

Doctoral thesis

Doctoral theses at NTNU, 2024:169

Mads Outzen

# Facing Terror

The Ethical Potential of Facing Terror  
Through Film

**NTNU**  
Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Thesis for the Degree of  
Philosophiae Doctor  
Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Art and Media Studies



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Science and Technology



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Trondheim, May 2024

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ISBN 978-82-326-7930-0 (printed ver.)

ISBN 978-82-326-7929-4 (electronic ver.)

ISSN 1503-8181 (printed ver.)

ISSN 2703-8084 (online ver.)

Doctoral theses at NTNU, 2024:169

Printed by NTNU Grafisk senter

## ABSTRACT

*Facing Terror* asks this question: What is the ethical potential of facing terror through film? That generally means this dissertation explores some possible ways that film as a medium and an artform can help us face terror, and more specifically how documentary films about terror may facilitate mediated relationships between spectators and survivors that embody affective powers which evoke an ethical responsibility and enhanced understanding.

This potential is therefore both the core position and complex proposition developed through the work, a certain something or happening further explored in turn through three interlinked dimensions of this specific sense of facing film: the face, reality, and trauma. The dissertation itself is idea-driven yet case-based, and written as a monograph where these three terms headline its main parts, which are made up by a theoretical and an analytical chapter each.

These three theorizations concern ethics and the cinematic face, documentary reality and audiovisual testimony, and mediated trauma and cinematic witnessing, all of which are respectively followed by close analyses of the films *Reconstructing Utøya* (Javér 2018), *Rebirth* (Whitaker 2011), and *The Look of Silence* (Oppenheimer 2014). Even though each part has its own perspective or path, they all move towards a joint overall point and purpose.

The dissertation is foundationally based in the philosophical ideas of Emmanuel Levinas and his ethical “optics” of our encounter with the face of the other, but it also goes into dialogue with a range of different scholars and discusses thoughts from both film and media studies and several other fields. Through open-ended exploration, it steadily works to develop such an otherwise idea of and approach to a possible ethics of encounter in a mediated context.

*Facing Terror* thereby explores the necessarily complex nexus between terror, film, ethics, and the face, relationship between aesthetics and ethics, and space in-between cinematic expression and experience. Built on findings that facing the traumatic reality of survivors through film creates a site for ethical learning, the dissertation finally so concludes that such encounters have a capacity to change the way we understand others, ourselves, and the world.



## SAMMENDRAG

*Facing Terror* stiller dette spørsmålet: Hva er det etiske potensialet i å møte terror med film? Generelt betyr dette at denne avhandlingen utforsker noen mulige måter film som et medium og en kunstform kan hjelpe oss å møte terror, og mer spesifikt hvordan dokumentarfilm om terror kan tilrettelegge for medierte relasjoner mellom tilskuere og overlevende med iboende affektiv kraft til å mane fram et etisk ansvar og en forsterket forståelse.

Dette potensialet er derfor både den sentrale posisjonen og sammensatte påstanden som vil utvikles i arbeidet, et slags noe som skjer som videre utforskes stegvis ved tre dimensjoner av denne spesifikke forståelsen om å møte film: ansiktet, virkelighet, og traume. Avhandlingen selv er idérettet men eksempelbasert, og skrevet som en monografi der disse begrepene er tittel for tre hoveddeler, og der disse delene består av et teoretisk og et analytisk kapittel hver.

Disse tre teoretiseringene omhandler etikk og det filmatiske ansikt, dokumentarisk virkelighet og audiovisuelle vitnesbyrd, og mediert traume og filmisk bevitnelse, der alle henholdsvis følges med næranalyser av filmene *Rekonstruksjon Utøya* (Javér 2018), *Rebirth* (Whitaker 2011), og *The Look of Silence* (Oppenheimer 2014). Selv om hver del har sin egen synsvinkel eller vei, så beveger de alle seg mot et felles overordnet mål og formål.

Denne avhandlingen er grunnleggende basert på de filosofiske ideene til Emmanuel Levinas og hans etiske «optikk» om vårt møte med den andres ansikt, men går også i dialog med en rekke ulike teoretikere og diskuterer tanker fra både film- og medievitenskap og flere andre fagfelt. Gjennom åpen utforskning, jobber den jevnt og trutt for å utvikle slik en annenledes idé om og tilnærming til en mulig møtets etikk i en mediert kontekst.

