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# **MAKING THE STRANGE FAMILIAR**

THE FUNCTIONS OF EMPATHY IN  
INTERCULTURAL FILM NARRATIVE

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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# ABSTRACT

The dissertation investigates the varied roles and functions of empathy in intercultural film narrative, in both text and process. The overall purpose is to gain an understanding of empathy as a key element in intercultural communication. The research aim is two-fold: first, to determine the general functions of empathy in intercultural communication, and second, to uncover ways in which empathy can be enhanced in non-fiction text and process.

As a compilation of four articles, this dissertation uses a mixed methods approach and different sets of material for each article. The dissertation material consists of non-fiction texts, case studies, and observations linked to the process of intercultural communication. Three of the articles focus specifically on non-fiction narrative and its production process. The material is rooted in the authors' personal experience as a film practitioner and educator, as two of the four articles exhibit cases in which the author was a participant observer.

The methods used to examine the material are qualitative, including textual analysis, qualitative interview, case study, and participant observation. The theoretical approach is interdisciplinary, combining film studies, cultural studies, post-colonial studies, and narrative and literary studies.

In light of the results, a general function of empathy is to create an understanding of and between others and of the self, enhancing trust and fostering shared meaning between different stakeholders in the narrative process. Thus, empathy can undo otherness and counter stereotypical representations. Additionally, one function of empathy is to challenge power hierarchies in non-fiction film production.

The results of the dissertation further reveal that empathy can be enhanced by allowing for relational empathy during the production process, and by enabling non-fiction subjects to take part in the design of the narrative. In the initial phase of a narrative process, empathy can be encouraged between author and subject by mutually sharing similar life experiences related to the central themes of the narrative. Elements in non-fiction texts that invite empathy include

a clear narrative structure and characterisations that allow for appraisals that precede empathy. In distribution and viewing, empathy can be enhanced by the construction of spaces that allow for uninterrupted viewing and immersion.

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# LIST OF ORIGINAL ARTICLES

The dissertation is based on the following studies:

I. Nåls, J. (2016). Drawing the Unspeakable – Understanding 'the other' through narrative empathy in animated documentary. *The International Journal of Film and Media Arts*. Vol 1, No 1.

II. Nåls, J. (2018). The Difficulty of Eliciting Empathy in Documentary in Brylla C. and Kramer M. (Eds) *Cognitive Theory and Documentary Film*. Palgrave Macmillan.

III. Nåls J. (2017). The Changing Cinema Spaces of Accra – Fragmented Spectatorship and the Loss of Empathy. *Journal of African Cinemas*. Volume 9, vol. 2-3, pp. 189-202.

IV. Nåls J. (2018). Documentary subjects speak out: Relational empathy and ethics in intercultural documentary film education. *Film Education Journal* 1.2.

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Jan Nåls

Rome, 29th May 2018



# PREFACE

I am in the dark.

It is the darkness of a movie theatre in 1980s Helsinki. Although I am only 12 years old, I have managed to sneak into the theatre on my own. The darkness surrenders to a flickering light that grows in front of my eyes and creates a world in which a story evolves, with twists and turns. Soon, I am hooked to the silver screen, immersed in the story and its characters. I laugh and cry, overcome with emotion. Looking at myself from a distance, almost 40 odd years later, I realise that I am still captured inside the world of story.

Darkness represents the start of something new, a place of not-knowing, not-feeling. Darkness is the place where inquiry, and research, originates, a starting point. A PhD dissertation is often described as a journey. This one starts at an intersection with three roads departing in different directions, often overlapping and merging.

The first is the study of narrative. Stories are what originally led me to film and its study. I recall a moment experienced in yet another dark cinema theatre in the early 1990s. I was watching a Wim Wenders movie, *Until the End of the World* (1991). A character named Eugene Fitzpatrick, played by actor Sam Neill, is stranded in the Australian outback, trying to make sense of a world spiralling out of control: 'All I knew was how to write. But I believed in the magic and healing power of words, and of stories'. This line stuck with me. I still wonder, is there healing power in stories? If so, what does it mean? How do stories work?

Another road is intercultural communication and its study. The challenges and possibilities of intercultural communication become inherent when stories travel across cultures. This research was created in an intercultural context. As part of my work as film teacher, I have acted as a co-ordinator of and lecturer in an intercultural exchange program between Finland, South Africa and Ghana for over 10 years. The programme started in 2006 and used documentary film as a method of inquiry into questions of cultural understanding, as well as a practical outcome. The exchange programme was called

‘Training Producers for Ecological Broadcasting’, later renamed ‘Documentary and Diversity’, and was part of the North South South Exchange (NSSE), a funding instrument devised by the Finnish Foreign Ministry aimed at enhancing cultural understanding and building academic networks between Africa and Europe. The experiences, both personal and professional, of teaching and researching documentary film has informed this dissertation on multiple levels. The curiosity regarding the nature of non-fiction stories that travel between cultures stem from many discussions and film productions completed with students and staff who have taken part in the exchange program. The overarching question remains: What kind of stories should we tell of each other?

Last, there is the road of empathy and its study. Feeling and emotion are intimately connected to stories. The important stories, those that stay with us and maybe even change us, are the ones that move us emotionally. My transformative experiences of story have had one element in common: submission. For a moment in time, I have surrendered a part of myself to a character. I have felt what they felt, and sometimes these feelings have been new to me. I have left the cinema thinking, ‘I did not know I had these feelings’. Character identification and empathy are at the centre of the visual narrative experience, but how does empathy work, and why is it important? An overall objective of this dissertation is to argue for the continued relevance of the concept of empathy as a way to understand narrative, as well as intercultural communication.

I began this preface with the word ‘I’. Academic research is largely dominated by a scientific concept of knowledge building, as demonstrated, for example, by articles I and II that form part of this dissertation. The imparted knowledge in cases such as these is somewhat impersonal and does not necessarily reflect the subjective interest or point of view of any one individual. In this dissertation, I will also make use of other ways of knowing. Another overarching objective is to connect this research to myself as a human individual: to personal experience, emotions, and embodied relationships with the world. This kind of knowledge, sometimes called ‘artistic’, comes partly to the fore in article III, as well as in parts of this summarising report.

An article-based dissertation’s summarising report can generally

be thought of as emerging from the articles, rather than a recap or a summary. As such, the report has three main aims.

Firstly, the report provides an introduction and general context for a reader of the articles. In the following pages, you will be introduced to the research fields of intercultural communication, narrative, and empathy, and you will gain a closer look at some of the thoughts I have found especially relevant to the study of empathy and visual narrative non-fiction. These include cognitive film theory, appraisal theory of empathy, and the theory of narrative empathy.

Secondly, the summarising report will supply a summary of the articles and an overview (Table 1), which imparts not only the research questions and methodologies but also touches on the significance of each article to the dissertation and presents summarised conclusions for the articles.

The third aim of this report is to offer conclusions for the entire dissertation, to elevate the discussion to a general level. I will touch on the linkages between the individual articles and show my changing, and hopefully still developing, thought process.

In short, my aim is to share my quest towards a deeper understanding of narrative, intercultural communication, and empathy. Part of me is still in the dark, but I have seen glimpses of light on my way. My hope is that you will enjoy the journey of discovery as much as I have.

Jan Nåls

Rome, 29 May 2018

# 1 INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPATHY

Empathy makes the strange familiar, allowing us to experience the subjectivity of others. Such experiences will, in turn, expand and alter our inner worlds. Thus, empathy also makes all that is familiar strange. The word itself is quite recent, although 18th century moral philosophy had studied similar phenomena under different names. Empathy entered the modern lexicon in the early 20th century, when it was used to understand why art moves us, as it described the imaginative act of projecting oneself into a work of art (Listowel, 1934; Titchener, 1924). Since then, the meaning, and uses, of empathy has expanded to other fields.

Our ability to empathise, as is often suggested today, is what makes us human. Through empathy, a person can become free from the solitude of the mind. This dissertation asserts the belief that our minds can, will, and must connect with each other, regardless of our differences. When we share another person's feelings, we connect to our own humanity; we expose it and are exposed to it.

Empathy is regularly celebrated as a hallmark of a noble spirit, a source of altruism, and an important feature in our interaction with works of art and stories in various forms. Additionally, empathy has been advocated as the foundation of democracy and social change, as an 'education of the imagination' (Nussbaum, 1996: 51). Nussbaum further suggests that society should strive to cultivate the ability to imagine the experiences of others and, with the help of stories and works of art, 'to cross boundaries of class, nationality, race, and gender' (Nussbaum, 1996: 51). The connection between empathy, altruism, and social change is far from uncontested. Many believe empathy contributes to a culture of submissive entertainment. Boler (1997: 253) suggests that empathy can easily become 'passive', and a 'consumptive mode of identification' (1997: 234-5) rather than a vehicle for social change. However, as Nussbaum (1996: 50) points out, 'it is important to be drawn into other people's struggles, to become a part of them', in addition to learning facts about these individuals

or understanding rational arguments relating to their personal or collective struggles. Nussbaum recognises that the arts serve a vital political function, even when their content is not expressly political, for they cultivate our empathic abilities, which are central to political life.

Artists and storytellers, such as filmmakers, tend to share Nussbaum's belief. One telling example is a statement from Iranian fiction film director Ashgar Farghadi (2017) upon receiving an Academy Award in 2017 for his film *The Salesman* (Farghadi, 2016):

*Filmmakers can turn their cameras to capture shared human qualities and break stereotypes of various nationalities and religions. They create empathy between us and others. An empathy we need today more than ever.* (Farghadi, 2017)

Similar statements are also commonplace within the context of non-fiction, as exemplified by documentary film producer Tabitha Jackson:

*There are incredibly important stories to be told, and injustices to be highlighted. A documentary camera is a kind of empathy machine. A documentary can put you in someone else's shoes.* (Jackson, 2014)

Empathy has strong positive connotations and is repeatedly linked to our humanity and our care for others (cf. Nussbaum, 1996; Batson et al., 1997; Hoffman, 2001). Furthermore, the phenomenon of empathy has important functions in relation to audiovisual stories and the narrative process. The study of empathy is often interdisciplinary, as it deals with a basic human trait with connections to communication, psychology, neuroscience and narrative, film, literary, and cultural studies.

Academic interest in empathy has steadily grown in recent years and has enriched many fields, among them neuroscience (Decety and Ickes, 2011; Stamenov and Gallese, 2002; Gallese 2003), psychology (Hoffman, 2001; Coplan and Goldie, 2011), and literary and film studies (Keen, 2006; Gaut, 2010; Tan, 2011; Currie, 1995).

As the title of this summarising report implies, the dissertation revolves around the varied roles and functions of empathy in narrative, in both text and process. Empathy is the central concept that informs the other concepts present in the title: intercultural communication, film, and narrative. These ideas form the context of the individual articles, as well as of this summarising report, and thus of the whole dissertation.

The summarising report is constructed as follows. The introduction presents the central concepts of empathy and narrative, speaks to the relevance of the dissertation, and presents the material and methods of the study. Chapter 2 delivers an overview of the central challenges in intercultural communication, which acts as a framework for the individual articles, which all share a connection to Africa and its narratives. Chapter 3 presents theories that speak to non-fiction film in Africa and narrative and character in non-fiction in general. Chapter 4 examines the central concept of empathy. Chapter 5 supplies the reader with summaries of the four individual articles, their aims, methods, context, and main findings. Chapter 6 offers a broader conclusion on empathy and its different functions, as well as an overview (Tabel 2) of results and conclusions for the dissertation as a whole.

Many concepts akin to empathy might have been suitable as a central concept. Empathy is often linked to other related concepts such as identification and emotional engagement. The reason behind the choice of empathy as a central concept for the dissertation is twofold.

Firstly, empathy is a broad concept that allows for an examination on the narrative process, rather than focusing solely on the relationship between audience and text. Concepts such as identification and emotional engagement are sometimes used as synonyms to empathy, but they are generally used to describe audience reactions and effects in relation to texts and narratives. Cohen (2001) concurs in that identifying with a character refers to audience members taking on a character's identity and vicariously experiencing events from within that identity. Identification occurs in relation to narrative texts that invite viewers to adopt the perspective of the characters,



as opposed to genres that directly address audience members or in some other way remind viewers or readers of themselves. Identification requires that audiences momentarily forget their own position as audience members and assume the role of a character (Cohen 2001, 247-8). Thus, identification holds similarities to definitions of empathy, but it is narrower in its scope, as it doesn't encompass other relationships within the narrative process. Similarly, the concept of emotional engagement points to audience reactions, although it does stress the emotional component in the relationship between audience and text, as does the concept of empathy. Coplan (2004) notes that emotional engagement with characters can be understood as being pluralistic, so an audience member can, for instance, take both empathic and sympathetic stances towards a character. Thus empathy can be more clearly defined, while it simultaneously allows for a broader examination of the narrative process.

Secondly, empathy differs from the related concepts of sympathy and compassion. Sympathy generally refers to an emotional process involving care and concern for another, and another's well-being. The difference between empathy and sympathy can be described as follows:

*“Empathy: I feel what You feel. I feel Your pain.*

*Sympathy: I feel a supportive emotion about Your feelings. I feel pity for Your pain.”* (Keen, 2006: 209)

Therefore, it can be argued that sympathy does not necessarily require an imaginative process that invites us to experience the subjectivity of others. Rather, sympathy is constructed on previous notions, values, and beliefs, and tends to reaffirm these. Empathy, on the other hand, has the potential to be transformative, and invite change to previously held convictions.

Compassion is not a synonym for empathy either, even though it is often used as such in everyday language, for example in sentences such as “He lacks empathy” or “Show some empathy!”. Compassion can, however, be seen as one potential consequence of empathy. Empathy may thus act as a prerequisite for compassion and even ethical behaviour. But, according to Håkansson (2003, 25) empathy does

not by default generate compassion and feelings of care. Although empathy may invite altruism, empathy for another individual is not sufficient for moral action (cf. Batson et al., 1997; Hoffman, 2001). In addition, moral principles are also needed in order to distribute one's action in a fair rather than arbitrary manner. Empathic feelings and moral principles seem to complement each other in order to produce moral behavior. Empathic feelings motivate people to care for others (cf. Batson, 1997; Hoffman, 2001). Without empathy, moral principles seem to lack the motivating force for people to care for others (Hoffman, 2001). Staub (1987: 111-2) suggests that 'without empathy, people might develop moral principles... but it is unlikely that they would feel a genuine connection to and care for others'. Thus, empathy seems to carry both potential and promise for compassion and altruism. This transformative quality is what makes empathy such an intriguing concept in successful intercultural communication.

The dissertation is positioned within the field of intercultural communication, where the parties of communication are situated in different cultures. Parts of the study and the individual articles deal predominantly with mediated transcultural communication. According to Hepp (2015: 2-3), transcultural communication takes place through media. Intercultural communication takes place between individuals and groups of individuals belonging to distinct cultures or nation states. Within the confines of this dissertation, intercultural communication encompasses both mediated communication and other forms of direct communication. Face-to-face communication is an important part of the non-fiction narrative process, and thus I choose to use the broader term 'intercultural communication' in the dissertation.

Intercultural communication is historically and socially positioned. Audiovisual stories, such as non-fiction films, which are the topic of interest in three of the individual articles, are 'contextualized interlocation between socially situated producers and receivers' (Shohat & Stam, 1995: 180-1). In this dissertation, non-fiction films are understood as acts of communication, as well as texts and processes. A broad interpretation of the term intercultural is

applied, one that refers to an act of communication, a group, a space, an experience, or a meeting that relates to and involves an exchange between more than one culture. By one definition, intercultural communication occurs ‘when a member of one culture produces a message for consumption by a member of another culture’ (Samovar et al., 2012: 8). When speaking of a group of people as a culture, the term usually refers to the dominant culture found in most societies, the group that has the greatest amount of control over the culture and the power that allows it to speak for the entire culture while setting the tone and agenda. However, cultures are not monolithic, and one will always find numerous co-cultures and specialized cultures within the dominant one, for example, cultures based on sexual preference, gender, race, or religion (Samovar et al., 2014).

There are many obstacles for successful intercultural communication. An obvious problem arises from the fact that the producer and receiver belong to different cultures, and thus the intended message can become distorted in the communication process. Cultural and post-colonial studies (Hall, 1997; Shohat and Stam, 2013) suggest that the major problems are due to differing social, political, and economic interests. The representation of others is a continuing challenge in mediated communication, as it is linked to questions of power, access, and knowledge (Hall, 1997; Shohat and Stam 2013).

