Yale University School of Medicine in June 1965, probably the first time this was noted.

<sup>98</sup> MacLean (1967), 374.

viewing becomes obvious. However, the way film scholarship positions itself in relation to the findings in psychology is problematic, and empathy as such has only recently been employed for understanding the emotional relationship between the spectator and the moving image character. As late as the 1990s, thanks to the work of those scholars which took a cognitivist approach to film studies, the debate on the topic of filmic empathy was finally opened, and the concept, for the first time, appropriately entered the field. What is interesting here is that, under other names (mainly identification) it was always present amid concerns of film thinkers; questions about how it occurs, or how intense it can be, have been, *en passant*, approached. On the whole, though, film theory ignored an as core a problem as filmic empathy is, and when it eventually approached it, the tendency was towards an insufficiently scientific treatment. And this is a paradox of film theory, since the very beginnings in the field were rather promising.

Already for classical film theorists, the nature of the relationship between “the ordinary film spectator”,<sup>99</sup> in Pudovkin’s

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<sup>99</sup> Pudovkin (1955), 103.

words, and moving image character, came as a natural question. Hugo Münsterberg, Béla Balázs, Serghei Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Rudolf Arnheim – they all followed with their writings, as will be shown below, a similar objective: the validation of film as art. They were all preoccupied with showing that film is not a circus distraction, not just a technical curiosity, but a new art in its own rights, unique and, for many of them, superior in terms of expressivity and realism and ideological power than, say, literature and theatre. And in order to serve the case of film-as-art demonstration, they were quite soon facing the need to shed light on the relationship between the moved spectator, on one hand, and the film and its characters, on the other.

When film was just in its early stages, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, two German-American psychologists, Hugo Münsterberg and Rudolf Arnheim, independently from each other, both alleged the strong psychological impact film can have on its spectators, and tried to interpret the potential of this emotional effect. Hugo Münsterberg not only described the phenomenon, as early as the beginning of the last century, but even identified modes of inflicting it in the spectator, and described them in what stands as the very first book of film theory – one that is inherently interdisciplinary – *‘The Photoplay: A*

*Psychological Study*'. The idea that empathy has a visual component was just commencing to be of some concern for psychology when Hugo Münsterberg wrote about it. Writing at the same time as Lipps, Münsterberg accurately describes some of the empathic effect film can have on the spectator (though he continues to call it sympathy). Commencing from the premises that psychology and aesthetics are inseparable when it comes to understanding our response to art, he asked some of the very questions which are at stake in the present work, questions which remained without a satisfactory answer for the following hundred years: what is "the psychological effect of the moving pictures themselves"<sup>100</sup> and, consequently, what exactly is it within the image that can have an impact on the viewer?

As an answer to his first question, Münsterberg hints at the empathic process or, in his own words, sympathy, and goes on to describe what we today refer to as basic modes of stimulating it. Münsterberg defines sympathy as a "mental state", imitation or mimicry of emotions, which is exactly the motor facilitation of the emotional understanding of the moving image:

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<sup>100</sup> Münsterberg (1916/1970), 79.

The visual perception of the various forms of expression of these emotions fuses in our minds with the conscious awareness of the emotion expressed; we feel as if we were directly seeing and observing the emotion itself. Moreover the idea awakens in us the appropriate reaction. The horror which we see makes us really shrink, the happiness which we witness makes us relax, the pain which we witness brings contractions in our muscles; and all the resulting sensations from muscles, joints, tendons, from skin and viscera, from blood, circulation and breathing, give the colour of living experience to the emotional reflection in our mind.<sup>101</sup>

For Münsterberg, filmic empathy is a rather primary phenomenon, but we should note that he argued it is basic, because the films that were available at the time were very basic themselves. But what kind of films did Münsterberg watch, when his book was first published? Only a bit more than one year prior to the writing of *The Photoplay*, Münsterberg had not yet seen any single film. For a long time, he refused to go to the movies, undignified hypostases for a Harvard professor, he thought. It wasn't earlier than 1914 that Münsterberg watched his very first movie, **NEPTUNE'S DAUGHTER**, a fantasy film with Annette Kellerman, directed by

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<sup>101</sup> Münsterberg (1916/1970), 53.



Figure 1.2 Poster of NEPTUNE'S DAUGHTER (director: Herbert Brenon), 1914.

Herbert Brenon, and was inescapably converted to a film spectator.<sup>102</sup> But the condition of the ‘photoplay’ (as Münsterberg calls the moving picture), film itself, at its beginnings, was a basic form of expression, with no sound or more complex narrative strategies which could have triggered more complex empathic processes. Some of these limitations have been foreseen, and Münsterberg pointed out that because it had to overcome the absence of sound, and therefore of words, the ‘photoplay’ had to make use of “a heightening of gestures and of facial play, with the result that the emotional expression becomes exaggerated”.<sup>103</sup>

The German-American psychologist distinguishes two different categories of emotional processes. The first such category is the “independent affective life” of the spectator, the emotional luggage the spectator brings along, from personal background or experience, which in its turn will be influenced by “imitation of

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<sup>102</sup> Münsterberg reminisces his personal early considerations and his first movie experience in an article from *The Cosmopolitan* (December 1915), 60, no.1, 22–32, cited from Koepnick (2007), 122.

<sup>103</sup> Münsterberg (1916/1970), 49.

emotions which we see expressed”<sup>104</sup>. Münsterberg, very much like Rudolf Arnheim some 20 years later, identified a key emotional potential in two film-specific means that (as opposed to the mimicry of emotions, which happens automatically), require some affective or cognitive investment from the spectator’s side. He recognised one of them as being *depth of field*, and the other, as the illusion-of-the-real-world-effect that *movement* has in film, since “the subtle art of the camera is reality-like, and therefore has reality-like psychological functions”<sup>105</sup>:

The Spectator (...) if he faces the film world, the motion which he sees appears to be a true motion, and yet is created by his own mind [...] Depth and movement alike come to us in the moving picture world, not as hard facts but as mixture of fact and symbol. They are present and yet they are not in the things. We invest the impression with them.<sup>106</sup>

Rudolf Arnheim (1933/1966) is the other German-American psychologist who, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was concerned with the emotional effect film has on the spectator. Quite like Münsterberg, he saw a clear relationship between filmic

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>105</sup> Münsterberg (1916/1970), 56.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 30.

reality-illusion interplay and their effect on emotional, sympathetic response: “the consciousness of the unreality of the situation works as a psychological inhibition on the automatic instinctive response”.<sup>107</sup> Arnheim correctly observed that the more reality-like the employed film and filmic means are, the more intense the emotional response would be but, for the sake of unfastened artistic possibilities, Arnheim commenced his venture in writing on film by vehemently pleading against reality-like effect in film. What constitutes the specificity of film, and what makes it art, is reducing reality to filmic essentials, with the dissimilarity between reality and film being left in the care of the spectator to correct.<sup>108</sup>

For Arnheim (whose object of study, we should not forget, were silent films from the 1930s), the dilemma seems to be between reality-like and partial illusion. Reality-like filmic means, which enable a better imitation of reality in film, should be avoided, in order to preserve the specificity of film as art. Thus, even if the reality-like filmic means trigger a stronger emotional response, “the technical development of the motion picture”, Arnheim insists, “will soon carry the mechanical imitation of

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>108</sup> Arnheim (1933/1957), 30–34.

nature to an extreme. (...) They do not see that the film is on its way to the victory of wax museum ideals over creative art”.<sup>109</sup> It is one specific step towards imminent damaging of the intrinsic quality of film as art – the implementation of synchronized sound in film – vis-à-vis of which Arnheim was openly sceptical.

Reality-like means play their part, and Arnheim, too, re-evaluated his early radical views, only five years later. It is not that Arnheim did not maintain his position against the spreading of synchronized sound in film, seeing it onwards, as many other critics of the phenomenon, as *impure*: a technicality which narrows the specificity of what is *filmic per se*, anything but good news for the film as art. But synchronized sound in film brings along discussion, discourse, conversation as such. For all of the above, Arnheim commenced to clearly see the positive side, “the possible advantages of film dialogue”.<sup>110</sup> He identifies exactly the empathic potential that sound will bring (through dialogue, and what we know today as more complex empathic modes): “the felt presence of the events is enormously enhanced by the sound of voices and

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<sup>109</sup> Arnheim (1933/1957), 154.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 224–230.

other noises”.<sup>111</sup> Arnheim celebrates the introduction of sound, because it enables the spectator to figure out the more complex emotional state of mind of the character, thus allowing the audience “to *take part in* exciting events as fully as possible”.<sup>112</sup>

Taking part in events might have an ideological influence, and the first proper attempts to understand the interconnection between the emotional and ideological power of film come from Pudovkin and Eisenstein, the Russian filmmakers concerned “to force the spectator to think in a certain direction”<sup>113</sup>:

My new conception of the film is based on the idea that the intellectual and emotional processes which so far have been conceived of as existing independently of each other—art versus science—and forming an antithesis heretofore never united, can be brought together to form a synthesis on the basis of *cinedialectic*, a process that only the cinema can

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<sup>111</sup> Arnheim (1938/1957), 226.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Eisenstein (February 17, 1930), as enthusiastically accounted by Samuel Brody, *Paris Hears Eisenstein*, in the British film journal *Close Up*, April 1930, 286. The article follows Sergei Eisenstein’s lecture, *Principles of the New Russian Cinema*, which Brody, among other two thousand spectators, witness at Sorbonne University.

achieve. A spectator can be made to *feel-and-think* what he sees on the screen.<sup>114</sup>

By praising the acting method of Stanislavsky and his influence on social realism, and by assessing film editing as the core of film montage, Pudovkin tried to see the perspectives of the emotional power of film over the spectator, some sort of identification theory *avant la lettre*. He describes an identification of the spectator's eye with the camera, through the help of editing as instrument of impression: "editing is not merely a method of the junction of separate scenes of pieces, but is a method that controls the 'psychological guidance' of the spectator".<sup>115</sup> This, complemented by the support of a realistic actor, would then enable the spectator to care for the joy and suffering on the screen. Pudovkin seems to suggest that the novelty of cinema brings alongside realism, and together with the possibility of seeing the fellow human being objectively, cinema is just the ideal art field for exciting real-life emotions.

Pudovkin's main concern was film's capacity for triggering an emotional response, in order to deliver to the audience means

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<sup>114</sup> Eisenstein, cited in Brody (1930), 286–287.

<sup>115</sup> Pudovkin (1929/1954), 47.

and *a point* of identification: “The lens of the camera is the eye of the spectator”.<sup>116</sup> Through convincing acting and editing techniques, the spectator has no other option, but to follow with excitement and care the evolution of various characters on the screen, and even simultaneous ones. Even if Pudovkin’s line of argumentation sounds today a bit manicheistic, he must, however, have been aware that different audiences receive various films in different ways. In a comprehensive analysis of Pudovkin’s *Film Theory*, Peter Dart complains against the romantic belief that the spectator’s attention will follow the dictatus of the director. In Dart’s view, this has no solid basis, since the Russian theoretician and filmmaker does not give any explanation for the principle of identification.<sup>117</sup> But an attentive reading shows that Pudovkin was very well aware of the empathy debate that was going on in psychology and aesthetics at the time of his writing, had subsequent thoughts about emotional transfer, and described both *mimicry* (“There is a law in psychology that lays it down that if an emotion give birth to a certain movement, the correspondent

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>117</sup> Dart (1974), 102–104.

emotion can be called forth”<sup>118</sup>) and the more complex *understanding* of the other’s emotions: “the actor was brought close to the spectator, who could thus perceive the most subtle expression of human emotion”.<sup>119</sup>

There are reasons why these early film writings are valuable today, and are of use for studying filmic empathy, and broader theory of resistance documentary viewing: the complex phenomenon that empathy is had been successfully acknowledged, and alongside, its importance for spectator engagement. Attempts at defining it were undertaken, both basic and complex modes of triggering it have been recognized (mimicry, identification), and even effective filmic means charged with stimulating empathy have been described. Béla Balázs, on his turn, wrote extensively on the emotional power of filmic means, completing the findings of his predecessors by further describing the empathic role of close up and cross cutting.<sup>120</sup>

Although already early attempts to understand film spectatorship took some interdisciplinary approach, one of the

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<sup>118</sup> Pudovkin (1929–1954), 45.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Balázs (1945/1970).

first accurate uses of the psychological understanding of empathy in the context of theory of film spectatorship dates no earlier than 1953. In attempting to establish the theoretical basis for the emotional involvement of the spectator in the action represented on the screen, Belgian experimental psychologist Albert Michotte van den Berck defines *film empathy* as affective “participation”.<sup>121</sup> For it is the same empathic process that occurs while watching sport, or a theatre spectacle, or even while reading a novel – just that the intensity of the empathic experience is stronger when it comes to film viewing:

Ceux-ci se manifestent lorsque le spectateur d’une action exécuté par une autre personne, la ‘vit’ lui-même en quelque sorte, et ne se borne pas à la comprendre d’une façon purement intellectuelle, en la classant dans telle ou telle catégorie conceptuelle.<sup>122</sup>

Michotte’s forward-looking, interdisciplinary approach, primarily deals with the capacity of the film scene to stimulate the motor

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<sup>121</sup> Michotte (1953/1962), 501. “La participation émotionnelle du spectateur à l’action représentée à l’écran. Essai d’une théorie” was first presented at a conference in Sorbonne, and published nine years later in A. Michotte et collaborateurs: *Causalité, Permanence et Réalité Phénoménales, (Réalité Apparente)*.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

system of the viewer. In other words, he describes mimicry, the facial or bodily responses the spectator might have while watching the person on the screen. Michotte describes four possible ways (corresponding to various intensities) of responding to visually experienced moving performances (“performance motrique”, display of movements), out of which the fourth, specific to moving images, is the empathic response, described here as a ‘projection’ in an exterior object. Following Lipps, Michotte pleads for a full projection, the spectator–character complete identification, when “one enters the skin of the actor”.<sup>123</sup>

What is at stake for Michotte is the psychological (and physical) response to seeing movement in film, in other words mimicry as basic mode of stimulating empathy; he calls it “empathic motrique”. Even if only briefly, Michotte draws attention to a few other significant aspects, such as the lack of congruency between the emotions of the spectator and those of the character (when, let’s say, the situation amuses the character, but the spectator, holding more data, experiences anger). Michotte seems to acknowledge one main feature: that the

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 503.

observer/spectator comes with his own set of previous experiences, background and knowledge, and therefore situational differences in response will always occur. Even only by holding more data about a particular given situation in the film, through personal experience, the spectator might have a different emotional response to the same filmic happening: while the character is infuriated, the spectator might be just amused – Michotte’s exemplifies with the burlesque film genre, but the observation should apply to all film genres.

As an answer to our functional question, Michotte notes what might be one of the means through which this identification is made possible: *establishing the space* in the film sequence. In other words: cut-aways, general shots and the concern of preserving a realistic filmic space construction. And there is another element, which plays a role in the empathic arousal, this time from *outside* the frames of the film: the attentiveness of the spectator, his focus being guided, concentrated on the main hero.<sup>124</sup> The ‘attention’ condition, Michotte draws on several musts, like “the darkness of the cinema, the brightness of the screen, the fluctuations of retinal

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<sup>124</sup> Michotte (1953/1962), 510.

stimulation and the attitude of sustained concentration, and hypothesises that the cinematographic empathy is one of ‘complete identification’”.<sup>125</sup>

The identification explanation of the empathy phenomenon, that Michotte pleads for, is still part of the debate on the topic to this very day. The discussion rests anywhere between opinions that identification always happens, and that it is total, to scholarly texts which question the existence of such a thing altogether. For some theoreticians, if identification does not occur, neither does empathy with film characters, since identification is closely related with empathy. But are the two even related, or quite the opposite; are not identification and empathy actually describing the same phenomena? In the following chapters, we will return to identification and show how most of the debate evolves from terminological, rather than conceptual disagreements, and that identification is just one of the ways, the most complex one of them, of mobilizing empathy with characters in moving images.

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

At the time of his writing, Michotte had a unique interdisciplinary approach, using his expertise in psychology, in order to study a new domain, cinema, and one's empathy with a person/character in the moving image. Only a few years later, beginning with the 1960s, did empathy become a main subject of empirical research for psychology. Film theory, on the other hand, followed a very different path. The emotional response to the destinies of the people in cinematographic works received attention from mainly two theoretical schools of thought: film psychoanalysis and, only in recent years, film cognitivism. Up until today, psychoanalytical film studies and cognitivism are the two models available for dealing with the study of empathy, for understanding more out of moving image spectatorship.

For the psychoanalyst, identification with the camera, and through it, with the character in the moving image, is a way to demonstrate that the 'cinematic apparatus' is ideological. Identification, a process in two stages as understood by the French theoreticians Jean Louis Baudry and Christian Metz, is a closed circle: it is a means to annul the boundaries between spectator and character, creating a complete unity, based on an unconscious desire to regress to an infantile stage, that has too little to do with features of an individual spectator's psychology, with specific

characters in a given film, and with possible connections between the two.

It is only as late as the end of the 1980s that the psychoanalytical model of analysing spectatorship started to lose terrain in favour of the more scientific methodologies of the cognitivists. The academic dispute between the two approaches took many years, and studies of spectatorship, empathy included, were part of the matters of dispute. One of the most influential and vehement foes of the hegemonic grand paradigm of Film Theory (Lacanian psychoanalysis, structuralism and post-structuralism, Althusserian Marxism), is Noël Carroll, who over many years brought consistent evidence that the method is neither desirable, nor is it scientific.<sup>126</sup> Other theoreticians made similar points, convincingly arguing that an appeal to psychoanalysis should be approached, like almost in any other academic field other than film studies up to that time, only *after* standard rational modes of enquiry fail to provide answers:

It is worth noting the oddity of this situation: in most fields of enquiry, it would be an appeal to psychoanalyses, rather

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<sup>126</sup> Staring with Carroll's *Mystifying Movies* (1988, b).

than a decision not to appeal to it, that would require a defence.<sup>127</sup>

I align with the above position, that psychoanalytical film studies do not bring much to the understanding of filmic empathy, but I do not engage in a consideration of the psychoanalytical model here, since extensive critique is already available; in the following chapter, I will only give a close look to the psychoanalytical view on identification.<sup>128</sup>

The cognitivists took it upon themselves to challenge the one scholarly model available at a certain time, the psychoanalytic approach. They started to give increased attention to spectatorship theory, providing increased attention the phenomenon of empathy in film. The interdisciplinary approach to film studies incorporated findings from other scientific fields and, alongside neurosciences

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<sup>127</sup> Murry Smith (1995), 5.

<sup>128</sup> A critique of psychoanalytical model in film theory is to be found in Noël Carroll *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory* (1988); Richard Allen *Representation, Meaning, and Experience in the Cinema: A Critical Study of Contemporary Film Theory* (Dissertation, 1989) and *Projecting Ilusion* (1995); Dudley Andrew *Concepts in Film Theory* (1984, 148–156); Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema* (1995); Greg M. Smith, *Film Structure and Emotional System* (2003), 174–194.

and philosophy, the self-labelled cognitivists gave a special attention to recent discoveries in psychology.

We have seen by now how the theoretical grounds are paved for an interdisciplinary approach towards the exploration of empathy in film studies, one which applies findings from psychological researched-base theory. In the following chapter, I will look at the main explanations for the complex phenomena that filmic empathy is. Where relevant, earlier film literature is going to be brought under scrutiny, but the focus is however primarily on the findings in the context of the cognitivist film theory. I will show how, even among the cognitivists, terminological disagreements and the concern to limiting the definition occupied too much of the discussion: *what it is* and *how we should name it* were questions more significantly approached than *how it occurs*, *what it means* and *where it leads*. However, these questions should not be rejected altogether, but rather, with a more scientific, psychologically-grounded take on the matter, the findings should be encompassed in a more complex, single theory of filmic empathy.

## **2 From a Narrow Definition Towards an All-Encompassing Theory of Filmic Empathy**

### **2.1 Sympathy or Empathy? A Never-Ending Terminological Disagreement**

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The cognitivist film theory is by no means a unified one. What unifies the film cognitivists under the same label is the common belief that theories and findings of science – cognitivist science, psychology, philosophy – should be applied to the study of film, thus contributing to the largely neglected field of the film-spectator relationship.

It is within this self-labelled cognitivist film theory that, ultimately, some valuable work has been done in recent years concerning mood, point of view, mimicry, as aspects related to film spectatorship and empathy. Among the film cognitivists there is, nonetheless, serious divergence when it comes to explaining the empathic nature of the relationship we have with film character. The lack of agreement goes as far as disputing that such a thing exists in the first place (Noël Carroll), while other film scholars insist that, quite on the contrary, not only empathy with film characters exists, but it is fundamental for our experience of the

moving image (Torben Grodal, Alex Neill). There are, however, recent convincing clarification that the debate might actually be one of the nomenclature rather than concept (Carl Plantinga),<sup>129</sup> and what appears like conflicting views on empathy are actually compatible ones, in a complex theory of cinematic engagement, where we do need more distinctions instead of fewer (Berys Gaut): “Cinema is a sophisticated art form, and our emotional relationships with characters can in the best films be more complex than our relationships with real people”.<sup>130</sup> Hence the aesthetics-inherited old dispute, namely the sympathy-empathy distinction, has lately been keeping the film scholars, and preponderantly the cognitivists, busy.

At this point, it must also be said that the above-described approach to film studies, with an utmost caution in defining the notions, did not surface in a vacuum. It is a reply to the void left behind by that film scholarship which was holding the monopoly on theoretical frameworks for film studies since the 1970s. It was, in Noël Carroll’s terms, the ‘monolithic’<sup>131</sup> film theory – a term

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<sup>129</sup> Plantinga (2009), 97–106.

<sup>130</sup> Gaut (2010), 136–157.

<sup>131</sup> Carroll (1996), 38.

ironically referring to the theory with a singular body of ideas, as opposed to the (much more desired) pluralism of theories.

Alex Neill makes the point that the body of ‘monolithic’ film theory granted too little care for distinctions and nuances (including when it comes to defining empathy), when the better chance to understand these aspects of spectatorship would be to acknowledge the variety, rather than treating them as a ‘homogenous class’.<sup>132</sup> While Neill is right when pleading for more nuances, which the complexity of the empathic process obviously requires, he however steps on more dubious ground when he returns to the old confusing distinction between sympathy and empathy. Surely, emotional responses are not all of the same kind. Alex Neill identifies two distinct categories, other-focused and self-focused (sympathetic and empathetic). Sympathy for Neill is feeling for another, a response that does not depend on what the other is feeling: at times, the other might not feel anything at all, or the viewer might feel pity for a victim which, for various reasons, such as not understanding his situation, is, however, happy. On the other hand, in responding empathetically to *the other*, we come to

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<sup>132</sup> Neill (1996), 175–194.

share the other's feelings, "to feel with him": "however, in feeling with another, empathetically rather than sympathetically, we may find ourselves feeling in ways that are not only new to us, but in ways that are in a sense *foreign* to us".<sup>133</sup>

Neill's definition of empathy has its emphasis on the sharing of emotions between viewer and victim, emotions that can only be type-identical: "loosely speaking, empathy involves my feeling as I do *because* you feel as you do".<sup>134</sup> In underlining the differences between the two categories, the sense of empathy is limited to those emotions, which are accurately understood and thus imitatively shared:

Sympathizing with the other doesn't depend on my getting her mental state, or for that matter anything else about her, right. If I don't, my sympathy may well be misplaced, but it would none the less be sympathy. In contrast, if I am wrong about the mental state and/ or situation of another, I won't be able to empathise with them at all.<sup>135</sup>

But what Neill divides into sympathetic (I *fear* for you) and empathic ("for I may also feel fear *with* you") is to be understood

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<sup>133</sup> Neill (1996), 179.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 183–184.

in the current work as two distinct aspects of the very same phenomenon. A greater degree of involvement of cognitive processes and imagination leads to a better understanding of the other's situation, thus determining emotional responses which can be different in various ways, in type of intensity, than those of the character.

Amy Coplan commences from the same premises. Pleading for empathy as explanation for many of our connections with film characters, and acknowledging the benefits of empirically-studied empathy for understanding this relationship, she draws some interesting conclusions. Coplan is surely right when she insists for more distinctions rather than less:

Despite this advantage, accounts of spectatorial response that highlight empathy face many of the same difficulties that plague identification accounts, namely, multiple competing conceptualisations of empathy that refer to distinct psychological processes that vary, sometimes widely, in their function, phenomenology, mechanisms, and effects. Only if we employ a more precise conceptualisation of empathy will we make progress in our attempts to understand it.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Coplan (2009), 103.

Accounting empirical findings in psychology, Amy Coplan's definition of empathy encompasses a very important distinction – namely the understanding that *the other* (film character making no exception) is not the viewer. While sharing some of the character's psychological states, this “self/other differentiation”<sup>137</sup> allows the spectator to have various psychological experiences, which may be triggered by, but not identical to, those of the character. In order to evaluate a certain dramatic situation from the character's point of view, the spectator's imagination plays a distinct role: it is through the imagination that the sharing of some of the character's experiences, beliefs and so on, is rendered possible. Thus understood, filmic empathy is in concordance with Hoffman's explanation of the phenomenon, namely that we talk about empathy when the observer knows the experience is not his own; the observer is not the same person as the observed, and therefore they can have congruent, but also very different emotional states, such as pity for pain:

To empathise with a character, a spectator must accurately represent the character's relevant psychological states to a greater or lesser degree, but she may also experience

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

additional states as part of her own separate response. A separate response is made possible by her clear self/other differentiation. Empathy allows spectators to connect to characters while remaining separate from them. Spectator's involvement in characters' experiences in this case is deep, but it does not come at the expense of a separate identity, which means that the spectator can continue to have a wide range of psychological experiences that do not match those of the character.<sup>138</sup>

In the last twenty years, the most extensive body of work about the relationship(s) between spectator and characters in movies comes from Noël Carroll who, in a manner similar to Coplan's, emphasizes the importance of a proper understanding of the character's beliefs, goals, values, for the empathic relationship to take place. If the character is built up in such a way, so that his beliefs and projects are aligned with those of the spectator, his values, congruent with those of the viewer, than a pro-attitude is triggered. The spectator will consequently experience feelings of distress when the character is endangered, and relief when things turn out well for him or her.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> I will account Carroll's view on a universally-appealing character in more detail at the end of this chapter.

Noël Carroll explores a non-exhaustive list of such emotional relationships, with a focus on fictitious characters: type-identical; vectorially converging emotive states – his “favourite candidate for the title of empathy”; sympathy, which at times is vectorially-convergent; solidarity, when the spectator has similar response to the antagonist as the character would have, but not because he or she copies the protagonist’s feelings, but as a result of our own emotional review.<sup>140</sup> Out of them, Carroll argues, the spectator’s sympathy, once secured, is, alongside antipathy for the villain, the more long-lasting emotional process. The sharing of values and goals (which has to do to with the empathical phenomenon of *familiarity bias*, and) which Carroll calls sympathy, is what assures the emotional, lasting spectator-character bond:

It is our sympathy towards the character that disposes us to regard her as inside our network of concern, and, therefore, to assess an injustice done to her as something perpetrated against one of “our own”. The negative emotions that we muster in response to the protagonist’s setback are a function

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<sup>140</sup> Whenever writing on emotions, Carroll mainly refers to mainstream motion pictures – narrative fictions for cinema or TV.

of our sympathy to her. Sympathy is the real foundation here.<sup>141</sup>

There is evidence that people are inclined to empathise with family members, friends and with people who are part of the same group, ethnical, religious more than they do with strangers. We are even inclined to empathise more with those with whom we share some similarities or values, rather than with those with whom we do not. The phenomenon finds plausible explanations in evolutionary theories since, because people evolved in small groups, altruism for the members of the same group was necessary for survival, while lack of resources turned members of different groups against one another.<sup>142</sup> Carroll's observation, that the protagonist of moving images can prompt our empathy *because* we get to associate him or her with one of 'our own' is theoretically exceptionally rich. It is of use for criticism and praxis, and a valuable 'bringing home' to film studies of empirical findings. Only that, at times, it seems that Noël Carroll is complicating, not simplifying the nomenclature

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<sup>141</sup> Carroll (2008), 179.

<sup>142</sup> Hoffman (2000), 206.

further, when he chooses *sympathy* for defining our pro-attitude towards, or liking of the protagonists.<sup>143</sup>

While Carroll's life-long work on affective relations between characters and spectators is of great importance (and its relevance for non-fiction film is apparent), the grounds on which he rejects empathy as a theoretical framework are debatable. He manifestly avoids the use of empathy, even more so in recent years, by arguing that he has been "unable to find much consensus in either ordinary language or the *relevant technical literature* about how we are to understand empathy".<sup>144</sup> The argument simply does not stand since, when it comes to sympathy, the disagreement is equally deepened – if not more so. It is not clear which "relevant technical literature" Carroll refers to here, but if he means the current film literature, it is exactly when we should try to come out from the misapprehensions in our own field, and attempt an even more interdisciplinary understanding of emotional spectatorship. The cognitivists are, once more, correct in insisting that more distinctions are necessary, not less, however, I will argue, we should continue making them in the context of the same

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<sup>143</sup> Carroll (2008), 177

<sup>144</sup> Carroll (2011), 163, emphasis added.

phenomenon, not try to artificially skater unitary concepts into minor, dissimilar ones.

What follows is an account of various instances of filmic means for triggering empathy in the writings of cognitivist film scholars. However, I will not be departing from the belief that empathy is a single, complex phenomenon. This view, that empathy is a unitary, multifaceted process, is in harmony with most recent empirical findings in psychology. Hence, applying findings from this scientific field in the study of film spectatorship is in the very sprit of the cognitivists.

## **2.2 Identification: Traditional Theoretical Explanation for Filmic Empathy**

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Empathy and sympathy are new approaches for understanding the relationship between film character and spectator but, as shown in chapter 1, the topic has been of concern since the beginning of film and film theory. However, it used to be differently labelled. *Engagement* with character was what absorbed the field's attention

on the matter, and the concept most frequently employed to describe it was *identification*.

It was pointed out earlier that there is some body of writing on the notion of identification, but it is basically limited to the relationship between spectator and fictional characters, with almost no attempt to expand the findings towards documentary film. However, some of the questions asked are the same for fiction and non-fiction and therefore, thankfully, research in documentary does not have to start from scratch in answering them: what is there within the moving image that makes spectators care about the well being of characters (fictional or real people) on the screen?

The Hungarian-born film theoretician Béla Balázs was one of the first to underline, as early as 1945, the existence of a psychological, inherited dimension, which allows sharing emotions with the film character, and that it is essential to the experience of watching a film. Whereas theoreticians before him were mainly concerned in their writings with the validation of film as a unique, even superior art form, Balázs proceeded on a different path. He gave extensive attention to the emotional power of filmic means. His end goal was, nevertheless, to establish the 'absolute artistic novelty' of the new medium. But in doing so, he identified its

intensity in generating emotions, unprecedented in other art forms. The key element recognized by Balázs is the experiencing *from the inside*, from the film character's perspective, which allows various degrees of character engagement:

(...) in the cinema the camera carries the spectator into the film picture itself. We are seeing everything from the inside as it were and are surrounded by the characters of the film. They need not tell us what they feel, for we see what they see and see it as they see it.<sup>145</sup>

In other words, Balázs remarked the capacity film has to elide the distance between the moving images and spectators. It is this production of character/person oriented-emotions, which can occur solely through moving images, even without narrative or dialogical support, which Balázs described as the key element, that broke the emotional distance between spectator and work of art. This break in emotional distance is produced through specific filmic means, starting with mere cut-aways, which enable the film spectator to experience the happenings on the screen through the eyes of the protagonists, hence the sharing of emotions:

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<sup>145</sup> Balázs (1945/1970), 48.

Although we sit in our seats for which we have paid, we do not see Romeo and Juliet from there. We look up at Juliet's balcony with Romeo's eyes and look down at Romeo with Juliet's. Our eyes and, with it, our conscious is identified with the characters in the film, we look at the world out of their eyes and have no angle of vision of our own.<sup>146</sup>

This new psychological effect, where the uniqueness of film art resides, is for Balázs 'identification'.<sup>147</sup> Balázs recognised more aspects from the multifaceted, empathic spectator-character relationship, and used *identification* to gather them under the same concept: the more basic mimicry, but also role taking or perspective taking. At its apex, Balázs emphasizes, identification does not only happen remote from the filmmaker's control, but there are auctorial filmic ways and mechanisms available to guide the entire process: the immersion of the spectator in the story presented on the screen, the fact that the film "does away with the distance between the spectator and the work of art"<sup>148</sup> and "deliberately creates the illusion in the spectator that he is in the middle of the action reproduced in the fictional space of the

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Balázs (1945/1970), 46.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 50.

film".<sup>149</sup> Particular choices of field sizes (close-ups), the variation in angulations, with the help of the editing process, might contribute to the triggering of an empathic response, or such choices will at least determine a degree of intensity.

It is of a peculiarity of film studies that Béla Balázs' scrupulous approach to theorizing the moving image spectatorship was abandoned for such a long time, and his is not even the first name which occurs to us when we discuss nowadays identification as explanation for sharing of emotions. But rather, when bringing up identification, many might split into associating it with psychoanalytical film theory, which provided a very different understanding of the matter. There is debate as to whether the psychoanalytical theory should be dismissed altogether. Some argue that, for the benefit of theory, it should be just reconceptualised.<sup>150</sup> Is there anything, within the frames of psychoanalytical writings, that can be of any use to the scientific approach of theorizing filmic empathy, or from which the criticism or the praxis could benefit? In a concise manner, we should show why film psychoanalysis is not of use for us here.

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Allen (1989).

The film psychoanalyst Christian Metz described several types of identification, naming the one with the camera as the main type of identification, a form of recognition with the self, to which the identification with a character falls only as secondary. For Metz, identification is central for the cinematographic experience (film viewing itself is a “lovable fetish”<sup>151</sup>), but understood in a problematic way, a view that is extensively and, I will claim, unjustifiably quoted to this day:

Ainsi, le film est comme le miroir. Mais en un point essentiel il diffère du miroir primordial: bien que, comme en celui-ci, tout puisse venir se projeter, il est une chose, une seule, qui ne s’y reflète jamais: le corps propre du spectateur. Sur un certain emplacement, le miroir devient brusquement glace sans tain.<sup>152</sup>

This is what Metz seems to ask: with what exactly does the spectator identify throughout the film projection? Drawing on Freud’s *Interpretation of dreams* (1914), *Inhibition, Symptom and Anxiety* (1926) and Lacanian work on the *Mirror stage*, Metz finds identification as being crucial to the experience of watching a film,

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<sup>151</sup> Metz (1977/1993), 80.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

which in a far-fetched manner he compares with “the sexual act”, in the sense that, for both intercourse and the watching of a film it is essential that all psychical faculties would be intact, for the act (sexual, as well as watching movies) to be considered normal, outside psychoses and neuroses. For Metz himself, the theory remains valid for fiction *and documentary* alike: “Fiction ou pas, il y a toujours quelque chose sur l’écran”,<sup>153</sup> implying elsewhere that all cinema is fiction, “tout film est un film de fiction”.<sup>154</sup>

The famous Metzian identification appears to be quite detached from what the film per se, and the act of viewing, are really about. First, let us briefly look at its “stages”, as Metz describes them: the infant, in the mirror, recognises familiar objects (the mother holding him in her arms) but, above all, he identifies his own image (“la formation du Moi”<sup>155</sup>). In other words, when the child identifies his reflection, himself as an *object* in the mirror, this is when, for Metz, the self is formed. With time, the early type of identification ceases to be a necessity, however, the adult, now film spectator, carries on some evolved sort of

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>155</sup> Metz (1977/1993), 65.

continued identification when going to the movies. Metz is drawing on the Lacanian theory of identification, without taking into account the potential diversity of implications which might occur in various films, or between various spectators, or the complicated relationship between the two, spectator and film. Consequently, it comes across as an artificial, ‘monolithic’ approach.

The identification with the film character, or actor, would only be for Metz of a secondary type. “L’écran, en ce sens, n’est pas un miroir”,<sup>156</sup> since the spectator does not find himself or herself on the screen *as object*, but rather objects which are “without him”:

Et il est vrai que, s’identifiant à lui même comme regarde, le spectateur ne peut faire autrement que de s’identifier aussi à la caméra, qui a regardé avant lui ce qu’il regarde a présent, et dont le *poste*(=cadrage) détermine le point de fuite.<sup>157</sup>

It is because of this identification with the camera, Metz thought, that some spectatorial behaviours are explicable, and it sheds light

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 70.

on why, for example, the spectator does not turn his head left or right when the camera describes a panning, and so on.<sup>158</sup>

The final stage of the abstract identification theory of Metz is the doubling of the spectator with the projector, machine to be found in a fantastic way behind the spectator's head. Even if one might try to make sense of the theory up to this point, the projector argument is still confusing, and highly outdated, since it is by all means not with a projector in the very back of our heads that we experience a film. To a lesser extent, that was still the case at the time of Metz's writings.

For Metz, the mirror stage-generated identification happens with both the projector and with the screen, in a film-spectator theory where neither the film nor the spectator play any role, and are ever replaceable. It appears as an implausible theory about film experience where fine distinctions do not find any place. But what seems to entirely annul the psychoanalytical film theory from any scientific debate on spectatorship is the implied and puzzling assumption that understanding the film means the spectator takes himself for the character, considers himself as

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<sup>158</sup> But, however, the film spectaoor does move, and this is due to our innate, basic mimicry capacity.

being the character, as if the spectator is some empathy-less puzzle piece, ready for being robotically and routinely infantilised. The filmic product does not get too much of a chance for proper theory, or analysis either, since it is just the creation of the “identified” spectator.

Metz talked about regression in the darkness of the cinema venue, and regression in the darkness it was: seized by psychoanalysis, there was no alternative approach for film identification, other than the one described above, one that has its followers to this day. It is only as late as 1989 that a fundamentally different perspective on identification emerged. In his opening essay from *Post-Theory* (a book which could almost be seen as a cognitivist manifesto), David Bordwell criticises this “*subject-position theory* of the mid-70s”, which was applied to film throughout the ‘70s and the ‘80s: “for the subject-position theorist the communication, because it is an interplay of subject and another, requires something like identification to take place”.<sup>159</sup> Bordwell is surely right when stating that the “subject-position theory”,

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<sup>159</sup> Bordwell (1989), 15.

according to which the spectator believes he or she is creating the film, is extremely improbable.

Without giving too much attention to identification, David Bordwell, however, pointed to the exact same issue that I find fundamentally problematic with Metz's identification theory, that is, the spectator not being acknowledged as a person, with the variety of psychological functions carried along. Bordwell proposed a radically different take on identification, for him a concept imported in film theory from the field of criticism, where it emerged from a concern for effect, which naturally followed style; more specifically, driven by the concern of making criticism understandable, the critic was the first who needed to take into consideration the spectator "as a person":

I have also argued that when interpreters "apply" theory, they do so principally in a piecemeal, ad hoc, and expansionist manner. Theory functions as a black box; if it gets the job done, there is no need to look inside. While the constraints on "pure" theorizing are logical and broadly empirical, the constraints on using theory in interpretation arise from the needs of the immediate task. Reciprocally, pre-1970 film

criticism furnishes contemporary film theory with many of its central concepts.<sup>160</sup>

Bordwell seems to suggest that, only with the help of other academic fields, film theory should seek to compensate for the (again) regressed stage the topic of filmic identification is to be found in. In cultural studies, he continues arguing, identification is more “straight forward”: “In grasping features of race, class, gender, or other sub-cultural attributes, the spectator identifies with the figures on the screen or the cultural allegiances offered by the film”.<sup>161</sup> Bordwell’s observation, inspired from cultural studies, is congruent with the significant *similarity for the keen* component of empathy, which will be described, in connection to documentary film, in the third chapter of this work.

By and large, film theory mainly defines identification as the positive connection with the movie character, especially with the protagonist. In a similar manner, viewers themselves generally

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<sup>160</sup> Bordwell (1989), 250. Here, Bordwell refers to identification, auteur and voyeurism in one director, Alfred Hitchcock and the critical discussion in *Movie* magazine in 1962 and 1963, where the critique’s the search for a way to write of style lead to thinking about effect, eventually approached in terms of identification. V.F. Perkins eventually elaborated on the subject of identification in *Film as Film* (1972), 139–157.

<sup>161</sup> Bordwell (1996), 16.

describe their positive emotional relationship with moving-image characters using identification: *I really identified with one or the other character in the film*, the moved spectator would say, *so I was really sad about what happened to him/her*. Identification is also the concept employed to define several other instances of the spectator – film character relationship, in both film studies and in the vernacular, and sometimes is used in contradictory and misleading ways.

To avoid confusing terminology, in the context of this work I will however limit the use of identification exclusively to the complex, imagination-requiring empathy-arousing mode of role-taking (or perspective-taking).

### **2.3 Against Identification: Alternative Explanations for Filmic Empathy**

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One of the most outspoken critics of identification (understood as explanation for our relationship with film characters) is Noël Carroll. This is a view from which I distance myself: a certain degree of identification with moving image characters, I argue, is possible, though requiring a complex imaginative process. The

dissension is not irreconcilable: it is Noël Carroll's years-long work that first properly shed light on the overall relationship that we have with film characters – or in his terms, *relationships*. Carroll identified multiple ways in which we emotionally relate to characters in moving images: type-identical, vectorially converging (including at time sympathy), emotional solidarity (an emotional response to the antagonist, similar to the one the character has).