*Facing Terror* utforsker dermed den nødvendigvis komplekse sammenhengen mellom terror, film, etikk, og ansiktet, relasjonen mellom estetikk og etikk, og rommet innimellom filmatisk uttrykk og opplevelse. Med bakgrunn i funn om at det å møte den traumatiske virkeligheten til overlevende med film skaper et sted for etisk læring, så konkluderer avhandlingen til slutt at slike møter har en kapasitet til å forandre måten vi forstår andre, oss selv, og selve verden.





*From a one*

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## PREFACE

Before the beginning, the face that started it all retains, a real face of trauma.

More than fifteen years ago today, in the fall of 2006, after walking back out through the famous gates of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp complex, something started to haunt me. I felt a deep feeling of desire, perhaps even a sense of obligation, to face people who actually lived the absolute horror of the Holocaust. To make faces of names, marks and traces, so as to be faced by them. This compelling demand, perhaps even a sort of obsession, in the end led me to watch Claude Lanzmann's nearly ten-hour long 1985 documentary film *Shoah* one late October afternoon. Yet, doing so did not lessen this sense of responsibility – the haunting only gained resonance.

One expression especially epitomized this profound power and gave face to such a hold. This was indeed the experience of a face, the mediated face of a barber, the cinematic face of a survivor, the face of Abraham Bomba. In one scene, in which he is asked to tell his own story while he acts out cutting hair in a staged salon, about what he is able to recollect and recount from his time in Treblinka, there emerges an extraordinary moment of encounter. As he reminisces about being there inside the walls of the gas chambers, cutting the hair of acquaintances, neighbors, and even friends, not long before they met their deaths, he reaches a memory of when the wife and the sister of his fellow barber and good friend entered. His voice breaks, then stops short as he softly seems to cry, yet he continues, without words and in silence: *his face speaks*.

From the start of the scene, the camera mostly keeps itself to a medium close-up shot, one that moves around to capture his surroundings, all the while keeping with his movement as he responds to questions posed, moving back and forth, away from and closer to his face. In face of his silence, it does not shy away at all, it closes in. From the front, in profile, from the back, it follows as he almost squirms around in the frame, bites and licks his lips, blinks and wipes his eyes, turns towards and away from the camera. It closes up to his face, as if transfixed by its tense, teary-eyed, trembling expression. A monumental minute of silence in facial close-up transpires. Lanzmann then pleads: “Go on, Abe. You must go”. Abe answers: “I cannot. It's too horrible”. “Please. We have to do it. You know [...] Please. We must go”, Lanzmann continues, to Abe's soft protests and long pauses, before he eventually goes on.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Although the morality of Lanzmann's approach to solicit testimony has been heavily debated, with criticism centered around opening up old wounds or forcing moments of working through, in this sense making Bomba “re-live” it all, which may certainly be debatable, still the sheer emotional power of the scene is undebatable.

Facing this face, as if it called out and spoke to me and me alone, affected me as never before. Something occurred in this moment of encounter, in the experience of this expression, that was beyond what I could grasp. Yet this something was felt, something was understood, a something that I have wondered about ever since. Immense and immediate, perhaps this unforgettable but also near unbearable audiovisual mediation, this face captured through film, made trauma real to me. Somehow, the testimony and humanity of the face itself changed me. Still, I did not know, and could not say, what precisely was, or how and why it was, the case. Soon going into my secondary school graduation semester and considering my options, this unanswered question became one of the major reasons I ended up choosing film and media studies when I started university the year after.

Almost five years later, in the summer of 2011, while staying back home on holiday, the terrorist attacks on July 22 happened. Through this tragedy, my haunting fully returned, charged not only by terror and horror at what took place and shock and sorrow for those who died that day, but also by a hope of compassion for those who still lived on. Two days after the events, then prime minister Jens Stoltenberg held a speech at the memorial service in Oslo Cathedral. Borrowing some words, originally formed by one of my former students from my small hometown, he there said: “If one man can show so much hate, consider how much love we can all show together”.<sup>2</sup>

In the early aftermath of the attacks, first and foremost, public reaction and response indeed seemed to follow those words. People reacted predominantly not with fear nor anger, but with sadness and feelings of unreality (Thoresen et al. 2012).<sup>3</sup> A responsibility arose, one that was demonstrated both through rose parades in sociality and rosy phrases on solidarity. Thus, the message of togetherness, to be there for the survivors and those who lost their loved ones, and one another, looked to have come through. However, watching the constant media coverage about the devastating and deliberate murder of seventy-seven and attempted murder of hundreds more, too soon it all instead seemed to “move on” from such an onus. During the months that followed, what struck me the most was not just the continuous presence of the face of the perpetrator, but rather the conspicuous absence of the faces of survivors.