A special focus in the dissertation is documentary film, in this study referred to as non-fiction film or non-fiction. This genre has a rich tradition of representing others. Non-fiction narratives are valuable occasions for meaningful engagement with otherness. They often present encounters that retell life, history, and experience. At best, these encounters create openness, fellow-feeling, and dialogue between distant others. Renov (2016) regards these as ‘second-order encounters that could not have existed before the invention of photography and film’. Such relationships are built on trust, delicate affairs between strangers that have the potential to become intimate. Relationships are established between filmmaker and documentary subject, filmmaker and audience, and audience and character, with boundaries that are constantly challenged. Each relationship is an evolving process. As with any relationship, it is also riddled with

misunderstandings and unequal power hierarchies. The text, the finished coherent narrative, is a product of that relationship. Speaking for someone else is complicated, and some have argued that it is almost impossible to escape certain power hierarchies, such as colonialism, when representing others (cf. Spivak, 2006; Hall, 1997; Shohat and Stam, 2013). Hierarchies of power are also inherent between the different parties in the film production process<sup>1</sup> (cf. Mayer, Banks and Caldwell, 2009).

In the dissertation, the real-life individuals who appear in non-fiction are referred to as documentary subjects, or subjects. The constructed representations of these subjects are referred to as documentary characters, or characters.

Although rooted in reality, non-fiction regularly presents us with constructed stories: narratives. Stories entertain us, they give us comfort, and perhaps therapy, while they also sell us ideas and commodities. They teach us moral lessons, new facts, and new emotions. The 20th century witnessed a growing interest in narrative practices. Often referred to as ‘the narrative turn’, this new field of inquiry originated from the French structuralists and their interest in language, and more explicitly Todorov’s passion for the art of narrative, *la narratologie* (Meretoja, 2014). This school of thought was premised on the idea that life is inherently storied: the real must be fictionalized to be thought. Narrative scholars of today (Bamberg, 2011; Josselson and Lieblich, 1995) suggest that even our lives are stories we tell ourselves. Narrative is of central importance when defining our identities. As Murray (2003) suggests, we are born into a narrative world, live our lives through narrative, and afterwards, we are described in terms of narrative. Furthermore, as argued above, we make sense of others with the help of narrative. Stories are im-

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<sup>1</sup> In the dissertation, ‘production process’ refers to the different stages in a film production. Pre-production usually consists of an initial idea, development, financing, research, scriptwriting, casting, location scouting, storyboarding, and sound design. This is followed by production, which covers the actual shoot on location. Post-production includes the editing and the final mix of image and sound, the score creation, color grading, marketing, distribution, and screening. The stages mentioned are not exhaustive, and they differ depending on documentary mode, and scale of production. (cf. Rabiger 1987; Rosenthal 1996, Nichols 2010)

portant in themselves, in the way Nussbaum (1996) proposes; we all need to expand our experiences and reinforce our grasp on central ethical truths. Stories acquaint us with novel situations and feelings that we may not encounter in real life.

## **1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS**

Most studies on empathy and narrative have been focused on narrative as text, such as the study of novels or other forms of written fiction narrative (cf. Dadlez, 1997; Gerrig, 1993; Harrison, 2008; Hogan, 2009; Hogan 2010; Keen, 2006; Keen 2007), or fiction film (cf. Tan et al., 2001; Tan, 2011; Carroll, 1990; Carroll, 2011; Vaage, 2010; Coplan, 2011; Gaut, 1999), often from a certain cultural or genre-specific perspective. In a majority of these studies, the point of interest is the relationship between the text and the audience, often examining the text and its effects on readers and viewers. A large portion of studies disregards the audience as well, and deals solely with the characteristics of fictional texts such as novels or films. Subsequently, there are gaps in the existing body of studies on empathy that the current dissertation strives to fill. Non-fiction film has been largely overlooked within the study of empathy and narrative. In addition, the process of constructing complex narratives often remain unnoticed, as analysis is typically directed at a finished narrative. As a whole, the dissertation fills a gap by introducing the non-fiction film process as an object of study. An additional gap is the lack of a holistic view on intercultural communication, one which stresses the productive relationship between communicators, and the potential and promise of empathy in said relationship.

To sum up, the dissertation offers the following points of view:

- Empathy as a key concept in understanding intercultural communication and narrative. A special focus in this dissertation is the Africa-Europe context.
- Non-fiction constructs are similar, although not identical, to fiction, mainly in terms of narrative.

- Narrative, and especially non-fiction narrative, can best be understood as a process.

Narrative is examined predominantly as text in article II. This somewhat narrow view of narrative is expanded in the remaining articles (I, III and IV), which interrogate narrative as process.

A key objective of the dissertation is to gain a deeper understanding of empathy and its functions in intercultural communication, as well as in non-fiction film education, an area that is examined in articles I and IV. The dissertation asserts that by understanding the varied ways empathy works, we come to understand intercultural film narrative as well. Thus, the main objective of examining empathy can be divided into four research aims rooted in the individual articles:

- (1) To apply theories of empathy to gain insight into creative narrative processes.
- (2) To combine theories of empathy with narrative studies to gain a deeper understanding of non-fiction narratives and to identify formal strategies in film texts that invite empathy.
- (3) To expand the discussion on empathy to include the physical space of viewing and to introduce the audience as an intrinsic part of understanding the construction of empathy.
- (4) To give a voice to the participants of non-fiction film and to examine the ethics of non-fiction filmmaking by studying the responses when documentary subjects view themselves.

The central research question addresses the functions empathy may play in intercultural film narrative:

1. What functions does empathy have in intercultural film narrative and its processes?

A second research question addresses the practical implications of empathy in non-fiction:

2. In what ways can empathy be enhanced in non-fiction text and process?

## 1.2 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

Studying empathy and narrative is important in a broader context because global, national, and individual relationships are ripe with conflict and prejudice. A general need for cultural understanding on individual, institutional, and societal levels is apparent. Hence, the specific relevance of this dissertation stems from the need to interrogate, and indeed combat, the use of stereotypes and strategies of othering and consequently gain knowledge of how narratives can enhance our understanding across different borders that separate cultures, both real and imagined.

Furthermore, the dissertation can offer practical recommendations as to how to design narratives and creative and educational processes that contribute to cultural understanding, given that understanding is often hindered by othering in traditional media content. This notion is rooted in the belief that there is a need for deeper narratives with more complex characters than those currently offered to us by the news and entertainment industry. The world urgently needs better stories, and these stories need to travel. Narrative texts, and the processes that inform them, can include empathy on different levels and with different functions. As I argue in the dissertation, I believe empathy is as a key element in the enhancement of cultural understanding.

Theoretical relevance stems from the interdisciplinary approach, which combines cognitive film theory, narrative and literary studies, and varied studies on empathy to shed light on the functions of empathy. As noted earlier, empathy has been predominantly studied within the context of fiction, be it literary or film.

Three of the four articles (I, II, and IV) specifically examine non-fiction film. Since the early years of film, non-fiction has played a special role in the representation of foreign cultures. Robert Flaherty, generally regarded as one of first documentary filmmakers, was also one of the first that used film as an anthropological tool, and many others followed his example (Barnouw, 1993: 33–51). Non-fiction has played a different role in Africa, however, if viewed from an African perspective, a topic discussed in Chapter 2.

An industry study (Chattoo 2016) suggests that, from a global perspective, the documentary industry is enjoying the early days of a digital golden age. Production, distribution, and consumption practices have changed radically over the past few decades. The landscape has been altered by accessible digital production, new TV distribution opportunities, virtual reality, and transmedia storytelling. Audience consumption has changed as well, via online streaming and on-demand viewing. As Chattoo (2016: 3) concludes, ‘New distribution strategies including festivals, theatres, TV, community based distribution, and online distribution, provide a pathway for documentaries to enjoy a longer and more dynamic life cycle with international audiences’.

On a general note, we need to understand media, regardless of whether we study, teach, produce, or consume media. Being able to critically engage with media from different perspectives is a vital form of cultural capital. A key competence in this effort is understanding stories, sometimes called story literacy, an element of the well-known concept media literacy, which concerns itself with cultural awareness and expression in media. Media literacy, according to Potter (2013), is a set of perspectives that we use to comprehend the messages we encounter. Media literacy is multidimensional, as it requires us to build understanding and knowledge in ‘multiple dimensions; cognitive, emotional, aesthetic and moral’ (Potter, 2013: 26). Arnheim and Messaris (1994) argue that viewers should acquire an awareness of the processes by which meaning is created through the visual media. To become story-literate we must decode the stories that surround us, by understanding the basics of the art of storytelling, be it as producers, distributors, researchers, or consumers of those stories.

To become story-literate we also need to know what a story can and cannot do, and we need to be able to tell and listen, to encode and decode. The skill of encoding involves telling stories that engage, create empathy, and foster cultural understanding. Decoding includes understanding and critiquing the stories we receive, as well as asking and answering who is telling the story and for whom. Additionally, decoding entails understanding the method and con-



text of the story: the tools of persuasion, the intentions, and the potential effects. One way to understand stories is to examine the narrative process.

### **1.3 MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The dissertation material consists of texts, case studies, and observations linked to intercultural communication, in three of the articles specifically to non-fiction narrative and its production process. I chose this material because, combined, the articles represent a (predominantly non-fiction) narrative process. The individual articles focus on different binaries present in the process: author-subject (article I), author-text (article II), text-audience (article III), and subject-author (article IV). The material is unique, in that it is rooted in the researcher's personal experience, as three of the four articles showcase material in which the author was a participant observer. In article I, the tangible material consists of observations of a non-fiction production process, which inform the reading of the non-fiction text. Article II focuses on texts, intercultural non-fiction narratives, and the formal strategies that can be identified in them. Article III's approach is different, as it presents a case study of a viewing space and the audience in it, and thus, the material consists of observations of the audience and the space it inhabits. The material was filmed and edited into a short documentary film, representing an artistic research approach. Article IV examines three different events where documentary subjects view themselves. The main object of study in each of the individual articles remains empathy, in its differing forms, functions, and manifestations.

The methods used to examine the material are qualitative. Qualitative analysis aims to increase the overall understanding of the quality, characteristics, and meanings of the researched object or topic, in this dissertation the concept of empathy. The specific methods used include textual analysis, informed by the theory of narrative empathy. The aim of textual analysis is to describe the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in texts (Hansen et

al., 1998). Another method, employed in article I, is the qualitative interview. Interviews can be defined as a qualitative research technique involving individual discussions, usually with a ‘small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a specific topic’ (Boyce and Neale, 2006: 3). In articles I, III and IV, participant observation was used, and this method was combined with artistic research in article III. The participant observation in I, III and IV is qualitative observational research, as it describes and classifies various cultural and/or sociological phenomena by employing interpretive approaches.

Participant observation can be thought of as a description of events, behaviours, and artefacts in the chosen social setting (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Similarly, Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999: 91) define participant observation as ‘the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting’. Through participant observation, the researcher may gain a close connection with a group and the given context. The dissertation’s articles employ different forms of participant observation. In articles I, III and IV, the researcher held multiple roles during observation, including lecturer, filmmaker, and supervisor. Overall, the stance of the researcher is one of moderate participation, a term introduced by Spradley (1980). In such moderate participant observation, the researcher strives for a balance between the roles of insider and outsider. This can invite a fruitful combination of involvement and detachment (Spradley, 1980).

Participant observation is a natural, but challenging qualitative data collection method. It is natural in the sense that it resembles human experience in general, akin to being a member of a family, or an ethnic or a national group. The challenges of harnessing this innate human capability for research purposes is that when we are participant observers in a more formal sense, we must systematize and organize an inherently fluid process (Guest et al., 2013). The case studies in articles I, III, and IV were complex processes with multiple participants, and they required a high degree of reflexivity, sensitivity and inside knowledge from me as the participant observer. Questions of reliability and bias are pertinent in such case

studies. It is evident that participant observation is highly practitioner-sensitive, and the characteristics of the author are essential to the account published. This proved to be the case in the current case studies as well, where my intimate knowledge was an essential part of understanding the process. In line with the ethos of this dissertation, a lot of the knowledge was produced in dialogue with the examined spaces, situations, and people. As the author, I could not have understood the creative practice of student filmmaking in an intercultural context without encountering the students in multiple roles in an ongoing dialogue. This dialogue provided me with a multi-dimensional view and subsequent understanding of the processes described in detail in articles I and IV. It is, therefore, my understanding that the benefits of such a method outweighed any potential drawbacks. Simply put, the case studies would not have been possible to carry out without participating in the observation. Viewed from this perspective, the accounts are unique, but they include observations that are general and applicable to other similar situations to those studied.

In article III, the researcher also made use of the method of artistic research. Artistic research refers to a creative process in which practice, theory, and reflection, doing and thinking, are intrinsically related. Knowledge in artistic research is more of a verb—knowing—than a noun—knowledge (Johnson, 2010: 142-143). One approach is to use artistic expression, as in article III, a poetic documentary film, as a method of inquiry. This is an interdisciplinary approach to method that makes use of both theory and practice to gain knowledge.

Furthermore, the articles predominantly employ the method of case study. A case study can be defined as an ‘intensive study of a single unit, analysed for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units’ (Gerring 2004: 340). A unit connotes a spatially bounded phenomenon observed at a single point in time or over some limited period of time. Within the context of this dissertation, the articles use the method of case study because (a) the method is qualitative, with a small sample size (Yin 1994); (b) the research is ethnographic, participant observation, or otherwise ‘in the field’ (Yin 1994); (c) the research is characterized by process-tracing (George and Bennett 2004); (d) the research investigates a single phenome-

non, instance, or example (Gerring 2004: 341-2).

Articles I, III, and IV are case studies and are thus informed by an interpretive stance towards the material, one that is close to what Geertz (1975) labels thick description. Such an interpretative stance views human behaviour in a way that not only explains the behaviour, but the context as well. In this way, the behaviour may become meaningful to an outsider (Steel and Guala, 2012: 143-4). In article I, for instance, the creative choices of a non-fiction filmmaker are interpreted in a broader context that includes cultural, social, and individual backgrounds. In article IV, the responses of non-fiction subjects are interpreted by considering their social situation. These acts of interpretation occurred on site, in the group's natural environment, and attempted to be non-manipulative of group behaviours.

The overall research approach is inductive. Inductive research involves the search for patterns from observation and the development of explanations for those patterns. Naturally, the inductive approach does not disregard theories when formulating research questions and objectives, as it may combine theories from different disciplines to gain new perspectives.

The approach aims to generate meanings from the data collected to identify patterns and relationships. Inductive reasoning is learning from experience. Patterns and regularities in experience are observed to reach conclusions or to generate theory (Goddard and Melville, 2004).

## **1.4 THEORETICAL APPROACH**

My theoretical approach is interdisciplinary, combining research and thoughts from film, cultural, post-colonial, psychological, narrative, and literary studies. This approach to the study of film has been called post-theory, and the current study can be partly seen as a work in this tradition.

In the mid-1980s, a new type of scholarship within film, called post-theory, emerged. This movement can be attributed to the early works of David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Bordwell and Carroll, 1996). Their approach stood in contrast to earlier research in the

study of film narrative, which had been 'dominated by semiotics and psycho-analytical perspectives' (Barratt, 2007: 530). The latter perspective suggests that the viewers experience is to be understood as an ongoing conflict between the 'id' and the 'superego', between principles of pleasure and principles of reality. In this tradition, the viewer is seen predominantly as a passive recipient (Metz, 1982). Christian Metz became a leader of semiological thinking about cinema. Determined to expose the structures of cinematic expression, he developed a Grand Syntagmatique, a grammar of cinema that was object-centred. Many early cinema semiologist paid little attention to explaining filmic comprehension psychologically (Livingston and Plantinga, 2008: 358).

As an alternative to these so-called grand theories, Bordwell and Carroll advocated the practice of mid-level research. Rather than being guided by one doctrine, scholars should concentrate on specific problems with specific solutions relating to the medium. Different questions often require interdisciplinary approaches, something Carroll called a piecemeal approach. The researchers built theory 'as they [went]' (Bordwell and Carroll, 1996: 69).

In the last 30 years, two post-theoretical areas have gained ground: neo-formalism and cognitivism, although the two are closely related, as illustrated in Figure 1. Both are concerned with the film viewer.