Identification is to be discharged from the list because, in Noël Carroll's view, if one identifies with the protagonist, the spectator would thus be “infected” by the protagonist's emotional state. And this is a vision Carroll rejects for not being relevant for analysing the spectator-character relationship. Carroll pleads for what he calls asymmetric emotions: “Since quite frequently, our emotional states often have different causes and take different objects than the putative mental state of the protagonist”.<sup>162</sup> This is the reason why, at times, he also seems to plead for more distinctions rather than fewer, namely “a distinction between emotions that are held in common or coincidentally and emotions

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<sup>162</sup> Carroll (2011), 165.

that are shared due to some intimate causal relation between them”.<sup>163</sup>

But while more distinctions are needed, and while identification, overused and misplaced, has been at times exhausted of meaning, could we however dismiss altogether that something like this exists: assuming the perspective of the character, and feeling some of the relevant emotions that come along with the lack of well-being of the protagonist? In Murray Smith’s understanding, Noël Carroll “has argued unequivocally that spectators never really adopt the viewpoint (in a general, rather than in a purely optical sense) of characters”.<sup>164</sup> However, in earlier works, Carroll did not seem to question this particular type of spectator-character connection, namely putting oneself in the filmic situation, be it fiction or non-fiction, and eventually imagining, to various extents, how the victim feels or felt like. The underlined problem is the naming of psychological hypostases with a persisting lack of rigor and specificity:

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<sup>163</sup> Carroll (2008), 166.

<sup>164</sup> Smith (1995), 78

Obviously, character-identification could mean a range of things and could be connected to a variety of different psychological theories. But the term is often used – even by professional critics – in a way that fails to specify exactly how we are to characterize the mental state to which speakers are referring.<sup>165</sup>

The existent terminology seems to imply, in Carroll's more recent writings, some kind of exact symmetry, some sort of blending with characters, which would suggest that the spectator either 1. confuses himself for the character or 2. fuses with the character, duplicating his or her emotional states.

It is not this particular instance of responses that Carroll seems to reject (i.e. fusion and confusion with the character), since there are regardless multiple instances of emotional response, many still out of our reach – in Carroll's own words: "There are a number relations; I do not know how many".<sup>166</sup> The predicament seems to be a terminological one. For Carroll, the phenomenon of identification would imply that we respond to a filmic situation as the character would respond to it. This, of course, would be a

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<sup>165</sup> Carroll (1990), 89.

<sup>166</sup> Carroll (2011), 180.

mistake, since spectators give a response while ‘assimilating’, and not ‘duplicating’ the character’s situation.

Carroll is right that the spectator-character emotional relationship is not always congruent, but so is every other emotional relationship for that matter, with fictitious characters, non-fiction ones and real people alike. Furthermore, as will be discussed in detail later, the two higher-order psychological modes of empathic arousal both do imply more or less similar emotional states to those the observed finds himself in: mediated association (where the observer processes and assimilates information about the one observed) and role-taking (imagining how the victim/spectator feels or how one could feel in an identical situation). Carroll’s categorical position against identification extends against empathy as well, on the grounds that there is not enough agreement on what the term empathy really refers to, and he finds it reason enough to introduce new terminology in order to refer to the phenomenon. The new nomenclature was not meant to bring the field to a consensus, but rather deepened the disagreement. One of the defenders of the identification approach is Berys Gaut, who recently convincingly showed how the arguments Carroll gave throughout time to support the various

instances of the spectator-character relationship are in reality compatible with the identification view.<sup>167</sup>

However, for Noël Carroll, instead of empathy or identification, a different approach to defining the complex emotive relationship has more significance, namely assimilation.<sup>168</sup> The emphasis is on the necessity on the spectator's side that, while giving an emotional response to the character, one understands that the character is not oneself. This conclusion is, however, already in full agreement with the way that, for some time now, psychologists define precisely empathy: as a process at the end of which a person would have feelings more appropriate to someone else's situation than to his own, the emphasis being on the fact that the viewer knows at all times that the other is not oneself, a fact crucial for the empathic process to be accurate.<sup>169</sup>

The very same goes even for moral philosophy: Martha Nussbaum makes an interesting distinction between the different terminology in this field and what the terms represent. In this wide range of emotional responses to somebody else's undeserved

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<sup>167</sup> Gaut (2010), 146–154.

<sup>168</sup> Carroll (1990), 95.

<sup>169</sup> Hoffman (2000), 30.

misfortune, Nussbaum uses empathy to underline its imaginative component.<sup>170</sup> She sees it as an important thread, an instrument that enables us to understand what the other is going through, generates our apprehension and establishes connection. It easily generates compassion and establishes altruism. For Nussbaum, it is an important aspect that, while understanding the suffering of the other, one is aware that the pain is not one's own. "If one really had the experience of feeling the pain in one's own body", she explains, "then one would precisely have failed to comprehend the pain of another as another".<sup>171</sup> In order for us to empathize, let's say, with someone who just lost a spouse, it is not relevant to imagine how we would feel in that very situation, but rather to understand more closely what the suffering is for that particular person, with his or her particular background, family situation, religion and so many others: "the person with a lip injury is a

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<sup>170</sup> Nussbaum prefers to use *empathy* for the imaginative reconstruction component, but with no evaluation of the experience of the other. Still, she goes on admitting that psychologists and psychoanalysts "use the term empathy to mean some combination of imaginative reconstruction with the judgement that the person is in distress and that this distress is bad".

<sup>171</sup> Nussbaum (2001), 327–328.

bassoon player, as one is not oneself'.<sup>172</sup> It is the truthful position from which one could more fairly evaluate the distress of the other, and experience the consequential emotion.

Even if he avoids naming the process empathy, and resorts to assimilation, Noel Carroll's view is congruent with the definitions of empathy from various other fields, as stated above. Thus, for Carroll, part of this assimilation demands that the spectator has an understanding of both the filmic situation and the way the character evaluates this situation:

For example, in horror, when a character is beset by a monster, part of my response is grounded in the recognition that the protagonist regards herself as confronting something that is threatening and repellent. In order to do this, I must have a conception of how the protagonist sees the situation; and I must have access to what makes her assessment intelligible.<sup>173</sup>

And exactly this access to the other's assessment of the situation implies assimilating it, and that I, as spectator, replicate the feelings, which by necessity implies that I also take an external view of it, I evaluate it, to some extent from an exterior point of

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<sup>172</sup> Nussbaum (2001), 328.

<sup>173</sup> Carroll (1990), 95.

view (i.e. my own). The understanding and sharing of emotions between spectator and character depends on the understanding and sharing of the character's situation, structure, principles and ideas. The convincing account that Noël Carroll gives of assimilation corresponds to some aspects of another empathy-arousing mode in psychology scholarship: the direct association of cues in the victim's situation, which makes the viewer bring personal emotional responses to the given situation (through memories etc.).

In conclusion, it is safe to admit that what Carroll calls infectious identification (identical replication of the emotions of the film character), cannot be responsible for the entirety of the character-audience spectrum of emotional relationships, as this dynamic can encapsulate a much vaster degree of variation than the spectator simply replicating the emotions of the character. The emotions of the spectator can be identical, but they can also be similar to those of the characters, or different to them. This departure from the affective state of the character and variation into a new emotional direction depends on a number of factors, like what kind of information we as spectators possess, or what do the characters themselves know. In documentary film, indexed with reality-status (the film comes to use labelled as documentary,

with real stances, real people), the spectator's digression from the emotional state of the character leading to an entirely new emotional state, unique only to the spectator, is even more important than in fiction film. The cheerful march of the Salvadoran guerrilla soldiers in the documentary **IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE**,<sup>174</sup> their smiles and songs and energy, can only frighten the spectator, who probably has the distressing thought of real people in the real-world marching to a sure death.

Our emotions, as Carroll puts it, have here "different causes and take different objects than the putative mental states of the protagonists",<sup>175</sup> and there is no faithful match between them. Nevertheless, I argue here that these asymmetric emotions fall, too, under the frameworks of a single, complex empathic process.

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<sup>174</sup> **IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE**. Director: Frank Christopher. USA, 1985.

<sup>175</sup> Carroll (2011), 168.

## 2.4 Mobilizing a Pro-Attitude in Character's Construction

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Proponents of the identification explanation for filmic empathy have suggested that there is some sort of natural, automatic trace to filmic empathy, due to its two main features – the visual and the imaginative: “(...) the imaginative activity that is characteristic of empathy involves taking another’s perspective on things, imaginatively representing to oneself the thoughts, beliefs, desires, and so on of another as though they were one’s own”.<sup>176</sup>

So even if some empathy arousing modes are automatically triggered, and the spectator can imaginatively share the character’s desires of beliefs, for a complex empathic experience he or she has to have some knowledge or belief about what those thoughts or desires or beliefs of the character *actually are*, and appropriate some of them. After sharing of some of the same values, interests and goals with the film character, some sort of benevolence will be installed. It is central to securing the empathic response to film

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<sup>176</sup> Neill (1996), 186.

characters, fictional and non-fictional alike, and strong sympathy (and antipathy) will in their turn trigger solidarity. But how is it mobilized, and once mobilized, how is it sustained throughout the duration of the movie?

In real life, our benevolence concerns firstly those with whom we share same values or same interests, members of the same group – gender or political, or simply people with whom we share the same loyalties and system of belief, or simply a similar sense of humour. But it appears not so simple to secure benevolence for film characters, which are aimed to appeal to a large audience. The wider the audience, the more complicated the filmmaker's task seems to be, a task which involves a way to elicit these feelings in very diverse audiences, pertaining to highly distinct groups.

More often than not, documentary films aim to address a wide audience, not one group or the other and, in the case of documentary films from revolutionary contexts, it is exactly the empathy of trans-cultural audiences that is at stake. So how do you secure benevolence from a wider, diverse, or cross-cultural audience? One rich clarification comes, again, from Noël Carroll.

As showed above, Carroll is taken aback by the amount of contradictions and lack of agreement about the simple

terminology, which gravitates around the notion of empathy, and by the fact that findings of new phenomena employ older wordings, in the detriment of coherent linguistic accuracy. Though, is it not the same history behind so many other concepts in film theory and elsewhere, when “our nomenclature gets confusing, because we do not have enough labels to go around”?<sup>177</sup> Is it not the case with notions such as *popular*, and *fiction*, and *character* – to use just some key-terms Carroll decided is safe to use, while being cautious with *empathy*, a word he decides to bypass? Consequently, Carroll replaces empathy with “vectorially converging emotions”, in other words, emotions which are not (type-)identical, but tend in same direction, “converge vectorially” in distinct ways: in a positive way (love, pride) or in a negative one (discomfort, distress); the experiencing of feelings belonging to the same extensive category.<sup>178</sup> And the pivot of the emotional trigger for the “vectorially converging emotions” is the spectator’s sympathy towards the characters, *sympathy* meaning in this case benevolence, kindness, wishing-good, and an overall pro attitude.

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<sup>177</sup> Carroll (2011), 164.

<sup>178</sup> Carroll (2008), 161–184.

Therefore, in gaining benevolence from a larger or more diverse audience, the construction of a main character with some very broad, universally-agreed upon moral traits is helpful, the building up of the good-guy who can appeal very diverse people:

As a matter of empirical generalization, protagonists who command the audience's moral endorsement. In other words, morality, of an extremely broad cast, provides the moviemaker with an interest, or project, or loyalty upon which the viewer of diverse backgrounds can converge.<sup>179</sup>

Hence, if the main characters are morally appealing, benevolence from a larger and more diverse audience can be secured, for the spectator has a special bond with the protagonist who, starting from this one element, seems more a part of his or her group:

Good guys are precisely what the movie doctor calls for – characters likely to engender a pro-attitude from heterogeneous audiences of otherwise varied and often conflicting interests and loyalties. Morality of the fairly generic sort found in movies is just what people from different backgrounds are apt to agree upon, at least roughly.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Carroll (2008), 181.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

And by good guy, or “morally good”, Carroll seems to mean fair, just, loyal, the one who cares for the weak, family-oriented, truthful and trustful, in a word, moral in a universal sense (or at least as moral is generally perceived by western audiences).<sup>181</sup> The ‘good-guy’ type of character construction should not be understood as a single, one-sided feature but, in order to win sympathy, the film characters have more chances when perceived as morally good. Hence chances are greater to win the sympathy of a larger audience, when there are characters portrayed as encompassing ‘a variety of virtues’. Even if at the beginning he or she seems anti-social, shortly he or she must prove to be “prosocial at heart”. Protagonists win our benevolence because of the multitude and diversity of their virtues, and this is why the spectator hopes the protagonist will just do well (and their antagonist, if any, do badly). A character whose virtues we might find doubtful, to say the least, who puzzles us with his choices or with his morals, can still trigger our empathic feelings, with well

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<sup>181</sup> The moral emotions are described in Carroll (2010).

developed features. This can be possible because (and only when) our pro-attitude is secured.<sup>182</sup>

Solidarity is another important instance of the spectator-character relationship. As Carroll puts it, solidarity can be defined as “sympathy and antipathy viscerally felt”,<sup>183</sup> mainly when a strong bond is established with the good guy, whose misfortune will trigger the viewer’s distress, distress which could be alleviated when the well-being of the character is achieved. But in extreme scenarios, solidarity can be established with the not-so-morally-rightful, too: this happens when antipathy towards the antagonist reaches high intensities. Alongside benevolence (sympathy in Carroll’s terms), solidarity is a key factor in securing a pro-attitude, and consequently responsible for triggering empathy. Leaving at time the reserve I have at times with Noël Carroll’s terming of the concepts at stake, his works appear to be the most comprehensive theoretical frameworks film scholarship currently holds.

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<sup>182</sup> When analyzing the paradoxical pro-attitude of the spectator towards the TV-series character Tony Soprano, Carroll (2004), 173, points out that there is a pro-attitude towards Tony, without identifying with Tony, or imagining oneself as having identical feelings, reasons and incentives as Tony Soprano does.

<sup>183</sup> Carroll (2004), 184.

However, the work in the field seems to be just at the beginning, since so many other spectatorship-related issues have not been brought sufficiently (or at all) under scrutiny: the various valences of mimicry (not only the length of shots and angulations, but also posture and movement), and their empathic effect on the film spectator, the use of dialogue and language association, as well as the complex interplay of protagonist/antagonist. The following chapter is a possible approach to such a list of empathy-generating filmic mechanisms, and it is by all means not exhaustive.

Many more pages are being written on how exactly we should name the affective response we give to characters, and amid this favoured dispute, I argue that the more stringent questions keep unfortunately pending: how is empathy mobilized, how is it sustained and what follows the empathic process?

### 3 How Does Filmic Empathy Work? Means for Empathic Arousal

#### 3.1 The Many Empathies: Empathy as a Process

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*Films are also effective means of presenting larger life sequences, which can promote viewers' empathic identification with others' lives. Seeing that people in other cultures have similar worries and respond emotionally as we do to important life events, while sitting in the audience and feeling the same emotions, should contribute to a sense of oneness and empathy across cultures.*

– Martin Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development. Implication for Caring and Justice*, 2000<sup>184</sup>

Up until this point, we have looked at the multiplicity of understandings when it comes to empathic response to film characters, and how this variety led to a narrowing of the sense of the concept. Various scholars strictly delimited their theoretical territory by distinguishing their understanding from other

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<sup>184</sup> Hoffman (2000), 294–295.

definitions in circulation. As a result, explanations of empathy, which could have otherwise cohabitated, started excluding each other. This particular problem of studying empathy is not specific to film scholarship alone, but rather an old heritage of psychology. Here, likewise, empathy and sympathy were routinely used to address concepts that were interrelated, as if they were entirely different psychological states. In an attempt to bring this oddity closer to resolution, social psychologist Daniel Batson identified eight distinct concepts for which empathy is employed, and the fine distinctions between them<sup>185</sup>:

- **Knowing another person's internal state**, his thoughts and feelings, “cognitive empathy” or “empathic accuracy”<sup>186</sup>;
- **Adopting the posture or matching the neuronal responses** of an observed other (which implies mimicking the other, and the match of feelings deriving from it);
- **Coming to feel as another feels**<sup>187</sup>;

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<sup>185</sup> Batson (2009), 3–15.

<sup>186</sup> “Empathic accuracy” is influenced by a lot of factors, including the degree of knowledge of the other and the situational information received.

- **Projecting oneself in the situation of another**, the closest to Lipps' initial use of *Einfühlung* in aesthetics – the imagining of what it would be like to *be* somebody else;
  - **Imagining how the other is thinking or feeling**, or imagining the perspective of the other<sup>188</sup>;
  - **Imagining how one would think or feel in the place of the other**, which is similar to the projecting oneself in another's situation, while “the self remains more focal here”<sup>189</sup>;
  - **Experiencing distress when witnessing somebody else in distress**, which in the current work, following Martin L. Hoffman, will be referred to as “empathic distress”;
  - **Feeling for another person**. This particular use of the term empathy does not imply feeling the precise distress of the
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<sup>187</sup> Coming to feel how the other feels differs from mimicking, in the sense that it is used to account for similar feelings in the observer, but it is not a must, as is the case with mimicking, identical ones.

<sup>188</sup> This does not presuppose to imagine *being* exactly the other, but rather taking the sensitive imaginative perspective of how the other feels or thinks in his or her particular situation.

<sup>189</sup> Batson (2009), 7. The *projecting of oneself* in another's situation and *imagining* how one would feel or think in the place of another are very close understandings of empathy, but they evolved from different traditions (aesthetics as opposed to interpersonal).

other, but rather that there is a certain congruency of emotion generated. In this case, the emotional response to the other in need is not identical, but “other-oriented” (like pity for pain).

Scholars embracing one or the other above-listed understandings of empathy incline to exclude the rest. As a direct consequence, what psychologists decided to measure was exclusive, as were the conclusions they thus reached. For example, a comprehensive review of measurement scales available (for role taking) done by Robert D. Enright’s and Daniel K. Lapsley’s shows how at the time different constructs employ different measurements, leading to different conclusions. It is exactly by the beginning of the 1980s that numerous measure scales were employed for the study of empathy. The most routinely used were the Hogan Empathy Scale and the Questionnaire Measure of Emotional Empathy (QMEE); in time, through research, they had been both confirmed as valid scales. But the QMEE and the Hogan scales measured different aspects of empathy, thus reaching different results: Hogan

Empathy Scale originates from the cognitive view on empathy, while QMEE measures emotional aspects of empathy.<sup>190</sup>

In other words, in analysing the two main phenomena carrying the same name (cognitive role-taking and affective reaction), researchers had the tendency to unnaturally exclude elements of the other phenomena. Growing around each other as they did, the above-described measuring traditions led, for psychology scholar Mark Davis, to the *Balkanisation* of the study of empathy.<sup>191</sup> By the beginning of the 1980s, an all-encompassing empathy measurement scale was urgently required. Mark Davis foresaw empathy as both cognitive role-taking and affective response to someone else's situation, consequently putting forward a new approach to measurement scales and correlating it with the existent subscales: the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI).<sup>192</sup>

Davis' IRI is a system of four subscales, measuring various understandings of empathy: cognitive perspective taking (PT), fantasy, or the capacity of the respondent to identify with fictional characters (FS), the capacity to answer with compassionate feelings

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<sup>190</sup> Choplan et al. (1985), 635–653.

<sup>191</sup> Davis (1994), 12.

<sup>192</sup> Davis (1980), Davis (1983), 113–236.

or empathic concern (EC), and personal feeling of distress, the response to the other's negative experience with feelings more appropriate to the other than to one's own (PD). Amidst psychology theorists, Mark Davis' extensively used today IRI gathered evidence for a novel approach: the development of a complex understanding of empathy, for better incorporating the two main empathy models, cognitive and affective, based on the relationships and commonness between the elements. In 1994, Davis argued in his book, *Empathy: A social Psychological Approach*, for a multidimensional model, including four categories of interrelated constructs: antecedents (the given data of the observer and the given data of the situation in which the empathic incidence might happen), the types of processes involved and the outcomes of the empathic processes, which can in their turn be non-interpersonal (not directed towards the victim) and intrapersonal (directed towards the victim). Out of Mark Davis' multidimensional approach, what concerns the current work are the modes of arousing empathy, initially put forward by "the most comprehensive attempt thus far to deal with these issues",<sup>193</sup> the

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<sup>193</sup> Davis (1994), 37.

seminal work of the “most ambitious of the modern empathy theorists”,<sup>194</sup> Martin L. Hoffman. As indicated in the organisational model, the viewer’s responding with prosocial behaviour or helping when witnessing someone else in distress depends on three categories of processes. These three distinct categories are borrowed from Hoffman’s two groupings of empathic arousal modes (first put forward in 1978)<sup>195</sup>: lower order processes (automatic, triggered by mere viewing) and higher order processes (involving sophisticated cognitive functions, imagination).

Martin L. Hoffman is a development psychologist, therefore he primarily focused on how our empathic capacities develop, and how they evolve from infancy throughout adolescence.<sup>196</sup> Starting from here, he advanced a very complex, multifaceted, (and today extensively cited) theory, one that film scholarship has a lot to benefit from. His theory, which will be furthered analysed, is mainly concerned with affective empathy

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>195</sup> In 1978, however, Hoffman put forward six modes of empathical arousal, the sixth being “primary circular reaction” (the cry of infants when they hear another infant crying).

<sup>196</sup> Hoffman (1984, 1987).

(“feeling what the other feels”) – while still acknowledging the existence of the second type, cognitive empathy (the *understanding* of the other’s feelings). The two types of empathy occur at times together, as it is when a documentary film viewer sees the character in distress, shares some of the disconcerting experience, becomes aware of the victim’s drama, understands the condition and imagines the pain. The empathic involvement can turn the experience of the victim (and documentary character makes no exception here) into the viewer’s personal experience. Understood in this way, empathy is a complex process, dependent on the countless liaisons that can be established between the observer’s and the characters’ feelings. For Hoffman, empathy is an “affective response more appropriate to someone else’s situation than to one’s own”,<sup>197</sup> the prerequisite for such a response being “the involvement of psychological processes that make a person have feelings that are more congruent with another’s situation than with his own situation”.<sup>198</sup> It is precisely this part of Hoffman’s theory, the mechanism behind the empathy, and the psychological processes involved in generating it, that are of interest to us here.

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<sup>197</sup> Hoffman (1987), 48; (2000), 4.

<sup>198</sup> Hoffman (2000), 30.

## **3.2 Empathy, with Whom?**

### **3.2.1 The Watching of a Documentary, a Moral Dilemma**

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The core of the Hoffmanian theory of empathy is its contribution to principles of caring and justice. Above all, the psychologist seems to wonder: what is the influence that empathy-generated feelings have on our moral judgment? Under the same broad model, emotion is intertwined with action. According to Martin L. Hoffmann, there are five types of moral encounters, out of which the one best corresponding to the documentary spectatorship is also the simplest moral confrontation. It implies mere seeing of someone in pain, danger or any other form of distress, termed by Hoffman the innocent bystander model.

The other modes of moral encounter are transgressor, virtual transgressor, multiple moral claims and caring versus justice. Transgressor is the one who is about to harm another, the moral dilemma being if one refrains from hurting again, or experiences guilt. Virtual transgressor is the one who, though innocent, believes he or she has hurt someone. The fourth type, multiple moral claims, involves choice: who does one help and

how does one feel about disregarding the other in distress? The fifth type, caring versus justice, comprises the clash between caring or helping others, and more abstract issues, such as rights and justice.

All models of moral-justice dilemmas might prove important when discussing reception of documentary films but, for the study of filmic empathy, we are going to closely look at the first one, a pattern for all the other four types of moral encounters: the innocent bystander. The victim, we have grasped that already, does not need to be present for empathy to occur, and therefore, alongside face-to-face *seeing*, the bystander model extends to other forms of perceiving the sufferance of the other. One might turn into an innocent bystander by perceiving the distress of the other in various other scenarios: while reading a letter, or hearing the voice of the victim – and film viewing makes no exception from such encounters. The spectator of resistance documentary watches the suffering of other human beings, experiencing some of the distress in the person on the screen, and the spectatorship gets additional nuances of innocent bystanding. The innocent bystander model is in agreement with the spectatorship model put forward by Noël Carroll, where the moral emotions are a subcategory of emotions, activated in the following fashion:

We are riled by the injustices suffered by protagonists and innocent bystanders, angered by children who fail to pay proper deference to their parents, while feeling a sort of moral satisfaction and even admiration towards characters who protect the weak and worthy, and we experience a sense of elevation or joy when justice is restored.<sup>199</sup>

### **3.2.2 The Other: Documentary Character**

We have now a better understanding of the role of the spectator in the empathy equation, and we have a name for it, but what about the other side? Who is *the other*, the one in distress, victim in the non-fiction moving image: a real person, a creative construct, or both? In order to properly define the documentary character, we should, at this point, briefly look at what a documentary essentially is.

One way of defining documentary film has been by stating its function, or role in society. Michael Renov identified four such functions of the documentary film: to record, reveal or preserve; to

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<sup>199</sup> Carroll (2010), 23. However, Carroll uses “innocent bystander” differently: to describe an instance of the film character.

persuade or promote; to analyse or interrogate; to express.<sup>200</sup> However, this list of documentary purposes is inexhaustible or, as film theoretician and documentary maker, Carl Plantinga put it, the purposes of documentary can be limited “only by the breadth of human communication itself”.<sup>201</sup> However, explaining what documentary *is* by explaining what it *should do* is as old as the genre itself. John Grierson who produced the word for it in the first place, also came up with the understanding that documentary is not a copy, but a creative treatment of reality, assuming that all documentaries must by necessity have a clear social purpose. Dziga Vertov’s instructions to the Kino-Eye group were, too, emphasising the function, or the bigger purpose of the genre:

The movie camera was invented in order to penetrate deeper into the visible world, to explore and record visual phenomena, so that we do not forget what happens and what the future must take into account.<sup>202</sup>

The praxis followed the desiderata, and what the genre *must* be was for long what Grierson said it should. Definitions diverge, from

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<sup>200</sup> Renov (1993), 21.

<sup>201</sup> Plantinga (1997), 1.

<sup>202</sup> Vertov (1984), 67.

the prejudicial delineations, such as the popular understanding of documentary as propaganda “trying to persuade us of something”,<sup>203</sup> to equivocal ones. Metz ambiguously stated, as we have seen in the previous chapter, that documentary is fiction, because “all film is fiction film”,<sup>204</sup> while for Dai Vaughan, documentary is “signifying what it appears to record”<sup>205</sup>, because “what makes a film *documentary* is the way we look at it”.<sup>206</sup> More recently, ideal-type definitions, coming from the philosophy of art, instituted the ideal-box in which, if some do not find room, too bad for them: those are not to be considered documentaries.<sup>207</sup>

It is exactly this kind of ideal-approach that the work of Carl Plantinga invalidates in his argumentation of the indexing/assertive stance view, possibly the most comprehensive modern understanding of documentary film as art. It is, of course, not primarily linguistic assertions that Plantinga refers to in his description, but rather moving images, sounds, montage cuts, and the multiplicity of non-fiction assertions. In the core of Plantinga’s

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<sup>203</sup> McEnteer (2006), xv.

<sup>204</sup> Metz (1977/1993), 63.

<sup>205</sup> Dai (1999), 87.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 84

<sup>207</sup> Currie (2004).

wide-ranging definition resides the belief that, for a medium of communication as complex as the documentary, a simultaneous cohabitation between rhetoric and techniques, interpretation and recording is indeed possible: “the fact that a film has a perspective does not make it inauthentic or untruthful”.<sup>208</sup> Primarily, like art itself, documentaries are no closed concepts, but have blurred boundaries. Carl Plantinga attempts to characterise documentary through a “prototype theory” explanation. “Prototypical examples”, placed in the centre of the category, share many of its family resemblances, while a peripheral member of the category might encompass only some or even one sole common attribute, while still fitting into the given category.

The argument is drawn from aesthetics, and especially from Morris Weitz’s 1956 influential essay *The Role of Theory in Aesthetics*.<sup>209</sup> For Weitz, traditional theories and methods of investigating art with their “necessary and sufficient” types of definitions are “doomed to fail”.<sup>210</sup> In a similar fashion, what Plantinga argues for is that traditional attempts of defining

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<sup>208</sup> Plantinga (1997), 221.

<sup>209</sup> Weitz was in his turn drawing on Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical investigations*.

<sup>210</sup> Weitz (1956), 35. Weitz sees essentialist theories as “doomed to fail”.

nonfiction by finding its essential features failed, since not all nonfictions share a single core characteristic, but only “a braid of family resemblances”.<sup>211</sup> For open concepts, such as tragedy, comedy and novel (and documentary makes no exception) there is no single property that the entire category has in common. Morris Weitz’s 1956 proposal for future theories was that, rather than finding yet another essentialist definition, they are to make “recommendations to attend in certain ways to certain features of art”.<sup>212</sup> So the role of the theoretician should change from implying “correct criteria for *recognizing* members of certain legitimately closed classes of works of art into recommended criteria for *evaluating* any putative member of the class”.<sup>213</sup> It is this recommendation that Carl Plantinga follows when prompting the theoretically rich view of documentary, that of the indexing/assertive stance.

Plantinga’s understanding is not entirely novel: it adds to Noël Carroll’s definition of documentary as “reality-indexed”.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Plantinga (1997), 15.

<sup>212</sup> Weitz (1956), 35.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>214</sup> Carroll (1983).

For Carroll, the core of the distinction is that spectators know they are watching a documentary, because the film comes labelled as such by its makers – directors, producers, even distributors.<sup>215</sup> The problem with the “reality-indexed” understanding is that sometimes, as Thomas Austin argues, a film could be ambiguously labelled for a multitude of reasons, most commonly marketing strategies. In this case, the viewer can still have a documentary experience, without having watched a film labelled as such. Therefore Plantinga’s enhancement of Carroll’s “reality-indexed” understanding is the addition of the assertive stance or, as he put it in 1997: “nonfictions assert a belief that given objects, entities, states of affairs, events, or situations actually occur(red) or exist(ed) in the actual world as portrayed”.<sup>216</sup>

The patient reader might wonder where exactly all this will fall into an understanding of the empathy equation in the context of documentary film spectatorship. We have seen by now that the documentary spectator can function as an innocent bystander who, seeing someone in pain, grief, fear or other form of distress, experiences some of this distress, too. But who is this someone,

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 5–45.

<sup>216</sup> Plantinga (1997), 18.

we asked. In the spirit of Plantinga's theory of non-fiction film, our understanding of character would rather benefit from an example-oriented definition. Also, to put forward an all-encompassing definition of the character in non-fiction film would be impossible, and even to approximate one for the purpose of the current work would be improbable, since the films we analyse here are produced over a period of more than 50 years, furthermore, the documentary prototype changed in time.

A film character, by and large, as straightforwardly described by Bordwell and Thomson, is the main vehicle prompting cause and effect in the film's narrative (narrative understood as "a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space").<sup>217</sup> A character in documentary film is thus any entity triggering events, or to whom events occur in the non-fiction moving images, delivered to us with the claim that the character essentially exists, or existed in reality, in the way portrayed in the documentary, or at least left traces to have existed as such.

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<sup>217</sup> Bordwell and Thomson (2008), 75.

The 1954 dinner scene between USA Ambassador John E. Peurifoy and Guatemalan President Jacobo Árbenz Guzman in *When the Mountains Tremble* is a re-enacted scene. Eddie Jones interprets the role of the ambassador, while originally Puertorrican Shawn Elliot plays the role of the president. What we see are the actors, but knowing that the scene is based on declassified CIA documents from 1954 is what provides the two characters with reality stances. Bordwell and Thompson make a valuable distinction between novel characters and film characters. When it comes to film characters, they point out, “[they] typically have a visible body”<sup>218</sup> – but this is not always the case. Serious repercussions come along with the participation in the making of a resistance film, and filmmakers try to find creative ways of documenting the distinct traits of the characters (abilities, aims, ambitions, aspirations) without revealing their recognisable physicality. For this reason, director Iara Lee opens her **THE SUFFERING GRASSES** (2012) with genuine but effective 2D animation scenes, portraying the Syrian revolutionaries as simple

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 78.

colourful spheres, and the members of the repressive regime as cubes.

Even when it comes to such a highly particular example, such as these colourful spheres, the documentary spectator, an innocent bystander, is aware of watching traces of people who exist, or existed in the real world. Therefore, when seeing some of them suffering or in pain, the spectator will experience some of that distress, “which in turn can usually best be alleviated by helping that person”.<sup>219</sup> It is this empathic distress that correlates with the helping behaviour: it precedes helping, reduces in intensity once one helped, or persists when one does not help and, according to Martin L. Hoffman, people know from experience that after helping they will feel better.<sup>220</sup> Hoffman’s theory revises a substantial number of laboratory tests, and following his findings will make it easier to: firstly, understand how various definitions of filmic empathy are actually interconnected and integrate them in a single theory, and secondly, to better understand the mechanisms behind triggering empathy. Hence, we will be closer to elaborating a model for documentary-film generated empathy, as well as to an

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<sup>219</sup> Hoffman (1978), 333.

<sup>220</sup> Hoffman, (2000), 31–32.

answer to the question: what particular filmic means uphold the process?

Since the modes of empathic arousal are complex and many-sided, it would be useful to consider one category at a time. The first three (mimicry, classical conditioning and direct association) are automatic and, for the most part, involuntary, whilst mediated association and role-taking involve complex cognitive processes.

### **3.3 Modes of Empathic Arousal**

#### **3.3.1 Motor Mimicry and Close-Ups**

One reason of discord in film theories, exposed previously, was that a match between the feelings of the viewer and those of the person on the screen is not achievable, the argument most frequently invoked being that the spectator has his own personal, intimate feelings and thoughts, and that they cannot be identical with those of the viewer. Others support the theory according to which, in order for this match to happen, a very accurate understanding of the emotions of the character should precede the imitation. There is however an instance of empathy which indeed involves imitation of feelings, without presupposing any understanding of those particular feelings.

Empathy is an innate capacity, and imitation of the distress in others starts in infancy. Newborns will respond with a cry at the sound of another baby crying. It is as early as 1917 that investigations collected data confirming this newborn-empathy

from infants between 1 and 14 days.<sup>221</sup> At the time only a gramophone was available to record the cries, but as science evolved, measurements based on sophisticated spectrograms left no room for doubt “that vocal properties of an infant's cry contain stimulus elements that are effective in promoting crying in other newborns”.<sup>222</sup>

The most basic empathic mode of arousal, mimicry, is precisely defined by the matching of emotions, when the expression of feelings in the observed is, to some extent, copied: an automatic imitation, principally preceding any accurate understanding of the other's feeling. In 1906 Lipps called that “objective motor mimicry”. As we pointed out in the first chapter, Adam Smith as well observed the phenomenon. Smith didn't restrain this imitation to the facial expressions, but rather noticed that people respond imitatively and automatically with their body as well as their posture:

When we see a stroke aimed and just ready to fall upon the leg or arm of another person, we naturally shrink and draw back our own leg or our own arm; and when it does fall, we

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<sup>221</sup> Blanton (1917).

<sup>222</sup> Simner (1971), 141.

feel it in some measure, and are hurt by it as well as the sufferer.<sup>223</sup>

Martin L. Hoffman, for whom mimicry is even “the very essence of empathy”,<sup>224</sup> insists that it is a process in two stages. Imitation is just one of the two, widely verified by laboratory experiments, which frequently employ empathy-EMG studies. The second stage in the empathy-arousing mode of mimicry is feedback: the facial expression we adopt influences our affective response. Studies starting in the mid-1970s brought about evidence for the impact facial expression has in the way people feel, or how challenging it turns out to be for a person to experience feelings dissimilar to the facial expression they have at that moment in time. Display of cartoons is a favoured method for proving the feedback theory. A German-American team of psychologists, Strack, Martin and Stepper, investigated this hypothesis using cartoons from Gary Larson’s *The Far Side*.

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<sup>223</sup> Smith (1759/2009), 8.

<sup>224</sup> Hoffman (2000), 37.



**Figure 3.1 Paul Ekman/ Photographs from the Papua New Guinea Exhibition**

In a preliminary stage of the experiment, the cartoons had been tested and positively rated as funny. For the actual test, subjects different than those in the pre-test were instructed to tightly hold a pen with their lips, while not using their teeth – thus inhibiting the muscles involved in smiling. Under these conditions, they were asked to rate the same cartoons from *The Fare Side*. Interestingly enough, as opposed to the respondents in the pre-test, those subjects, whose muscles associated with smiling were inhibited, found the cartoons far less funny. This is just one demonstration, out of the many, showing how the innate, automatic motor activity influences the emotional response, thus giving validity to the feedback stage of mimicry.

The culturists might claim that the connection between facial expressions and emotions is culture-specific, but several experiments of Ekman and his colleagues brought conclusive evidence about universal reading of emotions on facial expressions. In an initial experiment, Ekman, Sorenson and Friesen showed images illustrating various facial expressions to people from different cultures, who identified in the same way

sadness, surprise, disgust, happiness, fear, surprise.<sup>225</sup> A couple of years later, in order to straiten the universality theory, Ekman travelled twice to Papua New Guinea, to test the theory and photograph the faces of South Fore people, tribes' people who were illiterate, isolated from any media, and who had no previous contact with westerners. They, too, accurately identified matched facial expressions with the corresponding emotions, thus proving that a series of such expressions do not mirror social conventions, but are universal display of our emotions.<sup>226</sup> And not just somebody else's facial expression of feelings is mimicked: people recurrently engage in bodily and postural mimicry too. Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson have shown that emotional experience is at all times affected by such activation and feedback (emerging from this mimicry, since people mimic each other at all times), and therefore have the tendency to "catch" other people's emotions.<sup>227</sup> Summing up evidence from development, behavioural, clinical and social psychology, anthropology and cross-cultural research, Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson convincingly argued that this

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<sup>225</sup> Ekman and Friesen (1969).

<sup>226</sup> Ekman and Friesen (1971), 124–129, Ekman (1980).

<sup>227</sup> Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson (1994), 7–127.

*catching* of emotions happens “in all times, in all societies, and, perhaps, on very large scales”.<sup>228</sup>

This should solve some of the dispute behind the various understandings of empathy in film studies: the emotional life of the spectator as innocent bystander is indeed only in part influenced by the emotions of the characters on the screen, but there are instances when the spectator shares these emotions in an identical fashion, even in a situation of cross-cultural reception. That is, through facial mimicry – and mimicry is perceived at its best in cinema via the use of close ups. The spectator’s access to the mental state of the characters in film is dependent on the types of close ups used, and on the way they are incorporated in the entirety of the film.

Close ups are framings of shots, and the framing of a shot is the very basic aspect of the creative involvement of the camera in recording the realities in front of it, in order to transmute them, as Marcel Martin put it, in “*matière artistique*”.<sup>229</sup>

The broad distinction would be between large, medium and extreme close-ups (namely between framing of the character

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>229</sup> Martin (1985), 37.

from waist, shoulders and neck up). The tighter the framing, the more the facial expressions will be emphasised. An enhanced effect might be achieved by the use of camera or lenses movements: changing the frames from a larger framing to a closer one would cue the spectator to focus on the facial expressions, enabling a mimicking effect. As will be later shown in an analysis of an early movie made in apartheid South Africa, **THE END OF DIALOGUE** (1970), the use of close ups in a documentary largely constituted out of general shots will obviously trigger more mental tension.

### 3.3.2 Simple Cognitive Modes of Empathic Arousal: Conditionig and Association

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The simple cognitive modes, classical conditioning and direct association represent the next, still rudimentary level in the development of empathic arousal in children. Davis defines classical conditioning as follows:

Affective reactions to others result from past situations in which the individual perceived affective cues in another person while directly experiencing the same affect. The pairing of these two events makes it more likely that subsequent exposure to such cues will evoke the affective state.<sup>230</sup>

Classical conditioning differs from mimicry in two ways. Firstly, as opposed to the first one, which is automatic, classical conditioning requires the observer/spectator to invest at least some very basic cognitive activity; secondly, while mimicry is a response to the victim's facial expression, conditioning is a response to the

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<sup>230</sup> Davis (1994), 39.

victim's situation. This conditioning-generated empathic distress may bring along in the viewer feelings similar to those of the victim because, as Hoffman added, following Ekman et al.:<sup>231</sup> (a) All humans have certain distress experiences in common (loss, injury, deprivation), (b) they are structurally similar to each other and therefore likely to process distress-relevant information similarly, and (c) they are therefore likely to respond to similar stressful events with similar feelings.<sup>232</sup>

The other simple mode of empathic arousal, direct association, is similar to classical conditioning, but however more general. The name refers to the association the observer makes between the victim's distress, on the one hand, and on the other the memory of similar instances the observer experienced. This does not refer to a one to one match, neither is it obligatory for the observer to have ever experienced anything close to the exact situation the victims experienced, but rather, as Hoffman noted already in 1984:

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<sup>231</sup> Hoffman (2000), 45.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 46

Their facial expression, voice, posture, or any other cue in the situation that reminds us of past situations associated with our experience of that emotion may evoke that emotion in us.<sup>233</sup>

To this, Hoffman added in 2000 that the only requirement would be for the observer to have some feelings of the same nature. The sight of a wounded arm might remind the little boy of his own previous experience, and the boy might experience again some of those past painful experiences (but clearly, only if the little boy already had himself some sort of a wound of his own).

Mimicking, classical conditioning and direct association require very basic cognitive processes (they might not even lead to the viewer's comprehension that his or her feelings of distress are actually a response to somebody else's painful situation). They are innate and demonstrate without a doubt that human beings are built up in such a way as to experience the emotions of others, and even mere seeing or hearing can evoke empathy.

We see now that there is no purposefulness in limiting our use of empathy to those emotions imitatively shared and very accurately understood (as Alex Neill suggested). Identical share of

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<sup>233</sup> Hoffman (1984), 105.

emotions does exist, only that it accounts for just one instance of the empathic arousal modes. We also see now how empathic arousal is susceptible to similarities, and as Noël Carroll maintained, the more universal the goals, values, traces the character will have, the more plausible that the necessary bound for sharing emotions will be established, since people are inclined to respond to similar distressful situations in similar manners, and even if not everybody shared a tragic past, there are common, universal grounds when it comes to fear of disease and dying, or the loss of a dear one, or a betrayal in love. And the nature of scenarios does not have to be so dramatic: regret, defeat, longing, are common language in a cross-cultural reception.