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<sup>2</sup> Initially a “tweet” from Helle Hoås Gannestad on July 22, variations of this phrase were repeated by AUF representative Stine Renate Håheim in an interview with CNN on July 23, and then Stoltenberg in his referenced speech on July 24. See the bibliography for a web link to a transcribed written version of this speech.

<sup>3</sup> This cites a study that surveyed a selection of short-term emotional responses within the Norwegian population after the attacks, finding that the events had a significant effect on people with regards to early distress and later post-traumatic stress, and furthermore that these effects were influenced by societal responsiveness.

Whereas this was arguably the case for media in general, one medium was an outlier, namely that of documentary film. At least for the first year after the attacks, starting as soon as three weeks later, different projects that included testimonial material from those affected were showed on both major television networks, and once again, facing these faces affected me in more powerful ways than any news reports ever could. Something was taught through them, something was learned, but this something only brought further questions. Watching these documentaries while getting ready to write my master's thesis, I wavered between a certain will to articulate these raw and reappearing ideas and the complete want of adequate words to do so. Yet this unresolved sense that facing survivors, facing the reality of what happened and really facing terror through *film* held unexplored potential kept its hold.

In the years that followed, it seemed like the survivors went out of sight, and thus out of mind, and the being there for those affected was not there anymore. As Henrik Syse argues well in retrospect: “We have to a too large extent forgotten July 22 [...] We have not been able to be there for the victims and survivors as we should have done” (2018: 16). Such a “we”, in the sense of those of us who were not there standing together with or understanding those who were, recognizing our responsibility to remember, had been lost. Making a similar introductory point about our public forgetfulness in their study of survivors and society in the aftermath of the attacks, Grete Dyb and Tine Jensen summarize the reasons commemoration and compassion must be found again, as it makes us all “more capable of understanding and helping those who are affected by terror, violence and assault” (2019: 7).

My belief is precisely that mediated testimony may be a key component for building such a capacity, or in short: film can help us *face*. Like Anne Gjelsvik beautifully writes in the introduction to an anthology about July 22 in the arts: “Art can be tools for private works of mourning and individual processing of trauma [and] can offer emotional community or contribute to common reflections around the consequences of terror attacks for our society” (2020: 9). At its core, the argument in this dissertation is that film, cinema or audiovisual work altogether, is essential as a medium and artform for this facing, and that is the basic yet also complicated proposition it sets out to explore.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> These are my translations of Norwegian-language quotes that originally stem from the respective editors' introductions to publications about Norway in the aftermath of July 22 – see the bibliography for titles. These are all anthologies that come from the following larger research projects: “Negotiating Values: Collective Identities and Resilience after 22/7” (2013-2023), led by Henrik Syse at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO); “The Terror Attack: Experience and Reactions among Utøya Survivors” (2011-), led by Grete Dyb at the Norwegian Center for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS), and “Face of Terror: Understanding Terrorism from the Perspective of Critical Media Aesthetics” (2016-2021), led by Anne Gjelsvik and Aurora Hoel at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) – in which my own project was also part.

Tracking back five years again, in the spring of 2016, after wandering back in through the familiar doors of the Dragvoll university campus building compound, my haunting found new ground. That was an encounter with the writings of Emmanuel Levinas on ethics and the face. This followed a series of connected events, from teaching students about the Holocaust through audiovisual testimonial material and thus learning about the way faces were key to facilitating this learning, to seeing faces of survivors return during the five-year anniversary of July 22 as well as hearing about a research project about faces and terror at my university. Suddenly, even though it had been a long time coming, everything seemed in its right place.