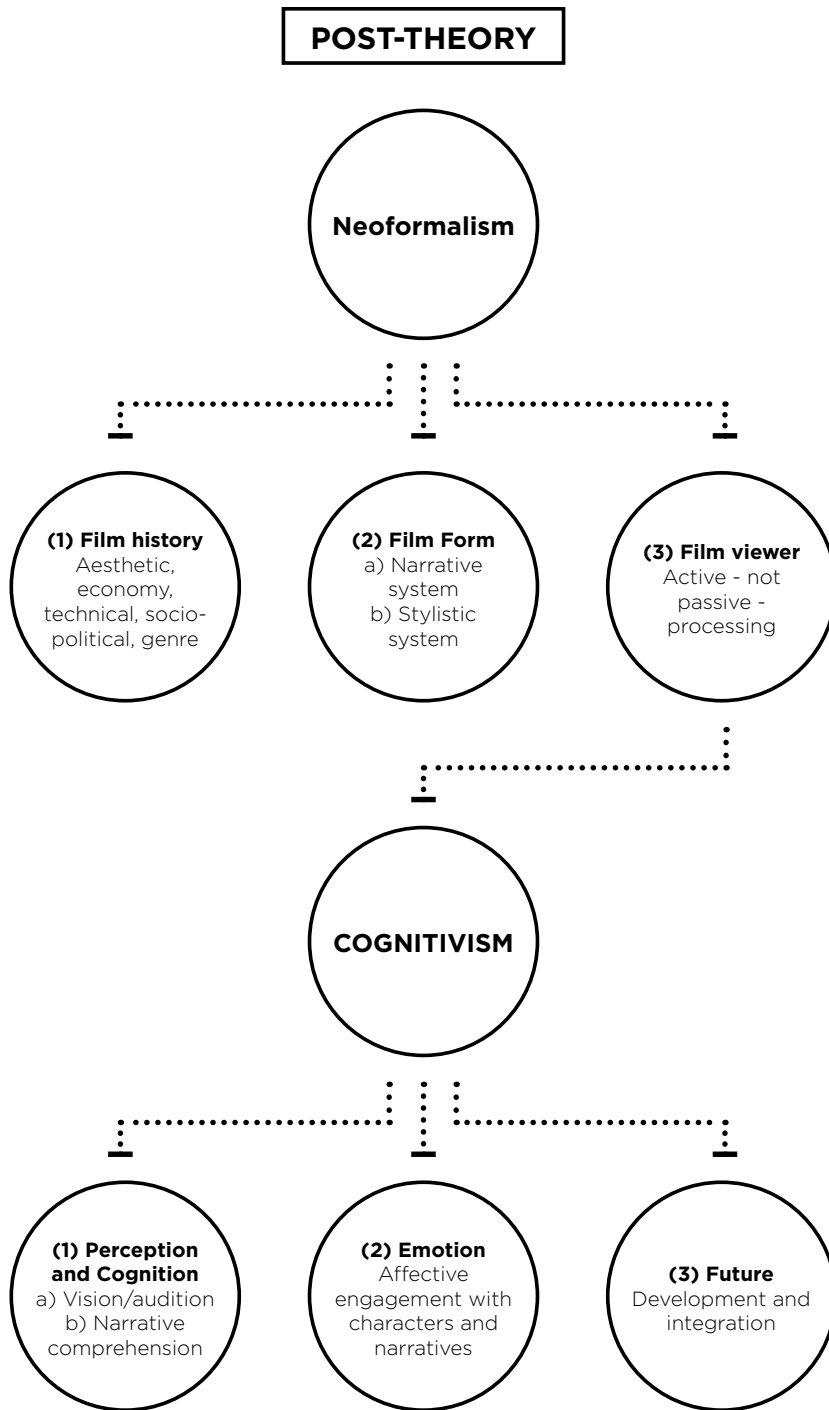


Figure 1 Post-theory, Neo-formalism, and Cognitivism

The first post-theory approach was labelled neo-formalism (Thompson and Bordwell, 2004). The name, and the thinking, was inspired by the work of Russian formalists from the 1910s through the 1930s, like Vladimir Propp and his studies on the structure of Russian folk tales (Propp et al., 1968). Neo-formalism is specifically interested in how films are constructed and how they yield their effects on the audience. This approach can be divided into three basic areas of study.

Neo-formalism tends to regard every aspect of a film as a component of the film's formal structure. One way to analyse film is to divide a film into two basic systems: narrative and style. The narrative system can partly be understood in terms of the Russian formalists distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet*. *Fabula* is the story of the film, a cause-and-effect chain of events. *Syuzhet* refers to how the story is organised and told (Cobley, 2014). This distinction is similar to the structuralist concepts of story and discourse. The French structuralists, drawing on Saussure, saw narrative as a formal system with clearly identifiable underlying rules and two distinct parts: story and discourse. A story is comprised of the building blocks of the event, character and setting. The discourse is the device used to tell the story. When a story moves from one medium to another, the discourse changes, while the story remains largely intact (Chatman, 1980).

The second area of neo-formalist study, film history, identifies elements and patterns in narrative, often placing them in cultural and/or historical contexts. The approach has strong links to genre studies, such as documentary film studies. Previous studies have been put forward by Nichols, who categorized non-fiction and examined documentary representation (Nichols, 2010; Nichols 1992). Plantinga applied a rhetoric approach to non-fiction representation and provided useful definitions for non-fiction (Plantinga, 1997). A dominant aspect of film studies argues that narrative always must be understood within a certain cultural context, examining national cinemas, specific authors, genres, and history.

Some scholars (Grodal, 1999; Hogan, 2009) argue that there are fundamental and even universal narrative elements that exist regardless of social or cultural contexts. This position does not exclude the possibility of certain narrative patterns being more dominant

than others in any given historical moment.

The third area of neo-formalist study concerns the film viewer. Bordwell (1985: 34) argues that the viewer must be conceived as an active processor. Questions around the film viewer's psychological activity has advanced the second post-theoretical approach, cognitive film theory, or cognitivism. Cognitive film theory has a general focus on the mental activity of viewers as the central – but not the only – object of inquiry (Nannicelli&Taberham, 2014). Emotional responses, among them empathy, play an important role in cognitive studies. This dissertation is focused on the functions of empathy in narrative, and thus it is partly a work in the cognitivist tradition.

The general approach, however, is best described as a broad interdisciplinary approach advocated by Carroll (1988a; 1988b). The individual articles are interdisciplinary by design, as they make use of different theories, such as the appraisal theory of empathy, apparatus theory, and the theory of narrative empathy. The use of such different theories and research traditions in the same dissertation is not unproblematic. Oftentimes the theories are contested and even in conflict with each other. Cognitive film theory in general, and appraisal theory, for example, suggest that the viewer is actively making sense, whereas apparatus theory mostly argues that the viewer is a passive agent. But apparatus theory is helpful in understanding different aspects that influence the construction of meaning, such as the physical space of viewing. The theory of narrative empathy puts the focus on the narrative process, while often disregarding cultural and historical factors. Postcolonial theory, on the other hand, naturally stress the historical, political and cultural structures that guide viewers' meaning-making. The rationale behind the broad theoretical approach is the focus on the narrative process, rather than a focus solely on the narrative text and its effect on recipients. The theories are thus not mutually exclusive. The different theoretical approaches and thoughts complement each other by offering a holistic view of the multi-faceted narrative process.



## **2 THE CHALLENGES OF INTER-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

In the following chapter, I provide an overview of prior research into the primary fields of study and revisit key theories that have influenced the individual articles. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 supply a theoretical context for the dissertation and combine elements of selected theories within the frame of the current study. First, I examine some of the inherent challenges in intercultural communication that prompted the current study.

Modern information technology allows for non-stop distribution and reception of audiovisual narratives. Most narratives are carefully constructed to entertain, engage, and coerce audiences. They come in many shapes and forms: news clips, social media content, TV-series, fiction films, advertisements, user-generated content, and longer non-fiction narratives, such as documentary films. As stories cross borders new challenges appear. Stories often repeat and maintain hierarchies of power with regards to culture, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and beyond (Hall, 1997; Shohat and Stam, 2013). The use of othering, stereotypes, and denial of voice are among the media strategies and practices that continue to foster inequality. How we speak of the ‘other’—be it with regards to culture, gender, religion, race or class—is a pertinent question. To develop solutions and promote change, we need to understand the problems of representation, including othering, stereotypes, and denial of voice.

### **2.1 THE BURDEN OF REPRESENTATION**

We give objects, people and experiences meaning by how we represent them: in words, stories, or images. We also give meaning how we classify objects, people and experiences, and by associating emotions with theses (Hall, 1997). Meaning is produced in every personal and social interaction in which we take part and in a variety of media

through complex technologies. These technologies circulate meaning between different cultures with a speed previously unknown in history (e.g., du Gay, 1997; Hall, 1997).

Acts of communication, such as media texts, are events designed and thought-out. This stance is held in narrative studies as well as in cultural studies (e.g., Bordwell, 2007; Chatman, 1980; Nichols, 1992; Shohat and Stam, 2013; Tan, 2011). Cultural studies refers to an interdisciplinary field concerned with the role of social forces and institutions in the shaping of culture. Among its central concerns are the place of race or ethnicity, class, and gender in the production of cultural knowledge (Ryan, 2010).

In any act of communication, the outside world—‘reality’—is not self-evidently given, nor can ‘truth’ be seized by oneself, a storyteller, a microphone, or a camera (Shohat and Stam, 2013: 180).

Individual users of language cannot be certain they can secure meaning in exactly the way they intended, although authors, such as filmmakers, greatly influence perceived meaning. Stories tend to represent the world in miniature. One inherent contradiction in representation is the relationship between the one and the many. When we represent something or someone, it, he, or she comes to represent an entire subgroup. Any behaviour by a member of a group or community is generalized as typical, and thus representations become allegorical. Often the represented behaviour is negative (Shohat and Stam 1994: 183).

Difference constitutes a central concept in representation and is essential to meaning. Meaning is relational, and without difference it would not exist. ‘Darkness’ has meaning because there is ‘light’. Difference is also important because we construct meaning through a ‘dialogue with the other’ (Hall, 1997: 234–6). In societies, exposure to difference can also give rise to conservative sentiments. The retreat of many cultures towards closure against ‘others’ is part of such a process (Hall 1997: 234). Social groups impose meaning on their world by ordering and organizing things into classificatory systems (Douglas, 1988). Binary oppositions are crucial for classification.

There is a long legacy of injustice and negative practises in Western representations of Africa (Michira, 2002; Jarosz, 1992; Hagos, 2000), a tradition in which differences between the West and Africa, rather

than common human traits, have been highlighted.<sup>2</sup> Difference is therefore ambivalent, as it is essential to meaning, while simultaneously creating divisions and thus hindering meaning-making.

A fundamental challenge in representation is that someone, such as an author, is speaking for someone else. The problem with speaking for others, as Alcoff (1991: 16) argues, is in the very structure of discursive practice, such as documentary filmmaking, irrespective of its content. It is thus important to subvert the hierarchical rituals of speaking and strive to create conditions for dialogue and the practice of speaking with, and speaking to, rather than speaking for others.

Representation is linked to power, which operates in unequal relationships related to areas such as access to knowledge and money, as well as other resources (Hall, 1997). Furthermore, power cannot be thought of solely in terms of force or coercion or in terms of one group or individual having a monopoly of power, distributing power downwards to a less powerful group. Power not only constrains and prevents, it also produces new knowledge and new objects of knowledge and shapes new practises. For example, as Hall states, the stereotyping of black masculinity has shaped resistance towards such representations, while forging black males' practises of identity construction throughout history. Since some reactions against stereotypes have been excessive, and in themselves stereotypical and simplified, they have in turn given rise to new stereotypes. This is an example of the circularity of power (Hall 1997: 261-3), which implicates the subjects of power as well as those who are subjected to it. Both the powerful and the powerless are caught in the circulation of power, of which representation is one area, although seldom on equal terms.

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<sup>2</sup> 'The West' is seen here as a historic and discursive construction, referring to industrialized, urbanized, secularized, and modern societies that began developing in the 16th century (Gieben and Hall, 1992: 277).

## **2.2 CREATING THE OTHER**

One of the strategies in representation is ‘othering’. Consequently, ‘the other’, and the understanding of that other, is a direct product of representation. The concept helps us understand the classification of ‘us’ and ‘them’, of the ‘familiar’ and the ‘strange’, and the ways in which the familiar becomes the norm and the strange becomes the exception. Some authors, notably Said (1979; 1994), have argued that Western identity and culture are fundamentally forged by an othering logic, one that dehumanizes or devalues other people, such as primitives, uncivilized, orientals, blacks, non-believers, women, and so forth. An essential feature of othering is denying the other his/her own voice, denying him/her the opportunity to speak for him/herself and instead attributing qualities, opinions, and views that refer to one’s own identity and culture.

Othering is always connected to power, especially the discursive power on the part doing the othering. Thus, othering is not a statement or depiction of facts, rather it is an act of constructing reality (Fiske and Hancock, 2016: 135). Othering makes the power hierarchies in representation visible. Often being different equals being of lesser value, lower than someone who represents the norm. When representing the strange, the traits that differ from the norm come to the fore. Identifying one trait often activates other traits associated with the initial trait.

According to post-colonial theory, power hierarchies are reconstructed and reinforced in media and narratives with four distinct strategies: exotic and idealistic representations, such as the ‘noble savage’; projecting fantasies about decay or desire onto the other; not acknowledging or giving value to differences; or repeating an Eurocentric world view (Gieben and Hall, 1992: 308). An illustrious and classic example is the study by Said (1979) on how the West created the Orient as a static concept, where the inhabitants were pictured as lazy, stupid, and untrustworthy. Parallel to this image, however, was a myriad of representations about an exotic and fantastical Arabia, filled with mystique and festivity. Similar patterns have been identified by post-colonial scholars with regards to Africa (Fanon et al., 2005; Gandhi, 1998; Hall, 1997; Shohat and Stam, 2013).

Even positive representations often focus on the outer manifestations of a foreign culture or person, and thereby renders these exotic and strange. Fanon et al. (2005) identified three positions of the subdued culture and explained how dominant cultures impact less dominant ones. The first position is subordination, where the oppressed acquires and accepts the values of the oppressive culture. All aspects of one's original culture are deemed less worthy. The second position is the opposite and constitutes rebellion or revolution. All elements of the oppressive culture are judged negatively. Despite the reversal, this position is still defined by the oppressive culture. Identity is built around one dominant factor: "I am black", "I am a woman", or "I am gay", for example. Position 3 constitutes liberation. The insight that positions one and two both are built upon someone else's definitions gives the oppressed the freedom to construct a unique identity. Fanon's positions were construed from a 1960s point of view, a time when many African nations gained their independence, but they are still relevant with regards to media representations.

A central problem associated with the representation of foreign cultures is the question of inclusion: The extent to which the production and distribution of media include images, opinions, and cultural manifestations of non-dominant cultures and their representatives. This is often called the question of voice, and documentary film has frequently been a mode of representation that can give, or deny, voice to marginalised groups.

## **2.3 DENIAL OF VOICE**

The question of voice is central when representing non-dominant cultures. Representations of a dominant group are often not as problematic since the variety of representations is rich and diverse. An obvious example is American culture, which has been represented in countless globally well-distributed media texts, which together form a sort of mosaic that reflect diversity, although individual representations may be stereotypical. Serious and complex representations of many minority groups, however, are still largely missing in

American film (Benshoff and Griffin, 2011).

Marginalised groups lack the power to control their own representations in media. They do not have a voice. A pressing question is the delegation of voice: who is given a voice, how much and how often is that voice given, and for whom is the message intended (Shohat and Stam, 2013: 184–6). Different solutions have been presented to solve the question of inclusion. Although including representatives of non-dominant cultures in various media output may seem obvious, an increase in quantity does not automatically lead to an increase in quality—to equal, complex, and fair representations.

Multiculturalism is sometimes offered as a possible solution. Hall (1997: 209–11) defines the term as the strategies and methods used to deal with and solve issues that arise within multicultural societies. He stresses that multiculturalism, a noun, is not a unified ideology, rather a concept that contains diverse strategies designed to solve the challenges within multicultural societies and contexts. Multicultural, as an adjective, can refer to diverse cultural expressions in multiple contexts, such as within a nation state, a city, a school, or certain media. However, an uncritical and commonplace view of multiculturalism can lead to exoticism. In such cases, the represented culture is defined by what makes it different from the dominant culture, and it is often, but not always, a representative of the dominant culture describing the other culture. This mirrors position 2 described by Fanon et al. (2005), in which the oppressed define themselves based on their difference from the dominant culture, with the dominant culture still defining the representations. Thus, cultural stereotypes need not be negative representations. They can be overtly positive representations, but still deem the other as exotic and strange. Although this is not an ideal strategy, the need for positive representations from inside any suppressed culture is understandable.

In addition to the question of inclusion in media representations, there is the vital point of increasing the role of media producers from minorities and oppressed cultures. Voice is always linked to hierarchy and power structures, and today it is often seen as a process. Both individual and collective voice can be seen as a continuing process reflecting between actions, experiences, and thought, an

open-ended process of giving account (Couldry, 2010: 1–4). Thus, the question of voice cannot be solved by simply giving voice to those that lack one. Creating a dialogue, of speaking *with* the other, is also necessary. Additionally, *how* foreign cultures are represented is important. This question examines the representation itself, the construction of character and narrative, for example, rather than *who* is being represented or by *whom*.

## 2.4 GOOD STEREOTYPE, BAD STEREOTYPE

One of the tools used in othering is the stereotype. Stereotyping reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics. The word stereotype is today almost always a term of abuse. This stems from the justified objections of various groups that have been, and are, misrepresented in media and beyond. However, when Walter Lippmann coined the term, he did not intend it to have a wholly pejorative connotation. Instead, he intended to explain the necessity of stereotypes, as well as their limitations and ideological implications (Marris et al., 2000: 245–5). An important function of stereotypes is their ordering quality:

*The real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and variations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it. To traverse the world men must have maps of the world. (Lippman, 1922: 60)*

Stereotypes are flawed maps. Often, we do not first see and then define; we define first, and then we see. Once we have defined, it is too late to see anything beyond our initial conception. In the confusion of the outer world, we recognise what our culture has already defined for us and thus tend to perceive that which we have recognized in the form stereotyped by our culture (Lippman 1922: 64). Gilman (1985: 12) concurs, stating “stereotyping is a universal means of cop-

ing with anxieties engendered by our inability to control the world”.