Hugo Münsterberg and Amy Coplan, a hundred years away from each other, remarked that the spectator has his own personal, independent emotional life, and this is why his or her emotional reactions might in some cases be still a result of the emotions of the characters in the moving images, but very different in type and intensity (like pity for pain). This, however, requires the performing machinery of the advanced cognitive modes.

### **3.3.3 Advanced Modes of Empathic Arousal: Language Mediated Association and Perspective-Taking**

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Mediated association and perspective taking require imagination, and more creativity in employing ways to trigger viewer's empathy. Triggering empathy will however require more time and more mental effort than the previous three modes.

Verbal mediated empathic arousal, or mediated association refers, like direct association, to a correlation between the victim's feelings and some past situation the observer himself experienced, just that this time the association is not automatic, but it is intermediated through language. It requires interpretation, because what triggers empathic response are not the words *per se*, but their semantic meaning. It is therefore an asset if the documentary character is not only a good speaker, but also an expert in putting feeling into words. Mediated association makes voice over an important tool for arousing empathy; voice can then accompany explanative or unrelated images, and sound cues – cry, moaning – supplement the language, accelerating the empathic response when the viewer can only imagine a face expression.

Through mediated association, empathic stimuli might already precede the first encounter with the character (when the information about the victim proceeds the sequence where the victim is shown). It would be a far-fetched conclusion to reach, that the trauma and distress can be recorded and *shown* as such in the resistance documentary. In fact, the situations when filmmakers actually “catch” the most traumatic moments on camera are rare and exceptional. It is true that, with the on-going expansion of recording devices, when anyone can film or be filmed, documentary makers might get their hands on the recorded traumatic scene, but they would still have to creatively incorporate it in the non-fiction film, which often implies providing a descriptive, verbal context. In other instances, a traumatic event has not been filmed at all, but it is reminisced and evoked by the victim. It is in the above-described hypostases that the verbally mediated association comes into play. If characters describe their experience vividly enough, and the strength of the filmic means counterweighs the absence of the actual “proof”, the spectator will be driven to imagine the traumatic episode, and these imagined

scenes can be as clear and vivid to the observer, as they are to the victim.<sup>234</sup>

The verbal stimuli have the particular property of establishing some distance between the observer and the victim's situation, due to encoding and decoding involved in the complex process, but are more effective combined with mimicry, classical conditioning and direct association, which are vivid and, thus combined, suitable to hold the viewer's attention for a longer time.

From the verbal association, there is a single more sophisticated step we can still take in the empathy venture, and that is role-taking, or what people popularly name "stepping inside the other's shoes", in order to envisage what the other is feeling, thinking, even what and how one sees. Or in Mark Davis' terms: "the tendency of individuals to entertain the perceptual, cognitive, or affective perspective of others".<sup>235</sup> Already early in the development process, children acquire flexibility in assuming several viewpoints belonging to affective states of other people

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<sup>234</sup> Hoffman (2000) suggests that the images in the observer can be even more clear and vivid than the victim's, „as when they cause nightmares in the observers who would otherwise not have nightmares“. However, there doesn't seem to be enough evidence for such a claim yet.

<sup>235</sup> Davis (1994), 47.

(Chandler & Greenspan, 1972), although a complex entertaining of the perspective of others requires a very advanced mechanism of cognitive processing, more demanding than for other empathy-arousing modes. Moreover, perspective taking is a voluntary act: the placing of oneself in the other's situation and eventually imagining, to various extents, how the victim feels or felt like.

Out of all empathy arousing modes, perspective taking is the one that film theory paid more attention to. It was employed, for example, in attempts of defining the effect of the point of view editing. The core of the empathy debate in film studies mainly inquired if the spectator either identifies with the character, or takes the character's perspective of the situation, or only imagines how he or she would be in that particular situation.

We will now see how the above listed three hypostases do not deny each other, but cohabitate within the framework of the single empathic mode of role taking and its three categories. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, measurements employed distinguished between affective and cognitive,<sup>236</sup> however

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<sup>236</sup> Choplan et al. (1985). Also in Enright and Lapsley (1980), 647–674.

Hoffman sorts role taking differently, in other-focused role taking, self-focused role taking, and a combination of the two.

For the other-focused role taking to happen, people need to imagine how *the other* feels in the particular given situation, and in doing so, they might even experience some of the same emotions the other is feeling. Memories from a past similar experience, or even just concerns that something similar might have happened to the observer – even if it never did – might enhance these emotions. Self-focused role taking, like the name implies, presupposes that, when one observes someone in a distressful situation, the observer imagines how she or he would feel in that given situation. Information about the victim, the context and circumstances, or cues from voice and posture or verbal association, they all might enhance the intensity of role taking. Hoffman's conclusion seems to be that the intensity of self-focused role taking is higher than that of other-focused role-taking. In other words, imagining how you would feel in the place of the other has a higher empathic effect, than imagining how the other is feeling. Hoffman partially followed Stotland (1969) in this, who provided the best known experiment in measuring empathy, by manipulating the perceptual set with which someone observes somebody else's distress. The key to Stotland's approach

introduced a set of instructions which manipulated the objective observations with the “imagine” type of instruction. The basic settings of the experiment implies instructing different groups of subjects to either imagine how the other is feeling, how one would feel in that particular situation, or to try to remain objective and follow what happens to the victim (on the screen, through a mirror glass etc.). In over fifty years, multiple such empathy-manipulating experiments were undertaken, relying on a variety of measuring methods, from palmar sweat measurements to self-reporting questionnaires. Results showed without a doubt that, when instructed to imagine, people have more intense empathy-generated feelings than when trying to stay objective, and attentively observe the victim. Furthermore, the ones who imagine how they would feel in that given situation have been reported to have even more intense feelings, than those who only tried to imagine how the victim feels like.

Some instances of self-focused empathic feeling can be so intense, that the thus-generated distress entirely moves the

attention from the victim to the observer's personal distress, fatigue which can no longer be defined as empathy.<sup>237</sup>

The combination of the two, the "other-focused", concentrated interest in the victim's distress, and the more potent "self-focused" role taking is, according to Hoffman, the most powerful scenario, and that presupposes that the observer shifts back and forth between the two. At this point, it became apparent that, in order to describe the phenomenon that enables the spectator to place himself or herself in the situation of the character on screen, it is valuable to preserve the term of *identification*. Besides being such an accurate description of what so often happens while viewing a film, identification also comes along with extensive theoretical work.

We already know two preconditions necessary for identification to happen: paying attention and a (not necessarily

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<sup>237</sup> Hoffman (2000), 57, supports this theory with an interview with a student expressing her feelings at the news that a friend of hers was just told her baby had Down's Syndrome. "When this occurred I was just so engrossed in my own thoughts about what it would feel like, that I forgot all about my friend and her condition". However, for Hoffman, this sort of "egoistic drift" points out empathy's fragility, and highly contributes to rounding his definition: "also humans can empathise with the other they are not the other".

realistic, but) reality-like environment, in the sense that space and objects are perceived in reality, and we know this can be achieved with the use of cut-aways, changing of angulation, depth of field. We have already underlined some of the role that mere *paying attention* has: it makes empathy with a character in the film inevitable, since watching a film implies by its nature paying attention; the very filmic means which contribute to securing attention are thus contributing to the securing of empathy. However, paying attention is a process in two interrelated steps: on one hand, it secures empathy, on the other hand, when empathising, spectators are consequently paying more attention to the filmic situation and to the background details of the story.

The influence empathy has on attention is confirmed by more recent experiments, which use Stotland's "imagine" type of instructions, but with a twist. In the more recent experiments, people undertaking the experiment are not only asked to imagine how the victim is feeling, or how they would feel in that particular situation, but rather subjects receive instructions of the following type: "picture to yourself just how she feels in that situation", "please try to empathize". The results were similar (people who were instructed to empathise did indeed empathise more than those who were asked to remain objective), but some of those

role-taking experiments, which manipulate observational process using moving images, shed additional light on the relationship between film empathy and attention. The experiment designed by Regan and Totten from Cornell University presented to female students a seven minutes videotape.<sup>238</sup> The videos displayed a basic encounter between Margaret and another youngster while chitchatting. The subjects from the group instructed to empathise with Margaret also paid more attention to her situation: when questioned, the subjects in the “empathy” group provided more accurate answers about the situation in the video. The empathic subjects “took the role of the other” and when answering the questionnaires “provided attributions more like those typically offered by actors themselves”. This is yet another way to think about the relationship between attention and empathic spectator.

Michotte, we remember, also suggested that attention is an important element in the empathic process, but back at the end of the 1950s, he was more concerned with the conditions established for the viewing process, among them, the darkness of the cinema and the brightness of the screen. Contrary to what Michotte

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<sup>238</sup> Regan and Totten (1975), 850–856.

assumed, film is not an exclusively celluloid experience. Today, the viewing of a documentary film is not bound to happen exclusively or even preponderantly in the cinema venue, and the viewing conditions changed in unexpected ways – and keep doing so. Resistance documentaries are made with an audience in mind, but less with the knowledge of the medium the films are going to be shown in. Not rare are the instances when, close to finishing such films, documentary makers do not have the distribution secured, and without knowing if those films will be shown on TV, or even have a DVD release, if they are going to have a cinematic release, or if their films will not end up only being watched online, on a highway, while the spectator is driving his car to work. And all the above modalities of showing the film do not necessarily exclude each other. So the securing of attention, and its contribution to complex modes of empathic arousing, are dependent on the means inside the moving image rather than, as Michotte assumed half a century ago, relying solely on the viewing environment conditions.

There are yet other prerequisites for something as complex as role taking to happen. To better understand the mechanism behind it, we should return to Noël Carroll's conclusions. Carroll insists, that characters should be morally good and have a variety of virtues. In Carroll's own terminology, it is only then that we can

talk about *solidarity*, that special bond with the morally good (we are going to maintain Noël Carroll's terming here). The spectator as innocent bystander can arrive to perceiving the character as *morally good* after a sharing of beliefs, goals, values. The broader, more universal those values are, the more appealing to a larger audience the character will be. If those common beliefs are made clear, and thus unambiguously understood, the spectator is increasingly inclined to emotionally react to this commonness. Once this type of relationship is established, and solidarity secured, the character might show more ambivalent, complex features.

And we can still be solidary with some morally ambivalent characters (and is it not morally questionable what guerrillas, insurgents, dissidents often do?) if, as the film scholar suggested, the bad are actually *very bad*.<sup>239</sup> Or, the way the moral development psychologist recommended, "the harm-doer" is put in a more sympathetic light, thus reducing negative feelings for a certain gesture, and replacing them with empathy-generated feelings.

As film theory for a long time concluded, starting maybe with the work of Balázs, identification with the film characters is

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<sup>239</sup> Carroll (2004), 173.

facilitated by the seeing *from the inside*, from the film character's perspective, which allows several degrees of character engagement.<sup>240</sup> In achieving that, documentary makers might at first glance seem to have far less creative possibilities than fiction directors have at their disposal. Documentary makers, and especially those making resistance documentaries, do not always have the conditions to calculate all the filmmaking steps, but have to be adaptable, and have to improvise on the spot. Filmmaking conditions are often so extreme, that there is no possibility to properly set a camera, or carry a tripod in a several-days long march. This is not entirely bad news since, as Andre Gide's famously remarked, sometimes "art is born on constraint, lives by struggle, dies of freedom".<sup>241</sup> As we will show in the Part II of the current work, proponents of the documentary genre had to invent new, creative filmic ways in order to make the experience of seeing from the inside possible.

Storytelling strategies shifting the attention back and forth from self focused role taking to other focused role taking,

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<sup>240</sup> Balázs (1945/1970), 48.

<sup>241</sup> Gide (1904/2000), 94.

ascertaining characters with a variety of virtues, and ways of securing solidarity with them, will be developed upon in Part II.

### **3.4 The Trouble with Empathy: Limitations and Biases**

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Opponents to the overall view that empathy can contribute to morality might also resist the theses prompted in this work: that documentary film means generating empathic feelings in the viewer, which might eventually generate a moral behaviour or desire to help. Philosophy Professor Jesse Prinz insists that moral judgements, which trigger feelings such as anger and disgust, are what should be held responsible for our morality, and not our empathy.<sup>242</sup> One argument behind such a radical theses is that empathy is prone to biases, that we tend to empathize more with the people we are in close relationship to; or we can be overwhelmed by emotions and thus not focus on the crime itself.

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<sup>242</sup> Prinz (2001), 214–233.

These two reasons, Prinz implies, make empathy an unsuitable tool for cross-cultural reception:

In other words, the dark side of empathy may be intrinsic to it, and it may infect our other moral responses. Empathy is not a suitable tool for morality. We can no more overcome its limits than we can ride a bicycle across the ocean; it is designed for local travel.<sup>243</sup>

Although it would accelerate our task to just overlook such arguments altogether, we cannot discharge the quarrels of the philosophy scholar: empathy is indeed subject to biases and overarousal. Nevertheless, beyond the shortcomings of the fellow feeling, evidence abounds – and mounts – that empathy greatly contributes to altruistic motivation to help. Arguments are made that empathy-generated altruism not only brought us so far through evolution but,<sup>244</sup> as Jeremy Rifkin advanced in his monumental work, *Empathy and Civilization*, that it is only the development of the human disposition, throughout time, towards global empathy, that might even stop the global entropic

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<sup>243</sup> Prinz (2001), 229.

<sup>244</sup> Davis (1994), 29.

downfall.<sup>245</sup> Rifkin went as far as arguing that it is the current race between the development in empathy and entropy that will decide between the saving or the perishing of the human species. To solve this dilemma, we should fearlessly look now into the dark side of empathy.

### 3.4.1 Similarity Bias in Cross-Cultural Reception

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Bias, or rather biases, influence the empathic distress or its intensity, and are of two main natures: *familiarity bias* and *here and now bias* (the very core of the differences between experiencing someone else's through a documentary film viewing, as opposed to distress face to face).

Familiarity should be understood in its general meaning here; *familiarity* is what makes us favour not only family members, but also friends, group-members, people who resemble us in some

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<sup>245</sup> Rifkin (2009).

meaningful way - people we are accustomed with, or with whom we share some degree of familiarity. Various studies undertaken on offenders, for example, confirmed that they experienced less guilt when the crime was committed against members of another group. It is in-group people we are more inclined to empathize with, and eventually help (again, group understood in a large sense, of religious, national scope, but even people with whom we share the same goals, as Noël Carroll remarked).

Evolutionary theorists argue that familiarity bias might have evolutionary reasons, since natural selection made way to empathy toward family and in-group members. Krebs made that obvious in 1975, with a study on students who were firstly given personality tests and were afterwards told they were being paired with other students on the basis of computer analyses.<sup>246</sup> Some were told they were having similar personality profiles with the paired students, while others were told the very opposite, that they

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<sup>246</sup> Krebs (1975), 1134–1146. The test measured the psychophysiological responses (heart rate, skin conductance, and vasoconstriction) of 60 males (average age: 20 years old) as they observed a performer play a roulette game. Half were to believe that they had similar personality and similar values with the performer, while the others were led to believe that they were dissimilar. The men who believed they were similar to the performer tended to react more strongly than the others.

actually have different personality profiles than their pairs. Interestingly enough, those who believed they have a similar psychological profile were reporting more pronounced psychological response. Even more so for our interests here, those who believed themselves as being similar with their pairs reported more empathic distress (when the ones they have been paired with, for example, were waiting to receive electroshocks).

This is a core issue for resistance documentaries, which address a cross-cultural audience. As I will exemplify in Part II, filmmakers try in various creative ways to draw on universal features and similarities of some sort, and employ the bias for cross-cultural empathy. This does not mean that people should be portrayed in films as being all the same, following an ideal recipe. But we have seen the role of personal intimate investment from the side of the spectator and how important it is to activate this mechanism. The Salvadorian Guerrilla in **IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE**, who fights for several years in the mountains, does not seem to be afraid of the fights, but he is troubled because of his mother, whom he misses, who might be sick or even have died. And while the average spectator might not really care for the fighter in the mountains of the small country with the exotic name,

still almost every viewer can have feelings of distress in response to the grief of the child for his missed mother.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with familiarity bias. It is natural to favour people you care a lot about, with whom you grew up, and by and large people who have similar concerns with those you have. And above all, people still help strangers, as research shows (most people in studies are actually strangers). The filmmaker only needs to employ the familiarity bias, and invoke people's sensitivity for their own kind in the support of the cross-cultural empathic reception.

### **3.4.2 When Empathy is too Much: Over Arousal and Fatigue**

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The intensity of the empathy-generated feelings is influenced by the intensity of the empathic distress. If the empathic distress is too weak, then it might be likely that it does not generate prosocial action. So what happens if, in order to prevent a frail empathic distress through a variety of empathy-generating mechanisms, the spectator's distress becomes too intense? We all know people turn

their faces away when a film sequence becomes too gory, or too much pain is displayed. What about when the overall situation is too painful, or the distress is just too much to sustain?

The problematic outcome of empathic over-arousal is that it can utterly remove the observer out of the empathic mode. Martin L. Hoffman defines empathic over-arousal as an involuntary process that occurs when an observer's empathic distress becomes so painful and intolerable that it is transformed into an intense feeling of personal distress, which may move the person out of the empathic mode entirely.

Hoffman sees the problem emerging from the use of multiple modes of empathic awakening, since the combination of the outcomes of so many arousal modes could turn the suffering of a victim in such a painful experience for the viewer. In other words, one imagines oneself in the victim's situation, leading to empathic distress, and on top of that the recollection of traumatic events from the spectator's own past, which in turn lead to personal distress – all this pulling the spectator's attention away from the victim – paradoxically so, since the advantages of many modes, and an interplay between them, are evident.

An appropriate tuning of the empathic package seems to be the solution here. Hoffman also postulates that over arousal is a

limitation when it comes to situations involving strangers, while being an asset when the observer is in a way committed to the victim (through work or family bonding, or other sort of commitment). This is particularly important for two reasons. Firstly, it shows the necessity of carefully choosing the amount and types of filmic empathy arousing modes. Further more, in documentary films conceived for a distinctively foreign audience, the question of over-arousal is very sensitive, as opposed to those documentaries having a function in their particular geo-political context – which explains why filmmakers so differently approach the two directions. And yet again, creating linking contexts, providing some universality to the story, enabling the stranger-spectator to bond with some aspect of the victim's background, is what will increase the chances of empathic connection against the odds of over-arousal. This seems to be one constant red thread throughout the entirety of filmic empathy theory.

Following too much empathy there is at least one other, very different phenomenon at risk: prolonged exposure to distress, over an extended time span, might generate habituation.<sup>247</sup> If

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<sup>247</sup> Hoffman (2000) 206–7.

someone is repeatedly exposed to the sufferance of another fellow human, the empathic distress will have the tendency to diminish as time goes by, “to the point of the person becoming indifferent to the victim’s suffering”.<sup>248</sup>

Hoffman links this empathic self-destructive mechanism to a phenomenon that interests us greatly here, in his own terms “social reform photography”. There is already a long culture of people being exposed to hard breaking lives of others, to refugees and victims of dictatorial regimes, victims of famine or natural disasters. There is evidence of people who, morally outraged when seeing such photos, travelled long distances just to offer help for alleviating the suffering of strangers. However, recent experiments undertook by Campbell et al. show that the image-generated empathic effect has a limited life span.<sup>249</sup>

In two different experiments, participants were being shown impressive (motorcycle stunts) and shocking images (billboard of masked Lady Gaga). After repeated exposure to such images, participants who already viewed the shocking images many times predicted that new participants in the study would react less

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 205–206.

<sup>249</sup> Campbell et al. (2014), 272–285.

intensely than they actually reacted, showing that too much exposure to other people's distress can degenerate in an empathic gap, or desensitization. Further measurements showed that participants were not aware that repeated exposure to these images affected their prediction.

Nevertheless, as much as it is true that prolonged exposure to distressful images can lead to desensitization, recent empirical findings show that the exposure to such images can also (still) lead to empathy and helping. The questionnaire-based study of Prot et al.,<sup>250</sup> undertook on people from 7 countries in 4 continents, explored the relationship between empathy and helping, on one hand, and the use prosocial media (films, TV show and video games) on the other hand. Empathy was measured using the empathic concern and perspective-taking subscales from Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index, described at the beginning of this chapter. The results finally showed empirically that the use of prosocial media, through the arousal of empathy, prompts long-term prosocial behaviour.

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<sup>250</sup> Prot et al. (2013/2014), 358–368.

Equally important for us here, the results were similar across countries, and the conclusion of the equally international research group was that “knowledge of these long-term effects may help parents, policymakers, and other concerned citizens make decisions about what kind of society they want for the future and how to create it”.<sup>251</sup>

So even if today, travelling the world to help the distressed might sound like a bourgeois luxury, we know that the documentary genre constantly reinvents itself, its means and stylistics and, as we will see in the last part of the present work, even the medium itself, thus fighting habituation, making room for empathic feelings and facilitating cross-cultural determination to help. It does perform as “sudden, unexpected occurrences that create a powerful emotional responses that ‘trigger’ a re-examination of one’s life choices. This in turn can lead to a new moral perspective and sense of social responsibility”.<sup>252</sup> But, in order to achieve that, which filmic means and mechanisms are to be employed?

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 366.

<sup>252</sup> Valadez (1994), 54.

Next, in order to come closer to an answer to this question, examples from past production of resistance documentaries from a wide range of geo-political contexts will be brought under scrutiny: films made in the revolutions in Central and South America in the 1970s and 1980s, rare productions from revolutionary situations in Guatemala, Philippines and Mexico, among others, early documentaries from the South African apartheid, and films that emerged from the more recent revolutions in Eastern Europe and in the Arab World.



## **PART II:**

### **REVOLUTION – DOCUMENTARY – EMPATHY**

## 4 Empathy – With Whom?

### 4.1 Empathy for the Group, the Intricate Type of Empathy: Case Study: IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE

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In 1979, in El Salvador began the “hoped-for swift uprising”<sup>253</sup>, a promise for democracy and a better life in a country suffering under poverty, inequality and, above all, a country suffering under an illegitimate, authoritarian military regime. In the following years, however, the “swift uprising” sunk in a bloody civil war. For the whole of the 1980s, the Salvadoran government received from the United States, under both Carter and Reagan administrations, \$ 4424 million in economic and military aid.<sup>254</sup> That makes about \$ 1 million for every fiscal year, including “counterinsurgency expertise, training and intelligence data. U.S. Marines even are reported to have led a number of attacks against the guerrillas”.<sup>255</sup> An American intervention was on-going in Central America, and

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<sup>253</sup> Foran (1997), 215.

<sup>254</sup> Dunkerley (1994), 145, Appendix 8 and 9.

<sup>255</sup> Goodwin (2001), 227.

American money was spent there, yet the American citizens knew little about who the Salvadoran ‘enemies’, the guerrillas, actually were.

It is not that the American intervention in El Salvador was a taboo topic in the United States. On the contrary, it was a constant presence in the public discourse and TV broadcasts; only that, as the media scholar Pat Aufderheide argued, it was a topic surrounded by a profound misapprehension. To make this point clear, Aufderheide reviews a 1984 *TV Guide* analysis of no less than 661 TV spots and programs about the conflict. After reviewing all of the films, the media scholar concludes: “One ends up knowing almost as little about Central America, and why the U.S. is involved there, as one knew before”.<sup>256</sup> Aufderheide argues that the misperception was not limited to the role of the U.S. in El Salvador, and in Central America; it was a more generalised confusion, extended to “the nature and even the geographical location of the conflict”.<sup>257</sup> In the revolutionary years of Central America, and especially in the first half of the 1980s, some American filmmakers took upon themselves to show the American

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<sup>256</sup> Aufderheide (1990), 151.

<sup>257</sup> Aufderheide (1990), 151.

documentary spectator a less abstract and more humane face of this particular, supposedly hostile group: the guerrillas. Two such documentary productions from El Salvador, scrutinising the empathy for the group, are **EL SALVADOR: ANOTHER VIETNAM** (by Glenn Silber and Tete Vasconcellos) and **IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE** (directed by Frank Christopher). Their far-reaching distribution and reception in the United States was invigorated by the Oscar Nominations, in 1981 and 1984, respectively.

In the previous chapter it was discussed how one's empathy for a group is the most complex and cognitively challenging form of empathic distress. One needs to understand the suffering of not only a single human fellow but, grasping social concepts, one comprehends the suffering of an entire group of people. When empathising with the group, one can be motivated to adopt ideologies concerning the alleviation of the group's distress.<sup>258</sup> But it is still the empathy for individual members of a group, enhanced by the understanding that those individuals belong to a larger community, which mainly generates feelings of distress for the entire faction. Empirical findings of Batson et al.

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<sup>258</sup> Hoffman (1980, 1990, 2000).

showed how increasing empathy for a even a member of a stigmatized group could improve the positive attitude towards the entire group.<sup>259</sup> Before analysing how that works in film, using the El Salvadorian example of **IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE**, let us briefly look at one of these laboratory experiments.

Batson et al. asked participants to listen to pilot radio shows for a possible broadcast, *Behind Bars* (fake interviews, in reality conceived only for the empathy measuring experiments). Participants in the test were divided into two sets of respondents. In the first set, participants were asked to remain objective; while in the other, participants were instructed to imagine how the people in the interviews felt like. In the (fictitious) interview, a murderer serving a life-sentence was recalling his story, and how he got to shoot someone, his feelings and regrets about it. Empathy was evaluated based on inquiries where the respondents had to asses, on a scale from 1 to 9, statements like *Anyone who commits murder must be inhuman* or *Convicted murderers have no one to blame but themselves* or *Our society should do more to rehabilitate and educate convicted murderers*, and so on. Those participants, who were

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<sup>259</sup> Batson et al. (1997), 105–118.

instructed to imagine how the convict felt like, were reported to have higher empathic level than those who were asked to remain objective. More important for us here, in a second stage of the test, the psychologists assessed the long-term effects of those brief instances of empathising: do these transient occurrences of empathy influence an overall positive attitude for the stigmatized group (in the particular experiment of Batson et al., the convicted murderers). One to two weeks after the first stage of the research described above, the participants were telephonically contacted for a survey. The participants did not know the survey was associated with the experiment. Participants were again asked questions about convicted murderers. The results proved surprising: even if, after the first test, the effects of empathy for a convicted murderer showed only a slight change to the positive in the overall attitude towards convicted murderers, two weeks later attitudes have evolved. Even the participants who did not show much higher empathy in the laboratory test changed their attitude towards the stigmatised group to the positive, within only two weeks time. Batson et al. concluded that it is possible to improve attitudes towards a highly stigmatised group, triggering empathy for the individual, and that the “empathy-attitude effect is not as short-

lived as we had feared. Apparently, it can outlive the empathic emotion itself'.<sup>260</sup>

It is enough evidence to assume that in order to trigger the audience's empathy for the group, in our particular case the rebel group, the distinction of singular figures and stories is essential. The documentary maker aiming to generate empathic feelings for an entire group will, by necessity, develop at least one unique character, an individual who is going to be elaborately shaped, whose single personality and misfortune is easier to comprehend and empathise with. How does the theory transpire in practice?

A relevant case study is **IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE**, filmed in El Salvador at the beginning of the 1980s. On February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1982, Frank Christopher, and his film crew of three, clandestinely entered El Salvador and spent about six weeks in areas controlled by the guerrillas, mainly around the slopes of the Guazapa Volcano, not far away from the capital city of San Salvador, and in the northern area bordering Honduras. It took Frank Christopher and his team another year and a half to finish the film, **IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE**. The voice over,

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<sup>260</sup> Batson et al. (1997), 116.

narrated by Martin Sheen and reminiscent of the **APOCALYPSE NOW** mood, is unambiguous in pointing out the filmmakers' take on the conflict: it is only "in the name of the people" that the peasants turned fighters are resisting on the slopes of the volcano, it is "in the name of the people" that the guerrillas are fighting the bloody El Salvadorian regime backed by the U.S. The intentions of the American film-crew are explicit and their partaking transparent. **IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE** had a function, and that was to give a voice and a human face to the Salvadorian insurgents and make their peril, suffering and struggle understandable to the Western audience, mainly the North American one.

Documentary films like this one, emerging from uprising contexts and presenting the conflict from the perspective of the resistance movements are, evidently, considered offensive in the countries where they were filmed, and are often banned. They are, though, commonly produced with a foreign audience in mind, and from early on in the production process, these films carry the very function of informing and moving an audience from outside the conflict zone or group, aiming to generate cross-cultural empathy or cross-group empathy.

For the particular group in our case study (North American film audience at the beginning of the 1980s), the association between Latin American interventions and the Vietnam War was pervasive. Several films, both documentaries and fiction, were contributing to making it difficult for the American public to forget the Vietnam War aftermath. Francis Ford Coppola's **APOCALYPSE NOW** was particularly popular, and increased the popularity of its leading actor, Martin Sheen.<sup>261</sup> So it is not far fetched to assume that the use of Martin Sheen's narration must have produced bitter associations in the minds of many filmgoers. The aftermath of the fiasco in Vietnam made way in the United States for the so-called "Vietnam syndrome", and to the ubiquity of questioning the use and the morals behind supporting foreign regimes to fight communist opposition.<sup>262</sup> Hinting on the Vietnam War legacy was rather the norm than the exception in the filmic narrative of Latin America in general, and El Salvador in particular. Glenn Silber and Tete Vasconcellos overtly titled their film **EL SALVADOR: ANOTHER VIETNAM?**

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<sup>261</sup> For his performance in **APOCALYPSE NOW**, Martin Sheen was nominated for BAFTA Award for Best Actor.

<sup>262</sup> Simons (1998).

(1981), which commences by using the same title, followed by an unequivocal question mark.

It is mainly for the above-described, large audience, that **IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE** was made, in a very different manner to the TV-style approach and its claim to objectivity. It must, however, be briefly pointed out here that the film had its various layers of interest to a smaller, more informed audience, and that is communicated from the very beginning, through the title. For the large audience, the title refers to the guerrilla resistance of Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN),<sup>263</sup> which formed in the Civil War years, between 1980 and 1992, the umbrella organization for the principal five guerrilla fighting groups. We see the human dimension of some of them who, “in the name of the people”, are resisting and fighting from the slopes of the volcano. But the more informed audience might read **IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE** as a reference to the routine political killings in El Salvador and the celebrated speech by the Salvadorian Archbishop Oscar Romero. Archbishop Romero gave the celebrated speech on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1980, the day before

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<sup>263</sup> Today, FMLN is an unarmed, legal political organization in El Salvador.

his assassination, when he begged the government to cease the massacres *in the name of the people*: “In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people whose cries rise to heaven more loudly each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression”.<sup>264</sup>

But the background and historical information, and the complex matters of armed conflict and politics in San Salvador are only very briefly presented, since the focus of director Frank Christopher is on the individual human portraits, assembled in the group picture, almost like a family photo of the FMLN.

How, then, can the problem of the complex and cognitively challenging empathy be solved: imagining and feeling for the faceless inhabitants of a far away land, about whom the distant spectator has perhaps heard of in geography classes, or

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<sup>264</sup> Quoted in America Watch Report (1990), 4. The assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero “in the history and the imaginary of Salvadorans, marks the beginning of their 10-years civil war. It really was a declaration of war in the old-fashion sense. It was – and against all civilians and against the pueblo that he defended so much. It was one—a provocative statement, killing the archbishop, who had been in his homilies and publicly condemning the actions of the army against the people of El Salvador”, as Almudena Bernabeu, attorney in the of Oscar Romero case put it (Transcript of the September 9, 2013 *Democracy Now! The War and Peace Report* available online on: [http://www.democracynow.org/2013/9/9/40\\_years\\_after\\_chil](http://www.democracynow.org/2013/9/9/40_years_after_chil)).

maybe even never before? The editing in the opening scene of **IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE** underlines similar implications, namely that distant, faceless populations are hard to place or grasp, and even harder to trigger empathic distress for.



Figure 4.1 Map of El Salvador, including the regions controlled by the guerrillas. Inserted in **IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE** (1985).

In the very first seconds of the film, the text caption promptly introduces the matter at stake, which might wake the interest of

the American audience: “Since 1980, the United States spent one billion dollars to prevent guerrillas from coming to power in El Salvador”.<sup>265</sup> To complete the picture, the opening scene of the film is the detailed shot of a map of Central America. The implied question appears obvious: but *where* exactly is El Salvador? A long *zoom in* slowly drags the gaze up to the tiny spot on the map, as if to point out the weakness, smallness and fragility of the thus discovered country. What is theoretically an overused artifice for placing the action, the zoom in on the map detail, serves the purpose here. On the other hand, it speaks for itself of the presupposed obliviousness of the supposed spectator, who presumably would not have been able to find this tiny spot on the map without the help of the camera lens’ movement. Once El Salvador is finally a big graphic contour on the screen, the zoom in stops, and the very next shot is a general take of mountain landscape, thus building up on the sense of the location of the insurgents’ nest; concise, distressing background information

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<sup>265</sup> The numbers presented in the film are not far-fetched; military and economic aid coming from the United States to be found in Dunkerley (1994), 145.

about FMLN guerrillas is delivered by a reliable, familiar commentator: Martin Sheen's voice over.



Figure 4.2 **IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE (1985).**

What follows is a key sequence: a group shot that will again be used to end the film. It is a gathering in *en plein air*, showing the guerrilla men, women and children while keeping a moment of silence for their comrades, friends and families, the guerrillas who already died in battle. For the spectator, the opening sequence is a

commemoration for faceless, nameless, identity-less people, FMLN insurgents with exotic names, from the mountains of a small country in Central America – it could have been the commemoration of any dead individuals, anywhere. However, at the end of the 75 minutes of the film, after the spectator “gets to know” (as Martin Sheen’s voice puts it) some of the insurgents, the “moment of silence” scene is shown once more, and this time the spectator’s attitude towards the group will most probably be different. Customarily, when the central character’s construction follows the narrative of the revolution per se, the resistance documentaries are mainly made around a well-portrayed, charismatic revolutionary fighter: the leader of masses, the romantic hero. Charismatic or popular figures of the political movement are also, in their turn, popularly used main figures of the documentaries portraying the movements (Fidel Castro or Salvador Allende). Social media development enabled another type of leader to step in front of the resistance. Without the need of established media to build one’s self-image and get the message across, new types of ideological heroes emerged, like Subcomandante Marcos in Las Chiapas, Mexico; documentary makers made fruitful film characters out of these already-constructed images, too.

But the leader is not always the obvious choice for the *leading* documentary figure. **IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE** puts forward several characters, other than the leaders, which are slowly rendered prominent. Some are roles, parts, jobs or positions in the revolution narrative: “the oldest fighter”, the toothless elderly insurgent who, at the age of 61, took up arms in the memory of his grandfather who fought in the bloody, aborted Salvadoran rebellion in 1932.

In Frank Christopher’s documentary, the ordinary San Salvadorians in the resistance are given faces, and names – Camilo, Julia, Nico, Jeremia, Oscar – and reveal in front of the camera unique personalities. The film is structured around a few core sequences, describing aspects of the fight: the insurgents preparing an attack, the transport of supplies from one guerrilla-controlled territory to another, the nursing of the wounded, or conveying hidden messages and intercepting radio transmissions. Death is a constant occurrence: the diseased are being talked about, displayed, and the threat of death is all around, in almost every shot. And in between these death-striking scenes, the insurgents cook, and wash, or even get married in a surreal ceremony. It is Camilo, Jeremia, Nico, Julia that we get to see washing themselves by the river, dancing at a wedding party or preparing for an attack

on the government forces. Their names and faces are constantly reminded to the viewer.

Nico, a 12-year-old boy, is the character receiving most time in the economy of the film. Nico joined the insurgents after his mother was raped and killed in front of his eyes (“They had her for five minutes and they put two bullets in her head”). Now, he learns how to use a gun while serving, like other boys, as a messenger for the various groups, transporting written messages on the back of his belt from one camp to the other. As the storyline advances, the names and faces of the same characters (Camilo, Jeremia, Nico, Julia) become constant presences.

And it is their names and faces that are shown once more, at the very end of the film, this time in some sort of group obituary. The *keeping a moment of silence* for the comrades who died or disappeared is the sequence which opened the film. It is repeated here, as a closing sequence, but with a difference. This time, in the middle of the “moment of silence”, shots shown previously throughout the 70 minutes film are sketchily inserted. Oscar taking the hand of his new wife, Jeremia in the fight, trying to recover the rifle from a corpse. Martin Sheen’s voice explains the unthinkable: “Some of the people you have got to know have been killed, or disappeared”. After the inserts, a cut returns the

viewers to the forest, at the obituary scene, now already familiar, and its ritual predictable: the fists in the air, guns in the left hand and the moment of silence (Fig 4.4). When the same scene was shown at the beginning of the film, the moment of silence, kept for the dead and disappeared without names or faces, couldn't have meant much for the documentary spectator. But seeing it again at the very end, after "getting to know" some of the people, the spectator's experience is meant to be, this time, entirely different.



**Figure 4.3 Interview with Nico. Footage included in IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE (1985).**

It is not for faceless, identity-less people who were killed or disappeared, and who are thus commemorated, that one is mourning, but people with a name, a past, thoughts – identities. Furthermore, while the initial experience is an outside look, a point on the map and a moment of silence for faceless dead, now even the spectator's position in regards to the events in the film frame is changed.



Figure 4.4 **IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE (1985).**

The long zoom in on the El Salvador map the movie starts with, has been, at the end of 70 minutes film, zoomed in to the smallest detail, that of the individual, since the spectator is no longer just an observer, but a participant in the moment of silence for the people whom he or she “got to know”. This moment of silence is this time a particular, shared experience between insurgents and spectator. Both insurgents and spectators “have got to know” Camilo, Julia, Oscar, Jeremia. The spectator, for once, in this moment of silence, is part of the insurgent crowd. The resolution is not entirely bleak: the name of the most attaching character, the one who received more time in the economy of the film, the 12 year old Nico, expected doubtlessly with unease by some spectators, is not uttered – meaning he is still alive. If empathic feelings are secured for the individuals, for characters like Jeremia and Oscar, it then extends to what in the United States was the “stigmatized group” of the FMLN. The peasants turned fighters in El Salvador, and the understanding of the enormous number of casualties in El Salvador is supposed to be differently perceived. The next issue to be discussed is how exactly empathy for the individual is secured in the first place.

## 4.2 Universal, Yet Distinct: Constructing Rigoberta Menchú in WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE

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*When we were appointed to form the CEH (i.e. Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico or Commission of Historical Clarification), each of us, through different routes and all by life's fortune, knew in general terms the outline of events. As Guatemalans, two of us had lived the entire tragedy on our native soil, and in one way or another, had suffered it. However, none of us could have imagined the full horror and magnitude of what actually happened.*

— Report of *The Commission of Historical Clarification in Guatemala*, 1999<sup>266</sup>

Drawing on David Hume and Adam Smith, the philosopher Richard Rorty insisted that “sad and sentimental stories”<sup>267</sup> are essential in the fields of human rights, since they have the property to make people extend the “circle of the we” to yet other human

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<sup>266</sup> Report of the Commission of Historical Clarification “Guatemala. Memory of Silence” (1999), 11.

<sup>267</sup> Rorty (1993), 134.

beings, identifying them as belonging to the same group – which simply steers people towards not treating the others bad, and help them if their rights have been crushed. But “sad and sentimental stories” are more sensitive to controversy, accuses of one-sidedness or inaccuracies – and this is something the genres of human rights reports, testimonies and documentary films have in common.

Diversity in the construction of film characters charms the documentary spectator, but we have seen how universal features can activate several modes of triggering empathy, and mobilizes the familiarity bias in favour of the empathic process. Noël Carroll also added “morality of the fairly generic sort”, the one which will appeal to a wide, diverse audience. We know by now that empathy is amplified when a person in need is similar to the observer, deriving in an increased tendency to help that person in need.<sup>268</sup>

Before anything else, however, behind the face and the name of documentary characters, the people we see in documentary films are real people, leading their very particular lives in the real world. Preserving their diversity, and in the same

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<sup>268</sup> Batson (1995).

time underlining universal features for which the spectator can have a sort of familiar understanding, while still maintaining a truthful account, is the task, makers of resistance documentaries seem to take upon themselves.

The task, as said, is not only that of filmmakers alone; it is an underlying thread in the human rights domain, and in different written and filmed genres, where one core objective is that of mobilizing empathy. The question prevails, from the very personal styles of biographies, to the genres characterised by fact-based non-emotional writing of human rights reports, which are put together by truth commissions and NGOs: how to present both the diverse and universal sides of the human story, while objectively preserving the facts? Let us briefly look at another of the many endeavours concerned with such questions.

After having worked on human rights reports in Israel, Ron Dudai describes a similar issue in his domain, where the debate on how to generate the reader's empathy rests between relying entirely on data and forensic or stockpiling details, or incorporating testimonies of victims and eye witnesses, alongside personal narratives. The dilemma lies in whether the storytelling will actually limit the reader's emotional involvement or, on the

contrary, the legal language is the one unsuited for creating identification with the victims and generating empathy:

The use of such testimonies allows the creation of a richer scene, beyond the statistics and legal rules. The victims are identified by name, as well as other personal details such as age, gender, and occupation, and they locate the event that the authors describe as “human rights violation” within a broader personal narrative. With this, the testimonies can help generate empathy.<sup>269</sup>

Dudai’s point is that, since the aim of those reports is, also, to render the readers active in the fight against human rights abuses, and because empathy plays a key role in this endeavour, then the ideal version is a combination of the two: the highly reliable forensic data, and empathy-generating personal testimonies. The writing of human rights violation reports does not have to be bad writing, Dudai argues, striped of human presence or political context, and successful examples exist of a mixture of scientific data and background information creatively inserted. The report of the Argentinian Truth Commission, *Nunca Más*, where the novelist Ernesto Sabato was invited to join the team, has become a

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<sup>269</sup> Dudai (2009), 254.

bestseller and was regularly reprinted since 1984.<sup>270</sup> The Guatemalan Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification, *Memory of Silence*, is also given as a positive, original example for the rich explanatory background that it provided on human rights violations there.<sup>271</sup> Even if the authors of the Guatemalan Report deliberately avoid identifying the multiple partakers in the conflict, Rigoberta Menchú's name could not have been left out: "1992: New impetus to the Mayan movement, after Rigoberta Menchú Tum is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize".<sup>272</sup>

Ten years prior to her becoming the first Indian woman holding a Nobel Peace Prize, the Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchú appeared as a leading character in the revolutionary documentary **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE** (directed by Thomas Sigel and Pamela Yates). Menchú's part in this film is a fruitful example for studying the sensitivity of the various sides of character construction, diverse but still universal, morally "of a fairly generic sort", credible but "sad and sentimental", as Rorty puts it.