All the while the idea in itself was straightforward enough, when I began my doctoral research following the new year, working it out soon became a rabbit hole of sorts. Through an ever-increasing exploration, steadily going deeper into the large theoretical framework and simultaneously getting seemingly never-ending recommendations for relevant material as I presented my project, there was a certain danger that what inspired the original idea was lost along the way or would become the road not taken. However, whenever I watched any of the films that I was considering as my analytical cases, all their cinematic faces were always the traces that got me back on track. That soon became the faces of Rakel, Mohammed, Jenny, and Torje in *Reconstructing Utøya* (Javér 2018), the faces of Ling, Brian, Tim, Tanya, and Nick in *Rebirth* (Whitaker 2011), and the faces of Adi, Rohani and Rukun in *The Look of Silence* (Oppenheimer 2014).<sup>5</sup> Thus, although this dissertation has certainly been a work-in-progress where its spider-web-like process has spun me around in a state of figuring it out as you go, the very idea that started the project has stayed its central motive throughout.

This is that idea of a something. Something in the spaces created by mediated faces, the encounter between images and spectators, and the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. A potential for teaching and learning something that becomes especially relevant and resonant when it comes to audiovisual testimonial material in the aftermath of atrocities. Yet, as something that remains so difficult to articulate, profoundly affective but problematically abstract, such an idea or such a something, necessarily betrays any way with words. Be that as it may, my hope for this work is that it serves as a reminder about the role film can play as part of a response and resilience to terror – the ethical potential of facing terror through film.

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<sup>5</sup> In the beginning, this included both numerous documentary films and other audiovisual works, but soon these three films stood out. I watched Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Look of Silence* many times, and it helped me work out that I wanted to write about terror in a wider sense of the word. I borrowed Jim Whitaker's *Rebirth* from my supervisor, which helped me work out that I wanted to write about survivors in a wider sense too. I was allowed to watch Carl Javér's *Reconstructing Utøya* first before its premiere and its close-up faces immediately let me see that I had to write about it as well. Therefore, a year or so into my research, three cases were chosen for close analysis. As for those many others, most are only mentioned in additional notes throughout the work.



More than fifteen years gone by, in the winter of 2021, while starting the final process of finishing my work, still that something haunts me. On this day, it has been over ten years since the terrorist attacks on July 22, over twenty since those on September 11, and well over fifty since the Indonesian state terror, as well as close to a lifetime since the genocide of the Second World War. Along with anniversaries that hope to commemorate those who lost their lives and to celebrate those who lived on, one lesson hopefully comes to the fore once more. Namely that no matter how far into the past, for the present and the future, nevertheless it matters that we all try to truly understand what happened and who it happened to – to face it is our duty to do. In many ways, to realize this responsibility that reverberates both is and will always be what this project is about: the importance of being haunted.

## Acknowledgements

It is also a project about love. Although I cannot say that I have loved every step of this long, strange trip, it is indeed love that has allowed me to complete my work. This in the sense of both my own love for film and what I believe it can be and do, as well as in the sense of all those lovely people who have so generously helped me on my journey. Therefore, there are many to thank here. Some are named in the following, while others may have been forgotten, but all of you deserve my sincere gratitude. I am thankful for many things in life, but most of all thankful for people.

First mention here goes to my super trio of supervisors. I would like to give thanks to my primary supervisor, professor Anne Gjelsvik, whose guidance as well as support on both the academic and personal level have gone above and beyond what may be expected – and who has backed me and this project from before the beginning, from the early stages of hazy ideas almost seven or so years ago until the eventual end of now finally finishing the work. Thanks also to my other two excellent supervisors, professor Aurora Hoel and philosophiae doctor Eirik Frisvold Hanssen, for thorough reviews and feedback as well as thoughtful care, patience and understanding.

Second mention goes to the other eminent researchers that have helped me along the way. I would like to give thanks to the research group that I have been fortunate to take part in, “Face of Terror”. Once more, thanks to Anne and Aurora, the leaders of the project, as well as its core members Ingvild Folkvord, Nadège Lourme and Mette Mortensen, for all the great comments, conversations and other collegial moments throughout this period. Thanks also to professor Mary Ann Doane, as well as the staff at the Department of Film and Media at UC Berkeley, who graciously hosted and cooperated with me as a visiting scholar in some key stages of my work. In addition, I would like to thank the Fulbright-foundation and here especially Cathrine Schrumpf Nordahl, for providing me the opportunity and means to do so.