The power and lure of the stereotype lies in its power as a ‘short cut’. Stereotypes speak directly to our subconscious, not to our intellect. They do not invite us to reflect nor to take another person’s perspective. This last notion is significant: the stereotype is ill-suited to invite other-oriented perspective taking or high-level empathy. Stereotypes are also binary; they tend to highlight certain objects as familiar or strange, emphasizing the difference, so the somewhat familiar is experienced as the extremely familiar, and the somewhat strange is distinctly alien. Through the construction of fixed stereotypes, we limit the threat that the other poses. Gilman (1985), Shohat and Stam (2013), and Hall (1997) all suggest that stereotypes often display a contradictory and dual nature. Racialised others, for example, are often represented through binary extremes, such as good/bad, ugly/excessively attractive, and repelling-because-different/attractive-because-strange-and-exotic (Hall, 1997: 229).

Behind the defences of the stereotype, we can continue to feel safe and comfortable in the position we occupy (Lippman, 1922: 96). In this way, stereotypes possess a stagnant quality, an implication that change is not possible.

The constant repetition of certain stereotypes, such as African women as powerless victims, maintains cultural hierarchy and asserts a constant discursive power. Representations become allegoric, representing a whole group instead of just one individual while simultaneously violating the individual, reducing any given person to a stereotype (Shohat and Stam, 2013: 183). The critique against stereotypes largely arises from the powerlessness of marginalized groups to control their own representations (Shohat and Stam, 2013: 184).

This unequal power dynamic becomes even more ethically problematic and complex when representing people, ‘social actors’ as Nichols (1992: 42-3) calls them, in non-fiction narratives. In this dissertation, the individuals represented in non-fiction are referred to as documentary subjects, or subjects. In non-fiction, it is not only the marginalised group as a community that may suffer from the impacts of stereotyping, it is also the unique human individual that may come to harm. As an example, in a study of wartime rep-



representations in documentary films, Renov (2004: 48) notes that stereotypes regularly robbed racialized others of their uniqueness and individuality. Japanese individuals in American-produced wartime documentaries were stereotyped to further American wartime aims. Similarly, Hall (1997: 87) argues that a documentary is generally representative of the paradigm in which it has been constructed, and he states that a documentary is never a mere recitation of visual facts, but a mode of representation coloured by ambiguities. Renov (2004: 68) suggests that it is still possible to provide alternatives to stereotypical representations in approaches that he calls ‘counterstereotyping’: representations that embrace difference and complexity.

Intercultural communication is arguably an area of communication that faces multiple challenges in relation to the representation of others. Some of these are due to a troubled history: centuries of unequal hierarchies of power and resources between cultures, classes, and genders. Other challenges are due to the inherent make-up of intercultural communication. This chapter highlighted three distinct challenges of intercultural communication and the representation of others: denial of voice, othering, and the use of stereotypes. All three are present in mediated narratives of distant others, and in the construction of narrative and character.

As this review suggests, post-colonial theories and cultural studies are useful in identifying the flaws in the narratives that represent others, as they adequately describe the inherent problems and inequalities that exist in media representations. As such, the theories tend to view the construction of narratives as predominantly guided by historical and cultural forces, largely beyond the control of individual storytellers, and received by mostly passive recipients. Herein lies a gap that this dissertation does address: as evidenced by the individual articles I and IV, both storytellers, subjects, and recipients of intercultural narrative can and do possess varied forms of power and agency, and the meaning is often created in an empathic dialogue between the parties of the intercultural communication process, such as in the cases of non-fiction film production.

### **3 NARRATIVE AND CHARACTER IN NON-FICTION FILM**

Non-fiction film has a history of representing other cultures, of depicting the alien and the strange. This became evident in the early years of cinema, at the turn of the 20th century, when many of the first non-fiction films, such as the Lumière-brothers' short films and Georg C. Hales 'Tours of the World', presented other cultures. The latter example entertained audiences at the 1904 World Fair in St. Louis. Other so-called travelogues told of the American president, Theodore Roosevelt, and his successful safaris in Africa, or of Robert F. Scott's journey to the South Pole (Barnouw, 1993: 30). The advent of documentary film saw pioneering non-fiction filmmakers, such as Robert Flaherty, use the camera and the non-fiction form as an anthropological tool to represent other cultures. The genre of non-fiction, and the representation of others, has largely been dominated by Western authors and producers due to the economic, military, and technical advantage of the West. In the following, an African perspective is presented.

#### **3.1 NON-FICTION: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

The history of non-fiction in Africa mirrors the discussions in the previous chapter in many respects, with recurring strategies of othering often by creating a spectacle of otherness.

African non-fiction cinema is one of the many hybrid products of centuries of the Euro-African encounter. The unequal nature of the exchange, with Europeans holding a technological and military advantage over Africans for centuries, can in part account for African filmmakers' ambivalence towards modernity and the medium of film: intrigued by its potential benefits but suspicious of its meaning for Africans (Shaka, 2004).

The first non-fiction images from Africa were produced by the

French Lumière brothers. Among their earliest productions is a series of 12 short films featuring a group of Ashanti women and children, from a region that is today part of Ghana. Shot at the Lyons Exhibition of 1897, the shorts feature dances, bathing, and a tribal parade. These early examples set the tone for future representations, such as a scene depicting Ashanti children struggling with an empty food bowl to produce a 'voyeuristic spectacle of difference' (Sanogo, 2009: 482).

From the outset, Western documentary representing Africa carried an episteme of colonialism that included specific rhetoric and features (Sanogo, 2009). In the 20th century, non-fiction produced in Africa was often educational in its approach, its imagined audience consisting mainly of the 'illiterate African peasant' (Sanogo, 2009: 485). Such films were not speaking for nor with, but rather speaking to. The educational films of production units such as Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment in East Africa or the Colonial Film Unit in West Africa are telling examples. Narrative considerations in non-fiction were of lesser importance to the colonial powers. However, as Sanogo (2009: 485) points out, there is 'documentary on one hand and colonial documentary on the other'. Beginning in the 1960s, the documentary form was hijacked to support the political aims of post-colonial independent regimes. In an instant, non-fiction became focused on teaching ideology and politics, only this time education served the independent regimes' interests (Goldfarb, 1995).

Individual African filmmakers, who did not work for the state, took a different approach. Many tacitly rejected the authoritarian approach, and thus documentary drama evolved into a central cinema form on the continent. Furthermore, documentaries satisfied audience desires for stories, something that had been lacking in earlier representations (Mhando, 2006).

European voices were also offering new perspectives. French ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch is perhaps the most prolific example. Rouch made documentaries in the post-colonial period that managed to challenge perceptions about colonial Africa and gave a new voice to Africans through film. Television was introduced relatively late on the African continent, in the 1970s, and few African broadcasters focused on documentary. Thus, the genre remained

marginalized (Sanogo, 2009).

Today, co-productions are an essential part of filmmaking everywhere, including Africa. Industry financing and broadcast outlets are limited, and thus co-productions can provide production opportunities (Holmes and Dawson, 2012). Additionally, co-productions might invite intercultural dialogue between different stakeholders since many views are represented in such productions, throughout the entire production process. The most successful local African filmmakers today are either producing wildlife documentaries for the international market or political documentaries earmarked primarily for Europe. Only a small minority of these are produced exclusively by African filmmakers and production companies, as the directors often come from Western countries, and the films are co-produced with African partners. (Rubin, 2018).

The new millennium has seen many new initiatives in the documentary field. New festivals have emerged highlighting documentary, such as Encounters Film Festival in South Africa. Networks such as Africadoc of documentary filmmakers and associations in Africa have been organized. Africadoc includes associations in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Republic of the Congo, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, and Togo (Africadoc, 2018). Documentary has also been established and developed as a part of film education in universities and film schools in Southern and Western Africa (Wits, 2018; NAFTI, 2018).

## **3.2 NON-FICTION AS NARRATIVE**

In a broader perspective, as Plantinga (2005) suggests, non-fiction can be understood as texts and practises, across different media, that take an indexical and assertive stance on the world. Indexical refers to the non-fiction markers of the narrative, including credits, titles, advertising, and word of mouth. Textual cues and other conventional characteristics of a certain documentary film genre, for example, are also part of indexing an act of non-fiction communication. If a story 'tells' the audience that it is non-fiction, then it is. In addition, the assertive stance means that non-fiction claims objects, events,

and characters or situations actually occurred or existed in the world (Plantinga, 2005: 107).

Hall (1997) calls attention to two distinct ways of understanding documentary expression, such as photographic reproductions or non-fiction films. First, documentary expression can be seen as an objective representation of something factual, the image as a way of presenting facts about a subject. Second, subjective representation contends any informational value that an image possesses is mediated through the perspective of the person making it and is presented as a mix of emotion and information (Hall, 1997: 83). Non-fiction films are not accurate descriptions, nor mirrors, of reality. Although rooted in the real, non-fiction texts are often constructed as narratives. At their core, they are merely proof of a meeting between the filmmaker and a subject in a social and historical reality. Both of the aforementioned definitions by Plantinga and Hall (who represent divergent research traditions) point to the fact that non-fiction films are constructs. The specific characteristics of non-fiction are often used as tools of persuasion in order to convince viewers of the validity of certain arguments. Cognitive film theory, which Plantinga is a representative of, does not generally display an awareness of the raced or otherwise culturally positioned spectator, but rather stresses the universal nature of film text and its reception. Hall, on the other hand, highlights the perspective of the filmmaker (but not necessarily the viewer) as a key element in defining non-fiction. This is an example of when different definitions can complement each other by offering varied perspectives.

The English documentary film pioneer, John Grierson, called documentary 'the creative treatment of reality' (Bluemel, 2009: 90). In documentary, Grierson saw a solution to the many problems that faced democratic society in the 1920s. The documentary filmmaker, meaningfully dramatizing issues and their implications, could lead citizens through the wilderness. Grierson stated, 'I look on cinema as a pulpit'. (Barnouw, 1993: 86). Both Griersonian keywords, 'creative' and 'dramatized', also point to a construction of reality, a fabrication, or fictionalisation, of the real.

Similarly, *Nanook of the North* (1922), often referred to as the first documentary film, introduced a dramatized narrative with a main

character, Nanook. Few understood at the time of the film's release that the role of Nanook was played by a man named Allakariallak, and that each scene in the film was carefully staged and directed (Helke, 2006: 29-36). Flaherty clearly manipulated his material when he gave real events the form of a story.

This is true for storytellers in multiple domains, such as filmmakers, authors, and historians. White (1980) observed that historians do not simply find stories in the actual world, they construct them. A comparable rationale can be applied to non-fiction film. Ordering of real events cannot be merely chronologically sequenced, but must rather be invested events with dramatic meaning and emotional force. The techniques and strategies used in non-fiction share similar intent to those of fiction film: to highlight, to emphasize, to exaggerate, to engage, and to persuade. Many documentaries tell stories, in increasing numbers, and these stories are highly influenced by fiction film and vice versa. The narrative strategies and devices employed in non-fiction are derived from centuries of discursive and artistic practices (Plantinga, 1997: 132-3).

Non-fiction filmmakers continue to use the same narrative and aesthetic devices used in fiction. The use of montage, controlled composition, staging, and construction of a story-world have been present in non-fiction since Grierson and Flaherty (Plantinga, 1997: 133-4). Characterisation is another integral part of the narrative strategies of non-fiction.

### **3.3 CHARACTERISATION AND NON-FICTION**

Narratives in non-fiction are constructs, as are the characters in them. As a concept, a character is difficult to separate from the events in any narrative or from the actions of said character. The narrative and character are necessarily intertwined. The American author Henry James contemplated the nature of a character as follows:

*What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? It is an incident for a woman to stand up with her hand resting on a table and look*

*out at you in a certain way; or if it be not an incident, I think it will be hard to say what it is. At the same time it is an expression of character.* (Henry James cited in Leavis, 1981: 87)

Characters in non-fiction are obviously not theatrical performers, but subjects with lives outside the narrative. However, their performance is similar to traditional actors in many aspects. They are individuals who often present a complex psychology, and viewers direct their attention towards the characters' development and destiny. Furthermore, documentary filmmakers tend to favour individuals whose unschooled behaviour before a camera allows them to convey a sense of complexity and depth, similar to what we value in a trained actors performance (Nichols, 2010: 5–7).

Non-fiction refers to actual people, the documentary subjects, but often constructs them as characters in a narrative. Non-fiction filmmakers present an image and conception of a person that is constructed, not an imitation of that person. Characterisation occurs when authors provide a character with a sense of personality, deep motivations, beliefs, and psychological characteristics, as they are manifested in gesture, posture, facial expressions, voice, and above all, action (Plantinga, 1997).

Characterisation must necessarily remain incomplete and partial. One of the realities of non-fiction practice is that it can only reveal some of the person's aspects, and only show some actions.

The power to understand and enjoy a character is attained by the self-activity of the receptive spectator (Bordwell, 2007: 30-1). What the author gives is only single strokes, but out of these grows an apparently richly layered picture in which the viewer supposes a fullness of a life. The author and the actor—in non-fiction the constructed documentary character—compel the excited imagination of the viewer to create a person-like entity (Chatman, 1980: 117).

The necessity of selection and omission, emphasis, and point of view implies that every characterisation is, to an extent, a construction. Thus, documentary characterisation is similar to fictional characterisation. However, non-fiction characterisation still differs in that it is subject to estimations of accuracy, honesty, and truthfulness in relation to the real (Plantinga 2005).

Although the characters are constructs from the audience's point of view, the subjects in non-fiction exist outside the narrative, and thus the ethical and moral responsibility towards the subjects is an important difference between fiction and non-fiction, a topic investigated in article IV.

### **3.4 NOVELISTIC CONCEPTION OF CHARACTER**

As indicated in Chapter 2, one of the strategies of othering is stereotypical representations. In literary theory and narrative studies, the stereotype is comparable to the concept of flat character. E.M. Forster (1956) introduced the notion of round and flat characters. He argued that all the characters in a complex narrative could not, and did not need to, have a 'complex and living soul' (Forster, 1956: 71). Instead, they could fill other functions in a story: to manifest an idea, to be an obstacle, or to provide a laugh. Flat characters can be defined in one sentence (Forster, 1956: 67-8). When a character only possesses a few traits, they are also easy to recognise and to remember. Round characters, on the other hand, possess many character traits and develop and change during the course of the narrative (Forster, 1956: 73-5, Chatman, 1980: 133). If these traits are contradictory, then the character can be labelled as a complex character (Chatman, 1980: 133).<sup>3</sup>

Some of the parameters of complex characters in film are evident in the nine qualities Dyer and McDonald (1998: 104-9) define as the 'novelistic conception of the character'. Dyer draws on literary theory to offer his explanation of characterisation in film narratives. The 'novelistic conception of character' consists of nine qualities, which offer insight into the composite nature of character construction:

- a) Particularity: characters are unique rather than typical;
- b) Interest: the particularity of characters makes them engaging;
- c)

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<sup>3</sup> Flat characters can be an important part of a story, but a main character is seldom flat. Charles Dickens is a well-known exception to this notion, as he successfully made use of flat characters in his stories (Rimmon-Kenan, 1994).



Autonomy: characters have a life of their own, rather than being merely functions of the plot; d) Roundness: characters possess multiple traits; e) Development: characters grow during the narrative; f) Interiority: characters have an inner life; g) Motivation: there are clear psychological reasons for character's actions, often derived from their particularities; h) Discrete identity: characters are designed to exist beyond the text in which they appear; i) Consistency: while characters must develop, they must also possess a central core, an ego-identity that does not change (Dyer and McDonald, 1998: 104).

The nine qualities listed above are drawn from Western literary tradition and represent a particularly dominant idea of character in Western culture (Nelmes, 2010: 201). This ideology was fully expressed in the idea of the novel in which the character is an autonomous individual, possessing multiple and perhaps contradictory qualities to give an impression of wholeness, roundness, and uniqueness and with motivating desires that help propel the character's story arch (Nelmes, 2010: 203). Dyer's study examined characterisation in fiction film, but as fiction and non-fiction share many strategies concerning narrative and character, the study is relevant to the current dissertation as well. It is worth considering that non-fiction is by default 'open' films (Dyer and McDonald, 1998: 102), narratives that suggest that the characters have autonomy and discrete identities as they possess lives that persists outside the frame of the film. Non-fiction characters are more than merely a function of the structure, they exceed the narrative and thus become closer to the novelistic conception of character – and as such have potential to be a stark contrast to stereotypes. Characterisation that aims to construct novelistic characters as a way to embrace difference is, in Renovs (2004: 68) term, 'counterstereotyping'.