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<sup>270</sup> An examination of 20 truth commissions and their reports is to be found in Hayner (2011).

<sup>271</sup> Dudai (2009), 262.

<sup>272</sup> The Guatemalan Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification (1999), 76.



Figure 4.5 **Rigoberta Menchú awarded the Nobel Prize.** Footage included in **GRANITO: HOW TO NAIL A DICTATOR** (2011).

Rigoberta Menchú lost her family in brutal ways, in the most violent years of the Guatemalan civil war (1978-1985), and took the path of exile, where she started campaigning for the rights of Guatemala's indigenous people.<sup>273</sup> Starting 1999, she was a subject of controversy and her Nobel Prize contested for some fictitious elements in her autobiography.<sup>274</sup> Some of these

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<sup>273</sup> Menchú's main early achievement is the autobiographical book *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1983), put together and signed by Elisabeth Burgos.

<sup>274</sup> Stoll (1999).

elements, which, in the vernacular, one would say “give colour” to the character, and which generated such controversies,<sup>275</sup> appear in the documentary film she features in, **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE**, one of the two US documentary productions which are linked to the Guatemalan genocide, and the evidencing of it. The two documentary films, **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE** and **GRANITO: HOW TO NAIL A DICTATOR** are realised by the same filmmaking team, but not earlier than 30 years apart, and are very different from each other. **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE** (1983) brings a very complex picture of the background and reasons behind the rise of the guerrilla movements in Guatemala: the large support of the population living in an endemic poverty and the brutal repression of the US-supported Guatemalan government. Some 25 years later, the directors commence a second, very personal film on Guatemalan genocide, **GRANITO: HOW TO NAIL A DICTATOR**, following the complex mechanisms behind the international trial, where the first film, **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE**, is presented as

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

evidence in court.<sup>276</sup> Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed in Guatemala, and in 1982 Pamela Yates was filming the very sharp edges of this crime.<sup>277</sup>

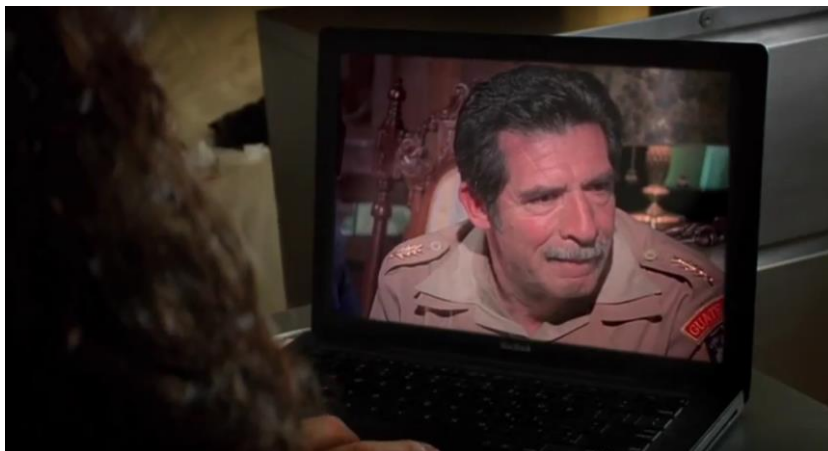


Figure 4.6 Looking for evidence against Ríos Montt in **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE** (1983). Footage included in **GRANITO: HOW TO NAIL A DICTATOR** (2011).

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<sup>276</sup> Due to the particular relationship between the two films, **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE** and **GRANITO: HOW TO NAIL A DICTATOR** are often analysed together. See Gibney (2013), 174–175.

<sup>277</sup> The Commission of Historical Clarification (1999) estimated at 200,000 the total of lives losses and disappearances. The Report also used as evidence documents concerning the US policies in Guatemala, declassified in the first Bill Clinton mandate.

“I didn’t know I was filming a genocide”, a candid filmmaker Pam Yates says in **GRANITO**, reflecting on her work, the footage from the first Guatemalan film, and the stories which determined its creation. Looking back at her 1982 film, with the evidence-informed eyes of the present, Pamela Yates’ self-reflexive remark seems too humble: there are many layers of a very complicated reality in the making, which did actually emerge from **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE**.

The two filmmakers, Pamela Yates (who was also recording the sound) and cinematographer Peter Sigel, filmed in Guatemala at the beginning of 1982, a time of turmoil which is difficult, if not impossible to evaluate and give a verdict for while being in the middle of. It was exactly the time when guerrilla groups just united under Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), a time of elections fraud, army coup d’état replacing one president with another, state of siege declared and the savage repression against civilian population intensified.<sup>278</sup> Even if, later on, Pamela Yates said she was not entirely aware of what exactly she was filming, a lot of the Guatemalan realities are

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<sup>278</sup> Goodwin (2001), 140.

very visible in Yates' and Segal's **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE**, in a visually sophisticated way: the landownership limited to a very small segment of the population, which contributed to the endemic poverty, landlessness leading to urban migration, the authoritarianism of the U.S.-backed military regime, even the complicated role of the catholic church, with the liberation theology influencing the revolutionary movement, they all come through with precision in the 1982 documentary.

The team filmed with the state military, spontaneously embarking in a helicopter throwing anti-guerrilla leaflets. On the other hand, the filmmakers had an extraordinary access to the guerrilla base camps, and the civilian population supporting it. The savage repression which was growing *as they were filming* is given evidence through complex editing. The amount of information encompassed in **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE** is very ambitious: in the 83 minutes of the film, the timeline slowly and with clarity advances from the 1954 CIA-sponsored overthrowing of the democratic, reform-oriented president Arbenz, all the way to the hype of the civil war, at the beginning of the 1980s.

Films from Guatemala were rare at the time, even if the beginning of the 1980s was a period when, generally speaking, more films from Central America were making their way to

cinemas, televisions, but also to educational and church screenings in the United States.<sup>279</sup> American and European filmmakers were increasingly present there, but meanwhile, following the Cuban example, the local filmmaking production started to emerge. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 1979, right after the revolutionary Sandinista victory, INCINE (Nicaraguan Institute of Cinema) was constituted through governmental decree; the Film Institute of Revolutionary El Salvador, and the Collective *Cero á la Izquierda* (Zero on the Left) were also delivering films to the United States. It was not, however, the case with Guatemala, the country where state violence was the “most deadly in the region”.<sup>280</sup> **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE** was at the time an exceptionally uncommon opportunity to see a documentary film on the Guatemalan conflict. Considering the obviously precarious and frantic conditions in which it was filmed, it is equally surprising that it presents a sharp picture of those days, while at the same time it is made out of high-quality material, with beautifully elaborated filmic sequences.

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<sup>279</sup> Lasage (1982), 15–20.

<sup>280</sup> Goodwin (2001), 161.

Some of the scenes captured are visual documents of crimes against humanity – especially the impressive funeral of Luis Godoy, abducted by police forces, and then discovered the next morning, his throat slashed. In the narrative of the film, this funeral sequence builds on how ordinary citizens like Louis Godoy could have been associated with activists in opposition organisation, even if they were not at all a member of any, and suffer repercussions, and how that infuriated friends, family members, neighbors, who, in their outrage, truly went to join the guerrillas. The intensity grows towards the end of the film, when a unique aftermath of a massacre is shown, with mourners around the corpses on the ground.

With all the above, however, the film would have been, maybe highly qualitative, informing and with a document-value, but it would not have had the empathy generating property it does evidently have. There is an extra element, a solution that came as a radical break in style, later in the editing process.<sup>281</sup> An interview

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<sup>281</sup> Yates (1988), 542–553. In an interview with Alan Rosenthal, Yates reminisces how she met Rigoberta Menchu in New York, and a collaborative work stayed at the geneses of the film as it is. They watched together the materials, and afterwards Rigoberta scripted the parts she wanted to say.

with a 24-year-old Guatemalan Indian was recorded in a studio and split into thirteen inserts, distributed throughout the film. The young Guatemalan woman, whose family had fallen victim to the brutality of the regime, was Rigoberta Menchú, who was awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize ten years later, but who at that time, as a film reviewer from the New York Times remarked, was still simply “a young peasant woman”.<sup>282</sup> The filming style, the content of the confession and the way this is structured throughout the film, all contribute to securing empathy for a familiar, yet very particular young woman, and help the spectator to get close to one of the many victims of the Guatemalan regime.

The statements made in front of the camera by Rigoberta Menchú are contrasting not only in style, but also in tempo, with the rest of the film. All the rest, including originally shot footage from Guatemala, television archive material with dramatic moments, the sit-down interviews with the president, and even the two re-enactment scenes have a sense of urgency, of filming on the run, in a hurry. It is a very dense filmic material, and the level of details is overwhelming: either a lot is happening in the picture

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<sup>282</sup> Canby (1984).

itself, or the editing is fast, or the camera work is frenetic in trying to capture as much as possible from the unique instances unfolding in front of it. In contrast, Menchú's parts are filmed with studio lighting and have the slow pace a confession requires.

Right after the opening credits, Rigoberta Menchú introduces the story of the film by introducing herself in a very formal way, but with an integrated final punch: "My name is Rigoberta Menchú. I am a Quiché Indian from Guatemala. I am a peasant and Christian, and one of the last of my family". She identifies herself as being the storyteller of the film, looks into the camera, addresses the viewer directly and promises to provide the larger frame to the picture: "I am going to tell you a story, which is the story of all the Guatemalan people".

Rigoberta Menchú wears her colourful Mayan traditional costume and, placed on a black background, she is rendered very present not only in the frame, but she has a constant, dominant presence in the entire film, right from its very beginning. She is actually narrating not only her personal story, but she comments on the political context and even on the film footage, on what the viewers actually see.



Figure 4.7 Interview with Rigoberta Menchú in **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE** (1983).

This dominant feeling she conveys is actually surprising when one analyses **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE** in some detail. Surprising I say, because in the actual economy of the film, Rigoberta's interventions occupy limited time: out of the film's 83 minutes, Rigoberta talks a total of a bit more than five minutes, distributed in thirteen inserts throughout the entire movie.

Nine out of the thirteen interventions are all inserted at the beginning of the film, in the first 20 minutes, when the focus is on her personal story: her childhood as a peasant in the mountains of

Guatemala, the family being forced to work for the big, abusive landowners, in the foreground of an undemocratic regime. Rigoberta's testimony does not include big words, neither does she break apart in front of the camera when reminiscing painful, intimate memories. Her contained voice, pace, and choice of words are rather taken from a human rights report *avant la lettre*. When, for example, she talks about how the family was fired, without being paid, only for attending the funeral of the two little brothers, she limits herself to credible elements: to describing the circumstances and facts. But when describing those circumstances (one little boy dying because of malnutrition, and the other while working the fields) the viewer is shown powerful images, with a little boy on the cotton plantation, while watched over by armed guards. Several things are thus achieved: the balanced testimony assures credibility, while the support of the images enables the viewer's imagination and opens a sympathetic bond with the young woman telling the story.

The drama escalates with two more such stories in the first 20 minutes of the film. One reason that makes Rigoberta Menchú such an effective documentary character, and makes her written testimony so successful, is that her own biography is closely linked to key tragic moments of the recent history of Guatemala. The

circumstances in which some of her family members have died are key moments in the rise of the resistance movement. One of them is the occupation of the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala City in January 1980, with which a group of peasants from El Quiché tried to attract international attention, demanding the investigation of the abuses of the military.<sup>283</sup> On governmental orders, the embassy was set on fire, and everybody in the building was burned alive. Among the victims – Rigoberta’s father.<sup>284</sup> Her balanced testimony, and archive images from the tragedy, facilitate the connection on behalf of the viewer: a long steady shot on one of the cremated silhouettes (and a very long shot in comparison with the shot lengths in this film, too) render it obvious, that the cremated silhouette belonged, or could have belonged to Rigoberta’s father, or that the silhouette gruesomely shown at length *was* somebody’s father.

One more of Rigoberta’s family’s agonies unfolds in the first 20 minutes of the film. In the department of El Quiché, her place of origin, numerous cooperative leaders were killed at the

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<sup>283</sup> Perera (1995), 107.

<sup>284</sup> The resolution in the investigation was given only on January 2015, exactly 35 years after the tragedy commenced.

end of the 1970s.<sup>285</sup> Rigoberta's younger brother, the leader of a small agricultural cooperative, was among them. A distinct such episode was a public killing in Chajul main square, in El Quiché, where, after a show trial, soldiers executed community leaders (supposed guerrilla leaders) – Rigoberta's brother allegedly among them. One was even set on fire, and later all bodies were thrown in a common grave.<sup>286</sup> Rigoberta tells the story from Chajul with the same reserved tone, and limiting herself to details, describing how the men were tortured, amputated, eyes and ears removed. She reminisces it from the perspective of an eye-witness (later on, in the controversial account of David Stoll, she was criticised for inaccuracy, for she was not seen in Chajul Plaza when that tragic event happened, or that the bodies did not show as many signs of torture as she described).<sup>287</sup> When describing the amputated body of her brother, it is the only moment where her voice is slightly shaking, and when some room for displaying emotion is allowed. After the first 20 minutes of the documentary, once the emotional

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<sup>285</sup> Handy (1984), 244. Handy refers to the 168 cooperative leaders killed between 1976 and 1978.

<sup>286</sup> Perera (1993), 104–107.

<sup>287</sup> Stoll (1990), 74.

bond between the spectator and Rigoberta is ensured, and alongside this connection, the interest and emotional disposition for the Guatemalan people, the focus of the film partially shifts away from her persona, and disperses towards several other personal stories. The empathic bond is extended with other shattering stories of Guatemalan people, while expert interviews maintain the level of trust and credibility of **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE**.



Figure 4.8 Interview with young guerrillas. Footage included in **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE** (1983).

A later intervention of Rigoberta is meant to extend the empathic bond to the guerrillas themselves.<sup>288</sup> Up to this point, Rigoberta explains how radicalization was the only path left for the orphans, and everybody for that matter.<sup>289</sup> Finally, in the tragic family portrait, but with the very same content, tempered voice, and sticking solely to facts, Rigoberta brings up into the discourse her only relatives left alive, her sisters. The sisters are however absent from the picture, since they took up arms, and subsequently lost track of each other. The sequence immediately following Rigoberta's portrayal of the sisters shows a few young girls in the guerrilla camp, endearing and optimistic, and the association is inescapable, almost manifest: some survivor from the Menchú family, about whom the spectator *cares* by now, might be in that guerrilla camp. The armed girls comb their hair, sew, giggle, and talk about how easy life would be after the victory. The building up of such connections, commonly understood in patterns like *not*

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<sup>288</sup> Rigoberta Menchú never joined the guerrillas herself, but supported them in building international credibility, according to Goodwin (2001), 161n.

<sup>289</sup> According to the *Historical Clarification Commission*, a large number of children, mainly Mayan Children, were left orphan in the years of the fratricide.

*knowing about a dear one*, on the background of a fact-based report on crimes, bring human care to the realm of human rights.

**WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE** ends on a positive tone, which unfortunately was not a fulfilling prophecy for the Guatemalan reality: “In 1988, the Council on Hemispheric Affairs placed Guatemala at the top of its list of Latin American countries with the most human rights violations”.<sup>290</sup> But it is a very fruitful example of how to bring up the *human* side behind the human rights issues, without compromising neither credibility, nor the empathic effect.

Even today, the two films seen together (**WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE**, 1983 and the one reflecting on the first, **GRANITO: HOW TO NAIL A DICTATOR**, 2011) could give faces to the victims, and make possible the empathic process, in providing the reader of the Report of the Commission of Historical Clarification with some of “the full horror and magnitude of what actually happened”.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Barry (1989), 27.

<sup>291</sup> Historical Clarification Commission (1999), 11.

## 5 How to Trigger Empathy?

### 5.1 Choosing of a Face: The Importance of Close-ups

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In the western world it is the face, the facial expression, Hermann Kappelhoff convincingly argues in his essay “Bühne der Empfindungen, Leinwand der Emotionen – das bürgerliche Gesicht”, that represents the main focus point of the affective interactions we have with the world around us:

Es ist der Raum der Empfindungen des Zuschauers, seines sinnlichen, affektiven und libidinösen Verwobenseins mit der Welt. Das Aggregat dieses affektiven Weltbezugs ist für uns in der westlichen Kultur das Gesicht.<sup>292</sup>

Research in the field of psychology, resumed in the third chapter of the current work, confirms Kappelhoff's claim, but with a difference: this is not solely the case for the western world alone, but rather faces are universal expressions of feelings. In some of the earliest movies clandestinely coming out of apartheid South

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<sup>292</sup> Kappelhoff (2001), 34.

Africa, it will be shown later in this chapter, facial expressions were some of the only resources filmmakers had at their disposal in order to trigger an empathic response from a distant audience. When films were made in covert, tough conditions, with no synchronous sound recorded on location, among other shortcomings, the choice of expressive faces and their placement in the economy of the documentary represented a precious filmic apparatus.

Evidence reviewed by Martin Hoffman and discussed in chapter 3 suggests that the connection between our facial expressions and certain principal emotions and facial expression are universal, and not culturally determined. Only in a later stage of the evaluation of somebody else's face, these basic emotions (corresponding to some basic facial expressions) are then elaborated in particular cultural and social contexts.<sup>293</sup>

Mimicry was first described by Adam Smith, but it received proper empirical consideration only in the 1980s and 1990s, with the employment, in the research of empathy, of electromyographic procedures (EMG). The EMG measurements of mainly facial skin

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<sup>293</sup> Hoffman (2000), 42.

(wrinkles and lines) and lip movements, as fine as not to be perceptible to the naked eye, could thus undoubtedly state what was already observed by the moral philosophers since the 18<sup>th</sup> century: mimicry, or motor mimicry, is a human innate and involuntary inclination to imitate somebody else's facial (but also bodily, vocal) expression of feeling, and thus render one to experience something of what the other is feeling. Through mimicry, people show understanding, interest, and participation, as Bavelas et al. indicated: "By immediately displaying a reaction appropriate to the other's situation (e.g., a wince for the other's pain), the observer conveys precisely and eloquently both awareness of and involvement with the other's situation".<sup>294</sup> Therefore, mimicry is a mechanism that, once activated, contributes to our helping of other people. As Martin Hoffman insisted: "Intuitively it [mimicry] appears to be the very essence of empathy".<sup>295</sup>

Mimicry is a key element in studying the empathic effect of documentary films. It is not only present in face-to-face encounters, but also in the distress experienced when viewing

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<sup>294</sup> Black, Chovil, Lemery, and Mullett (1988), 278.

<sup>295</sup> Hoffman (2000), 37.

images, both still and in motion: laboratory experiments which employed EMG and presented subjects with filmed clips show that this is indeed the case.<sup>296</sup> In film, facial expressions are empathised through the use of a certain shot distance, when the human body is framed from shoulders up – the close up.

To come back to our case in point, there is a close liaison between the harsh production means the apartheid opponents had at their disposal when making their films in the early 1970s, and the creative means of expression emerging precisely out of these shortcomings. In some of these films, we will see, the use of close ups was one of the few resources filmmakers resorted to, in order to build up a stable emotional bond between distant, non-western characters, and an invisible audience. Later on, in the 1980s, amidst the harsh control and censorship of the Pretoria regime, several important films showing the South African realities were being seen all over the world. The situation was however different before the 1980s, when films revealing the realities of apartheid to an audience outside the South African borders were an exceptional

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 38–39.

encounter.<sup>297</sup> Following the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, the most active anti-apartheid organisations, amongst them the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan-African Congress of Azania (PAC), had been banned in South Africa. Members of the PAC, in exile, together with other black and white South Africans and British filmmakers produced, under the umbrella of the newly created *Morena Films*, two important documentaries. The films were shot secretly in South Africa and assembled in London: **END OF THE DIALOGUE** (PHELA NDABA, 1970) and **LAST GRAVE AT DIMBAZA** (1974).

The documentaries were illegally filmed in South Africa and as such, a small budget and huge production shortcomings led to the meaningful use of this aforementioned device – well framed close-ups: the only way of triggering the empathic response the makers hoped for when, as the documentary film historian Erik Barnouw put it, they smuggled the films “to the outside world with vivid revelations about apartheid”.<sup>298</sup>

The makers from *Morena* were, in the best cases, film students; however, many were previously not at all trained in film

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<sup>297</sup> Mitchell (2012), 168.

<sup>298</sup> Barnouw (1993), 293.

and, as one critic wrote in 1976, “training was done *on the job*, under the most adverse conditions imaginable”.<sup>299</sup> Thus, and for this purpose, shortcomings could be turned into advantages, such as the fact that “black South Africans, of course, are not allowed to make political Films in their country”.<sup>300</sup> Describing the production circumstances, one of the filmmakers, Nelson ‘Nana’ Mahomo, noted in an interview from 1976: “One asset in our favour is that normally white South Africans don’t see black people, and if a black person is carrying a camera, he is regarded just as a labourer, carrying it for his white master”.

Both **END OF THE DIALOGUE** and **LAST GRAVE AT DIMBAZA** have been shown throughout Europe and North America, being reviewed by critics as “stark, unadorned, and horrifyingly direct”.<sup>301</sup> **END OF THE DIALOGUE** was screened at important festivals and received awards around the world: Golden Dove Award at Leipzig Film Festival, Golden Surreal Award from the Netherlands Film Institute, The Jury Prize at Oberhausen Film Festival, and even an Emmy Award. **LAST GRAVE AT DIMBAZA**

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<sup>299</sup> Anthony (1976), 31.

<sup>300</sup> Kamphausen (1972), 34.

<sup>301</sup> Anthony (1976), 31.

has been aired several times on British, Canadian, and American Public Television (October 1975).<sup>302</sup>

On one hand, the success of the Morena Films brought the prediction of the French film historian George Sadoul to an end. At the beginning of the 1960s, Sadoul was both infuriated and hopeful about the cinema's state in Africa – or rather lack thereof: “In the 1960, sixty-five years after the invention of the cinema (...),” the French film historian was complaining, “200 million human beings have thus been denied the most advanced form of the most modern of arts. I am persuaded that before the ‘sixties’ are out, this scandal will be no more than an evil memory”.<sup>303</sup>

With the Morena Group, founded in 1969, Sadoul's reason for concern announced its well-timed ending. As political scientist Patrick O'Meara noted in his review on **END OF THE DIALOGUE** and **LAST GRAVE AT DIMBAZA**, published in the film magazine *Jump Cut*: “it was already apparent that the technically proficient and sophisticated South African government films were being

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<sup>302</sup> O'Meara (1978), 7.

<sup>303</sup> Sadoul, cited in Rouch (1961/1962), 1, in the UNESCO report on *The Cinema in Africa*. Available online on UNESDOC:  
[http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=184262&set=0055F0297E\\_0\\_36&gp=1&lin=1&ll=1](http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=184262&set=0055F0297E_0_36&gp=1&lin=1&ll=1).

challenged by an equally proficient and sophisticated film made by an African”.<sup>304</sup> For one of the authors of the films, the first-time filmmaker from Morena Group, Nelson ‘Nana’ Mahomo, the main ambition was not to contribute to the belated birth of an African cinema.



Figure 5.1 **END OF DIALOGUE (1970).**

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<sup>304</sup> O'Meara (1978), 7.

For Mahomo, the purpose of the films was clear and unsophisticated: to disclose the realities of the apartheid South Africa. An exiled member of PAC's executive committee, he came across the idea of revolutionary films when, while actively working in exposing the situation in South Africa, he experienced scepticism and even distrust from the American and European public. He saw filmmaking as a long-term strategy to alert the civil society abroad, in countries which in time might have had a say in the Black struggle for civic rights.<sup>305</sup> **END OF THE DIALOGUE** and **LAST GRAVE AT DIMBAZA** are both simple in their means and powerful in effect. **END OF THE DIALOGUE** is a rhythmic montage, alternating between still and moving images, between black and white and colour, and between contrasting recordings from the life and work of the white minority, on one hand, and the black, coloured and Indian groups constituting the majority in South Africa, on the other. The contrasting association of the images alone is instructive. The footage is linked through the use of a male narrator who, in a discerning tone, delivers a shocking report on aspects of the lives of the black majority, on laws

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<sup>305</sup> O'Meara (1978), 7.

enforced with no concern for basic human rights. The commentator talks about education being for free only for the white children, about the separation in shanty-towns, but also delivers statistical data, such as a mortality rate of 60% amongst the black children up to the age of five. There, where the voice-over is rendered silent, the images are accompanied by unsettling music or rhythms of drums.



Figure 5.2 **END OF THE DIALOGUE** (1970).



Figure 5.3 **END OF THE DIALOGUE** (1970).

But the emotional link to the spectator is managed in both documentaries with the use of close ups. The camera is mobile, the lenses move too. Corrections and panoramic images, vertical and horizontal, are there to illustrate portraits of the people, while the zoom carefully frames a grasped instance of a smile, or the face of a child in tears. Once the camera ends its search and frames a particularly powerful close up, the image freezes with wondering eyes staring at the distant spectator. For several seconds, the

moving image turns into a photo, giving the face, and the innate mimicry, time to play its part, and form a closer connection between two distant people. Once the two directions are secured (an emotional relationship, and the understanding of the outraging truth that flagrant infringements of basic human rights are happening in South Africa), the spectator might have been wondering how it was possible, that the South African society could have sustained the apartheid system, with only the backing of such a small Afrikaans minority. The ending of **END OF THE DIALOGUE** leads to the point, and to an almost direct appeal for help from to the foreign spectator. Again, close-ups are used, this time of weapons, fighter jets, and fighting helicopters. “The might of South Africa is preserved with these weapons, supplied by the western world”, the commentator translates the images into words. The final scene is a montage of various fighting planes, while the commentator explains their French origins, Italian licence, or the British ground attack aircrafts, as being “highly effective for use against guerrillas”.

**LAST GRAVE AT DIMBAZA**, and even more so **END OF THE DIALOGUE**, by revealing a canvas of close-ups and extreme close-ups, open up the possible connection between distant people: South Africans in shanty towns and the European and

American far-away spectators of the films). This connection, activist and filmmaker Nana Mahomo believed, is one key to civic action since, as he put it, unless the people in America “know what the issues are, they could quite easily be sold the idea that America has to intervene on the side of white South Africa”.<sup>306</sup> The anti-apartheid resistance brought about one of the largest global solidarity movements the world has ever seen, with civic society in almost every single country on the planet supporting the South African struggle.<sup>307</sup> The documentary films, in Mahomo’s view, were essential tools in this respect:

We are trying to make sure that the inhumanity which is being paraded under the cloak of apartheid is absolutely understood by each and everyone so that the issues are clear and it can only be done through more and more people knowing what the issues are in Southern Africa. This is why we would like this film to be seen by as many people as possible.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Mahomo, cited in O’Meara (1978), 7–8.

<sup>307</sup> A comprehensive list of international organisations active against apartheid to be found on the website of Nelson Mandela Foundation. Available for download at: <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/images/uploads/aama-azlist.pdf>.

<sup>308</sup> Mahomo, in interview with Gabriel (1976), 106.

## 5.2 Language Association: Joan Jara as the Messenger in *COMPANIERO: VICTOR JARA OF CHILE*

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Anne Applebaum dedicated her Pulitzer-Prize winning book, *Gulag*, to “Those Who Described What Happened”, and suggestively began with a passage from the famous *Requiem (Instead of a Preface, 1935-1940)* by the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova:

In the terrible years of the Yezhov terror I spent seventeen months waiting in line outside the prison in Leningrad. One day somebody in the crowd identified me.

Standing behind me was a woman, with lips blue from the cold, who had, of course, never heard me called by name before. Now she started out of the torpor common to us all and asked me in a whisper (everyone whispered there):

‘Can you describe this?’

And I said: ‘I can.’

Than something like a smile passed fleetingly over what had once been her face...

The messenger, the individual *Who Describes What Happened*, the one able to find words to describe the hidden ordeal, is not expected to put an end to the horror. The old woman “with lips blue from the cold” does not ask the poet for a solution, neither does she ask “Can you end this?”; the old woman wished that, among those who saw the horror, there would be someone apt enough with words, so that the horror would not remain indescribable.

Like the poet, the individual *Who Describes What Happened* is a recurrent key character in resistance documentaries: the one who escapes the conflict zone or dictatorial borders, or does not escape it, but takes upon him- or herself innumerable risks, in order to appear in front of the camera and tell a personal story, relevant for the entire group. “And I think here I am speaking in the name of all the people in Chile who are silenced, who can’t speak for themselves”, Joan Jara confesses in **COMPANIERO: VICTOR JARA OF CHILE**.<sup>309</sup> Rigoberta Menchú started with a similar promise in **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE**: “I am going to tell my story, which is the story of all the Guatemalan people”.

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<sup>309</sup> Joan (Turner) Jara, in the opening scene of **COMPANIERO JARA**.

Sit-down interviews are often the norm to achieve such an endeavour, and the filmed testimony of Joan Jara in **COMPANIERO: VICTOR JARA OF CHILE**, with its minimalistic use of filmic means, constitutes a very good example. In this way Joan is telling the story of her assassinated husband, the famous singer-songwriter, theatre director and activist Víctor Jara. In the background of the personal tragedy which affected her family, Joan depicts the bigger picture of the complicated socio-political situation of Chile at the beginning of the 1970s: “I feel that the only thing that I can do is to go on and tell people about our experiences, even the very personal ones, so that they can understand profoundly what this (i.e. Fascism) means to human beings”.

Her declared goal is precisely to make people “understand profoundly” what fascism means to the people in Chile, “to human beings”. Joan Jara does not promise the spectator that at the end of the documentary they are going to better understand the political situation in Chile, but that her attempt through her filmed confession is to create a connection between distant people, a cross-cultural understanding of the other in a sympathetic manner.

After September 1973, Joan Jara spent the next 40 years of her life telling the same story countless times. She wrote it in a book, told it to the international press, gave lectures and talks throughout the world, and conveyed it in the various lawsuits she filed in Chile and in the United States, against those accounted responsible. Thanks to Joan's life-long work, Victor Jara's story is one of the most noted among all the stories on the victims of the Pinochet regime. At the beginning of 1974, however, the story remained yet untold, at least in the United Kingdom. The widow of Victor Jara, Joan, herself a British citizen, left Santiago for London with her two daughters, where they found "a Tory government actively hostile to Chile's disenfranchised population".<sup>310</sup> And it is here, in the United Kingdom, that Joan Jara made one of the very first public accounts of her husband's tragic end, in the documentary film **COMPANIERO: VICTOR JARA OF CHILE**, shown on the British Thames Television. Director and producer Stanley Forman later recalled in an interview the peculiar

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<sup>310</sup> Tyler, Andrew. 2013. Britain is one of the only European nations which at the time of the coup refused shelter in Santiago to all but UK nationals. British investment was considerable in Chile in the 1970s, and UK promptly recognized the newly installed military government, consequently granting no refugee and no asylum to Chileans.

circumstances of the TV screening, how it was shown “very late at night, with a bloody anchorman who said: ‘we don’t wish to associate ourselves with the views expressed in this film. Blah, blah.’ But still, they showed it, which was something”.<sup>311</sup>

**COMPANIERO: VICTOR JARA OF CHILE** operates within a scarcity of cinematographic artifice: talking heads illustrated with archive material. The storytelling, however, is in turn made out of three distinct narrators: in the first line, Joan Jara, the widow of the victim, and victim herself, the eye witness. The second is a “voice of God” type of voice-over, a confident neutral British narrator who pushes the episodes of the story forward, and who delivers more concrete information (dates, statistics). These facts and figures, if told by Joan, would have presumably compromised the personal, empathic relationship established between herself and the viewer. A third and last narrator is Victor Jara himself, the assassinated folksinger whose voice recordings from songs and poems are edited in such a way, that they function as a commentary on the story, explaining it or reflecting upon it.

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<sup>311</sup> Forman, in interview with Tony Pomfret (2000), 3.

The singer's voice is to be heard in the audio background, in Spanish, however, the lyrics are dubbed in English by yet another British commentator. The exception is only the very last song, where Joan's voice takes over in the dubbing of her husband's track, and the voices of the two Jaras are intertwined, like in the last swan's chant: the love song *Te recuerdo Amanda* (*I remember you Amanda*).

**COMPANIERO: VICTOR JARA OF CHILE** is a rich example in its consistent attempt to generate an empathic effect by primarily relying on uttered accounts. But responding empathically to speech (mediated association or verbal mediated empathic arousal, the way it was described in the third chapter of this work) requires additional mental effort from the side of the spectator, while the triggering of empathy through speech demands a longer time than the more basic empathic modes require. How does recounting, and voice over in general, work in triggering empathy, and in which way can they make up for the familiarity bias, and by and large support cross-group empathy?



Figure 5.4 **Interview with Joan Jara in** COMPANIERO: VICTOR JARA OF CHILE (1974).

There are various elements necessary for the spectator's empathy to be aroused through speech: the narrator needs to be an expert in using words, refraining from simply delivering text or listing information, but rather exhibiting poignancy, and even humour, solely through word choice and phrasing. At times, this expert rhetoric must be descriptive in a sophisticated way, so that it can compensate for lack of images and visual proofs. Secondly, because mediated association requires more effort from the spectator's side, and it is more susceptible to bias, the narrative

would be better understood without any other extra effort, such as the reading of subtitles. Thirdly, we will look at the role of audio-visual congruency: harmony between facial expression (or the visuals in general) and the narration. Lastly, we shall discuss dissonance, the incongruity between voice and face, and visual over all, and the role it plays in suppressing bias and scepticism. We were discussing earlier how laboratory experiments have shown that triggering speech-mediated empathic arousal requires more time and effort. From this point of view it makes sense that Joan's confession advances slowly, that the progression is structured in several episodes, and instead of starting with the bloodcurdling narratives, Joan's story advances from light personal memories towards the present-day tragedy. After a concise preamble, where the direction of the story is clearly marked and the sombre ending implied ("I feel that everything that I can do is to go on and tell people..."), Joan commences with stories from her husband's early infancy, the way a rather conventional biography would.

She reminisces about her husband's childhood, teenage years and youth at the university, his formation as an artist – all events that Joan herself in fact did not witness. Her own memories are brought into the story a little later, when she describes Victor

Jara's willingness to build up a family – the love story within the story – and from this point Joan herself grows into the other main character: her own loss is now also worth the spectator's empathy. After this beginning, when some degree of sympathy is secured, the narrative moves to the second episode, and into the complicated and controversial political dimension, with its particularities: the attempts of right wing forces at stopping the endorsement of Salvador Allende, the elected president, the assassination of the head of the armed forces, General Schneider, and the proclamation of Allende as president.

At this point, the spectator is expected to be more interested and focused and, in an attempt to extend to the Chilean people the empathy already secured for the Jaras, a short intermezzo with background information is edited in. It implies how Chile was one of the last territories conquered by the Spanish Conquistadores, followed by the British, when “Chile became a virtual satellite for the British economy, and fortunes were made in London”, as the voice over puts it.

After the First World War followed the economical control by the United States.



**Figure 5.5 Family photos from the Jara personal archive included in *COMPANIERO: VICTOR JARA OF CHILE* (1974).**

Sum-ups of Chile's importance for the U.S. economy, the CIA's attempt of opposing Allende's coming to power, and the failure of this attempt, are followed by the fight which erupted from here, including Allende's visit to the United Nations to denounce the foreign intervention in Chile's affaires.

Following this historical intermezzo, the third episode in the film's structure portrays Victor Jara's role in the above-described context: his activist work in the three years of

revolutionary struggle in the terms of democracy, which preceded Allende being elected president, the songs he wrote and his concerts in mines and in universities. From here onwards, both the political background and the portrait of Victor Jara are edited in parallel, as if properly tangled, until the 11th of September coup d'état and the last hours of Jara. Finally, a last part of the film concerns the storyline of Joan Jara, from the disappearance of her husband, until the widow recovers the bloody, half-naked bullet-ridden body of her husband, and buries it.

**COMPANIERO: VICTOR JARA OF CHILE**, as mentioned, is moved along by the three different narrators (mostly Joan's storytelling, but also the British narrator who delivers smaller bits of concise information, and Victor Jara's songs, dubbed in English). What makes the story engaging, despite the minimal filmic means used, is the type of speaker Joan Jara is: clear, concise, and through her consistent usage of uncomplicated words, she appears honest, accompanying various parts of the stories with sighs or sobs, without ever relinquishing her discrete facial expression. She shows a faint smile when talking about happy memories, and has a dim grimace when evoking the last phone call she received from her husband. All this might seem rather too straightforward but, in the absence of more filmic

material, recordings or visual proofs, the very simple approach to Joan's interview plays an essential role in guiding the emotional response to particular points in the story line. Towards the end of **COMPANIERO: VICTOR JARA OF CHILE**, Juan Jara gets to the point in which she actually must say that her husband is no more. When evoking this episode, she gets into details: she recalls that somebody called her, carrying her husband's message, and this message was "that Victor thought that he will not be able to get out of the stadium, that they'd recognized him".

And here, in simple but strong words, she reaches the point (which is obviously more painful than any other memory recalled so far) where she has to say in front of the camera that Victor Jara is dead, while in that particular moment she evoked, she did not yet believe it, or could not, or simply did not want to: "At this moment... I was.. I think there must have been many who were naïve enough to think that this meant imprisonment". After describing the entire ordeal of searching for the dead body of a loved one through a morgue, among hundreds of other naked corpses, sometimes with a discreet tear in her eyes, but with a voice contained, breathing harder, while keeping her speech restrained, she appears exhausted. In a heart-breaking scene, when even the viewer may feel like it is too much and too painful to

observe her reminiscing about the witnessing of such an ordeal, Joan releases the tension, positively twisting the story line: “I think it was logical to have found Victor’s body here”, and even “I think that Victor would have been glad to have died as he did”.



Figure 5.6 **Last recording of Victor Jara. Footage included in COMPANIERO: VICTOR JARA OF CHILE (1974).**

The flow of her speech brings along a melodic pace: the accent is on “think”, and the pitch descends, her voice barely perceivable at the end of the sentence. Joan’s mimic, posture, tone of voice are

very sombre and contained, and the discreet variations, smiles, sighs and barely visible tears do not contradict the tone of the story, but rather only support what is being said.

It is not solely how good of a storyteller Joan is, which is important for the effectiveness of the verbal association in triggering empathy. Joan is British-born, and tells the story in her British accent to a (first and foremost) British audience. She functions as a bridge, as a link of credibility between the two groups, the British audience and the “Chilean people” or “Chilean families”, as Joan herself puts it.

A messenger, and even more so an accomplished storyteller as Joan Jara is, prompts emotional responses. Therefore to fully benefit from such a narrator, filmmakers might willingly opt for minimal filmic artifice in order to allow the speech to manifest its full power. About Joan Jara, director-producer Stanley Forman says: “She’s a remarkable woman, but we didn’t know how remarkable until we started interviewing her”.<sup>312</sup>

In most situations images and sound cues – cries, moaning – come to accompany the language, accelerating the empathic

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<sup>312</sup> Forman, in interview with Tony Pomfret (2000), 3.

response (exception being when voice-over accompanies unrelated images, like when a letter is being read out loud). Mediated association might precede the others, for example when the information about the victim precedes the sequence where the victim is shown. The verbal stimuli have the particular quality of creating some distance between the observer and the victim's situation, due to encoding and decoding involved in the complex process, but are more effective combined with mimicry, classical conditioning and direct association – which are vivid, and consequently able to hold the viewer's attention longer.

### 5.3 Imagining the Other: The Problematic of the Roles of Protagonist/ Antagonist in Revolutionary Documentaries of Netty Wild

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*(...) but when we ascribe depth and authority to characters, when we talk about what makes them compelling or memorable, even when we describe them as realistic, we are really talking about what makes them tellable, how they are displayed apart from the way the plot, the narrative world, or the discursive style is displayed.* —

Thomas M. Leitch<sup>313</sup>

The narrative of revolutions is defined by Manfred Schneider in relation to the mediums representing it, as the opening of information channels which, previously, were closed or defective – a scenario delivered by the French Revolution to many uprisings, up to this day. The festive unblocking of communication channels is just one of the acts in the revolutionary scenario, as described by Manfred Schneider. Next comes the inauguration of the tribunal,

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<sup>313</sup> Leitch (1986), 158.

and possibly the execution of the dictator, followed by the display of his corpse. All these constitute in Schneider's view the scenario of the revolution, as a 'Trilogie des Wechsels', a 'trilogy of change'.<sup>314</sup>

Following the narrative of revolutions themselves, the narrative of resistance documentary aiming to trigger spectator empathy is more graspable when a singular figure is clearly framed as *the antagonist*, and the leader of the fight is the positive *protagonist*, the point of identification, the hero. While indeed extensively applicable to many revolutionary overthrows in recent history, Manfred Schneider's scenario is not all-encompassing. And the role of the documentary storyteller, aiming to trigger spectator empathy, becomes increasingly problematic when the usual scenarios do not apply; where the clear-cut roles of protagonist-antagonist do not so easily fall into place. For example, not all regimes have the distinctive figure of the dictator, so not all revolutions aim at overthrowing such a figure. In attempting to understand which are the common aspects contributing to the failure of some revolutions and to the success of others,

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<sup>314</sup> Schneider (1990), 133.

sociologist Jeff Goodwin convincingly argued that particularly sensitive to revolutionary overthrowing are neo-patrimonial, personality-oriented regimes, with the undesirable figure of the dictator clearly identifiable.<sup>315</sup> At least temporarily, the fall of such dictators is easily correlated, in the eyes of the revolutionary masses, with the success of the revolution: the stepping back of Anastasio Somoza Debayle in Nicaragua (July 1979), that of Jean-Claude Duvalier (Baby Doc) in Haiti (February 1986), Nicolae Ceaușescu in Romania (December 1989), or Hosni Mubarak in Egypt (February 2011). The flight or execution of the dictator creates a void of power, but doesn't necessary coincide with the political or social reforms that the resistance movements were aiming for. Thus, in the aftermath of the fall of the dictator, revolutionary movements might seize power (like Sandinistas in Nicaragua) but, on the contrary, they might also contest the new order openly or, even without giving up the arms, go once more underground.