Third mention then goes to some more of my colleagues at the Department of Art and Media Studies at NTNU. To be sure, I would like to thank you all, but still particularly so Jon Raundalen and Tore Kirkholt for help as department heads at different points of my project, as well as Inger Malene Nausthaug and Alexander Urdshals Schei for humor and humanity during both good and bad times. Thanks also to my fellow doctoral hallway-dwellers, with special mention to Eva Rem Hansen, Ingrid Synneva Holtar, Ingrid Lunnan Nødseth, and once again Nadège Lourme, for your solidarity and our shared moments of siege mentality. Lastly, thanks to the Faculty of Humanities for green-lighting and facilitating my work.

Final mention goes to my family as well as friends not already mentioned. I would here like to give thanks to my parents and my siblings – you know who you are – who have had the sometimes thankless task of bearing with me through thick and thin, whether that has meant reading texts and talking about things far beyond so-called common sense or even just the fact of becoming collateral damage of my curious schemes and creative excuses for not coming home as often. Thanks also to my long-time film-lover compatriots Endre Eidsaa Larsen, Anette Svane, and Sveinung Wålengen, who although further away geographically always remain as close to my heart. Thanks as well to those closer in space and time, Tom Rafaelsen and especially Thomas Hermansen, who in some ways may be called my personal advisor, for sticking with me through both the best and worst of times and thus also dealing with my demanding endeavors and otherwise idiosyncrasies. Last thank you goes to my love Karoline, for all of the compassion and cuteness, and little Wilma for all the craziness too. Finally and strangely, thank you to the tick – ceremoniously given the name “Tick-Tock” – who laid claim to my nervous system for a while, paralyzing my face and compromising my vision, thus making things more difficult through these trials and tribulations, for both teaching me further life lessons and laugh lessons.

In very short, once more with feeling, thank you all.

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As an addendum, I want to mention that some of the work that was produced through this project was published, that is transformed and translated, as part of the chapter “Navnet og ansiktet: *Rekonstruksjon Utøya*” [“The name and the face: *Reconstructing Utøya*”] in 2020 within the Norwegian-language anthology *Bearbeidelser: 22. juli i ord og bilder*. Thanks to both its editors, once again to Anne Gjelsvik and Heidi Norland at Universitetsforlaget, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to such an interesting and important book project. Other parts have been presented, described and disseminated, at different arenas during and following my degree candidacy itself; among other avenues the research seminars “Operative Images”, “Mediated Visibility of Conflicts”, and “Mediated Faces”, as well as at annual conferences respectively hosted by the Society for Literature, Science and the Arts, Society for Terrorism Research, Norwegian Media Scholar Society, and Society for Cinema and Media Studies, in addition to various workshop sessions and my own lectures. Thanks to all their hosts, participants and listeners for contributing to the progress of my PhD-process.



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## INTRODUCTION

### Facing terror and other introductions

In the world today, terrorism is primarily a mediated phenomenon. Media or mediations, in particular images and video, pertaining to the acts themselves, perpetrators, survivors, victims and witnesses, for most all of us, inform our perception and perspective on such events. They illustrate our experience and illuminate our understanding not only of terrorism itself but also its terrorizing consequences.

Questions around visibility and visuality thus abound. It could be argued that terror imagery is too visible in our contemporary media, saturating and stimulating to an extent or effect of desensitizing or disaffecting us as spectators. It should rather be argued, however, that such an issue is not about quantity but quality, indeed not a question of seeing too much but instead one of not seeing enough, or even more precisely a problem that concerns forms of visibility or modes of visuality. So, there seems to me to be no paradox in considering the potentially constructive or productive capacity of facing terror through film. That is to say that our encounters with those affected, prominently through documentary film portrayals, afford us powerful access to certain relations that bear upon both our responsibility and resiliency. Essentially, the tenet of this thesis is that there is an ethics to these encounters.

One central argument of this study is that such power and potential basally stem from three connected dimensions of these cinematic expressions and experiences, namely: the face, reality, and trauma. As this is both a comprehensive proposition and complex position, this introduction sets out to be a sort of guide to most of the questions, theories, analyses, terms, and points of view that make up the general approach of the exploration itself. Before doing so, it should be said once more that at the core of this dissertation lies the belief that facing terror through film is, or can be, to face the possibility or opportunity to profoundly enhance our understanding of the traumatic reality of survivors as well as to facilitate ethical learning of our own. As this is the formative idea or foundational purpose of the project and process, thus it follows the work all the way from this introduction to its conclusion.