The tradition to counter stereotypes has a long tradition in Western thought. The ideals for dramatic narrative were famously formulated by Aristotle. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle (Aristoteles, trans. 1994) argued for consistent, life-like characters, an idea that has proven to be persistent, and has influenced narratives ever since. He further argued that the audience finds recognition and discovery pleasura-

ble. Stories are appealing because they offer the audience a double pleasure. First, the audience is invited to discover a new and unknown characters in a new and unknown world, and while there, they recognise themselves. This thought is a cornerstone in Western dramatic art and is repeated, for example, in many studies and guidebooks on dramatic storytelling (e.g. Egri 1972; McKee 1999; Field, 2005).

*”No matter how intimate or epic, contemporary or historical, concrete or fantasized, the world of an eminent artist always strikes us as somewhat exotic or strange. Like an explorer parting forest leaves, we step wide-eyed into an untouched society, a cliché-free zone where the ordinary becomes extraordinary ... Once inside this alien world, we discover ourselves. Deep within these characters and their conflicts, we discover our own humanity” (McKee 1999: 5-6)*

The combination of an unknown world and an emotional connection with the characters is potent, but so is the use of stereotypes. The two differing positions can be summed up as follows: Stories can portray stereotypical characters that are familiar to the audience beforehand, and such narratives are prone to assert previous beliefs and values. Stories can, on the other hand, portray unknown worlds and round or complex characters that audiences get to know while the narrative unfolds, and thus form an emotional connection with the characters, perhaps by recognising something of themselves in the other.

The critique of stereotypes is therefore twofold. It can be seen as problematic from a moral, social, and cultural point of view, as presented in chapter 2.4. The use of stereotypes can also be seen as a storytelling problem, one that can hinder the emotional engagement of audiences. Both critiques imply that round and complex characters are to be preferred.

Furthermore, such characters are favourably positioned to invite empathy. Appraisal theory (Wondra and Ellsworth, 2015) claim that emotions towards a character are based on how we perceive the target’s situation. In narratives, we come to know a character and the

character's situation, and this creates the potential for empathy. The deeper our knowledge of a character in terms of situation, motive, and desire etc., the greater the potential for empathy. This notion is further explored in the next chapter 4 (as well as in individual article III).

This chapter introduced some relevant academic discussions on non-fiction and included an African perspective on non-fiction. As a genre, non-fiction shares many of the general challenges associated with intercultural communication. Furthermore, this chapter presented the argument that non-fiction shares many strategies with fiction film. In many aspects, non-fiction films are constructs, in that non-fiction authors regularly arrange real events into stories and characterises their real-life subjects. Characterisation is particularly relevant because it offers an alternative to flat and stereotypical representations and is a way for non-fiction storytellers to engage viewers, enable identification, and invite empathy.

## **4 EMPATHY, VISUAL NARRATIVE, AND CHARACTER**

The concept of empathy is at the centre of this dissertation, as it is closely linked to the concepts, challenges, and ideas introduced in previous chapters. First, empathy is a phenomenon well poised to counter some of the challenges identified in intercultural communication, introduced in Chapter 2. Second, empathy is relevant as part of the construction of narrative and character, in the reception of narratives, and in the narrative process as a whole, as discussed in chapter 3. In this chapter, the concept of empathy is introduced, starting with a brief historical overview and followed by definitions and discussion. The chapter also places the dissertation within academic traditions that have examined empathy and formulated theories with regard to narrative, narrative process, and character engagement.

The concept of empathy has received a generous amount of both academic interest and popular attention. Empathy has been studied in relation to fields such as political ideologies; medical care; ethics and moral development; justice; psychology; mirror neurons; neuroscience; and theories of mind, gender differences, and engagement with art and media (Coplan and Goldie, 2011: 3).

### **4.1 ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS OF EMPATHY**

Empathy has multiple definitions and can thus be seen as a broad concept encompassing many different forms with different functions. The dissertation agrees with this position: there are multiple types of empathy and their differences give important clues to the function of empathy in intercultural communication and narrative.

The origins of empathy as a concept can be traced to the works of David Hume and Adam Smith. Hume invoked the concept of sympathy to explain a variety of psychological phenomena, including the ‘transmission of emotion from one person to another, the formation

of moral responses, and aesthetic responses' (Bricke, 1996: 317–9). Adam Smith explained his view on sympathy in the following fashion:

*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. (Smith, 1759/2010: 9)*

Smith's sympathy is close to the modern concept of high-level empathy, which involves the use of imagination. The term *Einfühlung*, from which the English word empathy originated, was developed in aesthetics and psychology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This term was first used by Robert Vischer in 1873 (as cited in Listowel, 1934) to explain how artists thought about their work, and the way observers engaged with works of art: the novel idea was that objects were felt as well as seen. Soon German philosopher Theodore Lipps expanded the concept to explain both how people experience aesthetic objects and how they come to know of others' mental states. For Lipps, *Einfühlung*, which literally means 'feeling into', referred to a process of inner imitation, or resonance, based on natural instinct. Specifically, the word referred to the process of feeling one's way into an object of art or another person. In seeking to understand why art moves us emotionally, Lipps suggested that the power of its impact did not reside in the work of art itself but was synthesized by the viewer in the act of viewing (Montag and Gallinat, 2008).<sup>4</sup> Using a transliteration of the Greek word *empathia* to translate *Einfühlung*, Edward Titchener introduced the English term empathy in 1909 in his work *Elementary Thought Processes* (Titchener 1924: 417). In its original use, the term referred mainly to a process of motor mimicry. The understanding and use of empathy expanded, however, to other domains. Psychologists were influenced by the

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<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Freud was influenced by Lipps' thoughts on empathy, but this influence played a fairly small part in Freud's own work. Freud wrote that 'empathy is that which plays the largest part in our understanding of what is inherently foreign to our ego in other people' (Freud, 1922: 22).

original view of empathy, until Mead (1934) recognised self-differentiation in empathy and added a cognitive component, an ability to understand. Thus, empathy became an important concept for therapists who perceived empathy as a sufficient and necessary condition for psychological change (e.g., Rogers, 1959). A broad interest from various disciplines supports the claim that empathy is the basis of human interaction (Kohut, 1959: 462).

The majority of contemporary empathy researchers (e.g., Hoffman, 2001; Eisenberg et al. 1991; Batson et al. 1997; Coplan and Goldie, 2011, Wondra and Ellsworth, 2015) agree that empathy includes a cognitive, understanding, dimension and an affective, or experiential, dimension.

Coplan and Goldie (2011) suggest that empathy is a complex, cognitive, and affective, imaginative process, in which the observer simulates another person's situated psychological state, while maintaining a clear other-self differentiation (Coplan and Goldie, 2011: 5–7).

They further suggest that empathy can be understood as one or more of several loosely related processes or mental states. These include at least some of the following:

- (A) Feeling what someone feels
  - (B) Caring about someone else
  - (C) Being emotionally affected by someone else's emotions and experiences, though not necessarily experiencing the same emotion
  - (D) Imagining oneself in another's situation
  - (E) Making inferences about another's mental states
  - (F) Some combination of the processes described in (A)-(F)
- (Coplan and Goldie, 2011: 4–5)

Empathy is imaginative insofar as it involves the representation of a target's states activated by the observer's perception. Since there is no direct access to others mental states, we observe facial expressions, body language, spoken language, actions, and situations.

## 4.2 EMPATHY AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

If empathy means to successfully grasp the subjectivity of another person, then it also literally expands our own subjectivity, making our inner worlds somewhat larger. Empathy is a vicarious phenomenon, as empathic emotions are not first-hand emotions. However, empathic emotions are still as real as any other emotions we might experience. They strike us on an individual level in similar fashion as any other emotion does. This argument allows for a follow-up argument: Empathy with distant others, for example, characters in visual narratives, is similar to empathy we experience in real-life encounters. Scholars seem to agree that we emotionally engage with narrative character's experiences in 'similar fashion to real world encounters' (Livingston and Plantinga, 2008: 102–3). At least some of this engagement has been deemed to involve empathy on different levels (Coplan, 2004; Currie, 1995; Gaut, 2010; Vaage, 2010).

Most cognitive theorists assume our cognitive and perceptual experience when watching film is akin to our perceptions in ordinary life. Another of the fundamental assumptions is that viewers process films using psychological faculties that evolved in a pre-media age in order to cope with real world encounters (Barratt, 2007: 531).

Such arguments are also supported by the appraisal theory of empathy (Wondra and Ellsworth, 2015). The appraisal theory of empathy is particularly useful in this regard since it is based on the generally accepted appraisal theory of emotion, and it partly manages to explain why narratives are so powerful in constructing empathy between distant others.

The appraisal theory of emotion argues that emotional experience is based on evaluative interpretations of situations, or appraisals (cf. Ellsworth and Scherer, 2003; Scherer 2013). Many previous empathy models focused on the emotional state of the target, or our similarity with the target, whereas appraisal theories argue that emotions are based on how we perceive the target's situation. In narratives, we come to know a character and the character's situation, and this creates the potential for empathy. In general, appraisal theories claim emotions are based on appraisals, and emotions have universal patterns of ap-

praisal. According to Wondra and Ellsworth (2015, 418-9), empathy is possible whenever an observer ‘appraises’ the target’s situation. If the observer appraises the target’s situation in the same way as the target, then empathy occurs. Thus, empathy is not a special process, but rather a part of normal emotion processes. From an appraisal theory viewpoint, all emotions we may feel are part of the same appraisal process, be it real-world encounters or mediated encounters.

Furthermore, appraisal theory claims that any two people who appraise situations in the same way will feel the same emotions (Scherer, 1997). If we accept this, then the theory explains why emotions, and the narratives that evoke them, can be universal. In narratives that strive to be universal, it is therefore instrumental that the observer/viewer appraises the situation in the same way as the target/character. The differences between one’s first-hand emotions and vicarious emotional experiences concern what one appraises and how accurately one appraises the situation.

There is little doubt that emotions can be evoked by the experiences of others. Children, for example, are moved by the stories of imagined characters, including animated animals, robots, and superheroes. Noël Carroll’s work on horror films is an example of research in visual narrative that used the same rationale as appraisal theory. Carroll (1990) addresses the viewers capacity to respond to horror films from a philosophical perspective. He presents a version of appraisal theory in which people arrive at some judgement about the situation before being aroused emotionally. We feel suspense during a film sequence because we judge that a desirable outcome is less likely than an undesirable one.

Appraisal theory suggests that empathy can be constructed across cultural borders, and is thus useful in intercultural communication, as long as it is preceded by an accurate appraisal of the situation of the other. This thought highlights a central juxtaposition in this dissertation. Post-colonial theories and cultural studies argue that stories are interpreted by way of cultural, political and historical structures. However, stories – and the emotions they invite – can be universal. The two positions are not opposed to each other, and I hold both positions to be accurate, although they view representation and storytelling from two very different perspectives. They both



highlight the need for powerful complex storytelling, and they are intimately linked. The baggage and problems associated with the representation of others actually create the need for complex stories and characters that can be accurately appraised.

Empathy initiated by appraisal is clearly focused on the other's situation, rather than the other's traits, such as ethnicity, gender, or social status. This shift of focus allows the observer to disregard superficial differences and creates the possibility to view the other as a human being in a non-judgmental way, rather than a representative, or a stereotype, of a certain group. Arguably, encountering complex characters is quite different from encountering stereotypes.

As noted earlier, flat and stereotypical characters do not invite us to appraise their situations since they act as a form of shortcut to a shallow understanding of character. Round and complex characters, on the other hand, invite us to appraise characters and situations, thus creating a potential for high-level, imaginative, empathy.

### **4.3 DIFFERENT TYPES OF EMPATHY**

There are different types of empathy, in real life as well as in visual narrative. These types of empathy have different functions.

An automatic type, low-level empathy, includes affective mimicry and emotional contagion. These processes refer to the human tendency to 'automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures and movements with those of another person, and, consequently, to converge emotionally' (Hatfield et al., 1992: 153–4). A person may see an expression of fear on another person's face and subsequently mimic that expression. This mimicry triggers an emotional response of fear in the observer. Emotion is transmitted from one person to another, as if we 'catch' other people's emotions. Emotional contagion involves an involuntary spread of feelings, without conscious awareness of where the feeling began (Hatfield et al. 1992).

With mimicry and emotional contagion, the observer must see the target to imitate or to neurally match the target's emotion. This is obviously the case in visual narrative. Another automatic type of em-

pathy is direct association. This occurs when the observer sees the target's emotional expression or recognises the target's situation and is then reminded of a previous, similar experience or emotion. The observer consequently feels the emotions present during the former experience. The observer re-experiences the original emotion from memory (Wondra and Ellsworth, 2015).

There are other types of empathy that require advanced cognitive abilities and are thus different from the automatic empathic responses. Hoffman (2001) labels these types of empathy role-taking, as they involve active attempts to understand a target and the target's situation. He concurs that in some cases the observer can imagine the target's situation so vividly that the observer feels the same emotion. This, according to Hoffman (*ibid.*), is the only type of empathy that does not rely on previous experience or an automatic response.

Imaginative, or situational, empathy clearly involves conscious mental processes, and these processes can be further divided into self-oriented and other-oriented perspective-taking. When an 'I' engages in self-oriented perspective-taking with a 'You', I imagine what it is like for me to be in your situation. Many conceptualize empathy in terms of perspective-taking yet fail to distinguish between the self- and other-oriented varieties.

Goldie (1999) argues that, in most cases, in order to adopt another's perspective, one must bring a characterisation of the target individual to bear on one's imaginative process, encompassing facts about character, emotions, moods, dispositional tendencies, and life experiences. In addition to characterisation, Goldie (2002: 195) stresses narrative context: to empathise, we need to understand the situation of the other. We need to understand the narrative we are enacting. These thoughts are similar to the ones expressed in appraisal theory and help explain why empathy is so closely linked to aesthetics.

The default mode for attempting to understand and predict other's mental states seems to be self-oriented perspective-taking. We typically imagine ourselves in other's circumstances (Jackson et al., 2005; Jackson et al., 2006). Observers are often unable to move beyond their own perspectives, so they rely on their own imagined ex-

perience to formulate conclusions about the other. Furthermore, observers regularly fail to understand others because of their difficulty not allowing personal beliefs, values, and current states to influence the simulation (Goldman, 2006). The distinction between self- and other-oriented perspective-taking is also supported by recent studies in cognitive neuroscience (Ruby and Decety, 2001; Ruby and Decety, 2004).

In other-oriented perspective-taking, however, 'I' imagine being the target undergoing the target's experiences, rather than imagining being myself undergoing the target's experiences. This requires mental flexibility and at least some knowledge of the target. Fulfilling these conditions is hard, particularly when the other is someone different from ourselves. The more unlike a target we are, the more difficult it is to reconstruct his or her subjective experience. Empathy is subject to biases based on one's familiarity with a target individual. It has been claimed that we are more likely to empathise with those we know well and whom we judge to be like ourselves in some important aspect (Coplan and Goldie, 2011: 13). The more foreign and strange a target, the deeper the story and the clearer the narrative situation and characterisation needs to be. The notion of bias on the basis of familiarity is in line with appraisal theory. It is feasible that we appraise familiar characters faster and easier than characters that are in some aspect foreign to us. One strategy to overcome bias and invite empathy is to portray foreign characters as individuals with agency, clear motives and goals. This way of representing others, as explored further in article III, creates conditions for accurate appraisal of character situation, and may thus evoke empathy towards characters, although they are unlike the viewer in some important aspect.

The effort involved in other-oriented perspective-taking suggests that this kind of empathy is a motivated and controlled process, not automatic or involuntary, and demands that the observer attends to relevant differences between self and other. Other-oriented perspective-taking is also less likely to cause aversive arousal and personal distress since we do not think, for example, that we ourselves are in danger (Coplan and Goldie, 2011: 14-15).

The definition in this dissertation for this kind of high-level empa-

thy is primarily in line with Coplan's (2011) definition:

- a) Affective matching
- b) Other-oriented perspective-taking
- c) Clear self-other differentiation.

Affective matching indicates that 'I' have managed to match the affect of 'You'. In this scenario, 'I' have also imagined what it is like to be 'You' in 'Your' situation—other-oriented perspective-taking. This marks a clear difference to self-oriented-perspective-taking, where 'I' imagine what it is like to be 'Me' in 'Your' situation.

Clear self-other differentiation enables deep engagement with the other while preventing the observer from losing sight of the boundary between self and other. Without such differentiation, we may fail to empathise, lose our sense of self, or let our imaginative process be contaminated by our self-perspective, resulting in a simulation that does not replicate the experience of the other (Coplan and Goldie, 2011: 16).

In many instances, a distinction between low-level and high-level empathy follows the previous logic, where affective mimicry and emotional contagion represent low-level empathy and conscious perspective-taking represents high-level empathy. Thus, I argue that empathy that involves imaginative other-oriented perspective-taking is an ideal form of empathy in intercultural communication since it allows for deep understanding, while simultaneously retaining a divide between self and other. This argument is supported by several theoretical perspectives (Decety and Chaminade, 2003; Singer and Lamm, 2009; Eisenberg et al., 1991) on empathy that contend that the observer needs to maintain a sense of self separate from the target's experience in order to empathise. This allows for affective matching to become empathy and not a first-hand emotional experience.