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<sup>315</sup> Goodwin (2001). Goodwin's analyses concern comparisons of revolutionary movements in regions with numerous similarities (Central America, South East Asia), thus ultimately convincingly underlining the dissimilar aspects, which contributed to very distinct revolutionary outcomes for the different countries in those regions.

The aftermath of revolutionary changes in power structures are times of confusion and uncertainty, where the heroic and vile figures start to blur. The maker of resistance documentary faces the difficult, fuzzy scenario, where the roles of protagonist and antagonist become rather abstruse. Thus, in these ambiguous narratives, it is challenging to establish points of identification, to focus the spectator's empathy – and to care.

The revolutionary films from the work of Canadian documentary maker Netty Wild are useful in illustrating the problematic of the protagonist-antagonist roles: **A RUSTLING OF LEAVES: INSIDE THE PHILIPPINE REVOLUTION** (1988), which follows the resistance struggle in the Philippines in the aftermath of the flight of dictator Ferdinand Marcos, after 20 years in power (February 1986), and **A PLACE CALLED CHIAPAS** (1998), documenting the Zapatista resistance movement in Mexico (1994-present). Made ten years apart from each other, both films have a human rights approach to the conflicts, whereas the “people of the Philippines” and respectively “the people of Las Chiapas” are the tragic victims, suffering in the background of political dramas. The approach to the conflicts is an intimate one, even though the stories and histories are interpreted with, and for western eyes.

Each of these rare films is the result of over a year of shooting and editing. They are placed in very unclear social and political contexts, and sorting through these circumstances appears like a very difficult task, for the filmmaker and the documentary spectator alike. **A RUSTLING OF LEAVES** documents the resistance movements in the Philippines, including the armed guerrillas, and the not-so-peaceful times, which followed the peaceful revolution overthrowing Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. **A PLACE CALLED CHIAPAS** attempts to sort out the complicated conflict between the dispossessed and alienated Mayan Indians from southern Mexico, and the Mexican Government, a conflict that contributed to the uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in 1994.<sup>316</sup>

The films of the Canadian filmmaker Netty Wild are, beyond doubt, up to this day, relevant to a wide audience.

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<sup>316</sup> A place called Chiapas opens with the signing of NAFTA and the beginning of the uprising, called by John Ross “the first post-Communist, post-modern, anti-neoliberal uprising in the Americas” (2000), 4. The romantic figure of the revolutionary leader Marcos and his belief in the potential of the media led to a greater prevalence of documentary films about the Zapatistas (Listed in the Annotated Filmography). But Netty Wild’s documentary stands out as a complex approach, and for its interview with Marcos.

However they are both products of a direct interest of her co-nationals in the respective uprisings, due to particular geo-political contexts: Canada's signing of a Nuclear Cooperation Agreement with Marcos' dictatorial regime in the Philippines, paving the way in the 1980s to the selling of nuclear reactors and technology<sup>317</sup> (**A RUSTLING OF LEAVES**); and respectively to the treaty Canada signed with Mexico and the USA for the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA (**A PLACE CALLED CHIAPAS**). The signing of the NAFTA coincided with the Zapatistas declaration of war against the Mexican Army.

Multiple *voices* of the director Netty Wild are prevalent in both **A RUSTLING OF LEAVES** and **A PLACE CALLED CHIAPAS**: one is the filmic voice, a very personal way of juxtaposing in the editing, which reveals both her opinions and principles, but also uncertainties and questions Wild seems to ask herself while working on the film. A second is the journalist's voice: Wild as the persuasive debater, initiating vivid dialogues with the characters met on the way. This voice is however distinct from the

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<sup>317</sup> When she came across the Philippine guerrilla stories, Netty Wild was touring with her theater play, *Under the Gun*, which was problematising exactly Canada's tie in the military industrial complex; the action was half taking place in the Philippines.

conventional, unbiased type of interviews. If a more traditional approach would have been taken in the editing, and only answers of the characters alone would have been included in the film, the ambiguity and layers of the revolution and its players wouldn't have come out as distinct as they do when Wild's wonderings are heard from behind the camera. And there is yet another hypostasis of Wild's voices: the very poetic voice-over which describes whatever happened in front of the camera, but also whatever the camera didn't manage to film, or the sound didn't record. In other words, whatever Wild and her film crew lived while filming, or at least what she remembers they have been experiencing, is also transmitted to the audience. In rich, metaphoric sentences, Wild describes whatever she herself saw, or heard, or even felt while being on location. For instance, while showing a bamboo field, and a carriage slowly passing in front of the camera, entering the image from the right and disappearing to the left of the screen, Netty Wild's voice-over comments: "Those are my stories from the Philippine Revolution; their restless call for change resonates like the sound of rustling of leaves in the distant, yet now familiar cane field". Such examples are numerous in both films, thus allowing enough room for the spectator's imagination to direct sympathy or antipathy towards the players at stake. Her films seem to credit the

fight as being justified or unavoidable for the human rights causes, and thus positions herself more on the side of the guerrillas, but leaves enough open questions and space for the spectators to evaluate the political contexts as they consider fit.

In order to show some ways in which the problematic protagonist-antagonist roles could be solved, we are going to take a closer look at strategies of building up characters in **A RUSTLING OF LEAVES**. The 1988 Canadian production follows characters from diverse groups in the Philippine struggle: moderate left, mountain-based guerrilla units, political players, extreme left and extreme right paramilitary groups.

Commencing her career as actress and radio moderator, Netty Wild got in touch with leaders of the guerrilla forces in the time of Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorial regime.<sup>318</sup> While on tour in the Philippines with her theatre company and the play *Under the Gun*, a commander of the guerrilla force New People's Army (NPA) asked her to create a theatrical representation for the young, mainly illiterate villagers supporting the guerrillas; while in

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<sup>318</sup> In an interview with Marc Glassman (2008) in *Point of View* Magazine, Nettie Wild recalls the beginnings of the production of **A RUSTLING OF LEAVES**.

the Philippines, she also broadcasted for the CBS radio. Vancouver-based Wild went back to her home country to secure the budget for a revolutionary documentary in the Philippines, and then revisited the archipelago. Only that, on her return, she encountered a different reality than the one she had left: the personality cult of the Marcos-regime had come to an end, and a newly elected, first female president of the Philippines, Corazon Aquino, promised land reforms and democracy. Aquino, herself a member of the small land-owning Filipino elite, however, didn't appear to undertake the land and anti-poverty reforms which were expected of her; activists feared the carry-over of systematic pre-Marcos "domination of political clans".<sup>319</sup> The same military officers in charge under Marcos were holding similar strategic positions and privileges as before the fall of the dictator, and president Aquino was facing "pressure exerted by conservative members of her cabinet, the military and the U.S. government for a tougher policy towards insurgency".<sup>320</sup> The armed guerrilla movements, mainly the NPA, continued to operate. Yet more extreme paramilitary groups were now in action, too. Out of them,

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<sup>319</sup> Published Research of the Institute for Popular Democracy (1987), 95.

<sup>320</sup> Davis, Leonard (1989), 8.

the Sparrow Squads are insightfully documented by Wild. Joint counter revolutionary forces of the Philippine military and American intelligence units led to the formation of vigilante groups – some of them “private armies of politicians”<sup>321</sup> (Alsa Masa, meaning Masses Uprising, the armed vigilante group more extensively documented in the film, was the first out of 224, which were reported at the time **A RUSTLING OF LEAVES** was made).<sup>322</sup> Political kidnappings and assassinations were common. Only in the months necessary for the making of the film, president Corazon Aquino survived five attempts of coup d’états; each such coup leading to the increase in power and benefits for the military.

Due to the political grounds explained above, the situation had become more complicated for the documentary maker intending to create an empathic bridge between the revolutionaries in the Philippines and the Canadian audience. At the time of her first stay with the NPA, Wild later confessed, she herself identified with the guerrillas, and had decided to secure the production

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<sup>321</sup> Guillermo (2012), 412.

<sup>322</sup> Davis (1989), 16. See also Appendix II (2001–2006). According to Davis, out of the 224 armed vigilante groups operating in February 1988, 146 were right wing 63 religious extremists and 15 bandit groups.

money in order to make a film about them.<sup>323</sup> At that time, Ferdinand Marcos' personality cult regime was still in place and the protagonist-antagonist roles were more easily defined. This was not, however, the case in the aftermath of the 1986 Revolution, which left the documentary maker in the difficult position of having no proper focus point for the spectator's solidarity, "sympathy or antipathy viscerally felt", in Carroll's understanding. Neither was there such a distinguishable proper negative figure (like the dictator) towards which to concentrate the antipathy of the spectator, nor was it as easy as before, in the newly established political context, to frame a distinct positive figure towards whom the empathic feelings of the spectator could have been directed. In the post-Marcos reality, the documentary maker had to operate with the construction of characters within these vague frameworks.

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<sup>323</sup> In the interview she gave to Marc Glassman for *POV* (2008), Wild recalls such an encounter with the NPA insurgents: "I looked at him and the other young soldiers and I realized – they were me. They were my opposite number. If I had been born here rather than New York City, if I lived here rather than West Vancouver, I would be one of them. And that's the moment when I decided that this was a story that had been given to me to tell".

Wild's film crew travelled to numerous locations and gave a voice to many of the different, antagonistic players in the novel Filipino struggle. In the capital city of Manila, they filmed the sparrows showing themselves in front of the camera, with their faces covered. But from Manila, they also brought about images of the slum life – the abject poverty at the periphery of the capital. They filmed the sugar workers in the island of Negros and, thanks to her acting skills, Netty Wild's voice interprets dialogues (witnessed, or maybe even imagined) of the people met on the way, from their frustrations, to their dreams about a revolution.

Moving to another island of the archipelago, Mindanao, the crew extensively documented the life in the provincial capital Davao, home to the vigilante death squads. In the "Mountain" (as the home of the NPA is secretively referred to on the end credits) the documentary maker filmed an intimate portrait of the guerrillas, and provided it with a human face, or rather, several human faces and endearing characters. But while the film camera was accompanying the guerrillas, it also witnessed moments of highly debatable morality, which made the choice of points of identification even more difficult: an attack on a walking patrol, followed by his ad-hoc trial, condemning a presumable spy to death. This presumable spy, a youngster nicknamed Batman (for

the action hero) states in front of the camera how he accepts any sentence from the guerrillas only if they would "let him live" – but the guerrillas decided not to grant his plea (Fig 5.7). The moment of Batman's death is not explicitly shown in the film, but still makes a rather a disquieting scene, with the guerrillas bringing the small wooden coffin to Batman's weeping father, something that might have seemed morally bewildering for many, and keep western spectators from empathizing with the guerrillas. Wild's film manages to turn the ambiguities from the Filipino realities at the end of the 1980s into an advantage in her human rights approach to filmmaking: the spectator is presented with several such unresolvable situations, and invited to choose his or her standpoint, forced to take a personal, moral position. Wild makes her own partaking clear, but leaves a lot of choice on the side of the spectator. Hence, she is annulling the suspicion of manipulation, which is a constant barrier in the building of an empathic relationship with the documentary spectator.

Revolutionary documentaries like **A RUSTLING OF LEAVES** operate on an uncertain terrain, without easily identifiable antagonists and protagonists, heroes and villains as such, but instead with equivocal players in a complicated, multi-layered reality.



Figure 5.7 **The guerrillas let Batman know that he is going to be executed, in *A RUSTLING OF LEAVES* (1988).**

Nettie Wild's strategy is efficient in bypassing the problem: she attempts to construct situations and hypostases where either characters from various groups can be mirrored, or elements of distinct people can be easily associated by the viewer, thus securing empathy for a less concrete, more symbolic entity. The spectator is invited to solve a puzzle out of various elements belonging to multiple characters with common traits. In the case of ***A RUSTLING OF LEAVES***, the spectator is invited to feel for the

Filipino revolutionary going ‘overground’ to attempt the legal fight, to participate in – hopefully – democratic elections, and who falls victim to the ongoing oppressive regime.

About ten characters, coming from several of these groups of players, are constructed in more depth, providing large frames for the Filipino reality. One of Wild’s political stands on this reality seems to be that, in the post-dictatorial society striving for democracy, the Philippines found itself in at the end of the 1980s, various political entities finally should have attempted to coexist, not eliminate each other. Or, like Edicio dela Torre (“priest, artist and revolutionary”) puts it in the first minutes of the film, announcing the problems to be seen in the shades of the Filipino reality: “democracy has space for all sorts of Filipinos, thinking in all sorts of colours. Democracy must have as many colours as the rainbow, and there is no rainbow without red. It would be a terrible rainbow if it would have only yellow. Or blue”.

Wild’s crew accesses several of the strips of the rainbow, be they political parties of underground movements, or individual characters with their unique stories. Dadan is one of the ten codenames of a former student of agricultural engineering, who chose the underground life in the mountains. She has a schoolgirl look, with big glasses and two ponytails, and giggles with Netty

Wild about her work in organizing guerrilla movements. Other guerrilla figures are likewise portrayed: Father Navarro, a communist priest and revolutionary, or Commander Oris, who, by the end of the film, is betrayed and captured.

The cohabitation “like colours in the rainbow” appears utopian in the Philippines of the 1980s, as portrayed by Wild. Vigilante paramilitary groups are assembled at governmental whims to just “clean”, as another character, Lieutenant Colonel Franco Calida boldly puts it, meaning to annihilate the NPA in the Philippines (and, as evidenced in Wild’s well documented film, using terror and violating human rights).<sup>324</sup> In **A RUSTLING OF LEAVES**, Colonel Calida is followed “at work”, while patrolling with his military guard, but he is also suggestively framed in his office. Here, a zoom out starting on Calida’s close up reveals, on the wall behind him, a big framed portrait of the newly elected president Corazon Aquino.

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<sup>324</sup> Watch dogs organizations reported grave cases of human rights abuses. Vigilante groups responded by shooting leaders of Amnesty International, which previously published reports of tortures and executions by vigilante groups, according to Guillermo (2012), 458.



Figure 5.8 **Colonel Calida in A RUSTLING OF LEAVES (1988).**

While the Colonel goes on with his speech, the zoom out continues to reveal more of the ornaments on the wall, thus suggestively framing Calida's actions with the vigilante Alsa Masa in a larger, complex political chain: below Aquino's portrait on the wall, another one, this time smaller, reveals commander Ramos, who remained a military ruler, as he was under dictator Marcos. Calida goes on talking, and the slow zoom out only stops when

finally, even further down on the wall behind Lieutenant Colonel Calida, the camera ironically reveals another, this time fictitious Lieutenant: an armed and dangerous looking-like Sylvester Stallone as Lieutenant Marion “Cobra” Cobretti in a poster from **COBRA**.<sup>325</sup>

As previously mentioned, during her first visit to the Philippines, filmmaker Netty Wild was initially recording the events for CBS radio. With her understanding of this medium, Wild gives space in her movie to the importance of radio in the revolution – in the revolutionary scenario of the 1980s. The radio appears as a campaigning and propaganda tool, as communication and interception means for the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary movements. It is around the radio that points of identification are established. The characters of two very different radio-men, from opposite arenas, are thus framed: NPA radio operator Poloy and Radio DJ Jun Pala.

Poloy is a faceless character, who tragically died during the time of filming, “defending the film crew”, as Netty Wild’s voice over stresses it, while the film crew was documenting a failed

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<sup>325</sup> **COBRA**, written by Stallone himself, was released in 1987.

guerrilla attack.<sup>326</sup> His image, his physical presence or voice most probably went unrecorded by the time of his death, and even after his death - since Poloy's dead body was seized by the army. So even if Poloy's physical traces in the real world went largely unrecorded, Poloy's character, carefully constructed in the editing, is very present in the film. Shots of a silhouette climbing a tree, or a hand holding a radio emitter – the generic symbol images for the radio operator – are inserted in the documentary, while Netty Wild's voice reminisces bits of past dialogues she herself had with Poloy.

It is in this way, with minimal means, that the character of the radio operator is built up as a man with a poignant sense of humour. For the group portrait of the remaining guerrillas, scattered in some of the mountains of the more than 7100 islands comprising the archipelago nation of the Philippines, the radio operator in Wild's film becomes something of a symbol: that of the likelihood of actual communication between the various groups.

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<sup>326</sup> Wild encountered radio operator Poloy way before the film project started, when she was producing the theater play for the guerrillas. He was one of the actors in the play, as she puts it in an interview with Glassman (2008).



Figure 9 **Film sequence evoking Poloy, in A RUSTLING OF LEAVES (1988).**

“Poloy’s radio gets information” about arrests, or about future steps to be undertaken, as Netty Wild’s voice-over describes how the images of the radio operator are to be understood. But as symbolic as his character might be, Poloy used to be a real man, in the real world, who was shot in the chest, near the camera crew, and whose death is not recorded but to whom the film is dedicated.

The physical character of Poloy might not have been developed enough; neither has the spectator a concrete image of him, nor enough familiar traces to trigger empathy. The choice to turn him into a character most probably occurred after he passed away in such dramatic circumstances, without leaving behind traces, filmed recordings of himself. But it is by mirroring him with the radio-man from the opponents, whose traces would be “bad enough”,<sup>327</sup> that empathy for Poloy is secured. The thus constructed antagonist of Poloy is DJ Jun Pala, the self-labelled voice of the “Anti-Communist Crusade” in Davao (home of *Alsa Masa* and other fanatic vigilante groups).<sup>328</sup> Like the references to the radio operator Poloy, inserts from the interview with DJ Pala are scattered throughout the entire film, to some extent building up the antagonism between the two.

DJ Pala shows his gun to the camera, and boasts about himself routinely using Goebbels’ radio propaganda tactics, just to

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<sup>327</sup> Following Noël Carroll (2004) and his analyses of *Soprano*, I have shown earlier (chapter 3.1) how, while not identifying with a certain character, the positive attitude towards that character can be established or secured thru the negative attitude for his antagonist.

<sup>328</sup> As it is well documented in the film, at the end of 1980s Davao was home to *Tadtad* (Chop-chop), whose members were notorious for beheading the victims or hacking them to death (see Davis 1989, 200).

go on uttering his admiration for Hitler. Even if Pala is obviously aware of the film camera, and his intentions of being provocative come through, the way his interventions are intercalated in the film are efficiently prompting Poloy as the one more worthy of the spectator's affection. One last such insert from DJ Pala's zealous speech is placed on the end credits of **A RUSTLING OF LEAVES**: "it is useless to answer your interview because it seems to me that you want NPA, and you don't want our crusade, and you are inciting people not to support us".

By including this meta-reference, Wild properly invites her spectators once more, at the very end, to freely counter the views in the film with their own perspectives. Chances are that, by this very end, the point of empathy is already secured, and directed towards the Filipino people and their struggle, with its many layers, from underground fight accompanied by violence to political, legal debate (even if the legal alternatives are presented as a particularly unlikely possibility at the time of the making of the film). It is from the side of the legal debate that the most prominent duo of complementary characters is impersonated. Two men are introduced at the very beginning of **A RUSTLING OF LEAVES** and followed throughout the work: both of them former



Figure 5.10 **DJ Pala in A RUSTLING OF LEAVES (1988).**

revolutionaries, both arrested in the times of the martial law under Marcos, both fond of sweet beverages.

The similarities between them do not end here. Released from prison with the promise of a new democratic regime, both men appear to attempt, at the time of the making of the film, not to join once more the underground of the armed struggle, but to try the democratic struggle, giving the left a legal face, as one of them puts it, since now the armed struggle should only remain

secondary, as the other says by the end of the film. One of them is Bernabe Buscayno, famously known as Commander Dante, founder of NPA, the military wing of the Communist Party. Captured and tortured in 1976, he served years in isolated confinement as a political detainee. The other, Edice dela Torre, “artist, priest and revolutionary”, as Nettie Wild describes him in the film, is one of the former heads of Christians for National Liberation. The two never appear in the same sequence and none of them ever mentions the other in front of the camera, but their interventions are juxtaposed, as somehow to comment on one another, or to complete and support each other, and associations are to be formed on the mind of the spectator. The dissimilarities between the two men are equally important. Bernabe Buscayno aka Commander Dante is presented as “turned shy from the years of confinement”, emaciated, humble, serious, always on the go. During the nearly 10 years of his imprisonment, for both Filipinos and international press, Commander Dante became a symbolic figure for the peasant resistance in the Philippines.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Bernabe ‘Dante’ Buscayno was released by the Aquino government, in the first days of the coming to power. A detailed profile of Dante is to be found in Davis (1989), 70–77.



Figure 5.11 **Edicio dela Torre in A RUSTLING OF LEAVES (1988).**

Nettie Wild met him fist at his liberation in the aftermath of the 1986 Revolution. From there, the filmmaker followed Dante in his journey for a different kind of fight, an unarmed one: he runs for senator in the first free elections, under the newly formed Partido

ng Bayan (People's Party).<sup>330</sup> At both the very beginning and at the very end of the film, Dante is shown in the same hypostasis: in motion, driving his car, while all throughout the film he has an aura of perpetual motion. He is followed travelling the country, crumbled in the electoral van, sweating under the Philippine sun.

The other character in the constructed duo, Edicio dela Torre, is, on the contrary, statically filmed on location. He is first introduced talking to Netty Wild in the shady courtyard of his *Institute for Popular Democracy*, an NGO founded in the first days after the revolution, filmed in front of a wall painting he just finished. Most of the inserts with dela Torre are taken from a sit-down interview, where he theorizes in perfect English, with humour and intellectual balance, the socio-political issues at stake in the Philippines at the end of the 1980s.

Dela Torre's elaborated and clearly stated views seem to be shared by Dante, who doesn't open up to the camera in the same self-reliant way.

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<sup>330</sup> The election campaign is documented throughout the entire film. For a comprehensive review of the context of the elections on 11 May 1987, see Hedman (1996).



Figure 5.12 **Commander Dante in A RUSTLING OF LEAVES (1988).**

The filmmaker is witnessing how Dante, “turned shy from the years of confinement”, says little to the camera crew. We get some glimpse of his personal views and ideas from the electoral speeches he delivers in his senatorial campaign but, filmed on stage, in front of the audience of potential voters, he is more to be perceived as Dante playing a role – that of a senatorial candidate. It is the intercalation of the broadly applicable views of dela Torre that

puts Dante's character into context, indirectly explaining his actions and his stand.

It is the calm, tempered, contained statements dela Torre makes in front of the camera that rather explain the complex persona of Commander Dante. With a smile on his face and mainly talking about himself, dela Torre indirectly explains the consistency of the character of senatorial candidate Bernabe Buscayno, former Commander Dante, political detainee under Marcos: giving the left a legal space able to participate in the democratic debate, so that "people do not have a notion of democracy that is constricted to shades of conservative thinking".

Dante undertakes great changes during the course of the film, and **A RUSTLING OF LEAVES** documents these changes. When first presented to the viewers, in a newspaper cut-out showing a photo of him getting out of jail, Dante is displaying a faint smile, able to stand on his feet only with the help of another man supporting him. In this first encounter, Dante is already very slim. However, as the film progresses, and the election campaign gets harsher, he is visibly rendered even slimmer. By the last day of the campaign, by the time he gives his last speech, he is reduced to an exhausted, emaciated apparition. It is in the sequence of the very last campaign day that a music montage presents hypostases

of Dante, smiling a tired smile. His fist in the air at sunset, at the celebration of the closing of the electoral campaign, reveals to the camera not a sign of power, but a meagre arm of weakness or defeat. It is the beginning of the end of the film.



Figure 5.13 **Commander Dante after the last electoral speech in *A RUSTLING OF LEAVES* (1988).**

In *A RUSTLING OF LEAVES*, Dante is the fighter for social justice par excellence, and there is very little of his personal dimension that comes through, very few intimate details. Maybe the only

element portraying a human being rather than the hero is the collection of shots from the campaign, when Dante keeps looking prophetically upwards. The viewer, who imagined that this is a sign of hope for democracy, is probably disillusioned by the end of the movie. A funny, human Dante explains the meaning behind his gesture: in the Philippine heat, waiting for hours on a stage for his turn for the campaign speech to come, all that he was hoping for was a cloud to cover the burning sun. Now, in the sequence of the last long day of the election campaign, the sun is falling, and the footage shot in the dark becomes blurrier. Dante looks up again, but the sun has entirely disappeared. Netty Wild's voice-over announces grimly that Dante and his PnB party lost the elections, while the party of president Corazon Aquino won the majority of seats. But the almost tragic ending sequence just begins: walls with remains of election posters are shown, a child's hand grazes Dante's poster and the remaining traces of Dante's face become undistinguishable in the photograph. The gesture is charged with grievous premonitions. The sight of Dante's half erased face on the wall is juxtaposed with photographs from newspaper cut-outs showing, just 4 weeks after the lost elections, a Dante on a hospital bed, with a mutilated face.



**Figure 5.14 Electoral Posters with Commander Dante being removed in *A RUSTLING OF LEAVES* (1988).**

He is one of the PnB candidates who became the target of many terrorist attempts, and one of the few who survived them. The view of electoral photos burning, accompanied by the sound-mix of scorching fire, and bullets, add up to the information in the voice-over. Towards the very end of the film, Netty Wild interviews Dante one last time, this time asking him only two questions about the necessity of violence in the Philippine struggle for reforms. Dante's answers (about the need of peaceful

organisation for achieving democracy and violence as the very last resort) are moving, but what is hard to bear is the sight of him. Before presenting the interview, the filmmaker's voice warns: "we met a visibly tired Dante". Signs of the attempt on his life are to be seen on his face. His maxillary shows traces of fresh wounds, and a zoom in towards his face reveals more mutilation. He seems to struggle to answer the questions, and his speaking ability is affected. The display of him is heart breaking: it seems that in the 80 minutes of film, and the 8 months of filming, Dante almost vanished in front of the movie camera, which happened to document this fading away.

The viewer is left with this final edited confrontation between Dante and Aquino, who, the filmmaker seems to be suggesting, devoured the attempt of a democratic revolution with undemocratic means. In the ambiguity of such a complicated story and so many shades of grey, the filmmaker opens up the possibilities. Like many times before in the film, the revolutionary priest dela Torre one more time lends his voice to explain the dynamics on screen, this time indirectly commenting on the attempt on Dante's life. He ends by asking for an attitude – from the Filipinos, but maybe from the spectators, too.



Figure 5.15 **Commander Dante in A RUSTLING OF LEAVES (1988).**

Netty Wild's stand is obvious, and her views very personally stated, but the choice on the side of the spectator seems to be still there. The empathy for the new type of fighter, however, seems inescapable. The ending shows, yet again, like the very first time he was presented in the film, a Dante back on track, driving his car to another destination, suggesting he is looking towards new ways or solutions.



## **PART III: EMPATHY – SO WHAT?**

## 6 Consequences of the Viewing Process

### 6.1 Empathy, as a Problematic Ending of the Film-Generated Empathic Process

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*In sum, I would argue that most moral dilemmas in life arouse empathy, because they involve victims, seen or unseen, present or future. Empathy activates moral principles and, either directly or through these principles, influences moral judgement and reasoning.*

– Martin Hoffman, 2000<sup>331</sup>

“Who benefits from the production of empathy?”, educational theorists Megan Boler rhetorically wondered.<sup>332</sup> Unless empathy does not lead to direct action or helping, she argues, it remains only at the level of perilous ‘passive empathy’, meaning “those instances where our concern is directed to fairly distant others, whom we cannot directly help”.<sup>333</sup> Boler criticizes the recent “production of empathy”, namely the emergent teaching of

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<sup>331</sup> Hoffman (2000), 247.

<sup>332</sup> Boler (1999), 164.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 159.

empathy in a cross-cultural context, in the name of social justice or democracy in distant places, very remote from Western everyday experience. When empathy is not directed towards the one in need, it “produces no action towards justice but situates the powerful Western eye/I as the judging subject, never called upon to cast her gaze upon her reflection”.<sup>334</sup> It is for this type of reading of tragic stories about distant people, which Megan Boler finds rather patronizing than help-generating, that she coined the notion of ‘passive empathy’.

But even more passive than books or news reading, one might argue, is the cinema experience. Traditionally, film viewing implies that the spectator simply sits in the chair, gaze directed towards the screen; for the price of a ticket, multiple pairs of eyes and ears are ready to receive whatever they are being given. Recent technical developments, one might argue, have rendered film viewing even more passive, since it has moved to the comfort of one’s own apartment, first on TV and, in time, onwards to the video system. Film viewing (and documentary film makes no

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 161. Boler uses the reading and teaching of *Mouse*, Art Spiegelman’s Pulitzer Prize graphic novel about the Holocaust, as a case in point.

exception) preserved, or even enhanced, a certain passivity to it. Recently, video-renting shops have started to close down, making way for the online renting and buying of films. Documentary distribution platforms developed online renting systems, where one can rent films for a week, a month or even a year, sometimes for as little as one Euro.<sup>335</sup> Free alternatives, like online documentary film collections or libraries, are also becoming increasingly available.<sup>336</sup> In 2013, the video sharing website Vimeo launched the self-distribution service *On Demand*,<sup>337</sup> where authors can sell their own film productions, keeping 90% of the revenues after taxation. Thus, the documentary viewer does no longer even need to suitably dress up, prepare, and go out of his door in order to watch stories from the civil war in Syria or from the Ukrainian

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<sup>335</sup> One growing case is JourneyMan Documnetaries (<http://www.journeyman.tv/>). Film festival or associations of film festivals also developed such renting systems, like DOC ALLIANCE (<http://www.dafilms.de>).

<sup>336</sup> DocumentaryHeaven (<http://documentaryheaven.com/>), Documentary Addict (<http://documentaryaddict.com>), Top Documnetary Films (<http://topdocumentaryfilms.com>). National databases are also being establishe. In Canada, for example: HotDocs Doc Library (<http://www.hotdocslibrary.ca>) or The National Film Bord (<https://www.nfb.ca>).

<sup>337</sup> The service is available for Pro mambers, status ubgradable for a small fee. (<https://vimeo.com/ondemand>).

Maidan: today, this is rendered possible by virtue of one single click.

What happens, we have to ask, to the documentary-generated empathy, particularly in these times of increasing rush? Is it turning into a more of a passive empathy, the way Megan Boler fears? And she is not alone in her concern: similar to Megan Boler's notion of 'passive empathy' is Ann Kaplan's 'empty empathy', which refers to the catastrophe-related sentimentalism encouraged by Eurocentric culture and their medias.<sup>338</sup> It is the superficial empathy process, sped up by the abundance of images travelling from mobile phones via the internet to tablets and iPads, at the end of which one is left concerned more with his or her "own tears"<sup>339</sup> than with the suffering of the other. The thus described process doesn't lead towards helping, or towards any other sort of tendency to action or moral attitude, for that matter. The empathy might be there but, Kaplan fears, in a superficial form. The melodramatic form prevents the viewer from developing a meaningful, lasting concern.

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<sup>338</sup> Kaplan (2011), 255–275.

<sup>339</sup> Kaplan (2011), 265.

The prevalence of empathy-generating visuals is not surrounded merely with scepticism, certainly not on the art history terrain. Dominic McIver Lopes' conviction is that the image-generated empathy contributes to our overall 'empathic skill', adding to our overall ability of empathising, which will be exercised outside the particular pictures, and independent from them:<sup>340</sup>

By way of analogy, indoor climbing walls contribute to climbing ability because climbing mountains contributes to climbing ability and indoor climbing walls afford climbs that are relevantly similar to climbs up mountains.<sup>341</sup>

Regardless of their shortcomings, the contribution of the many empathy-generating images to our empathic skill, which needs to be trained and developed, is not to be denied. Megan Boler's 'passive empathy' theory is not entirely bleak, but she came up with a superior alternative to it: the 'testimonial reading'. In a contemporary continuous 'crises' climate, representations of truth, which are neither static nor fixed, are required, some of which

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<sup>340</sup> McIver Lopes (2011), 118–133. The 'empathy for pictures' is understood here in the broader sense: photographs and paintings alike also fall under that category.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 119.

enable the reader himself to actively play his part in the production of that truth.<sup>342</sup> As opposed to the passive or the empty empathy, testimonial reading presupposes a participatory self-reflexivity, and the acceptance that reading about the distress of others might potentially involve a task on one's own side. If we are to agree with Boler, then the new developments in media technology which made interactivity possible in the context of documentary products, and where the viewer can participate or even generate his own content, appear particularly fit to counteract the passive empathy.

I have argued in Part I of the current work that, regardless of the abundant literature on empathy in various other academic fields, the situation changes when it comes to documentary moving image. Yet, there is a bigger remaining reason of dissatisfaction with the current stage of the discussion: whatever already exists that follows the empathic process, has been of almost no interest to film theorists.<sup>343</sup> Documentary films in resistance contexts are emergency products and, besides the fact

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<sup>342</sup> Boler (1999), 166.

<sup>343</sup> There is some work coming from the cognitivist film scholars, for example Greg M. Smith (2003).

that they aim to *move* their spectator, behind the production process, as pointed out earlier, there is almost always a *function*: to attract aid – from political and humanitarian to military. At times, I have shown, these films are yet another tool of the resistance movement itself.<sup>344</sup> In other words, whatever action follows the viewer's empathic process, this is one of the reasons, and sometimes *the reason*, which in the first place motivated the production.

So, we firstly have to ask, can empathy translate into meaningful action or, quite on the contrary, is the increased production and distribution of traumatic images a danger for significant, empathy-guided moral attitude? The makers of resistance documentaries would argue that there is indeed a direct relationship between documentary film viewing and an altruistic tendency to action.

In order to test the hypotheses, we first need to look at the liaisons between empathy-generated feelings of distress and our

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<sup>344</sup> After the 1970s, starting with central America and The Caribbean, revolutionary and insurgent movements all around the world were establishing their own Film Institutes: INCINE (Nicaraguan Institute of Cinema), Film Institute of Revolutionary El Salvador (Collective Cero á la Izquierda), etc.

helping behaviour (6.2.1), as well as at the connections between film viewing and action (6.2.2). By the end of this chapter, it should become obvious how documentary interactivity, brought about by the Internet and transmedia possibilities, does not make the documentary viewing experience increasingly passive. Neither does it add to the passive empathy. On the contrary, it enhances the empathy-generated helping behaviour.

## 6.2 From Empathising to Action

### 6.2.1 Empathic Distress as Prosocial Motivator

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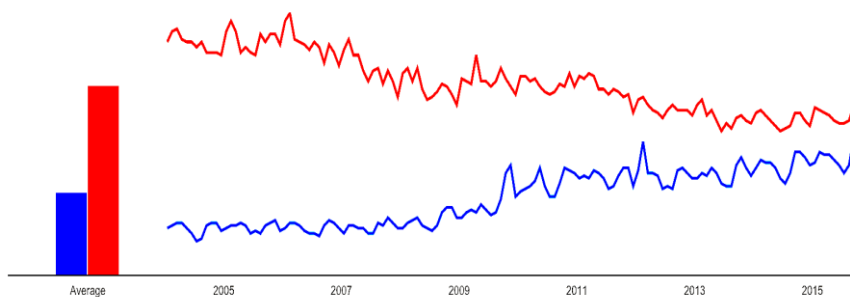


Figure 6.1 The interest in **Empathy** ■ increased in the last years, as opposed to the decrees of interest in looking up **Sympathy** ■ according to the data saved by Google and displayed by Trends.

The interest in Empathy is on the rise. Google Trends shows a boost in the worldwide curiosity for looking up the term (Fig 6.1). Jeremy Rifkin, advisor of the European Commission, of Chancellor Merkel and of president Barack Obama, amongst others, identified empathy, understood as “the ability to recognise oneself in the other and the other in oneself”, as a “deeply

democratizing experience”: “Empathy is the soul of democracy”.<sup>345</sup> Barack Obama himself pointed out the “empathy deficit” as being at least as stringent a problem for society as the federal deficit is.<sup>346</sup>

It is widely acknowledged that empathy plays a key role in our understanding of others, that it makes people kinder, more caring. It has become common to account empathy’s contribution to our moral attitude and the influence it has on our action: in other words, the fact that empathy does make us more helpful. Moral philosopher Lou Agosta went as far as to argue that we even get our “humanness”, the quality of being human, from the one we are empathising with.<sup>347</sup>

Yet, like other aspects of the empathic process, its important moral component, its capacity to wire helping, is not a novel discovery. Like mimicry, it was first observed by Adam

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<sup>345</sup> Rifkin (2009), 161.

<sup>346</sup> Obama (June 19, 2006), at Northwestern University Comencement. Available online on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=1069&v=2MhMRYQ9Ez8>. Transcript available online on:

<http://www.northwestern.edu/newscenter/stories/2006/06/barack.html>.

<sup>347</sup> Agosta (2010), xiv.

Smith, as early as 1759.<sup>348</sup> Abundant evidence confirmed Adam Smith's assumption. We know today that seeing somebody else in distress generates personal feelings of distress on the side of the observer, a distress that can be alleviated through helping: the empathic distress.<sup>349</sup> Consequently, having the ability to help anguished people can reduce that distress, alongside one's inclination to painful empathic over-arousal.

Psychologist C. Daniel Batson is one life-long examiner of the relationship between empathy and altruistic helping. In the last 25 years, Batson and his team undertook a long series of experiments investigating people's empathic responses to witnessing other persons in distress, the core question for many of his experiments being: in which way empathic distress is linked to altruism, generating care, and an overall prosocial behaviour. He managed to gather plentiful evidence for the empathy-altruism hypotheses (Batson et al. (1991, 1995, 1997, 2001, 2011). For most of these experiments, the emphasis was on the more complex, imaginative dimension of empathy (what I hitherto call

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<sup>348</sup> Smith (1759/2009), 8.

<sup>349</sup> Research is reviewed, amongst others, by Hoffman (1978, 2000), Batson (1982) and more recently Berenger, in assessing the relationship between empathy and pro-environmental behaviour (2007).

identification, and what in Hoffman's work goes under the name of role taking or perspective taking). One of them, dating from 1982, presupposed that participants are separated into two groups: one group was instructed to *pay attention* (law-empathy condition) to the information provided by the victim, while the other group was told to *imagine* the victim's feelings (high-empathy condition). The subjects, students in psychology, were asked to listen to a tape recording with another fellow student, Carol, who supposedly broke both her legs in a car accident and was still partially immobilized, risking to fail her first year at the university. One group of students, asked to objectively focus on the information, clearly displayed less empathic emotions, and in a later stage of the experiment, were also more reluctant to offer Carol the needed help. Conversely, the students asked to imagine how Carol must have felt in those circumstances showed higher empathic feelings and displayed an altruistic attitude.

Additionally, and more important for us here, in the second part of the experiment, the students were informed, via a hand-written letter from Carol, that she still hoped not to fail the class and was asked for her colleagues' help. She was asking the other students to assist her, by passing on to her their own notes. The help Carol needed was for them to go with her through one

month of missed classes. Two variables were built up by the experiment: 'ease of escape condition' and 'difficult escape condition'. In the 'ease of escape condition', the letter read that Carol was still immobilized at home and that, in order to help, subjects would have to travel all the way there. The 'difficult escape condition' was more problematic, since, as Carol was stating in her letter, she could have come to class, where the help could have been offered. In this case, even if the subjects didn't agree to help, they would have had to see Carol again and again, and face their refusal of the easily identifiable colleague, in her wheelchair with both her legs still in casts. The students in the 'objective' group accepted to help when escape was difficult, but rather not when escape from helping was easy, thus showing that, behind their helping attitude was the egoistic goal of reducing self-distress. Conversely, the students who, in the first part of the test, had been asked to imagine how Carol would feel, and thus identified with her, were highly inclined to helping – even when helping was easy to escape.

This is just one in a long series of experiments successfully bringing evidence to the way empathic emotions prompt altruistic motivation to help. Even more so: it also brought additional evidence that the higher the focus on the emotions of a person in

need, the higher will be the motivation to reduce that need. Since the above-described experiment was published, increasing empirical evidence was gathered to support the hypotheses that empathy not only strengthens one's motivation to act (Batson 1991), but that this motivation is altruistic (Batson and Show 1991a, Batson 1997). The desire to help others is not only aimed at increasing one's own welfare, alleviate one's own distress at the sight of the other in distress, or contributing to one's social desirability, but it can be truly altruistic. There is almost no opposition to Batson's findings <sup>350</sup> : the empathy-triggered motivation has as ultimate goal to alleviate the pain of the other, to help the one in need, and it is not ultimately aimed at the observer's welfare.