## Questions and desires

As the opening title announces, the topic of this work is facing terror through film. Therefore, the fundamental question that the dissertation researches, or the first and foremost problem that the project explores, is a concise yet considerable one: *What is the ethical potential of facing terror through film?*

Straight away, this can also be put differently, broken up and followed up: *Is there any ethical potential to film? Does film have a role in relation to facing terror?* If so, even further queries open up: *What happens? Why does it happen? How does it happen? Where and when does it happen? Who does it happen to?* As the word potential announces, it may not happen at all, but my hypothesis is that it happens, and such a happening is the crux of this study – its subject in question as well as object of desire. On this note, some of these question words can also helpfully be put to the work itself, precisely by asking what is studied, why it is studied, and how it is studied, or in short: *What does this study want?*

For one, it wants to expand media-related terrorism research, and it aims to do so in two main ways. First, although the general area of study is substantial, most of its studies are fixed in depictions of terrorist events and the terrorists themselves, with much less focus on the human consequences of terrorist attacks, that is terror, the tragedies of those affected, as well as its traumatic aftermath.<sup>1</sup> In such a specific context, although understandable due to the subject matter itself, the study of survivors, victims and witnesses is surprisingly insufficient. Second, even though it certainly makes sense that it is news media, as well as new media, that make up the center of attention for the research, still there seems a clear lack of attentiveness to the part that aesthetic or artistic media play in both how we deal with and learn about terror afterwards.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in such studies, the focal point is not often film, and if it is it is too often the fiction film. In this sense, specifically doing a study on documentary film portrayals of survivors arguably makes a dual contribution.

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<sup>1</sup> There are certainly some works that do so too, however. To exemplify with one work from each of the last three decades, Paletz & Schmid (1992) and Silke (2003) are both anthologies that partially deal with precisely the relationship between media and those affected by terrorism, while Howie (2012) more specifically concerns himself with the relationship between media and witnesses to terror. See the bibliography for titles.

<sup>2</sup> There are more and more works focused on this, however. Some of the most recent ones of relevance are three very different anthologies that deal with various reactions to and treatments of terror in the arts, where Finney & Shannon (2019), Gjelsvik (2020) and Harris (2021) respectively explore this subject in relation to 9/11, July 22, and terrorism in a more general and global sense. See the bibliography for titles.

For another, it wants to extend film-related ethical research, and intends to do so in a double form. First, although film studies have taken an “ethical turn”, at the least in the last few decades, there is more to explore when it comes to the ethical relationship between film and spectators, particularly the ethics of such encounters in the domain of documentary film. To be sure, this ethical turn, as Jinhee Choi and Mattias Frey argue, should rather be called turns, as it includes different schools of thought on both film and ethics (2014: 1-3), but due to the influence of his specific ethical thinking, could also in some ways be dubbed, like Asbjørn Grønstad puts it, “the Levinasian turn” (2016: 58).<sup>3</sup> Second, then, whereas the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas are evident within the field of research, and likewise that many have before had something to say about the face and film, this work delves face-first into his ideas to develop somewhat different and otherwise connections between ideas of cinematic faces, audiovisual testimony and cinematic witnessing.

For another one, it also wants to explore and express a spectatorial experience of three specific documentary films by doing close focus analysis of the following trio of case studies: *Reconstructing Utøya* (2018), *Rebirth* (2011), *The Look of Silence* (2014).<sup>4</sup> All these standout cases were chosen first and foremost because of their cinematically impressive qualities, but another reason was also their analytically interesting characteristic yet complementary ways of facing terror, as well as their furthermore intriguing similarities and differences in times and spaces, types of terror, memories and testimonies, survivors and witnesses, and last but certainly not least close-up faces.

In other words, as the central question asks, what this study wants is to explore the complex nexus between terror, film, ethics, and the face. Of course, such a question is also full of other questions and many questions are formulated at the start of each major part of the work and then followed up through theoretical and analytical exploration, an outline of which is found later in this introduction. Ultimately, all these questions and the arguments or avenues they suggest are but building blocks. Brick by brick, all the while they headline different dimensions of these potential happenings, each of them head in a similar direction in the end. One by one, as well as responding to one another, all of them respond to, or are even responsible to, the overall or overarching topic of the work. Part by part, together they aim and attempt to say something about the ethical potential of facing terror through film.