## 4.4 EMPATHY, NARRATIVE, AND CHARACTER ENGAGEMENT

As argued in appraisal theory, narrative techniques that enhance the appraisal of a character's situation also carry the potential to enhance empathy. In particular, elements such as establishment of character motive and of clear objects of desire are important in this regard since they make accurate appraisals possible. An observer can evaluate a situation if that observer understands why a character acts and what the character wants in a situation.

This argument is also supported by Tan (2011). He argues that understanding a character is often a pleasurable experience of discovery. Categorisation and individuation of characters clearly affect the emotional meaning for the viewer of situations involving the main character. The first result of categorisation is that the viewer recognises the character's most important objectives and concerns and either endorses or rejects them (Tan, 2011).

Intention and the ensuing character goals are among the attributes that trigger emotional responses in the viewer. Tan (2011) dwells on the notion of understanding the main character. Understanding is closely linked to motive: to feel with the character, we need to understand why the character is acting in a certain way. The viewer can then assess if he or she accepts or rejects that motive. In a classical narrative, the misfortunes of the villain are welcome and those of the hero are unwelcome; they are, respectively, in accordance or run counter to the wishes of the main character. The events and outcomes of the plot may be desirable from the character's standpoint as well as the viewer's (Tan, 2011: 156–82). The viewer understands a character and through this understanding may come to feel empathy.

Overall, empathic responses are magnified in the artificially designed environment that a visual narrative, such as fiction and non-fiction film, offers.

Smith (2011: 113-6) argues that visual narratives magnify empathy in terms of both scope and intensity. In life, we are naturally limited in opportunities where we can engage with other people and situations that differ greatly from our everyday lives. However, in

the realm of visual narrative, viewers are offered almost limitless opportunities for heightened engagement. Since empathy is a basic part of our everyday interaction with others, it is also a part of our engagement with narratives.

Our ability to empathise is sustained and intensified by the artificially designed environment of mediated experience. The maker of a narrative presentation can design an object to elicit empathy and to leave differing elements out of the narrative design. As Alfred Hitchcock (1960) said, drama is life with the dull parts cut out.

The narrative design may include specific scenes that trigger emotional contagion, which in turn may 'scaffold imaginative empathy' (Smith, 2011: 113). Plantinga and Smith (1999: 239-41) call such instances 'scenes of empathy': moments in visual narratives that enhance emotional contagion. These scenes are significant since they often occupy climactic moments in the drama of the film, even though they might represent only a small percentage of the total duration of that film. Plantinga's observation hints at the reasons behind the power of visual narratives. The scenes of empathy combine low-level and high-level empathy in a way that can elicit multiple empathic responses and in ways that are perhaps not available to other forms of mediated narratives, such as oral storytelling or literature.

Empathy is also present in the poetics of narrative texts, both in the intentional and unintentional design of authors and various collaborators that act as co-authors. Keen (2006: 216-20) proposes that techniques that invite empathy include manipulations of narrative situations to channel perspective and to offer specific points of view. Representation of a character's consciousness is another narrative technique that Keen associates with empathy.

Some of the existing empirical research on empathetic effects in narration concerns film and its visual content (e.g., Gaut 2010; Tan et al., 2001, Tan 2011; Grodal 1999), where the use of the close-up and point-of-view shot have been identified as techniques linked to empathy.

There is no single affective relationship that manages to completely and comprehensibly describe the connection between viewers and

characters (Coplan and Goldie, 2011: 180).<sup>5</sup>

Experiencing empathy with a character is, according to Smith (2011: 103), a complex imaginative process through which a spectator simulates the character's situated psychological states, including the character's beliefs, emotions, and desires, by imaginatively experiencing the character's experiences from the character's point of view, while maintaining clear self/other differentiation.

This definition contains the same elements as the general definition of high-level empathy in the previous chapter: a) affective matching, b) other-oriented perspective-taking, and c) clear self-other differentiation. In this view, empathy does not risk dissolving the boundaries between self and other, nor does it require that spectators only possess the emotions of the characters with whom they empathise. Empathy can expand our minds, but it does not do so at the expense of other psychological experiences that do not match those of the character.

The effects of character engagement is a contested topic. Psychoanalytical film theorists tends to focus on the potential harmful effects of character engagement (Aumont, 1992: 216–18). According to this academic tradition, identification draws the spectator into an illusion in which the spectator feels more powerful and important than he or she is. Social and political effects can indeed be harmful, as they can help maintain and reinforce discriminatory power hierarchies, such as identification with male protagonists in standard Hollywood films leading to the adoption of the male gaze and viewing males as subjects and females as objects (Mulvey, 2009).

Certain forms of character engagement that invite empathy can, however, do more than enhance aesthetic appreciation or dramatic conflict. Empathy can potentially improve and expand our understanding of ourselves and others, including others whose experiences are different from our own. Through our engagement with charac-

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<sup>5</sup> Empathy with characters is closely linked to the concept of identification. Gaut (1999) defines identification as a viewer imagining being in the character's situation, not being the character. This constitutes the general meaning of identification. Gaut singles out four aspects of such identification: perceptual, affective, motivational, and epistemic. A viewer can imagine what a character 'sees, feels, wants and/or believes' (Gaut 1999: 205).

ters, we can gain a unique experiential understanding (Coplan, 2011: 108). This knowledge of distant others is, in many cases, only available through mediated narratives.

The beneficial effects are difficult to estimate and equally hard to predict. Empirical research in social and developmental psychology show that people are more willing and able to empathise with those whom they perceive to be like them in some significant respect. The more similar they are, the more likely the attempt to empathise will succeed (Hoffman, 2001). Flory (2006) examined the relationships between race and film viewing and concluded that white viewers are less likely to empathise with African American characters. The assumption that empathy will necessarily lead to altruistic behaviour has also been questioned. Battaly (2008) suggests that empathy is a skill, rather than a virtue, and it is up to each of us to decide what we do with this particular skill. Empathy might carry the potential for inciting pro-social or even altruistic behaviour, and it can add to the probability of positive behaviour, but empathy with characters is not a guarantee of such behaviour.

## **4.5 EMPATHY AND NARRATIVE PROCESS**

As previously argued, empathy plays an important role in the construction of narrative and in the responses to narrative texts and the characters in them, especially regarding visual narratives. This section argues further that empathy has different functions in different stages of the narrative process.

Davis (1996) divided the empathy phenomenon into different activities that occur at different points in time and have cause-effect relationships. In his work, Davis constructed an organisational model that differentiates antecedents, processes, intrapersonal outcomes, and interpersonal outcomes. Although Davis' model is not specifically concerned with narrative, it is helpful in that it considers the observer, the observed person, and the overall situation, and suggests that empathy can best be understood as a process between different stakeholders over time.

Keen (2006) and Taylor et al. (2003) hold similar views. They



offer the theory of narrative empathy, one which expands the concept of empathy to encompass the whole narrative process. Their primary concern is that of written narratives, such as novels, but in this dissertation, the theory is applied to visual non-fiction narratives as well. According to Taylor et al. (2003), narrative empathy is the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another's situation and condition. Narrative empathy plays a role in the following:

- a) Aesthetics of production when authors experience it
  - b) In mental simulation during reading/viewing
  - c) In the aesthetics of reception when readers/viewers experience it
  - d) In the narrative poetics of texts when formal strategies invite it
- (Taylor et al., 2003: 376-7)

Fiction authors and storytellers regularly experience empathy with their characters, and because of their profession and interests, they also habitually practice their empathic skills. Narrative empathy can thus be situated in both authors and viewers. In authors, this empathy may influence choices about narrative techniques and a desire to evoke an empathetic response in the audience (Keen 2007). In non-fiction, narrative empathy can occur between documentary author and documentary subject, as discussed in articles I and IV.

Apparatus theory also suggests that film can be predominantly viewed as a process. This theory claims that in order to understand film and the spectatorial response it evokes, one must first understand the nature of the cinematic apparatus and the ways in which the presentation and infrastructure of film interacts with human psychology, desire, and understanding (Baudry, 1986: 295). In his view of the cinematographic apparatus, Baudry (1975: 39) chooses to include the space of distribution and film watching in his 'apparatus', alongside the film's production process. Baudry emphasizes the fragmented nature of the production process, and as a contrast, he highlights the cohesive and continuous nature of the finished product and its viewing. Continuity is a key element of cinema as an intelligible language and consequently of meaning. Isolated images lack meaning, at least the unity of meaning, argues Baudry, but 'with

continuity both meaning and consciousness is restored' (1975: 43). He also emphasizes the disturbing effects when continuity is abruptly broken. The immobility of the spectator is another principle of apparatus theory. Cinema creates an impression of reality that fascinates, and the space compels the spectators to remain immobile: 'The darkened room and the screen present privileged conditions of effectiveness – no exchange, no circulation, no communication with any outside' (Baudry 1975: 44). In such a space, the spectator lacks the ability to test what he or she sees against reality, thus paving the way for the perceptual illusion of visual narrative, as well as the emotional, and sometimes empathic, connection to events and characters.

The aforementioned theories represent different and in some aspects contradicting academic traditions, especially in reference to the role of the spectator. Cognitive film theory generally highlights the activity of the spectator, whereas apparatus theory generally views the spectator as a passive recipient. It is not my intention to gloss over said differences but to advocate for a holistic view on the film production process, where the spectator can be seen as an active meaning-maker, while also playing a passive part in the cinematic apparatus, such as in the confined space of a cinema theatre. Also, the word passive is not used here as a negative description – being a passive viewer (in the sense that there is no communication nor interaction during the viewing) may open up for other kinds of active mental and cognitive processes within the mind of the viewer. Furthermore, both the theory of narrative empathy and apparatus theory expand the focus from the narrative text to include the production process and the different relationships in it, as well as the spatial and practical dimensions of distribution and viewing of visual narratives. In doing so, these theories allow for intriguing new perspectives on the functions of empathy in visual narrative.

In summary, I argue that empathy can create understanding and shared meaning in intercultural communication. Although empathy is a vicarious emotion by definition, it is still as real as first-hand emotions. Furthermore, despite our interaction with characters in narrative not being real-life encounters, they give rise to empathic emotions that are as real as those we may experience in real life. I

further argue that there are many different types of empathy, and that these have differing functions in narrative. Visual narrative regularly makes use of both low-level and high-level empathy, often in an overlapping fashion. Visual narratives magnify empathy in scope and intensity, especially in our interaction with characters. Last, I argue that empathy has different functions between different stakeholders in the narrative process. This has heightened relevance for non-fiction processes, which are founded on the interaction between filmmakers and subjects.

## **5 SUMMARIES AND CONTEXT OF THE INDIVIDUAL ARTICLES**

### **ARTICLE I**

#### **Drawing the unspeakable: Understanding 'the other' through narrative empathy in animated documentary**

##### **ABSTRACT:**

How should we represent the suffering of distant others? An international exchange program between Africa and Europe was set up in 2006 to address this question with the help of documentary filmmaking. One result was the animated documentary *A Kosovo Fairytale* (2009). This film is a case study of how animated documentary can provide insights into representing “the other”.

The theory of narrative empathy informs the understanding of the process as well as the final film. This paper examines animated documentary from three distinct perspectives: first, as a pedagogical tool to enhance cultural understanding; second, as a process of narrative empathy; and third, as a coherent text that makes use of narrative strategies endemic to animated documentary, designed to create emotional engagement.

Conclusions suggest that animated documentary can be a novel way of representing the other, especially if empathy is present throughout the production process and if the process involves participatory elements in which the subjects contribute to the narrative.

**KEYWORDS:** empathy, narrative, Africa, representation, animated documentary, refugee

### **ARTICLE II**

#### **The Difficulty of Eliciting Empathy in Documentary**

##### **ABSTRACT:**

Documentary can express a sense of common humanity, one based

on empathy with characters from different cultural and social contexts. Eliciting empathy with screen characters is thus one of the foremost challenges documentary filmmakers face. Filmmakers often display well-meaning intentions to create empathy but may still fail to do so. The gap between authorial intentions and potential audience impact is highlighted through two case studies. The South African documentaries *Miners Shot Down* (2014) and *I, Afrikaner* (2013) both claim to pursue empathy for social and activist reasons. The chapter makes use of models of high-level empathy to explore how and why the filmmakers do not fully reach their potential and what can be learned from their shortcomings within an academic and a film practice context.

**KEYWORDS:** empathy, identification, character, voice, documentary film, South Africa

### ARTICLE III

#### **The changing cinema spaces of Accra: Fragmented spectatorship and the loss of empathy**

##### ABSTRACT:

The space of distribution and reception of visual narrative is at the heart of this study. Cinema theatres are designed to foster collective emotional responses to characters and narrative. Ghana's capital, Accra, like many other African cities, used to be full of such spaces. Urban infrastructures no longer support cinema theatres, and subsequently, television, video, and small screens, in general, have replaced the dark room. This study maps the ways in which film is embedded in the historical and current geography of Accra. The article is an artistic and theoretical exploration of the undoing of cinema and its spaces, as well as the possible consequences of this development.

Collective spectatorship has turned into a mostly random event, where passers-by watch short glimpses of narratives without a pre-existing understanding of nor commitment to the narrative. Fragmented spectatorship can ultimately lead to a loss of shared feeling—empathy—between audience members and film characters and therefore between members of broader societal and even global contexts.

**KEYWORDS:** cinema theatres, space, spectatorship, Ghana, empathy

ARTICLE IV

**Documentary subjects speak out: Relational empathy and ethics in intercultural documentary film education**

**ABSTRACT:**

Documentary film education involves both ethical and practical challenges, especially when produced in an intercultural environment and when representing marginalised groups. The author of this paper was one of the acting teachers for an intercultural group of third year bachelor film students, making documentaries with sex-workers in rural South African communities. The paper explores the pedagogical and ethical dimension of the encounters between film students and their subjects. The analysis focuses on the responses of the documentary subjects in three public screenings. To understand the process, the paper makes use of the concept of relational empathy, which underlines a productive approach to empathy and subsequently the creation of shared meaning. Relational empathy is also an ethical pedagogical choice since it allows for informed consent on an emotional level. As a recommendation, documentary film education may be viewed as a process that stresses the construction of non-static shared understanding.

**KEYWORDS:** documentary film, education, pedagogy, intercultural communication, representation, relational empathy, ethics

ARTICLE	RESEARCH QUESTION	DATA / METHODS	CONTEXT
I	How does non-fiction – especially animated documentary – enable the representation of the suffering of others	Observations of a documentary production process / Participant observation, case study, interview	Theory of narrative empathy, intercultural communication, non-fiction film education
II	What formal strategies that invite empathy can be identified in intercultural non-fiction narratives? What functions do these strategies fulfil?	Two documentary films / Textual analysis including cognitive, narrative and character analysis	Cognitive film theory, narrative studies, character identification, cultural studies
III	In what ways does cinema space influence the emotional involvement of an audience, with regards to film narrative and character? What are some of the effects of the global and local changes in cinema space?	Observations of spectatorship and cinema space / Participant observation, artistic research	Embodied view of knowledge, cognitive film theory, African film studies
IV	How are subjects of documentary film emotionally affected by viewing themselves and their community in a finished film? What ethical responsibilities for the filmmakers does this encounter and reaction imply?	Observations of spectatorship and cinema space / Participant observation	Ethics of non-fiction film, intercultural communication, non-fiction film education, construction of the self

**Table 1** Context and significance of the individual Articles

<b>NUMBER OF ARTICLE / FORUM AND YEAR OF PUBLICATION</b>	<b>SIGNIFICANCE IN THE DISSERTATION</b>
I / International Journal of Film and Media Arts (2016)	Applies the theory of narrative empathy, especially with regards to authors empathy, to a specific case study – an intercultural non-fiction film production process. Provides an applied approach in the construction of empathy in a creative process.
II / Cognitive Theory and Documentary Film (2018)	Combines cognitive film theory with narrative studies to analyze intercultural non-fiction narratives. Identifies applied strategies in the construction of empathy in narrative.
III / Journal of African Cinemas (2017)	Expands the discussion on the function of empathy to include the physical space of distribution and viewing. Introduces the audience as an essential part in understanding the construction and function of empathy.
IV / Film Education Journal (2018)	Gives a voice to the subjects of documentary. Examines the ethics of non-fiction filmmaking by discussing the emotional effect on subjects. Resets boundaries between subject and filmmaker, and between real subject and constructed character.

**Table 1** Context and significance of the individual Articles



## 6 MAIN FINDINGS OF THE INDIVIDUAL ARTICLES

Articles I through IV cover a creative trajectory, one that is a description of different stages in a narrative production process. Together they examine the different functions of empathy in a narrative process. The process begins with article I, which examines the relationship between filmmaker and subject. Article II studies non-fiction narratives as texts. The changing practises of distributing and consuming narrative are the focus of article III, and article IV imparts how subjects of non-fiction view their own narratives and the ethical implications thereof. Thus, the trajectory from articles I through IV is as follows:

Article I	Pre-production and production process
Article II	Text and narrative
Article III	Distribution and reception
Article IV	Reaction of subjects

One can identify a through-line in this process in which the common denominator is empathy. Empathy is present in every stage of a narrative process, constantly changing in function, manifestation, and form but invariably influencing the stages to come, impacting both the story and how it is being told and ultimately received.