Batson's empirical findings constitute the basis for the development of several theories on empathy's moral dimension, as well as to moral action. This happened in academic fields, which traditionally do not cross the realm of psychological or clinical

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<sup>350</sup> Few researchers questioned Batson's methodology, that altruistic helping exists, and that it is associated with empathic feelings of distress. Neuberg et al. (1997), for example, advanced data against the empathy-altruism hypotheses, stating that Batson's observed effects were more likely accountable for non-altruistic and non-empathy-based factors. This theory was tested by Baston (1997) and convincingly rejected.

studies. Care theorist Michael Slote and ethics scholar Julinna Oxley, for example, both looked at Batson's results to answer core questions about the relationship between altruism and empathy, and reach the same conclusion: that empathy is crucial to moral motivation. When it comes to direct action, however, empathy's potential faces scepticism. Julinna Oxley distances herself from Slote when she argues that, while essential, empathy is however not sufficient for moral judgement and action.<sup>351</sup> Recent findings in development psychology, however, confirm Michael Slote in his account of empathy as being central to the ethics of care. Empathy constitutes the very basis of our moral judgement, while its limitations do not prevent it from guiding our moral behaviour. Martin Hoffman's work (1981, 2000, 2014) shows not only that empathy is enough for triggering action, but also why it is so. It accounts for the way empathy affects not only our behaviour on a short term but, in the long run, of society in its entirety: the long-lasting and significant contribution empathy has to caring, on one hand, and to law and law changing, and justice in general, on the other.

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<sup>351</sup> Oxley (2011), 73.

Empathic distress is central to the Hoffmanian theory of empathy. In order to demonstrate the direct interconnection between prosocial moral action and empathic distress, Hoffman correlates evidence from three distinct phenomena, convincingly showing that: empathic distress is associated with helping behaviour, that empathic distress proceeds and motivates our helping, and that we do feel better after helping.<sup>352</sup> Helping is what alleviates our empathic distress, with an equally valid flip of the coin: not attempting to help only prolongs our own unease. Consequently, past occurrences leave traces on what can lessen the personal empathic distress: we do know from experience that helping makes us feel better.

The empathy-generated instances of helping distant others are indeed multiple and, more often than not, outside the reach of conventional quantifications. An attempt to account for them comes from Martin Hoffman (2014), who makes a bottom-up evaluation, namely individual empathy-generated feelings of distress leading to significant contributions to social change: Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose loss of a son led to the writing of

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<sup>352</sup> Hoffman (2000), 30–36.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a highly influential work in the American Civil War; Nobel Peace Prize Nominee Craig Kielburger who founded *Free for Children* after being empathically disturbed by the photo and story of a murdered five year old Pakistani boy who tried to escape his factory work. An interesting case brought up by Hoffman is Susan Sontag's. In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag argued for the force that images of distressed others have on our empathic feelings (though she calls it sympathy).<sup>353</sup> Years later, in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, and after the proliferation of such images commenced, Sontag raised doubts about her earlier belief in the power of images.<sup>354</sup> Nevertheless, as Hoffman correctly points out, it was Susan Sontag's personal empathic distress in early teenage years, experienced at the sight of a photograph from the Holocaust, which was carried and developed throughout the years. Eventually, it contributed to the writing of her influential books. It might well be that caring is often selfish and every gene is a selfish gene<sup>355</sup>. As Hoffman ironically puts it, humans are not

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<sup>353</sup> Sontag (1973).

<sup>354</sup> Sontag (2003).

<sup>355</sup> Dawkins (1989), Williams (1988).

“saintly-empathic-distress-leads-to-helping-machines”,<sup>356</sup> and just by taking a brief look at the state of the world, it becomes apparent that empathic distress does not always lead to helping. But instances abound when this is, however, the case, and the viewing of a documentary film has the potential to influence a prosocial attitude in the spectator.

In the last two chapters, we will look at means of accurately quantifying the influence images from revolutionary documentary film, might have for producing meaningful action – in the context of novel possibilities brought about by technical developments. Firstly, however, there is one more argument to be made for the film-generated action hypothesis.

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<sup>356</sup> Hoffman (2000), 33.

### **6.2.2 Tendency to Action: Torben Grodal's PECMA Flow Theory of Film Viewing**

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Danish film theoretician, Torben Grodal proposed a general theory of the film experience (1997), which he later (2006) named PECMA flow (short for perception, emotion, cognition, and motor action), and developed it in his seminal book *Embodied Visions. Evolution, Emotion, Culture, and Film* (2009). Grodal starts from the premises that the architecture of our brains impacts the way we perceive film, as well as all other audio visual products which technology can afford, in the same way our embodied brain influences the way we experience the natural world around us.

Grodal based his PECMA flow model on the general architecture of our brains and bodies. In a first stage of the flow, those internal parts of the brain (for example the visual cortex), which receives information from the 'entrance' devices, the sensory, deliver it for further analysis to the peripheral organs responsible for perceiving the external stimuli, like sound and light. Second, the input is passed on to the association cortex and other adjacent parts of the brain, where it is being attributed an

accumulation of depictions and information stored in memory. A more sophisticated analysis is then performed in the cognitive centres of the brain, one of them being the limbic system, where the information is processed, suppositions of outcomes are generated and evaluated, before an actual outcome is produced. Thus, in the last step of the flow, the motor and pre-motor cortices activate the motor system, and actions are either planned, or performed by muscles (Fig 6.2).

In short, the functionality of the senses is that of collecting inputs, which in turn may trigger actions, as dictated by emotions. When one cannot respond to these inputs in a desirable way, the body's internal states might be modified in such a way as to produce bodily reactions like crying and laughter. Grodal's research made clear that our brains and bodies are constructed in such a way as to control and generate actions, and the human experience of viewing a film makes no exception. In the case of the typical movie viewing experience, as described by Grodal's PECMA flow, the eyes receive light (data) from the screen and pass it on to the visual cortex, where millions of pieces of information, such as colours and shadows, are being analysed.

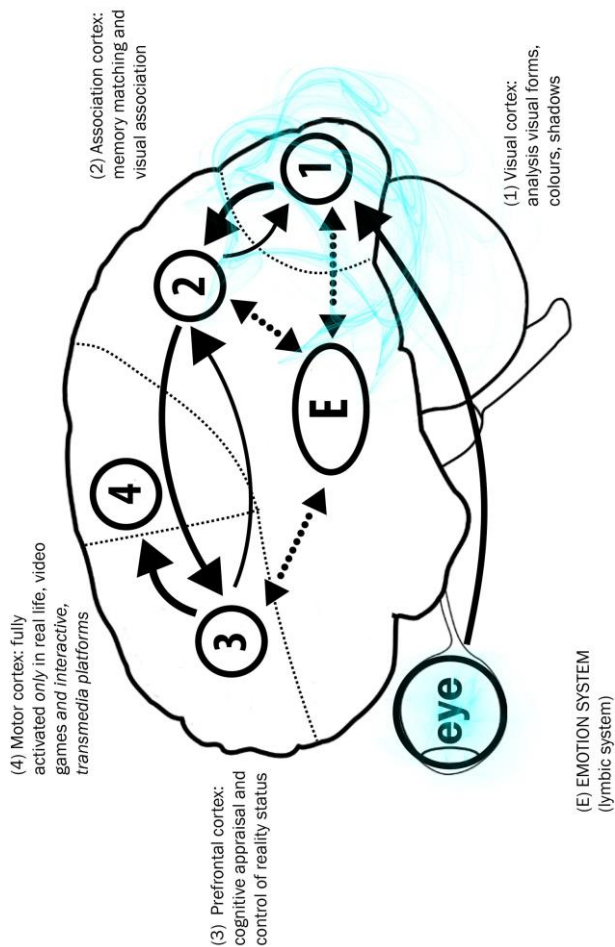


Figure 6.2 The PECMA Flow Model, incorporating transmedia platforms; adapted by me from Grodal (2006), 2.

In the second stage of the flow, parts of the brain such as the association cortex are attributing to the analysed object various representations from the millions already stored in the memory, where they are already labelled with emotional tags:

So when we make a match viewing a film, whether the match is tiger or handsome man, our emotions are automatically activated via links between memory files and the limbic system.<sup>357</sup>

The frontal lobe of the brain is now in charge with the control and implementation of actions. The tension accumulated so far might change into relaxation when turned into action: in Grodal's terms, when the goals are fulfilled. The fourth and final stage of the flow concerns the implementation of the action tendencies resulted from the earlier emotional processing. As opposed to other forms of visual art, Grodal argues, the filmmaker has an increased control over the spectator's attention and chain of emotions, and thus more prone to facilitate our tendency to action. Grodal argues that the forth step in the PECMA flow is only wholly activated not by

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<sup>357</sup> Grodal (2009), 149. That emotions are tendencies to action has been convincingly showed previously, as in emotion expert Nico Frijda (1986). The task of testing the applicability of Frijda's theories for the film viewing experience to be found in Ed S. Tan (1996).

film watching, but by real life actions and, more recently, video games.<sup>358</sup> It is true that we do not have the same type of reactions in the cinema venue and in real life. We do not run away in panic when we watch a horror movie, neither do we try to help film characters when endangered. Responsible for this, Grodal convincingly explains, is our capacity to evaluate the film's reality-status. A continuous evaluation of the sensory input, and the consequent assessment of whatever is real or not, is essential for real life as well as for film viewing, for understanding both the world around us as well as the filmic world. Furthermore, the response the reality status evaluation receives dictates whether action is to be undertaken – and, as it was stated at the beginning of this work, documentary films come labelled with reality status (with the assumption that what is shown in the film happened in the real world).

Due to the reality-status evaluation, the PECMA flow of film viewing doesn't activate the motor cortex, the way real life

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<sup>358</sup> In a paper presented at the University of Hamburg (conference *On Cognitive studies of the Video Games Experience: Games, Cognition and Emotions*), on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July 2013, Torben Grodal explains the applicability of the PECMA flow to action. Available online on: <https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/veranstaltungen/-/v/15224>.

does. Interactive video and computer games, however, Grodal argues, made way to a new type of immersive experience, finally being able to involve the fourth stage in the PECMA flow: concrete action.

The interactivity intrinsic to experiencing new I-docs, trans-media or cross-platform documentaries, I will argue in chapter 8, once they arrest the PECMA flow, have the same property attributed by Grodal only to real life and games: of activating that part of the brain charged with concrete, motor action. In the same way as the games do, i-Docs, we will show, enable a fusion between the role of viewer and participant, spectator and actor.

## 7 Towards an Ending: From Filmic Empathy to Action

### 7.1 Revolutionary Documentaries in the Age of Internet

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*Cinema has not yet been invented!*<sup>359</sup> – André Bazin

*The Web Documentary Manifesto* was launched in April 2013, when several documentary makers, pointing out the new technological possibilities Internet has to offer, called for a revolution. “It is time, fellow comrades, for a revolution!”<sup>360</sup>, was the third commitment of the *Manifesto*.

The *Manifesto* pointed out the need for using “the web” as a place of creation and distribution of documentary films, one which would potentially minimise the gap between filmmakers and their audiences. Before the emergence of the Internet,

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<sup>359</sup> Bazin (1967/2005), 21.

<sup>360</sup> Available on: <http://zeega.com/101357>. It is referencing Dziga Vertov’s various versions of *Manifesto*, among which *We* (1922), 5–9, and *Kinoks: A Revolution* (1922), 11–20, in Vertov (ed. Annette Michelson) (1984).

documentary making was still restricted by television and cinema norms, such as formats and running time. Linearity was another limitative quality of the documentary experience. When distributed online, these limits of the documentary genre seem to have come to an end.

There is no consensus on whichever name should be used for the new sub-genre, this new phenomenon in documentary making. But be they named multimedia products, cross-media, transmedia or multi-platform documentaries, they represent a point of increased interest for all sides of the documentary production spectrum: producers, distributors and documentary makers, including those who proclaim the bettering of the world as their goal, they all try to be fast in understanding the real possibilities Internet has to offer to the genre.

Yet, not everybody shares the same optimism when it comes to both the possibilities for democratisation that Internet has to offer to the new documentary films and their empathic potential. Gordon Queen, producer and director of documentary films since the 1960s, expresses such reservations: "I have some concerns about the fact that everyone is in their little niche. Narrowcasting is fine, but I think the element of broadcast – of

people experiencing a powerful emotional event together – is terribly important for a democracy".<sup>361</sup>

Whether or not the empathic capacities of revolutionary documentaries are to benefit from the new possibilities Internet has to offer, and how exactly the new sub-categories should be defined, are issues to be discussed in the following chapter (chapter 8).

Beforehand, however, we should acknowledge that *action facilitators* (as I call here the cues filmmakers build within the documentary frames in order to direct action) are not a novelty that came with the age of the Internet: they are as old as the genre itself (chapter 7.2). Older than ‘the age of Internet’, I will argue, is also the attempt to get the story told on various media platforms, in order to facilitate the tendency to action (chapter 7.3).

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<sup>361</sup> Gordon Queen, cited in Anthony Kaufman (2013), online at: <http://www.indiewire.com/article/transmedia-documentaries-are-sexy-but-whos-watching?page=1>

## **7.2 Action Facilitators: Captions and Direct Plead**

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Resistance documentaries, targeted towards western audiences, are made with an agenda in mind, being yet another tool for turning the passive spectators into moral active players, who in turn put pressure on their governments for taking a moral attitude in their foreign policy. Filmmakers of revolutionary documentaries have frequently tried to facilitate the tendency to action that comes along with the empathic distress emergent from the film viewing, and were by necessity looking for specific means to assist it.

There is a direct relationship between the political role that resistance documentaries can play, and developments in media technology, not only in terms of recording and processing, but more recently, as we will see, in terms of means of distribution. In the last years, the tendency was for documentary distribution to shift, from the cinema and television frames, towards the space of the Internet. Before documentary distribution started to occupy space online, however, the possibilities to create action facilitators were still limited. With restricted means at their disposal, filmmakers made the asking for help explicit; written text and

characters directly addressing the viewers were, until recently, the customary means of directing the empathy-generated tendency to action.

Later on in this chapter we are going to look at the possibilities that came together with the expanding of documentary resistance filmmaking from celluloid to digital file, and from the analogue and linear to the digital and non-linear, multi-platform. With the new developments, as will be shown, the appeal to action, and the action facilitators can now be more subtle and diverse, and no longer reduced to candid manifest statements. Beforehand, however, we need to briefly look into the less restrained, routinely used action facilitator: the direct, unambiguous message incorporated in either the written or spoken word.

White on black text insert is a basic, extensively used way of directing the spectator's tendency to action. A cut-in with a still displaying text, or – when it comes to documentaries broadcasted on TV – video graphics generated in the lower third of the screen (the so-called Chyron), are just some usual ways of directing the tendency to action that the moved spectators might experience at the end of the film viewing. **COMPANIERO: VICTOR JARA OF CHILE**, for example, discussed at length in Chapter 5 of the

current work, ends on a still frame displaying the address of the *Chile Solidarity Campaign*, a Cooperative Centre in London. The white text on the black screen lasts for exactly 10 seconds, time enough for the TV spectator to have it imprinted in one's mind, or to jump up for a pen and a piece of paper.

The other extensively used action facilitator is the open plead of the documentary character, directly addressing the overseas film viewer with a concretely formulated appeal. Some are very straightforward in their intent, as it is the case with **A CRY FOR FREEDOM**, which, as clearly stated in the title, is an imploration for help.

**A CRY FOR FREEDOM** is one of the documentaries about the resistance against South African apartheid policies produced at the beginning of the 1980s, with the support of various Christian Churches; in this particular case, the support came from the Lutheran Church in America, and the film's focus was Namibia. Despite media censorship, starting in the beginning of the 1980s, filmmakers were documenting the resistance against the apartheid within the South African borders. The inhumane policies South Africa applied in Namibia, however, such as torture and army repression, went largely undocumented. Nonetheless, in both South Africa and Namibia, the increasing availability of small

format filming equipment, such as Super-8, U-Matic or Beta, along with funds made available by western churches, foundations and foreign embassies, stimulated the production. In his 1988 book, *Cinema of Apartheid*, media professor Keyan Tomaselli remarked: “At the same time, this movement is introducing democratic structures and ways of producing films which give oppressed people control over the way they are represented”.<sup>362</sup>

The 21 minutes film is done with the apprehension that it is witnessing a crime of proportions, and it is not an oddity that it was part of the agenda of the churches: “since 1960s, most churches in Namibia have worked steadfastly for the political advancement of Namibia, often at great cost”.<sup>363</sup> The film is produced in 1981, a moment of great importance for the country’s struggle for independence, and was yet another project for the Lutheran Church to raise political awareness in a decisive times when the United Nations attempted to gain independence for Namibia.

**A CRY FOR FREEDOM** combines rare footage from Namibia and Angola, including interviews with international

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<sup>362</sup> Tomaselli (1988), 11.

<sup>363</sup> Tonchi et al. (2012), 57.

politicians. It also includes statements of African and international church leaders, mostly in exile for supporting the South West Africa People Organisation (SWAPO) liberation movement, or just for opposing the illegal actions the South African government was perpetrating in Namibia.<sup>364</sup> As early as the 1970s, Christian Churches developed and practiced ‘liberation theology’, and acted as a messenger to the outside world, positioning itself on the side of SWAPO.<sup>365</sup>

Destructions of the churches and church goods, church newspapers outlawed and numerous exiled clerics, Anglican and Lutheran alike, all are documented in this film. The immediate goals of the political work undergone in the Churches were sanctions against South Africa, and **A CRY FOR FREEDOM** constituted just one means to advocate that.

Amidst killings and terror, the Christian Churches in Namibia appealed to the Christian community, directly asking for

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 397–403. By 1989, SWAPO turned into a legal party and got majority in the first Elections of independent Namibia. The name of the organisation changed into *South West Africa People’s Organsation Party of Namibia*. It is onwards shorted to SWAPO, even if it is no more an acronym.

<sup>365</sup> Wallace (2011/2015), 436. The liberation theology in Namibia is also elaborated in Ejikeme (2011), 41–60, 62.

help from Churches in the United States. The production of this film, which was widely screened in church communities, was one way to echo this “cry for freedom”, as Kenneth Senft, at the time the Mission officer of the Lutheran Church in America, puts it. Without engaging the viewer directly, Kenneth Senft however clearly formulates what it is that the American viewer can do for Namibia: “They have asked us to assist them in convincing the nations of the world, through the United Nations, to provide an opportunity for free elections”. The film was made with a clear agenda behind it, as part of a bigger, urgent plan: in 1981, the United Nations tried to gain independence for Namibia, at a time when, in countries with great economical interests in the region, the United Kingdom and the United States, right wing parties were coming to power. The plan failed, with no chance for independence in the next 10 years, and Namibia entered “the lost decade”.<sup>366</sup> But the film, which is now to be found in the archives of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), is today a viable document for how active and how close the Church was in

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<sup>366</sup> Wallace (2011/2015), 460.

trying to determine concrete action, a resistance documentary being just one of the tools at hand.

The appeal to action that **A CRY FOR FREEDOM** implied, namely pressuring the American public in order to determine the government to raise sanctions in South Africa, was the common goal that documentaries about the apartheid were pleading for in the 1980s. However, other films made it even more explicit. Two documentaries produced in the mid-1980s, **THE MAKING OF SUN CITY** and **WITNESS TO APARTHEID**, do it in a very straightforward manner: Winnie Mandela, wife of Nelson Mandela at the time, looks into the camera and directly asks the American “friends” for sanctions. This interview is a rare instance of collaboration between two distinct documentary films, since Winnie Mandela’s appeal for sanctions is the identical ending of both documentaries, both released almost at the same time. Director Sharon Sopher and the team behind **WITNESS TO APARTHEID** (nominated for an Oscar the following year) brought the footage of Winnie Mandela’s interview from South Africa. They passed the footage on to the team that put together **THE MAKING OF SUN CITY**, a documentary which was to be released a few months earlier than its counterpart, thus letting Mandela’s message get across sooner. But it is not only swiftness that the

appeal needed. The effectiveness of such action facilitators relied on the context of their screening, at the time often limited to activist circles, NGOs and churches, which were organising projections, followed by discussions. The limitations in distribution were bringing along limits in the public they were able to reach: half way through the 1980s, these films were still seen mainly by the already ‘converted’ spectators.

## **7.3 Cross Platform Resitstance Storytelling Before the Age of Internet: SUN CITY and The Artists United Against Apartheid**

### **7.3.1 Distribution Constraints and the Rise of Creative Media Platforms**

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“What about films like **THE MAKING OF SUN CITY** (...)?”, a few independent documentary makers were complaining in an open letter published March 1987 in the monthly *The Independent*.<sup>367</sup> The letter was challenging the refusal of the Public Broadcasting

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<sup>367</sup> Yates, Kinoy and Siegel (1987), in *The Independent*, Vol. 10(3):2.

System (PBS) to permit the showing of the award winning documentary **THE MAKING OF SUN CITY**. Despite having received a Distinguished Documentary Achievement Award from the International Documentary Association, PBS refused to air it, on grounds that the musicians involved in making the film were promoting themselves and their album with the same name.<sup>368</sup> The documentary was part of a larger project, **SUN CITY**, initiated two years beforehand. It was calling for action in South Africa, bringing up issues such as the forceful relocation of the black South Africans in the so-called 'homelands', or the UN-imposed cultural boycott on South Africa. The authors of the 1987 letter (Pamela Yates, Peter Kinoy and Tom Siegel) were themselves makers of resistance documentaries. Their **WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE**, extensively discussed in Part II of the current work, was also subject to delays in broadcasting, while what the authors of such films need in hope of generating meaningful, prompt action, is actually a prompt distribution. In the particular case of the **SUN CITY** project, its makers were openly

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<sup>368</sup> Hostetter (2006), 107. According to the *Sequels* column in *The Independent*, PBS News and Public Affairs vice-president Barry Chase rejected the program "because he thought it promoted the careers of the producers of the *Sun City* record, music video, and the documentary itself".

aiming at contributing to the cultural boycott and sanctions against the Pretoria regime, by informing and mobilising the American citizens.

The work on the **SUN CITY** project commenced in 1985 and continued to grow in a time of turmoil in the American politics towards the apartheid era in South Africa. The second half of the 1980s was a time of social pressure in the United States, which proved to be decisive for the end of the Reagan “constructive engagement”,<sup>369</sup> along with the introduction of new sanctions imposed on the Pretoria regime.<sup>370</sup> Decisive was also the role played by graphic images coming out of South Africa, which prompted an outraged world to voice their concerns regarding the politics of apartheid. The indignation created by these visual depictions determined the South African government to impose

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<sup>369</sup> ‘Constructive Engagement’, notion coined by the Undersecretary for State in South Africa, was the policy of the Reagan administration towards the African country, meaning a relaxation in trade constraints, thus better serving the American strategic and economical interests, as elaborated in Fatton (1984), 57–82. An analysis of the debate around whether Reagan Engagement contributed to the ending of the apartheid in the MA Theses Shandrá D. Hipp (2012).

<sup>370</sup> The state of increased international sanctions and the isolation that South Africa found itself in the 1980s, arguably contributed in ending the apartheid regime. Ungar and Vale (1985/1986), in *Foreign Affairs*, 234–258.

new media restrictions and censorship, which only increased in July 1985, when a state of emergency was declared in South Africa. For international broadcasters it was now increasingly difficult to get a hold of images from South Africa.<sup>371</sup>

The urgency of the moment was thus considered, by filmmakers and activists alike, imperative for showing documentaries like **THE MAKING OF SUN CITY** on the Public Broadcasting System. Therefore, the refusal to air the documentary raised the frustration of the authors behind the Open Letter in *The Independent*. They criticised the attitude of the Public Broadcasters of waiting “for an appropriately acceptable climate to present documentaries like these”<sup>372</sup>: “Will that time ever come if we continue to practice such self-censorship?”<sup>373</sup>.

**THE MAKING OF SUN CITY** was actually aired in prime time by the public Television Station WNYC on January 21<sup>st</sup> 1987.<sup>374</sup> A shorter version of it was also aired on MTV Channel. But in those critical times, the complex team organising **SUN CITY**

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<sup>371</sup> Schechter (1992), 242–247.

<sup>372</sup> Yates, Kinoy and Siegel (April 1987), in *The Independent*, Vol. 10(3): 2.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

<sup>374</sup> According to *The Independent* (March 1987), Vol. 10(2): 7.

did not actually wait for a decision of a broadcaster to get the story through to the American large public. The makers of **SUN CITY** were in a rush to achieve their manifest goals: from concrete and quantifiable ones, like raising funds which went to families of political prisoners, to the less measurable empathic effect: to “move” the people, as one of the makers put it, and generate action.<sup>375</sup> They did not wait for the time-consuming, uncertain, often made behind closed doors decisions of broadcasters and commissioning editors, but rather distributed the story and the message on multiple, more or less interconnected media platforms, transmitting parts of the same message, telling slices of a single story. That makes **SUN CITY** indeed, as early as mid-1980s, a cross-media platform *avant la lettre*. Accordingly, it is considered to have had “significantly affected the anti-apartheid movement throughout the world”.<sup>376</sup> Since 2012, the documentary events or festivals, which have a transmedia entry in their program, are on

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<sup>375</sup> Little Steve in David Marsh (1985), [*Preface*, no pagination].

<sup>376</sup> Sannar (2011), 1.

the rise.<sup>377</sup> Producers, distributors and makers alike can no longer ignore the possibilities of what is diversely labelled cross-media, deep media, multi-platform or transmedia storytelling for communicating their stories. In what follows, I will argue that the spreading of the story on multiple media platforms plays an important role in both enabling the tendency to action of resistance documentaries and in reaching a highly diverse public in a short time frame. These emerging forms offer novel possibilities in quantifying the accomplishments of resistance documentaries and, contrary to wide spread opinion, the distribution of the story on multiple platforms does not coincide with the emergence of the Internet. To illustrate the above, I will use *Sun City* as a case in point, a cross-platform project started in 1985, almost 20 years before Henry Jenkins first coined the term ‘transmedia’.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> Amongst them, Tribeca Film Festival, IDFA Amsterdam, The East Doc Platform, DocsBarcelona, all have a an annual transmedia entrance in their programme.

<sup>378</sup> Jenkins (2003). Available online at: <http://www.technologyreview.com/news/401760/transmedia-storytelling/>. The term was however used beforehand: in analysing characters in video games and TV series for children and teenagers, Marsha Kinder (1991), 38, talked about “comercial transmedia supersystems”.

### **7.3.2 SUN CITY: Context and Origins**

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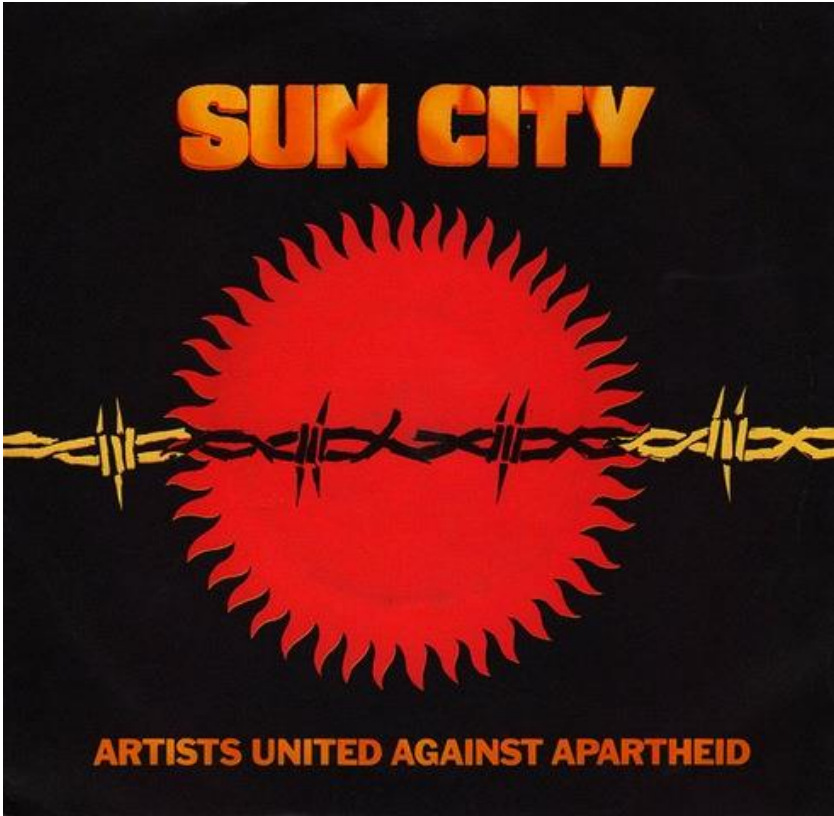


Figure 7.1 *Sun City* album cover. Same logo accompanied all the other channels of the project.

Opinions on what exactly *Sun City* is diverge constantly: from *public campaign*<sup>379</sup>, “comprehensive cultural endeavour”<sup>380</sup>, or “one of the most fervent and forceful *political statements* to emerge from Eighties pop music”<sup>381</sup>, a *song* “born out of outrage and the desire to educate”<sup>382</sup>, “a *compendium of the type of information* that moves people of conscience to become involved, to act”<sup>383</sup>, “*rock-for-a-cause project*”<sup>384</sup>, or simply “*project*”.<sup>385</sup>

*Sun City* is indeed all of the above: song and album, book and even educational booklet, video and documentary film, all deriving their names from the lavish South African resort Sun City. Six years after the resort’s opening in 1979, 54 musical artists of all origins, coming from five continents, took a political stand of a particular kind: the recording of a song. They authored it as the

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<sup>379</sup> Lahusen (1996).

<sup>380</sup> Sannar (2011), 1.

<sup>381</sup> *Sun City* is in *Rolling Stone’s* ‘100 Best Albums of the Eighties’, emphasis added.

Available online at: <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/100-best-albums-of-the-eighties-20110418/artists-united-against-apartheid-sun-city-20110330>.

<sup>382</sup> Little Steve in David Marsh (1985), [*Preface*, no pagination].

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

<sup>384</sup> Lahusen (1996), 92, emphasis added.

<sup>385</sup> Hostetter (2006), 107, emphasis added.

*Artists United Against Apartheid*, and had amongst themselves very famous names from a variety of musical genres: Afrika Bambaata, Bono, Fat Boys, Miles Davis, Peter Gabriel, Lou Reed, Run-DMC, Scorpio, Bruce Springsteen and many more. Other musicians, who kept joining the project once it started, added new contributions to *Sun City*—the song, and the songs thus recorded brought along the creation of *Sun City*—the album. For the first recorded song of the album, the producers and organisers made a music video: documentary, manifesto and call for action at the same time. The same year a book followed, and then several other booklets and videos, while the process behind the production turned into the longer documentary film **THE MAKING OF SUN CITY**. Although a lot was communicated through these various media platforms, the main message from the title was this: the Artists United Against Apartheid were not going to play at the Sun City resort.

Before understanding *Sun City*—the project, and the effects of it circulating on multiple media platforms, we justifiably have to ask, what exactly was, and meant Sun City? Up until today, Sun City continues to be an important holiday destination in South Africa, and it advertises itself as “one of Africa’s premier vacation

destinations”.<sup>386</sup> But in South Africa of the 1980s it played a considerably more complex role. In their book about the meaning of Sun City, Kesting and Weskott are describing it in the context of the African continent of the time: “There was no Disneyland in Africa. But in South Africa there was Sun City”.<sup>387</sup> After a visit to South Africa in 1982, Eddy Amoo, member of the British Rock Group *The Real Things*, was putting the description in context: “Sun City is an Afrikaner’s paradise in a black man’s nightmare”.<sup>388</sup>

The project *Sun City* took its name from the extravagant South African holiday resort, and one of the problems that its creators targeted was the massive involuntary relocation of the 1980s in which, at the beginning of the decade, the South African Government forcefully removed three and a half million black people from the “white areas”, and displaced them into Bantustans (the so-called homelands or black states). For white South Africans, however, there were prospects to be found in the

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<sup>386</sup> Sun City official Website, available online at: <http://www.sun-city-south-africa.com>.

<sup>387</sup> Kesting and Weskott (2009), 29.

<sup>388</sup> Amoo, cited in The Buletin. Available online at: <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1243&dat=19831026&id=FpZTAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=M4cDAAAAIIBAJ&pg=5105,755852&hl=de>.

Bantustans. One such opportunity was that their so-called independent status was bringing about possibilities of economic freedom, like the opening of places banned to them in South Africa proper, such as casinos, on grounds that they lacked morality.<sup>389</sup>

Therefore it was the creation of Bantustans that paved the way to the creation of Sun City. The resort was eventually inaugurated in the vast and poor homeland of Bophuthatswana. Here, the entertaining magnate Sol Kerzner created Sun City, as part of the “construction of dream places that the white middle class desired, which were mirrored in the TV series and soap operas being watched from the UK, the US, and Germany”.<sup>390</sup>

The 90-million-dollar pleasure resort, incorporating the Superbowl, a vast auditorium, attracted famous entertainers. The more artistic and sports boycotts that South Africa proper was facing, the greater was the importance of the Sun City Superbowl Arena. International entertainers kept coming to perform at Sun

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<sup>389</sup> Up until 1996, gorse-racing was the only legal possibility of gambling in South Africa, according Collins et al. (2011), in *South Africa's Medical Journal*, Vol.101(10): 722–723. Casino industry in homelands is extensively described in Rule and Sibanyoni (2000) and in Sallaz (2009).

<sup>390</sup> Kesting and Weskott (2009), 27.

City, having the South African reassurance that the audience was not part of the apartheid system. The arrangement was receiving increased criticism: “Because most blacks can’t afford the high ticket prices at the Superbowl, often a few token tickets are given to them for free in order that the entertainers can perform before a ‘mixed’ audience”.<sup>391</sup> Many people refused to perform in Sun City, joining the U.N. -sponsored boycott of all cultures and sports. But despite the bans, and motivated at times by the extraordinary high fees, or solely due to a lack of political knowledge, or simply by being misinformed, many important names of the entertainment industry still did perform there.

**THE MAKING OF SUN CITY**—the film, first aired in a shorter version on MTV, focused the attention on the cultural boycott, and brought new layers of information to the young American public. For the best-paid performers of the 1980s, however, the cultural boycott on South Africa was not something they had to find out from MTV. Many of them subsequently found their names on the United Nations blacklist for having defied the boycott, sometimes drawn by generous fees: Frank

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<sup>391</sup> Marsh (1985), [no pagination].

Sinatra, Ray Charles, Cher, Queen, Elton John, Liza Minnelli – and up to 200 more.<sup>392</sup>

In its early beginnings, in 1985, the project *Sun City* was not conceived to function on as many platforms as it ended up eventually. These media platforms emerged from the success or limitation of the others, which will be discussed in the following sub-chapters. A glimpse of the impromptu quality of the entire project is visible in the documentary film: we see Steve "Little Steven" Van Zandt, organiser and co-producer of the project, on the phone, calling people up. Having been two times in South Africa and witnessing South African apartheid first hand, an outraged Little Steven initiated *Sun City* as an attempt to take action. So what he did, once back home in New York, was to call up his friends and colleagues; only that his friends and colleagues happened to be the likes of Lou Reed, Bruce Springsteen and Bono. Big names, in fact as big or even bigger as those appearing on the U.N. blacklist for violating the cultural ban, were now supporting the boycott through the *Sun City* platform.

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<sup>392</sup> Usher (1983), in *The Bulletin*, C-8. The fee reported for Sinatra's appearance at Sun City in the summer of 1981 was \$ 1.79 million. The boycott and its defiers described in Kesting and Weskott (2009), 25–26.



**Figure 7.2 Lou Reed, John Oates and Ruben Blades at the filming of SUN CITY documentary video. Photo: David Seeling/ *Sun City* by Steve Van Zandt.**

The renowned names and renowned voices were trying to convey the above story for a large, American (and later international) audience, and to make a personal manifest towards a boycott, while addressing the American citizen, as David Hostetter suggests, in the language of popular culture he was accustomed

to.<sup>393</sup> It is often the case that resistance documentaries make use of celebrities to support the story or prompt action. There is also extensive academic literature, especially from research performed mainly in the field of advertising, which confirmed that the backing of a celebrity largely increases the credibility and impact of a message.<sup>394</sup> The idea of using popular celebrities in a revolutionary documentary in order to increase the trustworthiness of the message is thus not a novelty brought about with the *Sun City* project. As early as 1959, Hollywood actor Errol Flynn appeared as himself in two films meant to increase the popularity of the Revolution in Cuba, and that of Fidel Castro, amongst the American public: **THE TRUTH ABOUT FIDEL CASTRO REVOLUTION** (by Victor Pahlen) and **ASSAULT OF THE REBEL GIRLS** (by Barry Mahon, produced, as stated on the opening credits, with the support of the New Army of Cuba).

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<sup>393</sup> Hostetter (2006).

<sup>394</sup> Atkin and Block (1983), analysed the multiple reasons why a well-known endorser are influential. Ohanian (1990) developed a Scale to Measure the trustworthiness of celebrity endorsers, while more recently, Goldsmith, Lafferty and Newell (2000) evaluated the impact of celebrity credibility and their attractiveness in reception of advertisement.



Figure 7.3 **Errol Flynn pointing out Cuba's location in *THE TRUTH ABOUT FIDEL CASTRO REVOLUTION* (1959).**

In a similar fashion, the initial clinch of the *Sun City* story was that popular celebrities, like Bono, Peter Gabriel and others, would not play at Sun City. At the same time, substantial information was being delivered on what was actually going on in South Africa in the mid-1980s, when, due to South Africa's media boycott, less and less images from the struggle against apartheid were reaching the Western media. The aim of the project became increasingly

ambitious: *the Artists United Against Apartheid* wanted not only to inform, but to “move”,<sup>395</sup> as Little Steve put it.

The song, the album, the music video and the documentary are all very explicit in conveying the anti-apartheid message and asking for attitude, regardless of the media platform used, as will be explained below.

### **7.3.3 SUN CITY, as Intertwining of Distinct Media Platforms**

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The lyrics of Sun City—the song directly address the listeners, while in the video, the musicians are being shown in the streets, mingling with the American passers-by, while singing their manifesto; the sound of it, too, was described as “very street”:

It was hot: part rap, part rock – very street. The song was high-energy, danceable, a gritty New York-sounding tune, in stark contrast by its angry attitude and sound to the sweet

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<sup>395</sup> Little Steve in Marsh (1985), [*Preface*, no pagination], emphases added.

harmonies of Hollywood's more syrupy anthem for aid to Ethiopia.<sup>396</sup>

Even though the song *Sun City* did not escape the comparison with “syrupy anthem” *We are the World*,<sup>397</sup> it is obviously more informative, more diverse in music and emotions delivered, preserving at times a humorous tone while incorporating controversial political statements, like criticism towards Reagan's “constructive engagement” policy:

Our government tells us we're doing all we can (*George Clinton*)

Constructive engagement is Ronald Regan's plan (*Joey Ramone*),

Meanwhile people are dying and giving up hope (*Lon Reed*)

This quiet diplomacy ain't nothing but a joke (*Darlene Love*)

*Sun City*, words and music by *Little Steve*<sup>398</sup>

Disturbing realities from South Africa are also explicitly put in lyrics:

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<sup>396</sup> Schechter (1999), 298.

<sup>397</sup> Kesting and Weskott (2009). Also in Hostetter (2006), 106–107.

<sup>398</sup> Lahusen (1996), 393. Transcription of the *Sun City* music score made by Christian Lahusen, 387–392.

Relocation to phoney homelands (*David Ruffin*)

Separation of families I can't understand (*Pat Benatar*)

23 million can't vote because they're black (*Eddie Kendricks*)

We're stabbing our brothers and sisters in the back (*Bruce Springsteen*).<sup>399</sup>

By referring in such familiar, close terms to the “brothers and sisters”, by underlining the proximity (“Ain’t that far away Sun City”) and by bringing the South African Apartheid to the universal moral dilemmas (“Separation of families I can’t understand”), *Sun City* attempts to transmit to a domestic, maybe even uninformed audience, the “persuasive mobilisation message”<sup>400</sup> that Lahusen was talking about.

After telling the story, the stars performing the song thus make public the personal action through which they challenge the morally unacceptable (disgusting) problem: no matter how much the entertainment resort and the Superbowl Arena have to offer, there will be no bargain, and the long list of musicians who we see in the video is not going to play in the resort of the so-called homeland Bophuthatswana:

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 214.

You can't buy me, I don't care what you pay (*Duke Bootee, Melle Mel & Afrika Bambaataa*)

Don't ask me, Sun City, because I ain't gonna play (*Linton Kwesi & all rappers*).<sup>401</sup>

The refrain is performed by what Lahusen called 'a choir':

In popular music it is the refrain which presents the primary and distinct tune of the song. Sun City sticks to this convention and uses the refrain to unfold the concept of a multi-singer song in a bold manner: a choir is the main singing subject.<sup>402</sup>

Lahusen's explanation for this unusual take of a choir interpreting the refrain is that it points to a participative performance, establishing a relationship between this and the solos, between person and the collective. It is another way of pointing out the main goal at stake: joint action, group solidarity, and the togetherness of the enterprise that *Sun City*—the project is.

The self-labelled *Artists United Against Apartheid* continued to put together new tracks, besides the two mixes of *Sun City* (one more guitar-based, the other featuring synthesisers). Rather than having

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<sup>401</sup> Lahusen (1996), 393. Transcription of the *Sun City* music score made by Christian Lahusen, 387–392.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 204.

an initial plan, the impromptu work of Peter Gabriel, Scorpio, Fat Boys and many others led to the creation of a new media platform for the project, the album *Sun City*. The titles of the tracks are self-explanatory: *No More Apartheid*, *Let me see your I.D.*, *The Struggle Continues* and what the makers called “a documentary montage”<sup>403</sup>, *Revolutionary Situation*. In 1987, *Artists United Against Apartheid* were nominated for the Grammy awards as a group, while the video received its own Grammy nomination in the same year. The book *Sun City* followed the success of the album. It was produced in only four months and promptly published by Penguin Books in 1985.<sup>404</sup> It documented the process behind the production of the album with a lot of voluntary work from producers, photographers, publishers and others. One agenda the makers had with the book was for it to be a fund-raising project. All the money gathered from selling the book went to The Africa Fund, a non-profit organization registered with the United Nations.

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<sup>403</sup> In Marsh (1985), [no pagination].

<sup>404</sup> The full title of the book is *Sun City by Artists United Against Apartheid, the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa: The Making of the Record* by Dave Marsh.



Figure 7.4 Standing l-r: David Ruffin and Eddie Kendrick; seated l-r: Arthur Baker and Little Steve. Photo: David Seeling/ *Sun City* by Steve Van Zandt.

At the same time, it was working as an advertisement for the music album. It is a premium product type of music book, a high format album with glossy, thick paper that features many colourful photos with famous musicians, plus the lyrics of the tracks included on the album. And even if it might look like the average music book, it is by all means not an ordinary one.

The book has a two-part structure – intercalated but contrasting sides: on one hand, the book is a rather conventional making-of of an album and its single, including large parts of the story behind its making and the boycott which were both left out of the video. It is richly illustrated with colourful, joyful photos of the start of the recordings, from Master Jay jamming for Run-DMC to Miles Davis playing his trumpet and Jimmy Cliff and Darlene Love smiling widely to the camera. Only, every fourth or sixth page the content changes, as if one would look through an entirely different book, or into a rather different world. This other, intercalated part is no longer in bright colour, but black and white, and displays disturbing photos and information from the South African apartheid-regime. Thus, the book combines various photos from the making of the project, with powerful photos from South African realities, and concrete information, mainly quotations from *The Washington Office on Africa Educational Fund*,

about various realities: education, health, crime rate, abuses, arrests and relocations, statistics, or legal aspects (such as Africans being forbidden to vote). Quotations from South African politicians complete the picture. It is not that images of convoys of coffins, police abuses or the horrid view of the Sharpeville Massacre and protests presented in *Sun City—the book* were a novelty to the Americans in 1985. Neither were the attitudes of the Nobel Peace laureate Desmond Tutu, or Nelson Mandela, quoted there.

But the book provides a strange mixture, and looking through it can be a strange experience: the fact that by flipping through the pages one goes from images of joyous stardom to such scenes as corpses lying on the floor, must have been an uncanny experience for the American music fan of the mid-80s, regardless of political views or personal social involvement.

Thus, it overcame the conventional frameworks of a ‘rock book’, by having faithfully followed the concept of the video-doc **SUN CITY**.

### 7.3.4 Resistance Music Video-Doc and the Tasks Performed by Multiple Platforms

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The **SUN CITY** video was made as a hybrid between short documentary and music video: indeed, a **resistance music video-doc**. The pro bono work of so many performers, dispersed on five continents, meant that many did not show up in the studio offered by co-producer Arthur Baker, but rather just recorded their part, and then shipped it to New York. Here, the pieces were eventually mixed together. Despite this discrepancy, the video-doc, with all the various artists of different styles, rockers and rappers, intertwining their voices and walking streets together, conveys a sense of collaborative action.

Consequently, part of it is conceived as a rather classic music video. It features footage of the artists at the recording of the album, or outdoors original footage on the streets of New York, in East Harlem with the musicians engaging with the camera and thus delivering the message. Images from Washington Square Park or from East Harlem creatively blended in through superimposition with images from South Africa, unrests in Soweto, uncanny footage covering brutal police force, mass

funerals of people shot to death, and funerals turned into protests. Disturbing images of the life of black people in Bophuthatswana are effectively combined with footage from the resort Sun City.



**Figure 7.5 Little Steve and Lou Reed. Photo: Chase Roe/ *Sun City* by Steve Van Zandt.**

The video, signed by the self-labelled *Artists United Against Apartheid*, was presented at the United Nations. And to the *Artists United Against Apartheid* went the official Letter of Appreciation signed by Ambassador Serge Elie Charles, Chairman of the Special Committee Against Apartheid. The ceremony, an episode in the

documentary *The Making of Apartheid*, brought in the same room what David Marsh called “probably the most diverse group of musicians ever assembled for any purpose”<sup>405</sup>:

For almost forty years, world leaders and dignitaries have graced reception in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library in the penthouse of one of the United Nations buildings, but rarely has the U.N. played host to a group anything like the one that showed up on October 30, 1985.<sup>406</sup>

The U.N. moment is documented in **THE MAKING OF SUN CITY**, this being just one of the instances when the various platforms do not deliver an identical story, but grow out of each other. Another such instance is the direct reference to the entertainers who performed at Sun City for, more often than not, very generous amounts of money. Even if the accusations in Sun City are not overt and names are not being mentioned, the song is not exactly subtle. The decision not to name fellow musicians who had not respected the U.N. cultural boycott did not come without argument: “Since there were many well-known artists who had deliberately and sometimes repeatedly violated the boycott, yet got

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<sup>405</sup> Marsh (1985), [no pagination].

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

away scot-free when they came home, Schechter felt that [it] would be appropriate to name names. Little Steve wasn't so sure".<sup>407</sup> In an early stage of the song's production, lyrics did single out some entertainers and musicians who violated the boycott and performed in Sun City, and did it in a straightforward manner:

Linda Ronstadt, how could you do that  
Rod Stewart, tell me that you didn't do it  
Julio Iglesias, you oughta be ashamed to show your face  
Queen and the O'Jays, what you got to say?<sup>408</sup>

Later on, these lyrics were left out from the song, but other *Sun City* media platforms – namely the documentary and the book – keep references to the boycott violators. In the book even more of the ones performing at Sun City are named: Elton John, Ray Charles, and Frank Sinatra. In the documentary film, only Rod Stewart is named *en passant* in a spontaneous interview on the street, which does not appear out of place, since the entire film has

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<sup>407</sup> Marsh (1985), [no pagination].

<sup>408</sup> The lyrics left out to be found in Marsh (1985), [no pagination]. Schechter (1999), 298, describes the debate.

a making-of aura, filmed on the run, in the exact way the video and the album were made.

The spreading of the message on multiple platforms raises consequent problems. In the Introduction to the current work, I was elaborating on issues of inherent dangers related to the making of resistance documentaries. Even if at a first glance *Sun City* might seem remote from such intrinsic risks, it is not, however, the case. Musicians from all around the world were involved in the project, and it seemed just natural to include groups from South Africa as well. Eventually, two participated in the making of it, Via Africa, at the time of the making of *Sun City* working and living in the United States, and Malopoets, whose members were still living in Soweto. In the book Little Steve recalls the bold nature of the collaboration: “I asked them: it could be dangerous to be on this record, I mean, who knows what reprisals may happen? And they just told me: ‘We have to be on this record. We don’t care about reprisals. Even if it means our death’. When somebody tells you they are ready to die to be on a record, you know, that’s commitment.”<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> Little Steve in Marsh (1985), [no pagination].

Such statements distributed in the book, on the album, the video/documentary and the MTV film had another, broader meaning: openly aiming at triggering an empathic response from a large American public, and eventually generate action. In the words of the creator of the project, Little Steve, the book was “a compendium of the type of information that *moves* people of conscience to become involved, to act”.<sup>410</sup> Did Little Steve and *The Artists United Against Apartheid* achieve this declared goal? The direct connection between the project (one among many others) and the unprecedented international civic involvement in the South African struggle is impossible to quantify. The subsequent question prevails: can we ever quantify the empathy-generated action?

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid., [*Preface*, no pagination], emphases added.

### 7.3.5 Empathy-Generated Action: Unquantifiable Achievements

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*The song Sun City was born out of outrage and desire to educate. The thrust of this effort has been to stimulate awareness, to ask people everywhere to get involved by singing along and informing themselves about South Africa.*<sup>411</sup>

– Little Steve, 1995

*Sun City [i.e. the resort] can't be as easily condemned as 'I ain't gonna play Sun City' would have us believe.*<sup>412</sup>

– Kesting and Weskott, 2009

The political statement and mobilisation message that Little Steve and *Artists United Against Apartheid* wanted to get across, reached a public beyond the limits of the small crowd of the usual documentary goers, or the 'converted' already involved in the cause. The sole fact that it combined so many musical styles was yet another way to approach a larger audience, but it also got beyond the much larger crowds of rock and rap fans.

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<sup>411</sup> Little Steve in Marsh (1985), [*Preface*, no pagination], emphases added.

<sup>412</sup> Kesting and Weskott (2009), 20.

Thus presented, on multiple media platforms, *Sun City* reached a broad and diverse crowd, from the uninformed citizen watching TV, all the way to the doors of the United Nations. It is customary to measure success of resistance documentaries, as well as human rights campaigns, by the awards and distinctions they summed up. **SUN CITY**-the film received a Distinguished Documentary Achievement Award from the International Documentary Association and was nominated for the Grammy Award for Best Long Form Music Video, while the *Artists United Against Apartheid* got a Grammy nomination for Rock Duo or Group Vocal. In the Rolling Stones magazine, the Album made it to the first 100 albums in the 1980s,<sup>413</sup> while in the press at the time it got some raving reviews: “The album has a fierce, declamatory impact”.<sup>414</sup> But is all the above enough evidence to consider that the people behind *Sun City* achieved their goal, to “move” and stimulate action? Up until today, music reviewers see the eclectic style of Sun City as an exceptional achievement:

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<sup>413</sup> DeCurtis and Azerrad (1989), in *Rolling Stone*, Issue 565: 53–107.

<sup>414</sup> Hochanadel (1985), in *Schenectady Gazette*, November 30: 25.

The 'Sun City' project did an amazing job bringing people together and raising awareness. Anyone who can rally Miles Davis, Brett Michaels and the Fat Boys around a cause that doesn't involve heroin, hot chicks, or an enormous sandwich has got to be doing something right.<sup>415</sup>

For Little Steve, specifically the fact that the mix of music genres was too eclectic was the reason why the song never made it into a Radio Hit.<sup>416</sup>

The point was made earlier that there was a great degree of spontaneity behind the growing of the entire project. But the distribution of such ingenious appeal to action was not achieved only by the odds being favourable. Although there was large improvisation to the project, implied by its unpredictable nature, a well thought-up media plan stood behind the becoming of *Sun City*.

The *Africa Fund* charitable organisation put together the logistics necessary to make use of the momentum created by the song: infrastructure necessary to manage telephonic and written

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<sup>415</sup> Stereogun (2007). Available online at: [http://www.stereogun.com/6642/video\\_hangover\\_artists\\_united\\_against\\_apartheid\\_su/video/](http://www.stereogun.com/6642/video_hangover_artists_united_against_apartheid_su/video/).

<sup>416</sup> Little Steve cited in *Rolling Stone*, Issue 565: 53–107.

enquiries, educational texts and videos, aiming at the fulfilment of the didactic side of the project. From the perspective of the *Africa Fund*, the project consisted in an information campaign, where the *Sun City* album was just the beginning. The organisation prepared several school handouts, increasing in complexity, alongside teaching guides. In an interview with Christian Lahusen, Jim Carson, the former Associate Director of the Africa Fund was describing the *Sun City* project as an information path. From his point of view, as NGO coordinator, the success of the project was to be measured in the amount of people who, starting from the initial *Sun City* incentive, accessed the complex layers of information the NGO had to offer through its conventional channels (e.g. booklets, videos, teaching material) and eventually triggering action. For Jim Carson, there was a big gap between those who got the *Sun City* incentive (bought the album, for example) and those who reached the more complex information stages:

But the point is you gradually reach up the level of knowledge as you go on. And I am not claiming that all of the people, all that one million people who bought *Sun City* got to that

level. I'm saying there is a path that you can go through to go further up. And clearly less and less people make it up.<sup>417</sup>

Jim Carson was talking here from the perspective of the NGO coordinator. His view, even if very informative, is however limited to a single aspect of the entire picture. **SUN CITY** spread on so many media platforms, and it would be erroneous to track down its effectiveness or success in the path-following explicit terms in which Carson sees it. **SUN CITY** was not a path, but, if we are to preserve Carson's metaphor, we should call it a conglomerate of suspended bridges and highways, leading to a similar destination while taking up passengers from different points and taking different directions. If we are to quantify in Carson's terms, then the starting numbers are the more than one million copies of the album sold world wide, from which less and less were taking the path up in getting interested, accumulating more in-depth information and action.

However, this bottom-up quantification of success proposed by the NGO coordinator is limitative, since *Sun City* is outside the realm of a conventional media campaign. Neither did

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<sup>417</sup> Jim Cason in interview with Christian Lahusen, cited in Lahusen (1996), 95–96.

*Sun City*, as a complex cross-media project, originate solely from the initiative of musicians. The TV producer, filmmaker and media critic Danny Schechter was involved in the process from the very early stages. It is in agreement with him that the concept was brought together, both the narrative, which was to be delivered – namely a story of a fight of music stars against the system in another country – through a musical boycott, and the multiple platforms on which it was to be delivered. The role of the media expert Danny Schechter in envisaging *Sun City* is acknowledged by Christian Lahusen (1996) and David L. Hostetter (2006). The famous face behind *Sun City*, the organiser of the project, Little Steve, reminisces Schechter’s contribution: “Danny really inspired the thing”.<sup>418</sup> Lahusen describes the early stages of the concept in his in-depth analysis of the music production of *Sun City*:

As a result of conversations with Danny Schechter, a journalist and television producer, Little Steven decided in the spring of 1985 to produce an album that would take up the issue of the struggling black South Africa from a clearly political perspective. (...) Furthermore, Little Steven and Danny Schechter agreed that the album had to deal with the cultural boycott in order to link the US-American artistic

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<sup>418</sup> Little Steve in Marsh (1985), [no pagination].

community to the struggle of black South Africans, stress the artists' contribution to the end of apartheid and use this topic as a tool for educating the general public about the issue.<sup>419</sup>

In a project where borders between media were loose, so were the roles performed by the few people leading it. Thus, Danny Schechter was even involved in conceiving, composing, arranging and producing one of the tracks on the album *Sun City*.<sup>420</sup> Going under his news producer nickname, 'The News Dissector', and together with Keith LeBlanc, he signs the six minutes music collage *Revolutionary Situation*. The track takes its title from a statement made by Louis Nel, at the time Deputy Minister of Information in South Africa, who condemned "the revolutionary situation".<sup>421</sup>

The *Sun City* project and the commitment of the people making it went way beyond the frames of a music album, a book, a documentary film. In the following years, Danny Schechter

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<sup>419</sup> Lahusen (1996), 93.

<sup>420</sup> According to Marsh (1985), the track was conceived together with Keith LeBlanc and co-produced together with Little Steven, Arthur Baker and Keith LeBlanc.

<sup>421</sup> Schneider (1999), 299. It also features original record with Louis Nel's voice, as specified in Marsh (1985), ["Revolutionary Situation", no pagination].

continued his work, shifting the focus of his anti-apartheid activities, and support of the entertainment boycott in Sun City, in an attempt to undermine the media ban and censorship in South Africa. Following the state of emergency declared in South Africa, a new media ban and new censorship rules applied in the country were making it increasingly difficult for American Media to get a hold on images from the apartheid. Not everyone agreed on the unequivocal power of the media ban. *Sun City* filmmaker, Danny Schechter, was of another opinion: “Surely if they could get pictures from Saturn, they could get them from Soweto”.<sup>422</sup> Starting with a modest grant awarded by the United Nation, Schechter commenced the co-production of the TV programme *South Africa Now*.<sup>423</sup>

Earlier in this chapter I was bringing up David Hostetter’s view that the anti-apartheid movement was at its best “when it defined South Africa’s conflict in terms familiar to Americans”.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> Schechter (1999), 238.

<sup>423</sup> Schechter, in Hawk (1992), 242–256.

<sup>424</sup> Hostetter (2006), 127. A critique of Hostetter to be found in Francis Nesbitt’s review, *A ‘Postmodern’ Interpretation of the Anti-Apartheid Movement* (June 2007), in H-SAfrica, H-Net Reviews, available online at <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13284>.

But the success of Schechter's complex and informative *South Africa Now* in the following years stands proof that David Hostetter is only partially right. Nevertheless, his take cannot be dismissed altogether: the various viewers, listeners and readers *Sun City* reached, by distributing its story and message cross-platform, clearly shows the impact of addressing the American audience in the popular culture's idiom they were accustomed to.

*South Africa Now* had "inside-out coverage", meaning that film was delivered by South African producers, while anchors for the show were exiled South Africans, trained in-house, as the show advanced, with footage delivered by South African producers and makers. Initially transmitted solely on one satellite network, the show quickly made its way to the leading PBS stations, turning into a 156 weeks series. It continually added numerous broadcasting stations in the U.S. and overseas, until the series came to an end, in 1992.<sup>425</sup>

*Sun City*, I argued, is a convergent cross-media platform *avant la lettre*, before the time of the Internet. Between 1985 and

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<sup>425</sup> Cohn (November 18, 1990), in *New York Times*. The production of the show *South Africa Now* is extensively described in Schechter, in Hawk (1992), 242–256.

1992, *Sun City* and the various other projects directly or indirectly deriving from it, like *South Africa Now*, were reaching an international public from all ways of life. What is the direct connection between this and the end of the apartheid politics in South Africa? An exact answer to this question is impossible to formulate, but a viable direction is a cumulative of the direct results of single platforms. Next, we will see how Internet, and the transmedia documentaries, brought along new, reliable ways of quantifying this tendency to action.

## 8 Revolutionary I-Doc

### 8.1 Engaging Spectators Beyond the Screen

“When the multimedia revolution is completed”, began Tim Congdon’s evaluation on the future of broadcasting in the UK, “people may receive input to their political thinking from many different sources”.<sup>426</sup> The above-quoted visionary assessment was uttered a bit more than 15 years ago in a BBC-commissioned study. Visionary, I say, because, at the time, up to 70 percent of the Britons were still listing television as the primary source for their news. Congdon’s forecast in the study announced a multimedia revolution lasting for the following 20 to 30 years, with “some mix of public service and commercial broadcasting”<sup>427</sup> intuited as a better solution for the future. The British economist pleaded at the time for an open society where individuals will be able to exercise their critical prerogatives at maximum capacity. But in order to achieve that sort of strong society, a multimedia revolution would

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<sup>426</sup> Congdon (1995), 23.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 24.

have first been necessary. However, even in the early 2000s, a multimedia, or digital revolution, a radical line of change in the established media, still seemed to several media experts as a distant ideal.

“Which Digital Revolution?”, Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn were rhetorically wondering in their introduction to the volume *Democracy and New Media*, almost 10 years after Tim Congdon’s BBC-commissioned prediction. Jenkins and Thorburn were ironically stating in 2003: “Utopian visions help us to imagine a just society and to map strategies for achieving it”.<sup>428</sup> At the time, they were still showing serious scepticism surrounding the likelihood of the so-called ‘new media’ in reaching a wide audience, as opposed to the possibility of the established one (such as cinema and television):

The power of movies and television to speak to a vast public is immensely greater than the diffused reach of the new media, through which many messages can be circulated but few can ensure a hearing.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Jenkins and Thorburn (2003), 9, emphases added.

<sup>429</sup> Jenkins and Thorburn (2003), 13.

We know today this is no longer the case. One acknowledgement of the new media's possibilities of talking to a large public was the decision of the Egyptian government to cut down the Internet and other forms of electronic communication in the country on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, at the peak of the revolutionary days (Fig. 8.1).<sup>430</sup> Similar connectivity interruptions happened in Syria with the government-owned providers at the end of November 2012<sup>431</sup> and July 2013 (Fig. 8.2).<sup>432</sup>

The “power of speaking to the public”, as Jenkins put it, through either the established or the new mediums is, as shown up to now in the current work, of an utmost importance for filmmakers of revolutionary documentaries, many making their films with a task or an agenda. However, how much the documentary films succeed in their endeavour mostly goes

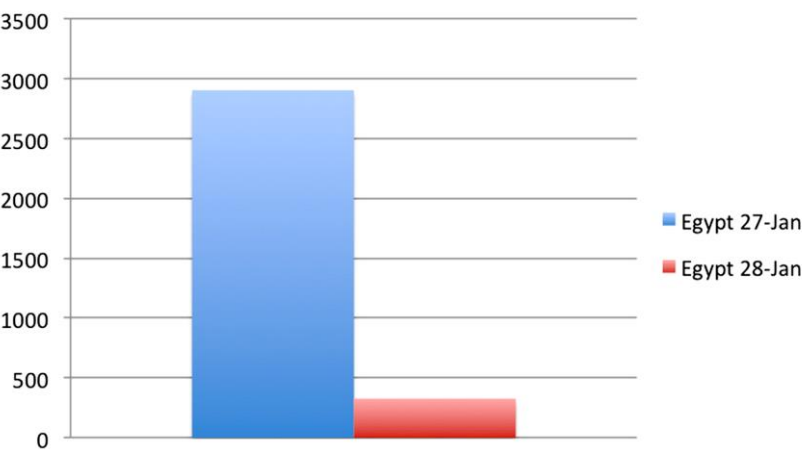
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<sup>430</sup> According to the analyses of BGPmon, Canada-based network monitoring and routing expert, 88% of Egyptian networks was unreachable on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2011. Analyses available online on: <http://www.bgpmmon.net/egypt-offline/#lastupdate>.

<sup>431</sup> Analyses available online on: <http://www.bgpmmon.net/syria-shuts-down-the-internet/> and <https://blog.cloudflare.com/how-syria-turned-off-the-internet/>.

<sup>432</sup> Analyses from ARBOR Networks available online on: <http://www.arbornetworks.com/corporate-blog-rss/4870-syria-offline-again>.

undocumented. Even if filmmakers explicitly state that they make these films in order to generate action, there is a rupture between the production of documentaries and the effect they have on their public. Once the films are released, there is little information available about the empathic effect they might have had on their spectators and their contribution to a moral attitude; the measure of the films’ success in triggering action is erroneously associated with festivals’ achievements or critiques’ positive reviews.



**Figure 7.6 BGPMON Analyses of Egyptian Routes, published on BGPMON website on the 28th of January 2011: 2576 out of 2903 Egyptian networks disappeared from the Internet.**

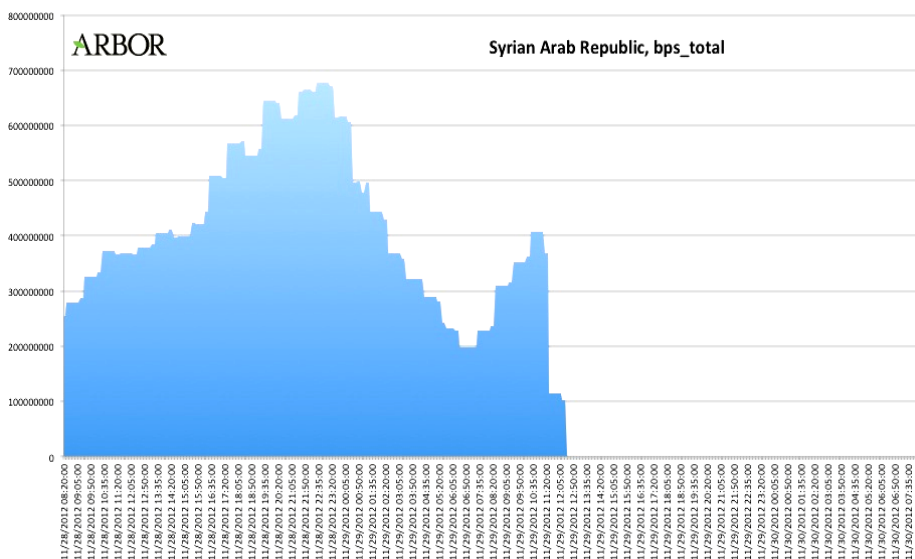


Figure 7.7 **ARBOR Networks Analyses of Internet traffic to and from Egypt on the 27<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup>–30<sup>th</sup> November 2012.**

The problem is not one solely faced by documentary film alone, or cinema in general. Theatre is confronted with a similar rupture between production and its public. In his analyses of the liaisons between production and the public sphere, Christopher Balme remarked a similar one-sided flow, where indeed the production side approaches its (potential) public through a multitude of media channels, but the public itself has minimum or no means at all at its disposal to reciprocally approach the theatre, respond to it or

give feedback.<sup>433</sup> Balme's view on the present state of the matter is not entirely discouraging, since the possibilities that arose with the Internet, social media, and especially Twitter, bring up new means through which the public itself can now engage.

This novel potential of the Internet is good news for revolutionary documentaries, too: they escape linearity, are distributed on novel, hitherto unexplored channels, give instant possibilities of action, and propose networks of direct interaction with their public.

In the previous chapter it was underlined how revolutionary documentary makers, while looking for rapid and efficient ways of passing the message, reaching and activating its publics, have, for a long time, looked for new platforms for showing various aspects of the same story. Internet facilitates the assembling of such platforms. Convergence media, transmedia, cross-platform or multi platform, while still being mistaken with each other or interchangeably used in their loose definitions, are all part of a vocabulary which has been increasingly used only in the recent years. They definitely add to Torben Grodal's PECMA

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<sup>433</sup> Balme (2014), 68–73.

Flow theory, since they activate the part of the brain Grodal was arguing is responsible for action and reserved solely to gaming, and not to film viewing. We will next look at several ways of approaching the new types of documentary experience, where aspects of production, distribution and reception have all radically been reinvented.

## 8.2 Spectatorship Engagement within Media Convergence

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At every point in history, the technological revolutions in medias (and by that I understand the changes towards a use of new medias which were not controlled by the ruling classes) triggered and facilitated socio-political major transformations. These changes in media, however, didn't happen as a replacement of the old with the new. The adepts of technological determinism might disagree with the above statement, but I will argue that, when a new media was introduced alongside the existing ones, there have been instances of convergence or, as Balnaves, Hemelryk and Shoesmith put it, "transformation of older media into new cultural forms".<sup>434</sup>

Convergence is part of the technological context, which led to the development of emergent ways of storytelling in the recent years. Defining convergence is not easy, and some might want to avoid the task altogether:

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<sup>434</sup> Balnaves et al. (2009), 11.

The rapid evolution of convergence means that it may be better not to attempt to define the term, but rather to describe its impact, both in different parts of the value chain, and in different regions of the world.<sup>435</sup>

The technological progress is the core for understanding convergence. For Balnaves et al., the beginning of the use of convergence coincides with the beginning of computer networks, responsible for bringing together various types of media.<sup>436</sup> Nevertheless, this transformation of old media into new ones is not specific to mobile media or social media alone, but it can be tracked down in the history of the telegraph, radio, or television.<sup>437</sup> Taking the case of the United Kingdom, Tim Dwyer is convincingly arguing that the communication markets have been converging for several decades, the difference in the last years (since 2005) being the increased speed of these processes. The individual mediums do not replace one another, nor do they evolve from each other or emerge as a separate or virtual community. Dwyer puts forward a complex theory, where media convergence is understood as “the process whereby new

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<sup>435</sup> Ofcom (2007), 90.

<sup>436</sup> Balnaves et al. (2009), 34.

<sup>437</sup> Dwyer (2010), 21.

technologies are accommodated by existing media and communication industries and cultures”.<sup>438</sup> It is then not a mere replacement of the old with the new, but rather a complex process where the new, emerging media, start being contained by the existent ones by, as Seung-Hoon Jeong explained, “emulating and incorporating them”.<sup>439</sup> For Jeong, the enhancement of old media with the new (he calls it ‘hypermediacy’) brings urgency to the effect media has on the spectator.

The very term ‘convergence’ was coined in 1983 by the social scientist Ithiel de Sola Pool in *Technologies of Freedom*, who emphasized it as being the revolutionary trigger of media industries:

A process called ‘convergence of modes’ is blurring the lines between media, even between point-to-point communications, such as the post, telephone and telegraph, and mass communications, such as the press, radio, and television. A single physical means – be it wires, cables or airwaves – may carry services that in the past were provided in separate ways.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>439</sup> Jeong (2013), 2.

<sup>440</sup> Pool (1983), cited in Jenkins (2006), 10.

In the convergence of mediums, not only are the services, which used to be provided in separate ways, becoming increasingly offered by multiple vehicles, but also mediums which were separately provided by one service or the other increased their means of reaching their consumers/audiences through various mediums. What de Sola Pool was essentially remarking, already at the beginning of the 1980s, is that the relationship between medium and service becomes ever looser. Henry Jenkins adds to de Sola Pool's understanding of the media convergence, underlining the unfastening between the production and the consuming sides, but also between various genres or technologies:

Perhaps most broadly, media convergence refers to a situation in which multiple media systems coexist and where media content flows fluidly across them.<sup>441</sup>

The flow of content between various media platforms, the financing possibilities newly operating between various players and industries, audiences of old and new media interchanging – this is what increasingly dictates innovative prospects for revolutionary documentaries. The relationship is two-folded: in this new

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<sup>441</sup> Jenkins (2006), 322.

participatory culture, the way spectators get involved, act, or produce content, also influences how the entire content will flow between media.

The potential that convergence of media has for social impact in the time of the Internet is apparent. Joe Trippi, who extensively worked as a consultant for numerous election campaigns, in and outside the U.S., greatly used the Internet in the last years' election campaigning. Trippi orchestrated Howard Dean's Internet-based fundraising campaign, or what he called in his book *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* as "the opening salvo in a revolution, the sound of hundreds of thousands of Americans turning off their televisions and embracing the only form of technology that has allowed them to be involved again".<sup>442</sup> Trippi was clearly referring to the engaging possibilities Internet has to offer, but even Trippi himself questioned that the democratizing future of convergence in the age of Internet is a certainty:

At some point, of course, there will be *convergence*. One box. One screen. You'll check your e-mail and order your groceries and check your child's homework all on the same screen. That might be the most dangerous time for this

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<sup>442</sup> Trippi (2004), xviii.

burgeoning democratic movement – the moment when the corporations and advertisers will threaten to co-opt and erode the democratic online ethic. The future may well hinge on whether the box is dominated more by the old broadcast rules or by the populist power of the Internet.<sup>443</sup>

Civil disobedience, defined by Balnaves et al. as “the use of new communicative structures like the Internet for protest to influence decision-making”,<sup>444</sup> was one of the first activist tools that took advantage of the Internet, based on the belief that established social structures and their institutions are more exposed online than they are offline.<sup>445</sup> The Electronic Disturbance Theatre 2.0 (EDT), a group of artists and software engineers, even actively supported the Zapatista movement.<sup>446</sup> But for the convergence to play its democratic force, Jenkins pleads for a shift in focus from technology to the politics, social, cultural dimensions of the media convergence, and for vigilance on the side of the citizens:

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<sup>443</sup> Trippi (2004), 225, emphases added.

<sup>444</sup> Balnaves et al. (2009), 202.

<sup>445</sup> More in Harmon (1998).

<sup>446</sup> A documentary on the Zapatista movement is detailed in chapter 5 of the current work.

Consumers will be more powerful within convergence culture – but only if they recognize and use that power as both consumers and citizens, as full participants in our culture.<sup>447</sup>

There are undoubtedly new forms of documentaries that emerged thanks to convergence in times of Internet, but there is no single notion unanimously used to encompass them. This might be one of the reasons why some scholars tend to avoid the looseness of the term altogether. Sarah Atkinson coined the notion “emergent cinema”, an umbrella term meant to encompass most novel developments in production and distribution. Sarah Atkinson’s “emergent cinema” is a reminder of the interchangeable boundaries between whatever we might choose to name multimedia, cross-media, multi-platform, cross-platform, or transmedia. The very word ‘emergent’ perfectly underlines what is actually at stake here: that the Internet is not the only, or even main player in transporting the story from one platform to another. The Internet might, and nowadays almost always does participate in the moving of the story between platforms but,

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<sup>447</sup> Jenkins (2006), 270. A more recent plead for recuperating convergence for political and social scope to be found in Hess and Zimmermann (2014), 180–197.

contrary to what some scholars argued,<sup>448</sup> it doesn't necessarily have to, in order for the story to cross from one media to another.

However, out of the 'emergent cinema' categories, the one most frequently implied by both theoreticians and practitioners concerned with the new forms of filmic expression currently is transmedia. Before moving on to some concrete examples of revolutionary documentaries in the form of transmedia platforms, we should firstly attempt to define transmedia from two distinct perspectives: that of the media theoretician and that of the practitioner.

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<sup>448</sup> For example, for Christian Jakubetz (2008/2011) crossmedia is the interconnection of various mediums *in Internet*.

## 8.3 Transmedia Revolutionary Documentaries

### 8.3.1 Outlining Transmedia. Case Study: ROAD TO REVOLUTION

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At the annual *Future of Entertainment* conference, which took place in 2006, Henry Jenkins, who allegedly coined the term transmedia, moderated the *Transmedia Properties* panel. One of the panellists, Michael Lebowitz, himself a pioneer of transmedia storytelling, founder of the “convergence agency” *Big Spaceship*, introduced himself by stating that he actually cannot come up with a definition for transmedia. “I don’t exactly know what transmedia is”, Lebowitz literally stated and, while pointing at moderator Henry Jenkins and the other expert-speakers, he went on: “And I’m not sure these guys know either”.<sup>449</sup>

There is genuineness behind Lebowitz’ anecdote: transmedia is a contemporary phenomenon and, since it is

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<sup>449</sup> Michale Lebowitz at *Future of Entertainment Conference*, November 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, *Transmedia Properties* panel. Available for download at: <http://techtv.mit.edu/collections/convergenceculture/videos/21754-foe1-transmedia-properties>.

unfolding as we witness it, or as we take part in it, it is indeed difficult to define.

In 2003, the media scholar Henry Jenkins introduced the term to the field, stating that, for a story told on various platforms to be a transmedia one, each platform must play its specific role, rather than recapping the same content. In Jenkins's 'ideal-type' of definition, each of the platforms ("franchises" in his own terminology) plays its specific part in the media product, and can function not only in fusion with the other platforms, but as an unique media product in itself:

In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and experienced through game play. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained enough to enable autonomous consumption. That is, you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game and vice-versa. As *Pokemon* does so well, any given product is a point of entry into the franchise as a whole.<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> Jenkins (2003). Available online at:  
<http://www.technologyreview.com/news/401760/transmedia-storytelling/>.  
A few years later, Jenkins came up with a more condensed definition for transmedia storytelling: "Stories that unfold across multiple media platforms, with each medium making distinctive contributions to our understanding of

For Jenkins, fictional transmedia storytelling is a fluid process and, whether he refers to Pokemon, Star Wars or Matrix, the fun-system plays for him an important role in the successful development of a transmedia platform.<sup>451</sup> The fiction-film, fan studies-based definition, however, can only partially be applied to other multi-platform developments, like documentary transmedia.

Following Jenkins, Elizabeth Evans has tried to evaluate the changes television is undergoing in the new transmedia world. In the context of television broadcast increasingly moving from the TV to the Internet and mobile phone, in both terms of production and distribution, Evans's addition to the definition is specifically the central place occupied by technological developments in a transmedia project:

In essence, the term 'transmediality' describes the increasingly popular industrial practice of using multiple media

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the world, a more integrated approach to franchise development than models based on urtexts and ancillary products", in Jenkins (2006), 334.

<sup>451</sup> Jenkins (2007).

Available online at:  
[http://henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia\\_storytelling\\_101.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html).

technologies to present information concerning a single fictional world through a range of textual forms.<sup>452</sup>

Seen from the production side, that of the practitioner in the field interested in rapidly reaching a wider audience, the attempts of defining transmedia shift to the novel possibilities of reaching this very goal: getting the product seen faster, and by as many people as possible. One such attempt at explaining the novel category comes from the EMMY-nominated transmedia writer and producer Nuno Bernardo, one of the authors of the platform of revolutionary documentary, **ROAD TO REVOLUTION**:

Broadly speaking, transmedia storytelling involves creating content that engages the audience using various techniques to permeate their daily lives. In order to achieve this engagement, a transmedia production will develop storytelling across multiple forms of media in order to have different entry points into the story. These entry points are the places where the audience can access content, with each point also providing their own unique perspective on the overall story.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Evans (2011), 1.

<sup>453</sup> Bernardo (2011), 3.

We still navigate on a very broad terrain in understanding where the borders of transmedia are, only because we are witnessing its experimental, pioneering phase.<sup>454</sup> Two years after he proposed the above definition, Nuno Bernardo brought new layers to his own understanding of transmedia, by standing behind the production of the multi-platform documentary about the Arab Spring, **ROAD TO REVOLUTION**. The project, which lasted three years (2012-2014), is an example of balance between a non-fiction product delivered with urgency in the making, and a lengthy edited documentary premiered at the Cannes Film Festival 2014. **ROAD TO REVOLUTION** is many things at once: a TV documentary (two episodes of 52 minutes each), several “webisodes” (each of them between two and six minutes long), a book (*A Estrada da Revolução*)<sup>455</sup>, an ‘app’ for mobile devices and a feature length documentary film presented at Cannes film Festival in May 2014 (**ROAD TO REVOLUTION**, directed by Dânia Lucas). The main storyline of the project concerns three Portuguese journalists, Tiago Carrasco, João Henriques and João Fontes who, in the midst of the Arab Spring, go on a 15.000 kilometres journey, taking off

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<sup>454</sup> The point is made by Gerhards (2013), especially in Chapter 4: 107–133.

<sup>455</sup> Carrasco (2012).

in Turkey and moving through Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya and Tunisia, all the way to Algeria and Morocco, in order to document the revolutionary movements.

Short, roughly edited episodes with the journey the three go through were uploaded on the YouTube channel of the production company, thus enabling people all around the world to follow the phases of the transmedia documentary while still in the making. In the more conventional fashion of triggering action previously described (Chapter 8.2), the ‘webisodes’ include appeals, written or spoken pleas to action. Episode #7, for instance, filmed in Syria, is the first hard-hitting encounter with the realities of the Arab Spring. In the spur of the moment, people met on the way approach the Portuguese documentary crew as an opportunity to pass on a message. „We ask all the European countries!...”, one man starts crying towards the camera, while another such character makes an even more directly-targeted appeal: “I want to send a message to Russia: now Russia, if you help the Assad system, you kill the people in Syria”.

Through the ‘webisodes’, uploaded on the YouTube Channel of the beActive production company, both the makers and the viewers didn’t have to wait many months or even years for the journey, and the filming and editing process to come to an end,

and the film to have a cinema or television release. While essentially still in the making, small episodes could be seen by an increasingly interested audience. Furthermore, the growing audience was able to engage with the makers, and even with the people in the ‘webisodes’, via the social media possibilities embedded in the given platforms (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook), thus shifting Torben Grodal’s PECMA flow theory, according to which only games activate certain parts of the human brain charged with action.

The production company behind **ROAD TO REVOLUTION** additionally released an interactive ‘app documentary’, as it was termed, which allowed viewers to follow the journey through the Arab Spring, from country to country, at their individual pace.

The **ROAD TO REVOLUTION** one hour and a half linear documentary film was released no sooner than two years after the production started. However, producer Nuno Bernardo remained faithful to his 2011 definition of transmedia, in which he insisted that the various platforms, the ‘entry points’ into the story, “are the places where the audience can access content, with each point also providing their own unique perspective on

the overall story”.<sup>456</sup> Thus, the story of the feature documentary **ROAD TO REVOLUTION** was not redundant due to the content already being released, but it was rather more of an add-on to it. Like in the ‘webisodes’ or in the book, the frame of the story continued to be the journey of the three journalists who went to find out about the revolution. Only that, in the feature-length film, the emphasis shifts to another focus, a few locals encountered on the way and developed into characters. **ROAD TO REVOLUTION** is a fruitful example of how non-documentary formats, such as mobile-apps, can become part of the revolutionary documentary experience, in an attempt to enhance the tendency to action.

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<sup>456</sup> Bernardo (2011), 3.

### 8.3.2 From ‘just’ Dynamic, to User Generated-Content I-Docs: #18DaysInEgipt

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Producer of **ROAD TO REVOLUTION**, Nuno Bernardo, identified the core of a transmedia production as the distribution of parts of the story on various platforms, reaching its public not on a single media form, but rather approaching the members of a potential audience in their daily lives.<sup>457</sup> Yet again, the sort of engagement with the public Bernardo pleads for is a one-sided engagement. In the fashion advocated in his writings and in his documentary Bernardo avoids the opening up of the platforms for content coming from the viewers. For him, user-generated content, even if at times successful, is spontaneous and unpredictable, thus unreliable in its business potential.

Nuno Bernardo is right when insisting that user-generated content might be a delicate topic. One cannot just ask the public to provide content, or simply demand an invisible audience of the transmedia platform to film videos, and afterwards even expect

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<sup>457</sup> Bernardo (2011), 3.

this audience to put an effort into adding them to the platform. To rely on that might prove itself to be naïve – and unproductive. The 1% rule of thumb of participatory network effects online keeps being confirmed by empirical studies.<sup>458</sup> According to the 1% rule, the individuals who participate in creating the large content online are not more than 1% of the users (also referred to as Superusers), while the rest of 99% of the Internet users have a very modest contribution, if any.

Not everybody in the field shares Bernard's opinion on the dangers and lack of potential of user-generated content for transmedia. Publishing his guide to the very new possibilities of transmedia, *Getting Started in Transmedia Storytelling*, in the same year as Nuno Bernardo's *The Producers Guide to Transmedia*, Robert Pratten was however shifting definition of transmedia exactly on the user-generated content. Pratten, himself a practitioner in the field (founder of TransmediaStoryteller.com), was underlining the potential of the new platforms, not only for concrete participation, and content *per se*, but also for an increased emotional engagement:

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<sup>458</sup> Van Mierlo (2014).

‘Transmedia storytelling’ is telling a story across multiple platforms although it doesn’t always happen, *with a degree of audience participation, interaction or collaboration*. In transmedia storytelling, engagement with each successive media heightens the audience’s understanding, enjoyment and affection for the story.<sup>459</sup>

Pratten’s definition doesn’t stress the technological advancement, or the media convergence, which demand the story to be distributed on multiple platforms, but rather the collaborative dimension between creators and the public, which transmedia platforms can bring along.