### 6.1 AUTHORS EMPATHY AND SUBJECT PARTICIPATION

In the case study in article I, the focus was on authors' empathy, in a context where the subject was strange to the observer on multiple levels and vice versa.

The subjects' participation in the production process is a valua-

ble technique in non-fiction, paving the way for an empathic understanding between parties, contributing further to an empathic process. In a best-case scenario, the participation informs the discourse, the way the story is told, as exemplified by the case study in article I. The formal narrative strategies used are in general most powerful when they are motivated by the story itself, such as for the process that resulted in *A Kosovo Fairytale* (2009). The family members who were the characters of the non-fiction narrative were aiming their message to a child, thus animation was used. The family used Skype video calls to communicate with their son, who was so young he could not yet read and thus the emotional climax in the film involved a skype-call. The family sought redemption and forgiveness from the child they left behind, so they told a story that was structured as a chronological explanation of their actions to that very child.

The reflective, Brechtian, use of animation mixed with live-action proved to be a powerful way to tell the story and remind the audience that the story is non-fiction, even real. German playwright and director Bertolt Brecht devised his stories to achieve an effect of *verfremdung*, usually translated as alienation or distancing (Brecht 1977, Willett, 1984).

*Verfremdung* is traditionally understood as a strategy to shatter illusion, to stop the spectator from becoming immersed in the story and the characters. According to Willett (1984), Brecht wanted to keep his audiences thinking by breaking the illusion he so carefully created in his plays. This approach is evident in his techniques, such as actors directly addressing the audience, harsh lighting, and songs that interrupt the action. As Willet (1984) further notes, Brecht wanted to make familiar objects be unfamiliar.

By using similar strategies, non-fiction can break illusions by using illusion, breaking them, and, in this fashion, create new illusions. The case study in article I involves two distinct strategies at work: realism as a goal, which might signify a search for a symbolic truth, and realism as a strategy, aimed at producing an illusionistic reality effect.

The creative process that resulted in *A Kosovo Fairytale* allowed for a meaningful encounter with a tragic story that was initially hard

to access and understand for an inexperienced group of young filmmakers. Through experiencing the authors' empathy for their subjects, especially due to one team member's personal experience, the group also managed to find a form that communicated this empathy, with the help of animation.

The first lesson is that authors' empathy can open the gates to understanding, even though the subject is strange to the observer on multiple levels. This empathy can permeate the process and lead to more complex representations of the other. The authors' personal background played an important role in the construction of empathy.

Second, the subjects' participation is a valuable technique in documentary. When subjects take part in creating the narrative, trust is gained and the interaction between participants is greatly enhanced, as the traditional roles and power hierarchies between storyteller and subject are blurred and challenged. The subjects in the partly animated *A Kosovo Fairytale* drew themselves, which allowed for the act of representation to become part of the narrative. The animation also had a clear and strong dramatic function since the family wanted to explain themselves to the son they left behind, Albin, through the drawings.

Lastly, the combination of animation and live-action, especially the powerful close-up, greatly enhanced the potential for empathy and as such worked to represent deep personal trauma. *A Kosovo Fairytale* used the combination to maximum effect since the narrative included two separate endings that reminded us of the family's real situation. In this light, animated documentary is a Brechtian mode of representation, where the carefully crafted illusions are often broken. This strategy reinforces one of the basic requirements of the beneficial form of empathy that is argued for in this dissertation, which calls for a clear divide between the self and other, while still supporting other-oriented perspective-taking.

Furthermore, the combination of affective mimicry and emotional contagion coupled with a strong story produces a 'scene of empathy' (Plantinga 1999: 239), a fact that underlines the power of visual narrative, which can combine low-level and high-level processes of empathy.

Representing extreme, traumatic experience will never be an easy

task, but one way is to create narratives that have a strong reflective quality, such as *A Kosovo Fairytale*, with the eclectic mix of live-action and animation.

As an animated documentary, *A Kosovo Fairytale* is a contemporary text that deliberately attempts to present the viewer with representations that allow for an encounter with the uncertain and fracturing nature of trauma in the narrative context.

## **6.2 THE WHY OF CHARACTER**

Article II deals with the *how* of storytelling and the challenges of undoing the other in non-fiction narrative texts.

The non-fiction narratives in the study clearly indicate there is an abundance of context that tells of political, cultural, and societal phenomena that are part of the world in which the narrative takes place. Many of these phenomena constitute sources of conflict for the characters. The documentaries put considerable effort into staging the narrative and the building of the story-world, but the characterisation is to some extent left undone. This lack of characterisation may have many reasons and could partly be due to the nature of non-fiction and its characters, as they are subjects whose lives continue before and after they have participated in a non-fiction narrative process. A documentary director is often divided between the complexity of the character and the real-life situations of the real-life subjects and the need to structure the vast material into a narrow and coherent narrative.

The study in Article II draws partly on the appraisal theory of empathy, which suggests that empathy requires situations that can be correctly appraised. As such, narratives with closure, for example, are preferred over open-ended narratives. Also, narratives that lack structure, or lack a clear set-up that establishes character motive, may be less inclined to evoke empathy than narratives that have a clear structure. The analysis in Article II suggests that these features, clear set-up and closure, are lacking in the objects of study.

Although the characters in the two documentaries are actively pursuing goals, and face many conflicts in doing so, their motives

are not established. This lack of motive is perhaps the greatest flaw in the characterisation in the objects of study. The potential for empathy is greater if viewers can appraise why a character acts in a certain way.

The two documentaries analysed in Article II do not make use of stereotypes, however, and manage to give voice to characters from marginalized groups. This is in line with the filmmakers' stated intention of the films. The characters are for the most part round with many traits, and some are complex, baring their inner conflicts and consequently creates potential for identification and empathy.

Despite the complex characterisation on display in the non-fiction texts, and the universal qualities of character goals and conflicts, the link between story and character has partly been missing in the examined films. They do not lack context, the why of suffering itself is strongly present, but the filmmakers seem to have overseen the why of character. In this respect, the non-fiction narratives display at times an almost arrogant lack of understanding for their characters. Characters are partly denied their individuality: they are represented as disempowered since they seem to act without individual motives. The character goals also remain abstract, which has ramifications for the open endings in the films. Considering these observations, I argue that establishment of character motive is a key element often missing in non-fiction. Clear establishment of character goals and motives can help viewers appraise the narrative situation and thus invite high-level empathy. This is especially relevant in mediated intercultural communication with the intent to undo otherness.

### **6.3 FRAGMENTATION AND THE LOSS OF EMPATHY**

Article III ponders the spaces of distribution and viewing of visual narratives, which constitute an integral part of the narrative process. The study in Article III draws on Baudry's apparatus theory.

As argued in the study, the apparatus is broken. The narratives in the West African cinema space examined in article III are repeatedly

interrupted, the soundtrack is disturbed by external noise, and the images are predominantly watched on small television screens, with the view often obstructed by other viewers and random events.

Some of these changes in cinema space are distinctly West African, but most are not. I was personally struck by the many similarities between Ghana and my native country of Finland. The same decline in cinema theatres has been witnessed in both countries (and many others), and a similar radical rise in small screens has resulted in similar consequences.

There are only a handful of cinema theatres left in Accra. The outdoor cinemas have shut down and have, in most cases, been turned into churches or warehouses. World cinema that used to be featured in Accra cinemas has been replaced by local and Nigerian content.

The emergence of West African video culture has contributed to the fragmented nature of film watching. In particular, in video parlours, there is often no commitment, such as buying tickets or reserving time, associated with the traditional way of watching cinema. The current cinema spaces contribute to the fragmentation of spectatorship, which includes constant interruption of the viewing experience by traffic, walkers-by, noise, weather, and so on. Multiple aspects of these cinema spaces are unsupportive of emotional engagement with a given narrative.

The colonial legacy of film has also influenced the development at hand. The medium of film was, for long periods, associated with the colonial government and its educational approach, which strongly opposed all themes deemed African, such as the occult and magic. The excitement of a genuine African film culture instigated a fascination with the features that the colonial film propagated against. The old spaces associated with colonial, and later world, cinema were gradually abandoned as well.

What is left constitutes a cinema that has in some ways freed itself from colonial structures, for example, regarding the display of themes and issues pertinent to local audiences. In other ways, the structures of audiovisual narrative distribution and viewing are broken. The overall development in cinema space is moving from collective viewing towards individual spectatorship.

The current development favours occasional and unplanned view-

ing, instead of committed and planned viewing. In Accra, it is practically impossible to see audiovisual narratives in an immersive space; in a city of almost two million, there are only a few functioning cinema theatres. Rather, Ghanaians in Accra encounter film narratives on the street, in their homes, or on mobile devices. This viewing experience creates fragmentation, especially regarding how narratives are presented and perceived.

One reason we tell stories is to make sense of the world, to make the chaos of life coherent. The promise of coherence is largely betrayed in the fragmented cinema spaces of modern Accra. Ultimately, this lack of coherence and closure can lead to a downward spiral in the narratives themselves. The stories become episodic, concentrated on scenes rather than larger coherent narratives. The new cinema spaces tend to favour narratives of spectacle over plot and character development.

The development and change in cinema space are best witnessed in the often lonely faces and bodies of the spectators, standing in a video parlour on an Accra street. They display vulnerability and a willingness to immerse themselves in other worlds and into the minds and feelings of other characters. However, the space does not allow for immersion, it is built for interruption and noise, for moving on—a space of no commitments.

The most damning indictment of today's cinema spaces is the loss of empathy. When film audiences are denied sharing feelings with characters, the essence of cinema is lost.

The potential for empathy between characters and viewers is influenced by the act of distribution and viewing. Cinema theatres contribute to the creation of a collective experience that gives coherence and meaning. Article III concludes that when the space and act of viewing is altered and compromised, as modern technology implies, this alteration has consequences for the construction of empathy as well.

## **6.4 THE POTENTIAL OF RELATIONAL EMPATHY**

Article IV examines the reactions of documentary subjects upon viewing themselves and their communities in public screenings. The pur-

pose of the article is to examine the relationship between filmmakers and subjects and to discuss the ethical implications of such relationships. The concept of relational empathy is used to analyse the process and the subjects' reactions. As an initial conclusion, the study suggests that filmmakers and subjects did not reach relational empathy in their interaction since a common understanding of purpose was partly missing. This circumstance has an ethical dimension because informed consent is intimately tied to understanding of function, genre, and future context of the documentary film in which subjects take part. An intimate first viewing, in which only the main subject are present, would have been preferred to a public viewing. This closed viewing would perhaps have eased the subjects shock of seeing themselves on screen for the first time, especially at a public event with others present, as was the case in the project titled *Cornered Voices*. Intimate screenings would also have allowed for questions and comments in a safer space than a public screening provided.

Another source of confusion was in regard to the films' functions. The design of the screening added to subjects' bewilderment, as local dignitaries were present, and many of them expected 'educational' films, whereas the film students showed what many comments labelled 'emotional' films. Because of the mixed make-up and spectators expectations, expectation did not meet experience among the subjects, at least at first. Perhaps this was evident also in the elemental set-up of the screenings. It was the film students, supported by the institutions they represented, who showed the films to the subjects and their communities, which meant a passive, receiving role for the subjects. Power hierarchies inherent in the production process were thus reinforced in the screening. In later discussions, one of the student suggested that the screenings could have introduced a different power dynamic if the subjects had presented the films to the audience together with the filmmaking students. The discussion about the 'educational' and 'emotional' impact of the films was helpful, however, since it allowed the students to talk directly with their subjects about possible readings and impacts of the films. Overall, a common language of talking about film and the process behind it was missing. During their studies, film students are introduced to terms such as 'emotional impact', 'break down prejudice', and 'give voice',



as well as terms more related to the practical side of production, such as ‘documentary’, ‘narrative’, ‘structure’, and ‘open ending’. These, and similar, words and concepts associated with film practice were used many times during the screenings. To the subjects, however, these words and phrases were not fully intelligible, and thus they had limited relevance to the documentary subjects. The students, as well as the lecturers, found that ‘voice’ might be a useful theoretical concept but was hard to define in practice. The limited power of filmmaking thus became evident from the discussion. As one of the subjects explained, “Yes, documentary can be educational, but it doesn’t protect us”. The experience of watching the films in a public setting also made the subjects acutely aware, but perhaps also gave them the courage to speak, of the different hardships in their lives. Immediately after the screenings, the subjects commented more on their safety and their uncertain futures than on the actual films or the process behind them. This was a moment of revelation for many of the students, who, coming in to the screenings, were still focused on product. They felt the process had ended or at least that it would end at the screenings. Once at the screenings, the student filmmakers received a stark reminder that the subjects’ lives continued, as did the documentary film process itself. When asked how to improve living and working conditions through making documentaries, one of the student filmmakers responded, “I do not have answers”. This answer represented a humble and honest recognition of the limited power of film makers and their products. It also offered a potential for further dialogue, a third culture beyond the differences between filmmakers and subjects. If relational empathy is deemed desirable and ethical in intercultural communication, then the three screenings were in themselves an important part of the process of creating a third culture. The process of mutual understanding is ongoing. Documentary filmmaking, when viewed as a process made up of human relations, does not end with the editing and distribution of the film. Rather, the film text is only one, albeit tangible, piece of evidence of the ongoing relationship between filmmaker and subject.

As argued in article IV, the three screenings provided a unique learning experience, one that can offer suggestions for future documentary film education. First, if possible, an intimate first viewing, in

which only the main subjects are present, is preferred. Furthermore, student filmmakers and subjects should be encouraged to be open about their personal motives when taking part in documentary film production. It is quite easy to adopt and accept others motives when both filmmakers and subjects are inexperienced. Thus, it should be important to develop a common language to talk about documentary film. The subjects might not need to become filmmakers, but they should come to understand the filmmakers' perspective. As this study has argued, the documentary film, both as a process and as a product, can help develop and articulate a third culture and thus move beyond preoccupation with self and similarity. One option is to introduce relational empathy as a conceptual tool in documentary film education. In this kind of empathy, similarity with subjects is not essential. If we accept that a documentary film is ultimately a tangible product of the relationship between filmmaker and subject, then the documentaries resulting from empathic relationships have the potential to be both nuanced and meaningful to filmmakers and subjects, as well as to audiences.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

As a conclusion and synthesis, this section addresses the overall research questions. A discussion on the limits of the research is also offered, as well as thoughts on potential future research. First, I provide five general conclusions, based on the dissertation as a whole and its main findings regarding empathy in intercultural communication and non-fiction film narrative.

### 7.1 GENERAL FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Empathy is educational. By experiencing empathy individuals can confront new feelings and learn new knowledge, thus expanding their inner worlds. Authors, such as filmmakers, can experience empathy with their subjects, and in some cases, empathy can become relational. Similarly, audience members can experience empathy with characters. Encounters with mediated narratives is an especially powerful way to learn since the scope and intensity of situations that may enhance empathy is greater in designed narratives than in real life.

Empathy can be of use in film education. Two of the individual articles in the dissertation share a film pedagogical context, as they analyse case studies of film practice involving film students. Informed by these studies, I argue that empathy can be used as an educational tool to highlight the emotional, as well as the ethical, aspects of documentary film practice. A heightened awareness of the functions of empathy in visual narrative can contribute to a new and more sensitive approach in documentary film education for educators and students. Often, film education is centred around the how of filmmaking, and most film educational efforts are designed to enhance the end product, a finished film. An emphasis on empathy shifts the focus to the process and the relationships within it. This focus is especially valuable in non-fiction because of the ethical challenges involved in documentary film practice.

Visual narratives combine different types of empathy, of which

there are many, as previous studies have indicated. Visual narratives regularly combine low-level empathy, such as mimicry and emotional contagion, with high-level, or situational, empathy. The combination of unconscious and conscious emotional triggers enhances the power and impact of visual narratives. Knowledge of the types of empathy, and what triggers them, can also be used for pedagogical ends.

Empathy is a tool for non-fiction filmmakers. Formal narrative strategies in non-fiction, such as the establishment of narrative situation and characterisation, can invite empathic responses. I propose that empathy has different functions in the non-fiction narrative text: firstly, to undo otherness by enhancing the emotional understanding towards the documentary subject. Empathy allows for such a second-order encounter, one which is modelled after that of the filmmaker and subject. Another function is to act as a catalyst for change, to influence the attitudes, and perhaps even the behaviour of the audience.

By awareness of empathy and the mechanisms that enhance it, authors can design narratives that have greater emotional impact. This can possibly help authors control their narratives if they are aware of what triggers empathy and how they can nurture empathy in creative processes. The relationship between filmmaker and documentary subject is transferred and modified by the author into a non-fiction text, for example a documentary film. The author, perhaps in collaboration with subjects, designs a coherent whole with a beginning, middle, and end based on the encounter with the subject. This phase of the production process is when empathy functions in the poetics of texts, when formal strategies invite empathy.