Lina Srivastava, transmedia strategist and activist, involved in the making of various documentaries aiming at social impact, sees precisely the participatory dimension of transmedia as essential to the multi-platform documentaries. She made her view clear in an interview with Sarah Atkinson:

Transmedia is so participatory, is really based on co-creation, collaboration, consensus. [...] The entire thrust of my work is to make transmedia more participatory, and create that equal sense of partnership where local communities are architects

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<sup>459</sup> Pratten (2011), 1, emphases added.

of the platform with us, and their IP, and their stories are drivers.<sup>460</sup>

Evidence was brought earlier (chapter 7.3) that the distribution of revolutionary documentaries on multiple media platforms is a pre-Internet phenomenon. Lina Srivastava points out exactly one of the main novelties that Internet brought along to the transmedia platforms: the public's participation, highly enabled by the use of social media. This participative dimension is bringing people from all around the world in one's 'in-group', and therefore it is, as Frank Rose argues, highly connected to empathy.<sup>461</sup>

Already since Daniel A. Henderson invented the first prototype of camera for a mobile phone, in 1993, the world entered the era of the prevalence of images that we are living in right now. When the mobile phone camera became commercially available, at the begging of the 2000s, photographing and filming the world around became a part of day-to-day communication just as much as the written and spoken word. Sharing photos and videos with others was still slow at the time, but it rapidly changed

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<sup>460</sup> Srivastava in interview with Atkinson, Mai 2013, cited in Atkinson (2014), 154.

<sup>461</sup> Rose (2014), 199–220.

once Internet connectivity became widely available on mobile devices. Minor happenings or major events tend to be documented today by amateurs with an instinct for documentary.

Clearly, not all contexts or projects are favourable for being opened-up for contribution to the public. The revolutionary days in Egypt, at the beginning of 2011, with the rampant production and distribution of images, however, denoted such a context. The magnitude of images, still and moving, produced in the Egyptian revolutionary days of 2011, made it seem to many documentary makers that their job was rendered obsolete. Others, however, saw in the huge production of images novel possibilities of ingeniously documenting a revolution. The days of most interest are considered by many to be the time frame between January 25<sup>th</sup> and February 11, and the documentary **#18DAYSINEGIPT** underlines that. It is a participatory, crowd sourced documentary project, this time, which goes under the same name, and which offers a platform to the stories seen, photographed and lived by many thousands of Egyptian people.

In a context in which many filmmakers abstained from recording original footage in front of such a quantity of images already produced and distributed, while others ended up doubling what the amateurs or activists previously shared with the world,

#18DAYSINEGYPT was born exactly out of the turning of this abundance of images into its very core idea.

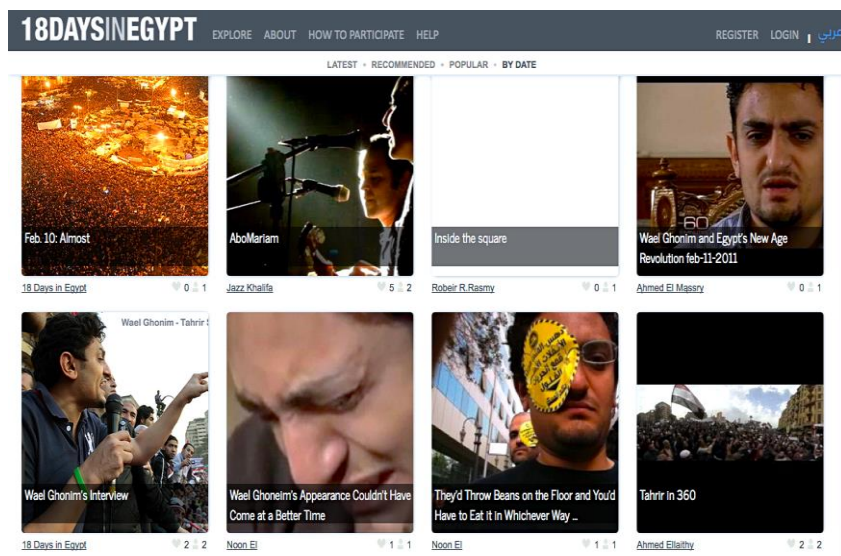


Figure 7.8 #18DAYSINEGYPT

One of the authors of the project, Jigar Mehta, put it assuredly: “I thought, crap, if they’re recording this, they’ve probably been recording for the last 18 days”.<sup>462</sup> With a tremendous urgency, one week after the military leader Hosni Mubarak announced his

<sup>462</sup> Jigar Mehta cited by Kessler (February 25<sup>th</sup> 2011) in *Mashable*. Available online at: <http://mashable.com/2011/02/25/18daysinegypt/>.

retreat, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 2011, journalist Jigar Mehta and developer Yasmin Elayat launched the documentary project **#18DAYSINEGIPT**. The project started with an investment of “\$60 on domains and a couple cases of beer”<sup>463</sup>.

A Facebook page was consequently created, and the first Facebook post, about the launching of the project, got a discouraging one single like. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, **#18DAYSINEGIPT**, still a work in progress, was presented at the annual Geneva conference on Social Change. Here, the makers presented their project alongside speakers discussing social media trends from UNHCR, ICRC and UNICEF. **#18DAYSINEGIPT** rapidly grew into an interactive platform, which aimed to bring together the Egyptian story of revolution unfolding on various media, such as tweets, cell phone photos and videos. The documentary escapes linearity, but the way it can be experienced is not entirely arbitrary: it is organized in such a manner that one can chose to follow the narrative of a particular day or location.

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<sup>463</sup> Madrigal in *The Atlantic* (February 24<sup>th</sup> 2011). Available online at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/02/preserving-the-online-legacy-of-the-egyptian-revolution/71675/>.

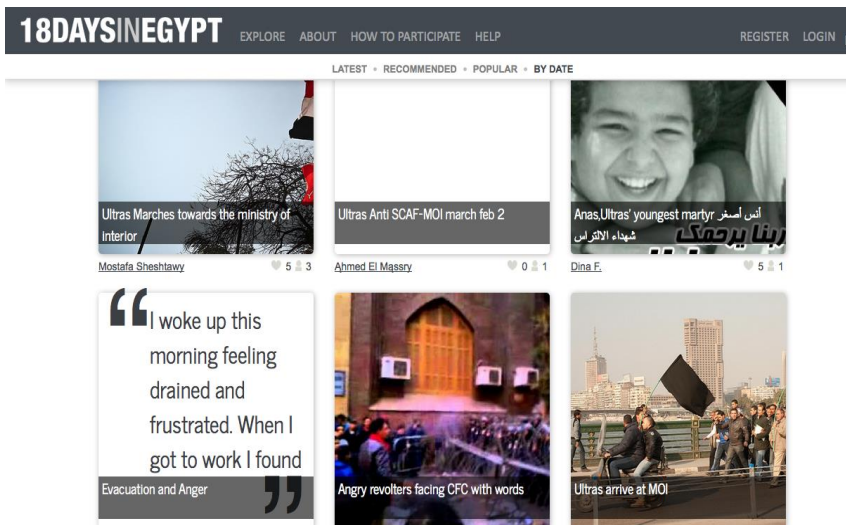


Figure 7.9 The entries in #18DAYSINEGYPT listed by date.

The one who experiences the documentary **#18DAYSINEGYPT** is no longer a viewer, but a ‘visitor’; only a few clicks away, anyone could turn from mere ‘visitor’ into a ‘contributor’ of the platform. With user-generated transmedia projects like this one, the traditional triangle of victim-filmmaker-spectator came to an end.

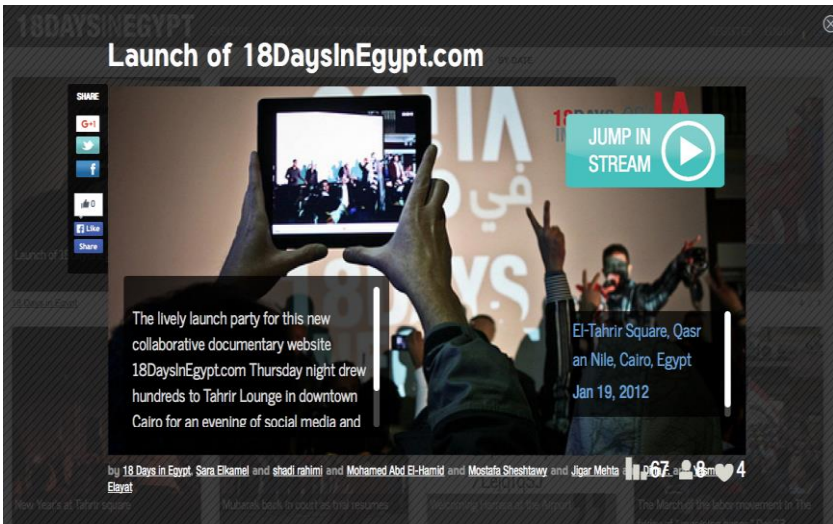


Figure 7.10 **Launching of #18DAYSINEGYPT as an entrance on the platform.**

Furthermore, media convergence in the age of Internet made it possible that the viewer himself, if he wishes, can take upon himself the role of archivist (with greater and safer possibilities of archiving than ever before), or even distributor: at any point one now has the means show any film to anyone else around the globe. Now, each of the parts can engage with the others *as themselves*, in a variety of creative, moral ways.





## Research, Filmmaking, and the Teaching of Empathy: the *Hakawati* Project

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“Academia is the death of cinema”, claimed one of the most prolific makers of documentary film, Oscar and EMMY nominated Werner Herzog.<sup>464</sup> Herzog’s intentionally provocative statement aimed to strike a definite divide between the making of films and their study. Such arguments are common among documentary makers, the most technically oriented, practical category of filmmakers, traditionally working in small teams, or even alone, trained in multiple filmmaking crafts, and able to perform several, or all duties. The underlying belief is that, in order to produce truthful documentaries about real life, the filmmaker’s life experience is more important than studying film. Herzog, for instance, advocates walking as a recurrent training for comprehending various aspects of life, and evoking them in film:

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<sup>464</sup> Herzog, in Herzog, ed. Cronin (2002), 15.

“While you are walking you would learn much more about filmmaking than if you were in a classroom”.<sup>465</sup>

For Herzog, furthermore, film research would reduce moving images to empty words, “the opposite of passion”, since praxis is, regardless, always one step ahead of theory. My current research was born out of a strong belief that assuming the fact that praxis can do without scholarly research is simply wrong. The content of my current research is an argument against the labeling of academia as passionless “death of cinema”, as Herzog vehemently claimed, hence the findings are not only of some value to the understanding of film *per se*, but are meant to bring their modest contribution to the production side of documentary making and, hopefully, to the teaching of it.

I will remain within the frames of Werner Herzog’s glossary a little longer, for my work is, too, an incursion happening close to the *death* of cinema – if I am to use Herzog’s strong vocabulary. It is an incursion into a territory paved with real threats for real films and real filmmakers. Chilean Jorge Müller Silva, Argentinean Raymundo Gleyzer, British James Miller are just

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<sup>465</sup> Ibid.

some of the well-known resistance documentary makers who tragically lost their lives or ‘disappeared’ while producing material for revolutionary documentaries. Many more faced imprisonment, exile, or countless forms of reprisals. In an essay published as early as 1945, Béla Balázs argued that the loss of lives among filmmakers producing, essentially, a creative work of art, “is a new phenomenon in cultural history and is specific to film art”.<sup>466</sup> This is not exclusively concerning non-fiction filmmakers, but “artists in olden days *rarely* died of their dangerous creative work”.<sup>467</sup> The current research aims to shed some light on scientific, production and pedagogical queries alike, for the life, and not the death of cinema, since academia and praxis are facing similar issues, and are not as far-off from each other as Werner Herzog might believe.

Presented here stands a study of empathy in the context of revolutionary documentaries. *Empathy* and *revolutions* are words usually not seen together on the cover of the same book. A very recent exception is Roman Krznaric’s 2014 *Empathy: A Handbook for a Revolution*. Krznaric is one of the few writers and empathy thinkers who, in the last years, argued that empathy does not only

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<sup>466</sup> Balázs (1945), essay included in Cousins and Macdonald (1996), 31.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., emphases added.

concern the *feeling for* the other close-by, but that it is directly connected to radical historical and social transformations<sup>468</sup> – and revolutions make no exception.

Revolutions, historical events with most radical consequences on society, are not always successful or heroic, as I have shown in the introductory chapter of this work (in *Revolutions and Resistance Documentaries*). The large variety of revolutions, at times, encompasses many years-long, sometimes bloody processes, at the end of which either new dictatorial regimes come to surface, or civil wars erupt. For a revolution to succeed, advantageous international relations are needed. The success of a revolution requires a timely foreign support for the revolutionary faction, or at least the withdrawal of backing for the ruling regime. I commenced this work by making the case that the offering of support – or the withdrawal thereof – has radically shaped the success or failure of revolutions throughout time. Furthermore, the consent of foreign regimes to offer or withdraw such support is in its turn influenced by the civil pressure in the respective countries.

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<sup>468</sup> Rifkin (2009), Olson (2013), Krznaric (2014).

The critical role that foreign intervention might have in the outcome of revolutions can be observed no further than in the so-called recent Arab Spring. It was the case of the Libyan revolution, which started in February 2011 with peaceful, pro-democracy protests. In a broadcast on the Libyan state TV Aljamahiria, Muammar Gaddafi threatened mass killings against his own people, the massacre of everyone who allegedly joined the rebellion. Gaddafi promised to “cleanse Libya inch by inch, house by house, home by home, corner by corner, person by person, until the country is clean of the scum and sickness”.<sup>469</sup> The bloodshed against civilian population that followed, and the moving images documenting the violent reprisals created, according to several historians, a cross-cultural empathic response, as historian Jeff Goldstone put it: “the whole world was watching and *sympathizing* with the rebels”.<sup>470</sup> People all around the world were now feeling for the suffering, rebellious Libyan people striving for freedom. This international wave of empathy generated a momentum for a resolution passed by the UN Security Council

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<sup>469</sup> Available online at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69wBG6ULNzQ>.

<sup>470</sup> Goldstone (2014), 125, emphasis added.

on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2011, authorising the use of force to protect the civilian population. It represented the legal basis for the NATO intervention in Libya, which commenced two days later.

The film of the Libyan-Norwegian documentary maker Nizam Najjar, **DIARY FROM A REVOLUTION**, catches the aftermath of the NATO intervention. It shows his experience when allowed to film the revolution in the middle of a Libyan rebel group fighting in the city of Misrata. In a tragic-comic film sequence, the leader of the rebel group, Haj Siddiq, the central character of the film, looks at his men and gives a ‘passionate defence’ for the decisive role of the documentary camera in the revolution. He looks at his men and ceremonially utters: “The *camera* is the reason for the NATO intervention. *Camera!*” Rebel leader Haj Siddiq points his finger towards Najjar’s camera, and ceremonially utters onwards: “Thank to God in the first place, and then to the camera”. Following the NATO intervention, Gaddafi was eventually captured and killed. Different, however, was the course of the dictatorial, family regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. The Syrian rebels, encouraged by the NATO involvement in Libya, waited for the world to intervene.



Figure 11 **Haj Siddiq** in **DIARY FROM A REVOLUTION** (2012).

“They waited in vain”, historian Jeff Goldstone concludes today.<sup>471</sup> In July 2012, China and Russia blocked any UN resolution, including even economic sanctions against Syria, and a full-blown civil war erupted.

The data gathered by Google and available thru *Google Trends*, a tool displaying the interest over time that Internet users have in finding out more about a certain term or for an association of terms, shows when, in the minds of the people around the

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<sup>471</sup> Goldstone (2014), 126.

world, the Syrian revolution turned into a civil war, with the clearly marked moment in time being September 2012 (Fig. 7).

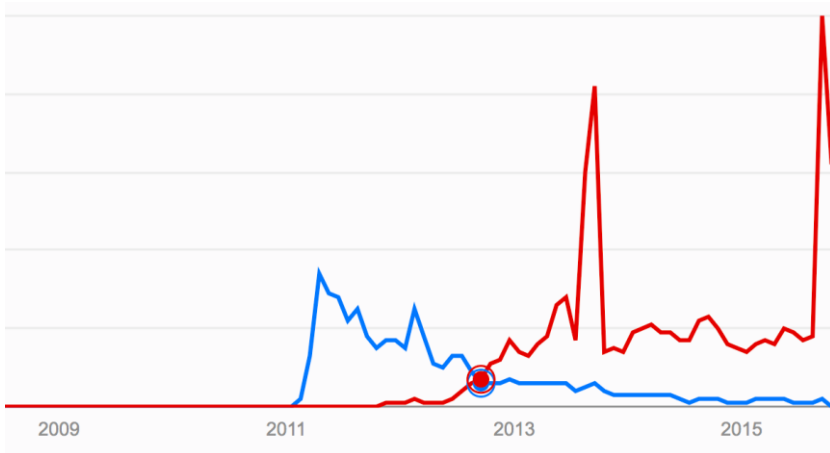




Figure 12 **Google Trends displaying the shift in interest from looking up in Google the [Syrian Revolution](#)  to the increased search of the words [Syrian Civil War](#) .**

Right before this moment in time, in August 2012, I had been precipitately asked to train a group of Syrian artists and activists, with no previous film knowledge.

For at least the following six months, I was supposed to teach them from scratch how to use a professional camera and a sound recording kit, to clarify principles of editing sound and image, and make sure they will be able to use this information,

once they are on their own. Ideally, we were to develop revolutionary documentary films with a chance for international distribution, films authored by these Syrian novices, while we were doing our best to help them learn how to keep the risks at a minimum.

The trainings took place in complete secrecy. My contracts and the entire correspondence with the NGO organising it were going under the code name '4026-1 SY-HR-EC'. The project was very generously financed, providing plenty of pricey equipment at our disposal, and open-handedly offered to the young Syrian documentary makers to be. At the time, as it often happens with such sensitive development projects in situations of crisis, most of us did not know who is behind the funding. Only in an advanced stage of working on the project, namely eight months later, have I learned that it was a European Union grant, financed through its European Instrument for the Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights worldwide, grant referenced as EIDHR/2011/281-308, formally named: "Digital Information Capacity, Security and Dialogue in Syria". In the meantime, however, we were expected to simply call the training *Hakawati* (*Storytelling* in Arabic).

Film was one largely neglected art field in Syria, with almost no concern given to documentary filmmaking. At the exact

time this project was starting, Orwa Nyrabia, Syrian producer and director of the only documentary festival in Damascus, DOX BOX, was reported missing. In a time of crisis, Syria was left with too few filmmakers around, while a few other people, artists and activists, disregarding the threat, were eager to learn how to tell moving stories in films made for the outside world. And they wanted to learn this fast. Some of my trainees from *Hakawati* were telling me that they want to do films which will travel ‘like a message in a bottle’ to the outside world. Both my filmmaking experience and my scholarly research so far were facing a tough reality check: how do you actually instruct it? How do you teach empathy in the context of revolutionary films? Herzog’s juxtaposing of the passionless, austere film studies, to the fervid filmmaking is simply wrong. Neither can do without the other, and both face the need of the academic research findings – and not only in extreme case-scenarios, like the *Hakawati* project was. The research within these covers attempts to bring its modest contribution to the theory of filmic empathy, an insight for the praxis, and a tool for its teaching.

The endeavour that *Seeing with Feeling* has become started five years ago, with a one year research project at ECLA (today Bard College) in Berlin about the visual proofs produced in Pol

Pot's Cambodia. I began the research journey under a main assumption about my theoretical frameworks which, I hoped, was supposed to ease the process for my research: since empathy is such an investigated topic in a variety of fields, my theoretical path for researching empathy in non-fiction film studies would already have been paved. This hypothesis proved nothing but wishful thinking, since it is still not an easy concept to grasp, and voices in film studies still wonder if such a thing even exists in the first place. Inquiries into what empathy really is, in film studies, were only recently approached, and are matters of ongoing disagreement, while the filmic means and mechanisms, charged with stimulating filmic empathy, go almost entirely unexplored. Part I of the current work is a thorough incursion into the study of empathy at the convergence of film and psychology (chapter 1), in film studies, especially in the frames of the recent cognitivist film theory (chapter 2) and research-based psychological studies (chapter 3).

Even if an interdisciplinary approach is new to film studies, I have shown in chapter 1 that, at least as far as empathy is concerned, findings from psychological studies are traditionally employed in answering questions about our emotional response to the events portrayed in moving images. Empathy with the people

in moving images, documentary and even fictional, exists, though lower in intensity than if the victim would be physically present under the eyes of the viewer (as I show in the introductory chapter *Filmic Empathy: An Interdisciplinary Approach*).

My work aims to bring empathy-related constructs and processes within the frameworks of a single theory. Therefore, I have reviewed experiments and laboratory measures and, evaluating recent works of psychology scholars, mainly Martin Hoffman, Mark Davis and Daniel Batson, I identified various means specific to the documentary genre, which contribute to the arousal of empathy. The applicability of the means and, at times, limitations, were brought under scrutiny in Part II, with a series of case studies, documentary films made in a variety of revolutionary contexts (El Salvador, Guatemala, South Africa, Philippines, among others).

Understanding that empathy with film characters exists, and knowing some of the ways in which it can be aroused, does not mean that the revolutionary documentary will turn into that “message in a bottle” my Syrian trainees wanted to send to the world in late 2012.

A complete definition of the empathic process, I have shown, does encompass its tendency to action, and its connection

to moral attitude. Part III (*Empathy? So what?*), while approaching aspects of production and distribution, explores what happens after empathy was triggered. Filmmakers of resistance documentaries have usually tried to facilitate the tendency to action that comes along with the empathic distress emergent from the film viewing, and were by necessity looking for specific means to achieve this (chapter 7). The empathic power of revolutionary documentaries benefits from the new possibilities that the Internet has to offer, as I showed in chapter 8. But *action facilitators* (as I named the cues filmmakers build within the documentary frames in order to direct action, some identified in chapter 7.1) are not a novelty that came with the age of the Internet: they are as old as the genre itself (chapter 7.2). Older than ‘the age of Internet’ are also the attempts to get the story across through various media platforms, in order to better facilitate the tendency to action – and that was exemplified thru the case study of the anti-apartheid project *Sun City* (chapter 7.3).

Chapter 8 brought the study of the empathy-action dynamic in the context of new technological developments in media. These developments bring about a novel category of revolutionary documentaries, characterised by convergence of medias, and a growing convergence of art forms (8.2). These films,

I have shown, tend to be not the result of elaborated production and distribution strategies, but rather the outcomes of decisions of urgency. Even if the films are made with a declared function (that of triggering a moral attitude), after they are released, however, there is not much information available about the empathic effect they might have had on their international spectators, or about their real contribution to action. With the emerging possibilities for interactive, transmedia documentaries, aspects of production, distribution and reception have all radically been reinvented. This interactivity enhances empathy's tendency to action and, mainly (but not only) with the incorporated social media possibilities, novel ways of quantifying this tendency to action are now opened to documentary film scholars. Future quantitative Internet research can shed light on which documentaries generated moral responses, and even what specifically was most impactful as an action facilitator.

The sensitive contexts these films are made in dictate impromptu decisions of production, distribution – possibly even discontinuing the distribution. The aggravation of the Syrian conflict made us face such tough decisions when distributing the documentaries made within the *Hakawati* project. One of the films produced in the course of *Hakawati*, **EVERY DAY, EVERY DAY**,

directed by a graphic designer with no previous film training, Reem Karssli, is a diary documenting the life of a Syrian family, and the dramatic circumstances they face when the oldest son, Mohamad, is called to join the state army. Trying not to jeopardise the security of the family and that of the filmmaker, at that time all of them still living in Damascus, we decided not to show the film anywhere in the Arab world. The film was screened at important festivals in Europe and Latin America; it was shown at Raindance, and made it to the competition of Leipzig Documentary Festival. However, after **EVERY DAY, EVERY DAY** was awarded the documentary prize at one of the most prestigious short film festivals, at Huesca Spain, in June 2013, the growing awareness around the film amplified our fears for the safety of the people involved in its making. It made us take the paradoxical decision of withdrawing the film instead of showing it onwards, and to abruptly close its film festival circuit. In the new landscape of media and arts convergence, two years later, and with Reem Karssli finally out of the Syrian borders, the film was incorporated in two other productions – this time theatre productions of the London Young Vic where, besides the documentary film, Internet tools, such as Skype, were inherent elements of the production. The most recent of these theatre productions, *Now is Time to Say*

*Nothing* (directed by Caroline Williams), premiered in July 2015, and was presented last month at the world's largest arts festival, Edinburgh Forest Fringe, thus approaching a novel audience, different from the documentary goers.

Last time I saw Reem Karssli was this fall, in Berlin. She was working on her second documentary, this time about Syrian refugees – herself being today one of them. In a somehow similar fashion, I believe, the current study of empathy is not limited to the frames of the resistance documentaries, but it can be applied in the studying – and making – of other human rights films which are empathically charged. The growing wave of recent documentaries concerning refugees is just one of many





## **An Annotated Filmography of Revolutionary Documentaires (1957 – 2015)**

The filmography is an inventory of resistance documentaries, some of them discussed at length or just mentioned in this work. The films are listed under the most commonly used English titles, or the original one, if the English version is not available. The original title, when in a language different than English, is mentioned second, followed by authors, producers and/or production institutions, supplemented by country of production; release dates and duration are also mentioned.

Some of the information is to be considered approximate, due to the fact that some of these films were released anonymously or travelled clandestinely, and the sources are at times conflicting or untrustworthy. For various reasons (such as different audience groups, information revealed in time and for historical accuracy) filmmakers or distributors re-edited aspects of the films, so different cuts might correspond to different copies.

## **Argentina**

**THE HOUR OF FURNACES [LA HORA DE LOS HORNOs].**

Director: Fernando 'Pino' Solanas. Producer: Fernando 'Pino' Solanas. Produced by: Groupe Cine Liberacion. Argentina, 1968. Running time: 260 min.

## **Burma**

**BURMA VJ: REPORTING FROM A CLOSED COUNTRY [REPORTER I ET LUKKER LAND].** Director: Anders

Østergaard. Producer: Lise Lense Moller. Produced by: Magis Hour Films. Denmark, 2008. Running time: 84 min.

## **Chile**

**FELLOW CITIZEN [MITBÜRGER].** Directors: Welter Heynowski, Gerhard Scheumann. Produced by: Studio H&S. GDR, 1974. Running time: 8 min.

**COMPAÑERO: VÍCTOR JARA OF CHILE [COMPAÑERO: VÍCTOR JARA DE CHILE].** Directors: Stanley Forman, Martin Smith. Producers: Stanley Forman, Martin Smith. United Kingdom, 1974. Running time: 58 min.

**MONEY TROUBLES [GELDSORGEN].** Directors: Welter Heynowski, Gerhard Scheumann. Produced by: Studio H&S. GDR, 1975. Running time: 6 min.

**THE BATTLE OF CHILE [LA BATALLA DE CHILE].** Director: Patricio Guzman. Produced by: Insituto Cubano del Arte y Industria Cinematograficos (ICAIC) and Chris Marker. Chile | Cuba | France, 1975–1978. Running time: 263 min. **PART I: THE INSURRECTION OF THE BOURGEOISIE [LA INSURRECTION DE BURGUESÍA],** 1975, running time: 96 min; **PART II: THE COUP D'ÉTAT [EL GOLPE DE ESTADO],** 1976, running time: 88 min; **PART III: POPULAR POWER [EL PODER PUPULAR],** 1978, running time: 79 min.

**GENERAL REPORT FROM CHILE [ACTA GENERAL DE CHILE]** Director: Miguel Littin. Producers: Bernadette Cid, Luciano Balducci, Fernando Quejido. Produced by: Alfil Uno Cinematografia, T.V.E. Chile | Cuba, 1986. Running time: 240 min.

**DANCE OF HOPE.** Director: Deborah Shaffer. Produced by LaVonne Poteet & Deborah Shaffer/Copihue. USA, 1989. Running time: 75 min.

## **Cuba**

**ASSAULT OF THE REBEL GIRLS.** Director: Barry Mahon. Based on a story by, narrated and reported by: Errol Flynn. Producer: Barry Mahon. Produced by: Exploit Films Inc. USA, 1959. Running time: 68 min.

**THE TRUTH ABOUT FIDEL CASTRO REVOLUTION.** Producer: Victor Pahlen. Narrator: Errol Flynn. USA, 1959. Running time: 50 min.

**CUBA SI!** Director: Chris Marker. Producer: Pierre Braunberger. Produced by Lhomond Studios. France, 1961. Running time: 53 min.

## **Egypt**

**#18DAYSINEGYPT.** Creators: Jigar Mehta and Yasmin Elayat. Created: 2011. [www.18daysinegypt.com](http://www.18daysinegypt.com)

**BACK TO THE SQUARE.** Director: Petr Lom. Producer: Torstain Grude. Produced by: Piraya Film A/S, Lom Films. Norway | Canada, 2012. Running time: 85 min.

**BORN ON THE 25<sup>TH</sup> OF JANUARY (MOLOUD FI KHAMSA WE AISHREEN YANAIR).** Director: Ahmed Rashwan. Producers: Ahmed Rashwan. Produced by: Dream Production, Dubai Media and Entertainment Organisation in association with Dubai Film Market (Enjaaz). Egypt | United Arab Emirates, 2011. Running time: 80 min.

## **El Salvador**

**EL SALVADOR: ANOTHER VIETNAM.** Directors: Glenn Silber and Tete Vasconcellos, Producers: Glenn Silber and Tete Vasconcellos. Produced by: Catalyst Media Production. USA, 1981. Running time: 60 min.

**WITNESS TO WAR: DR. CHARLIE CLEMENTS.** Director: Deborah Shaffer. Producer: David Goodman. Produced by: AFSC and Skyline Pictures. USA, 1984. Running time: 32 min.

**IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE.** Director: Frank Christopher. Producers: Alex W. Drehsler and Frank Christopher. USA, 1985. Running time: 73 min.

## **Ghana**

**FREEDOM FOR GHANA.** Director: Sean Graham. Scripted by Basil Davidson. Producer: Sean Graham. Produced by: Ghana Film Unit and United Africa Company. Ghana | United Kingdom, 1957. Running time: 35 min.

## **Grenada**

### **GRENADA: THE FUTURE COMING TOWARDS US.**

Director: Carmen Ashhurst, John Douglas, Samori Marksman. Producer: Paco de Onís. Produced by New York Cinema and Caribbean Research Institute. USA, 1983. The film was completed only shortly before the U.S. invasion of Grenada, in 1983. Running time: 54 min.

## **Guatemala**

**WHEN THE MOUNTAINS TREMBLE.** Directors: Pamela Yates, Newton Thomas Segel. Producer: Peter Kinoy. Produced by: Skylight Pictures. USA, 1983. Running time: 83 min.

**GRANITO: HOW TO NAIL A DICTATOR.** Director: Pamela Yates. Producer: Paco de Onís. Produced by Skylight Pictures. USA, 2011. Running time: 104 min.

## **Haiti**

**HAITI: DREAMS OF DEMOCRACY.** Directors: Johnathan Demme and Jo Menell. Producers: Johnathan Demme and Jo Menell. Produced by: Clinica Estetico, Chanel Four, Tranvision-Haiti/Cinema Guild Inc.. UK, 1987. Running time: 52 min.

## **Libya**

**DIARY FROM A REVOLUTION (DAGBOK FRA REVOLUSJONEN).** Director: Nizam Najjar. Producers: Kristine Ann Skaret. Produced by: Medicoperatørene. Norway | Libya. 2012. Running time: 80 min.

**POINT AND SHOOT.** Director: Marshall Curry. Producer: Marshall Curry, Elizabeth Martin and Matthew Vandyke. Produced by: Marshall Curry Productions, American Documentary/ POV, Independent Television Service (ITVS). USA, 2014. Running time: 78 min.

## **Mexico**

**EL GRITO.** Director: Leobardo López Aretche.  
Production: Centro Universitario de Estudios  
Cinematográficos (CUEC). Mexico, 1968. Running time:  
101 min.

**UNETE PUEBLO!....** Director: Óscar Menéndez. Mexico,  
1968. Running time: 20 min.

**MEXICO, THE FROZEN REVOLUTION (MEXICO, LA  
REVOLUCION CONGELATA).** Director: Raymundo  
Gleyzer. Argentina 1971. Running time: 65 min.

**A PLACE CALLED CHIAPAS.** Director: Nettie Wild.  
Production: Canada Wild Productions in association with  
Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Produced by Nettie  
Wild, Betsy Carson, Kirk Tougas. Canada, 1998. Running  
time: 89 min.

**ZAPATISTA.** Directors: Benjamin Eichert, Richard Rowley, Ståle Sandberg. Producers: Benjamin Eichert, Richard Rowley, Ståle Sandberg, Isiris Castañeda, in association with The Media Boutique. USA, 1999. Running time: 56 min.

**ZAPATISTAS: CRÓNICA DE UNA REBELIÓN.** Director: Victor Mariñaand Mario Viveros. Producer: Nancy Ventura. Produced by: La Jornada and Conalseis de Jukio. Mexico, 2003. Running time: 88 min.

## **Moldova**

**THE TRAP (CAPCANA).** Directors: Leontina Vatamanu, Ion Terguță. Producer: Virgiliu Margineanu. Moldova, 2009. Running time: 38 min.

## **Namibia**

**A CRY FOR FREEDOM.** Director: John A. Evenson. Producer: John A. Evenson. Produced by The Division for Mission in North America/The Division for World Mission and Ecumenia/Lutheran Church. USA, 1981. Running time: 21 min.

## **Nicaragua**

**NICARAGUA: REPORT FROM THE FRONT.** Director: Deborah Shaffer, Tom Sigel. Producer: Haskell Wexler. Produced by: Skylight Pictures. USA, 1983. Running time: 32 min.

**FIRE FROM THE MOUNTAIN.** Director: Deborah Shaffer. Producers: Deborah Shaffer and Adam Friedson. Produced in Association with Common Sense Foundation. USA, 1987. Running time: 60 min.

## **Philippines**

**A RUSTLING OF LEAVES: INSIDE THE PHILIPPINE REVOLUTION.** Director: Nettie Wild. Production: Canada Wild Productions in association with Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Produced by Nettie Wild. Canada, 1988. Running time: 89 min.

## **Poland**

**MAJOR, OR THE REVOLUTION OF THE GNOMES (MAJOR ALBO REWOLUCJA KRASNOLUDKÓW).** Director: Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz. Produced by: K. Irzykowski Film Studio. Poland, 1989. Running time: 31 min.

## **Portugal**

**SCENES FROM THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN PORTUGAL (CENAS DA LUTA DE CLASSES EM PORTUGAL).** Director: Robert Kramer. Producers: Barbara Stone, David Stone. USA | Portugal, 1976. Running time: 89 min. The film

follows the political and social transformations in the months between the overthrowing of the Salazar regime and the installation of a new government.

**VIVA PORTUGAL! (VIVA PORTUGAL. DIE NELKENREVOLUTION).** Directors: Christine Gerhards, Malte Rauch and Samuel Schirmbeck. Producer:. Produced by: Portugal | Federal Republic of Germany, 1975. Running time: 115 min.

## **Puerto Rico**

**PUERTO RICO: PARADISE INVADED (PUERTO RICO: PARAÍSO INVADIDO).** Director: Affonso Beato. USA, 1977. Running time: 30 min. It documents the history of Puerto Rico's independence movement, economic aspects of the industry in Puerto Rico, connecting to negative aspects of the presence of American Corporations. Includes footage from the American-Spanish war and the violent strikes in the 1930s. The film's stand is openly for a political independence from the United States.

## **Romania**

**VIDEOGRAMS OF A REVOLUTION (VIDEOGRAMME  
EINER REVOLUTION VIDEOGRAME DINTR-O  
REVOLUȚIE).** Director: Harun Farocki, Andrei Ujică.  
Producer: Harun Farocki. Produced by: Germany |  
Romania, 1992. Running time: 106 min.

## **South Africa**

**END OF THE DIALOGUE (PHELA-NDABA).** Directors:  
PAC (Antonia Caccia, Chris Curling, Simon Louvish, Nana  
Mahomo, Vus Make and Rakhetha Tsehlana). Produced by:  
Morena Films. Anonymously released in 1970. Running  
time: 44 min.

**SUN CITY: ARTISTS UNITED AGAINST APARTHEID**  
(Documentary Video). Directors: Kevin Godley, Lol  
Creme, Hart Perry, Jonathan Demme. Producers: Lexie

Godfrey, Hart Perry, Niles Siegel. USA | UK, 1985.

Running time:

**THE MAKING OF SUN CITY** Director: Steve Lawrence.  
Producers: Paul Allen, Steve Lawrence, Danny Schechter.  
USA, 1986. Running time: 51 min.

**LAST GRAVE TO DIMBAZA.** Directors: Chris Curling and  
Pascoe Macfarlane. Producers: Nana Mahomo, Antonio  
Caccia and Andrew Tsehiana. Produced by: Morena Films.  
Anonymously released in 1974. Running time: 56 min.

**WITNESS TO APARTHEID.** Director: Sharon Sopher.  
Producer: Kevin Harris. Produced by Developing News  
Inc in association with Chanel 4 Television. USA | UK,  
1986. Running time: 58 min.

## Spain

**ASIER AND I (AITOR +)** Directors: Aitor Merino and  
Amaia Merino. Producer: Ainhoa Andrak. Produced by:

Doxa Producciones and Cineática Films. Spain | Ecuador, 2013. Running time: 94 min.

## **Syria**

**THE SUFFERING OF LEAVES: WHEN ELEPHANTS FIGHT, IT IS THE GRASS THAT SUFFERS.** Director: Jara Lee. USA | Turkey | Syria, 2012. Running time: 52 min.

**EVERY DAY, EVERY DAY [KEL YAUM KEL YAUM].** Director: Reem Karssli. Producers: Mădălina Roșca and Maia Malas. Produced by: Passport Film and Metis Media. Syria | Romania | UK, 2013. Running time: 26 min.

**THE RETURN TO HOMS.** Director: Talal Derki. Producers: Orwa Nyrabia. Produced by: Proaction Film, Ventana Film- und Fernsehproduktion. Syria | Germany | 2014. Running time: 94 min.

## **Tibet**

**RAID INTO TIBET.** Director: Adrian Cowell. Producer: George Patterson. GB, 1966. Running time: 28 min.

## **Tunisia**

**ROUGE PAROLE.** Director: Elyes Baccar. Producers: Nicolas Wadimoff and Elyes Baccar. Tunisia | Switzerland, 2012. Running time: 94 min.

## **Ukraine**

**ORANGE REVOLUTION.** Director: Steve York. Producer: Steve York. Produced by: Marshall Curry Productions and ITVS. USA, 2007. Running time: 92 min.

**STRONGER THAN ARMS.** Produced by: BABYLON'13. USA 2014. Running time: 78 min.

**MAIDAN** [МАЙДАН]. Director: Sergei Loznitsa. Producers: Sergei Loznitsa, Maria Baker. Produced by: Atoms and Void. Ukraine | Netherlands, 2014. Running time: 130 min.

## **USA**

**IF A TREE FALLS: A STORY OF THE EARTH LIBERATION FRONT.** Director: Marshall Curry. Producer: Marshall Curry. Produced by: Marshall Curry Productions and ITVS. USA, 2011. Running time: 85 min.

## **Yemen**

**THE RELUCTANT REVOLUTIONARY.** Director: Sean McAllister. Producers: Elhum Shakerifar, Rachel Lysaght. Produced by: Underground Films, Tenfoot Films. Great Britain | Ireland, 2012. Running time: 73 min.

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## Abstract

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### **Seeing with Feeling. Filmed Revolutions of Others, from an Empathic Towards an Involved Spectatorship of Documentaries**

**(Sehen mit Gefühl. Gefilmte Revolutionen Anderer, vom empathischen zum involvierten Zuschauer von Dokumentarfilmen)**

Revolutionsforscher sind sich in wenig einig. Bezüglich der Tatsache aber, dass Revolutionen über ein gutes internationales Netzwerk oder internationale Hilfe verfügen müssen um Erfolg zu haben, scheint Konsens zu herrschen.<sup>472</sup> Revolutionärer Erfolg ist in der Mehrzahl der Fälle “abhängig von internationaler Unterstützung für die Opposition im entscheidenden Moment oder vom Entzug der Unterstützung für den Herrscher”.<sup>473</sup> Genauso maßgeblich ist, dass, auf Grund des Fehlens

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<sup>472</sup> Sharp (1993/2012), Goldstone (2014).

<sup>473</sup> Goldstone (2014), 19.

internationaler Intervention, viele Revolutionen gescheitert sind oder revidiert wurden. Folglich können Widerstandsdokumentarfilme als ein wichtiges Mittel angesehen werden, die Ziele einer Revolution bekannt zu machen und so letztendlich zu ihrem Erfolg beizutragen.<sup>474</sup>

Aus den genannten Gründen könnte man voraussetzen, dass es als selbstverständlich anzusehen ist, dass das empathieerzeugende Potenzial des Dokumentarfilms bereits gründlich erforscht wurde, da überdies bereits in verschiedenen Disziplinen eine reichhaltige Forschung zur Empathie als solche besteht, könnte man weiter davon ausgehen, dass alle Fragestellungen der Filmwissenschaften in Bezug auf Empathie bereits genauestens untersucht wurden. Dies ist allerdings nicht der Fall. Es existiert lediglich eine sehr begrenzte Basis an bestehender Forschung zur filmischen Empathie und fast keine in Bezug auf nichtfiktionalen Film.

Die revolutionären Bewegungen jüngster Zeit in der arabischen Welt und der Ukraine sowie die große Menge dokumentarischer Produktion aus diesen Regionen erzwingen die

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<sup>474</sup> Sharp (1993/2012), 78–79.

Frage, welche die Mittel und Mechanismen in den Bildern des nichtfiktionalen Films sind, die es vermögen Empathie hervorzurufen, eine Bindung herzustellen zwischen einander fernen Menschen und welche Beziehung besteht zwischen dem hervorgerufenen empathischen Disstress und unserer ethischen Haltung. Dies, im Kontext von Widerstandsdokumentarfilmen, nichtfiktionalen Filmen aus revolutionären Situationen, ist die zugrundeliegende Fragestellung dieser Arbeit.