These formal strategies are based in part on the interpretive understanding of the motivations the real-life subjects attach to their actions. Such understanding requires representing the subjects as unique individuals, rather than objects of observation. Narratives that lack a clear set-up that establishes character motive may be less inclined to evoke empathy, in contrast to narratives that have a clear, and perhaps a more conventional, structure. The dissertation suggests that to create empathy, a non-fiction narrative should establish clear narrative situations that can be correctly appraised. This argu-

ment indicates why documentary filmmakers should tell stories. If empathy is valued as a desirable outcome in audience reception, then narratives with closure should be preferred over open-ended narratives. In addition to structural concerns, character construction is instrumental to the formal strategies that may invite empathy.

Characterisation occurs on multiple levels, through the portrayal of actions, speech, clothing, visual appearance, and so forth. The intent is to portray the subject as a round and complex character with individual motives. If this is successful, the audience can interact emotionally with a unique individual, removed from stereotypical representations.

In this regard, non-fiction does not differ from fiction: authors in both genres create characters that can invite empathy with formal strategies. However, non-fiction is different in its indexical and assertive stance and thus is well positioned to create, and break, the illusion of coherence in character and narrative. Non-fiction marks itself as a non-fiction through credits, titles, and so on, as it simultaneously asserts a belief that given events occurred or existed in the world. A non-fiction author can design a coherent narrative with coherent characters and invite the audience to take part in a well-crafted story, as any fiction author would. The non-fiction author can then proceed to break the illusion and remind audiences that they are indeed encountering reality, in accord with the indexical and assertive stance endemic to non-fiction. This is a Brechtian approach, which is used in fiction to remind the audience that whatever they are encountering is not real. In non-fiction, breaking illusion can be used in an opposite manner, as a tool of persuasion, to convince the audience that the illusion being encountered is, in fact, real.

Some of empathy's effects are especially relevant in intercultural communication. Empathy can counter prejudice, combat stereotypes, and make audiences feel with distant others who have different ethnicities, social classes, genders, and so forth. This experience offers an insight into the minds of others, which might make it harder to maintain prejudice and stereotypical notions of others.

Narratives that evoke empathy can also develop empathy skills in audiences. By regularly interacting with narrative and character, we flex our empathy muscles. By feeling with others on a regular basis,

we become accustomed to viewing others in an empathic fashion.

Empathy permeates the narrative process. Different types of empathy are present in different stages of the narrative process and between different stakeholders. Filmmakers can feel empathy with their documentary subjects, for example, and viewers can feel empathy with the representation of the documentary subjects as characters in a narrative.

The text represents a small, albeit central, part of a larger and more significant whole, which is the narrative process. The reception and effect of any audiovisual narrative is also greatly affected by how it is distributed and viewed. The relationship between the space and audience is part of the narrative process. I have argued that the narrative can, if designed accordingly, act as a carrier of empathy. Similarly, I argue that the space of distribution and viewing can either enhance, or hinder, the construction of empathy.

The viewing patterns of today are geared towards unplanned individual viewing on small screens. We watch anytime and anywhere, mostly unplanned, usually alone, and often while doing other things. Most viewing events and spaces consist of a fragmented, solitary, and frequently attention-challenged environment.

I suggest that empathy between characters and audiences is maintained and constructed by catering to viewing in communal spaces that allow for uninterrupted viewing. The spaces are an integral part of the cinema apparatus, as are the committed audiences that inhabit them.

The holistic view of filmmaking and narrative as a process, rather than text, is an approach that can ultimately change practises of filmmaking, as well as the study of empathy and intercultural communication in its different forms. Over time, these findings can pave the way for non-fiction narratives and processes sensitive to the characterisation of subjects. In this way, the findings can contribute to undoing otherness and reducing stereotypes. By such extension, the dissertation itself can hopefully advance empathy between distant others.

Authors' empathy and relational empathy are ethical practises in non-fiction filmmaking. In the non-fiction process, two types of empathy are especially relevant in the relationship between filmmaker

and documentary subject: authors' empathy and relational empathy.

Authors of literary fiction regularly state that their fictional characters seem to possess independent agency, not only for their readers but also for the authors themselves. As a genre, non-fiction film differs greatly from literary fiction. Characters in non-fiction film do not only seem to possess independent agency, they actually do. They are real-life subjects, individuals with existences outside the narrative. This is one reason non-fiction film offers such potential for emotion-sharing between author and subject.

If authors' empathy in non-fiction fulfils the conditions of high-level empathy defined earlier, this empathy can serve multiple purposes. In educational practises of non-fiction filmmaking, for example, an extensive period of research and gaining the trust of the documentary subjects is deemed a necessity. If authors' empathy is achieved, it can blur and break boundaries between filmmaker and subject, a circumstance that can further enhance the trust and fellow-feeling between the two.

Authors' empathy can be achieved by identifying common experiences and themes in the life stories of filmmaker and subject. Another strategy is to invite the subjects to take part in the narrative production process and design. This practice allows for the filmmakers and subjects inner worlds to become visible and further enhances the potential for empathy. Such strategies also challenge traditional power dynamics in film production.

Relational empathy between filmmaker and subject allows for ethical filmmaking, which challenges unequal power hierarchies inherent in the production of film. Through such empathy, the filmmaker gains understanding and knowledge of the documentary subject that might be otherwise unavailable through a rational enquiry. Such knowledge can undo otherness and challenge power hierarchies traditionally inherent in film production. Understanding builds trust between author and subject. Furthermore, especially if mutual, empathy can help break down barriers between parties erected by culture, ethnicity, and beyond. In this fashion, the construction of the narrative can become a collaboration between author and subject and is thus less likely to be a spectacle of otherness or include stereotypical representations. Relational empathy highlights a produc-

tive view of empathy, pointing to a productive relationship between the non-fiction filmmaker and subject. Knowledge and meaning do not exist prior to communication and social interaction. Relational empathy does not happen to us; we establish it together, in dialogue with each other.

## **7.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

In Table 2, I summarise the findings of the overarching research questions 1 and 2:

1. What functions does empathy hold in intercultural film narrative and its processes?

An important general function of empathy is to create understanding of and between others, and of the self, to enhance trust and foster shared meaning between different stakeholders in the narrative process. Thus, empathy can undo otherness and counter stereotypical representations. Additionally, empathy challenges power hierarchies in non-fiction film production.

2. In what ways can empathy be enhanced in non-fiction text and process?

Empathy can be enhanced by allowing for relational empathy in the process that precedes the text and by allowing documentary subjects to take part in the narrative's design. In the initial phase of a narrative process, empathy can be enhanced between author and subject by mutually sharing similar life experiences related to the themes of the narrative.

In the text, designs that enhance empathy include a clear narrative structure and characterisations that allow for appraisals that precede empathy.

In distribution and viewing, empathy can be enhanced by the construction of spaces that allow for uninterrupted viewing and immersion.



In general, empathy is enhanced by adopting a position that allows for dialogue and change, one that accepts that the process in non-fiction continues after the film is finished and that the text is only one part of the process as a whole.

Accepting the importance of process has practical implications, as it calls for added resources such as the allocation of time for research, pre-production, and screenings and resources that allow for extended dialogue with subjects.

STAGE OF PROCESS	PRIMARY STAKEHOLDERS AND COMMUNICATIVE RELATIONSHIP	MAIN FUNCTION(S) OF EMPATHY	ENHANCEMENT OF EMPATHY IN PRODUCTION PROCESS
Pre-production and Production	Author <-> Subject	To create knowledge between author and subject. To build trust between author and subject. To undo otherness between author and subject. To challenge power hierarchies in the production of non-fiction.	Extensive period of research. Mutual sharing of life experiences related to narrative theme. Subjects act as co-authors and participate in the production and design of narrative.
Final text	Author -> Audience	To undo otherness and construct a fair representation of subject as a character in a narrative.	Characterisation, including establishment of motive and goal of character. Design formal strategies in the text: clear establishment of narrative situation.
Distribution and public viewing	Author -> Audience	To undo otherness and enhance understanding towards subjects in audience. To influence attitudes and behaviour of audience.	The construction of a space that enhances uninterrupted viewing and immersion.
Subjects viewing the finished narrative in their communities	Subject <-> Author	To enhance self-knowledge of subject and members of community. To influence attitudes and behaviour of subjects and extended community.	Mutual sharing of experiences from production process and viewing of film between subject and author.

**Table 2** Summary of findings

### 7.3 CRITICAL REFLECTION: THE LIMITS OF EMPATHY

I have argued that empathy has multiple functions in the intercultural narrative process, as it permeates relationships between filmmakers, documentary subjects, and audiences, as well as enhances understanding on multiple levels in different stages of the process.

Emotional arguments tend to face criticism. Some argue that emotional arguments replace rational and critical reasoning, even though it is generally accepted that empathy itself involves both feeling and thinking.

Critics, such as communication scholar Lilie Chouliaraki (2006, 2013), are wary of limitations and potential drawbacks of narratives in which personal feeling predominates over intellectual and/or political argument. Chouliaraki stresses the need to bring back the why of suffering, as well as the voice and history of suffering. She warns of the limitations and potential drawbacks of relying on personal feeling, rather than argument, where the personal feeling takes predominance over intellectual or political argument. Thus, Chouliaraki (2013: 182) argues solidarity becomes a matter of ‘training the soul’ rather than understanding the causes of suffering and injustice. Such representations tend to emphasise the relationship between the object and the subject, rather than aiding in understanding the political and economic dimension for injustice. She argues that the others portrayed often lack history and are isolated in their suffering. Chouliaraki (2006: 179) further claims that ‘The weakness of emotional humanism lies, predictably, in over-emphasizing feeling at the expense of rationality. The “universal” value of common humanity prevents the spectators from posing questions’.

Chouliaraki’s concern is certainly valid, although I would argue that any given event may best be understood by introducing narrative empathy on different levels and a thorough understanding of historical and political factors influencing the characters and events. Rational argument and empathy with characters are not mutually exclusive. Both can be present in a narrative and provide a holistic understanding of a given historical situation. The knowledge of historical and

political factors can actually enhance the appraisal of the narrative situation, thus raising the potential for high-level empathy between author and subject and for audiences' empathy with subjects.

The beneficial effects of empathy are significant, but one should be careful not to overestimate the transformative power of empathy. When we empathise with others, it is up to each of us to decide what we do with our new-found knowledge of the other. Empathy may not automatically advance altruistic behaviour, but it might be a point of departure towards such behaviour. Through empathy, we gain invaluable insight into the minds of others, one which cannot be gained through other means. What we choose to do with this insight is each person's own moral choice.

Narrative also has its limits. One is its preoccupation with individual characters, which favours an individualistic, some would say Western, world view. Italian author and holocaust survivor Primo Levi famously spoke of 'one single Anne Frank' who moves us more than the countless others who suffered just as she did but whose stories and faces remain unknown. He argues that it is perhaps better to focus our attention to one individual; if we were capable of taking in all the suffering of all those people, we would not be able to live. He continues to lament that maybe it is only the saints that have the capability to feel with everyone. For the rest of us, there remains feeling with the individual, a fellow human being that stands before us, within reach of our 'limited capacities of perception' (Levi, 2003: 526-7).

Narratives are good at representing many things, but not all things are narratives, and not all things can be told as coherent stories. Emergent behaviour in general, as one example, is not suitable for narratives. People often revert to centralized control and other easy narratives to explain complex phenomena, such as climate change, the global refugee crisis, the stock market, or evolution (Abbott, 2008).

Some phenomena are simply too complex to grasp in a narrative. Emergent behaviour typically has a massive number of causal agents, a complexity so vast it disallows any narrative thread. Narrative can play a limited role in our understanding of emergent behaviour, mostly when representing individual agents. The danger with

individualistic and often simplified stories becomes clear when our understanding of the internal nature of the process of emergence is critical to our choices. In some cases, our health and well-being depend on emergent behaviours to which we contribute. Climate change is a telling example. Stories are useful and can explain many phenomena, but not everything can be structured as a story, and not every story has a single main character with whom we can empathise.

## **7.4 QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES**

The conclusions of the dissertation reflect on the different functions of empathy. Many interesting questions remain that could be subjects of further study. Confirmation of many hypotheses about the specific narrative techniques and their cause-and-effect relationships to empathy has yet to be undertaken. There are arguably different strategies to create empathy between author and subject, as between author and audience, and these could be categorised and studied in detail.

The viewing spaces of non-fiction remain a largely unwritten chapter. Where do audiences view non-fiction, and what implications do the act and space of viewing entail? Audience studies in general are an obvious future area for empathy research. In previous studies in psychology, empathy has been detected by different methods: changes in heart rate, skin conductance, and perceptible and imperceptible facial reactions measured by EMG procedures, fMRI, or through questionnaires. Empathy can also be measured with the help of scales developed by psychologists, such as Mehrabian's Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale and Davis' Empathic Concern Scale. Some of these methods could be helpful in analysing empathy in film.

Perhaps the most interesting question deals with the actual effects of empathy: What, if any, is the relationship between empathy and altruistic behaviour? We regularly visit the minds and emotions of others; we enjoy the luxury of shared emotions, but the effects of this luxury are often overlooked. Future research questions might consider the effects, both positive and negative, of the sharing of

emotions for individuals, as well as their extended communities and societies. This dissertation did not specifically address the possible cause and effect between empathy induced by film and altruistic behaviour, which marks an area of future interest.

## **7.5 FINAL THOUGHTS: ANOTHER WAY OF KNOWING**

In the Preface, I posed a set of subjective questions and described the dissertation as a personal journey. My journey started from a text-based understanding of intercultural narrative and continued towards a holistic one, favouring process. In addition to my background as a lecturer in scriptwriting and directing, I have worked as a scriptwriter for film. Partly due to this, I previously held a strong belief that life and people can best be represented by a single author, told as a story. The current study has challenged my assumption, as I have become increasingly aware of the communal nature of creative practises. Non-fiction is a case in point, as the relationship between author and subject remain the most fundamental one. I believe non-fiction and empathy can best be studied, and understood, by acquiring a holistic view, which encompasses the production process in its entirety.

*Is there healing power in stories? If so, what does this power mean? How do stories really work?*

I still believe that stories possess healing power. The study in Article I is a solid example: the re-telling of a traumatic event helps an author and a family heal. In this case, the narrative process interestingly provided the author a greater understanding of her own trauma. The encounter had therapeutic qualities for both parties involved. This new-found understanding was continued in the story and how it was told and then on to a potential audience. It seems that one function of narrative is to transport empathy, over time, from one stakeholder to another, perhaps infinitely. After the dissertation process, I see narratives as vessels, travelling through time and space as carriers of empathy.

*How does empathy work, and why is it important?*

Empathy invites us to take part in other people's lives, sometimes with abandon, almost losing ourselves. By one definition, high-level empathy includes a clear self-other differentiation. The ruse of empathy fades, and allows for a return to the self, although the self is slightly altered. Thus, we gain the power of hindsight. It is this Brechtian quality that is inevitably present in non-fiction narrative. We step in and out of illusions, and this pulse gives us the necessary space to learn. The value of empathy lies in that a good narrative may not only increase our understanding of the world, but it can change our way of seeing the world.

Visual narratives are especially powerful because they, by the very nature of the visual medium, combine low-level and high-level empathy. This marks another insight gained during the dissertation process. There are many different kinds of empathy, present in different parts of a narrative process. They often overlap. In film, high-level and low-level empathy often create powerful scenes. It is no coincidence that filmmakers use close-ups in the dramatic climaxes of films. This kind of scene elicits two kinds of empathy, and we are moved; we change.

Empathy takes us on a journey from the surface to the core, wherein perception leads to an emotional connection. It is a journey towards another person and towards oneself.

*What kind of stories should we tell of each other?*

The stories we choose to tell of each other should be carriers of empathy. They should make the strange familiar and perhaps make the familiar—even the self—strange. When one embraces the strange, and the stranger, one take on his or her destiny. After this encounter, there can be no turning back. The stranger, and the strangeness, will always be with the viewer, somewhere inside, informing his or her feelings, thoughts, and choices. He or she will have grown and will always be that other person, somewhere deep inside.

Empathy is another way of knowing. This knowing is not predominantly rational, nor is it empirical; it is not a knowing born of cause and effect. Rather, empathy is knowing how it is to be another person and that at a deeper level we share a common humanity.

At the centre of East Asian philosophical traditions, there lies a conception of oneness among human beings, according to which human beings are intricately and inextricably intertwined and share a common destiny with other people, creatures, and objects (Ivanhoe, 2018). This tradition suggest that differences, as well as similarities, exist solely on the surface and claims that as human beings, we are not simply similar to each other; rather, at the core of our beings we are one. This provocative thought may point to deeper reasons for our preoccupation with stories. Perhaps the experience of empathy provides us with a small glimpse of an ecstatic truth.



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