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this particular study, as it both does and wants other things, these works are not discussed much further but should be mentioned as excellent contributions to the field – which is also the case for works such as those of Stadler (2008), Hagin et al. (2011), and Sinnerbrink (2016). See the bibliography for titles.

<sup>4</sup> Further presentations and full references for the films will follow later on in the introduction.

## Theories, analyses, terms

As the introduction has indicated so far, there are lots of themes within or that come together with the larger topic that frames this work. Moving from what the study wants towards how it works, that is from questions and desires to theories, analyses and terms, the best way to open these frameworks is to start with the two words that comprise the main title.

*Facing*, among its many additional etymological and connotative meanings, is here a term with three key senses related to both the face and to face, as well as each other. One is about how film gives face to terror through functioning like a magnifying glass of sorts for survivors, particularly through facial close-ups, that is how films “make” forms and figures or even cinematic faces. Another is about facing as our way of seeing as spectators, as in turning towards or confronting terror through the faces of survivors. One last other is thus about the encounter itself, that is the situation or space of the cinematic “face-to-face”, the interaction and the relationship between survivors and spectators as mediated by the film medium.

*Terror*, in a lexical sense as well as colloquial use, terms an extreme or intense feeling of fear or dread, a state of being terrified or terrorized, yet also something that is terrifying or terrorizing. Therefore, even though the terms have a close connection, terror is not terrorism, and this work does not explore the contested concept of terrorism but, as Alex Schmid writes in short words, “the core concept behind terrorism: terror” (2011: 1-2). Even more precisely, the specific sense of the term that is of most interest here is the terror of terrorism. While this might seem intricate, it is also a simple distinction between these two terms as directly related yet not interchangeable, one intended to stress an emphasis not on any terrorist act, but rather on its aftermath. However, as one follows the other, it is important to have an idea of the two together, for which it is informative to look closer at an academic consensus definition:

*Terrorism refers on the one hand to a **doctrine** about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence and, on the other hand, to a conspiratorial **practice** of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties (Schmid 2011: 86).<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Italics from the original quote. Although it is part of a handbook of terrorism research that is over ten years old today, this revised definition was compiled through surveying a range of academic, historical, and legal sources. For a description, see both the section (ibid. 39-87) and its comprehensive appendix (ibid. 99-148).



This concept definition is followed by a series of further points that sum up its core elements, where terrorism is noted to involve the following: threat-based communication processes and physical violence most often politically motivated and meant to create and spread terror; state or non-state perpetrators that act as individuals, in groups or within larger networks; and non-combatant or civilian victims and larger citizen audiences as the direct and indirect targets of attack (ibid. 86-87). Therefore, terrorism and terror, and the relationship between them, also importantly revolves around relations between individual and collective aspects, as well as immediate and mediate aspects – and in both these relations media play a major part.

Media-related terrorism research has described and debated the relationship between terror and media for decades, also in the sense of how those affected become a medium of communication for terrorism, a means to generate and disseminate fear and dread, and how our media become a medium to emphasize this message. This problematic is an important part of the complicated and controversial workings of what Brigitte Nacos has appropriately named “mass-mediated terrorism” (2016: 31). As mentioned before, seldom explored in such research, however, is the opposite or the other side of this very idea, namely the sense of how those affected can also become a medium of communication against terrorism, a resource for embodiment and development of resistance and resilience, and how our media can therefore also become a megaphone to enhance that message.

In our contemporary mediated society, or even reality, the role of media is one of both significant impact and import well beyond the contents they convey. Media are all around us; constructing and conditioning our encounters with the world through the work of mediation, and they do so to such an extent it seems exact to state, as W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen do, “that media *are* our situation” (2010: xxii).<sup>6</sup> Such a thought, of course, follows the famous train of thought of Marshall McLuhan, and since his point about the message of the medium is so often cited almost like a slogan of sorts outside the full articulation of the argument in the original source, it seems quite useful to use the fuller quote:

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any extension of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology (McLuhan 1964: 7).

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<sup>6</sup> Although this is really a play on words around Friedrich Kittler’s well-known theorization: “Media determine our situation” (1999: xxxix), which they critique, Mitchell and Hansen rather base their phrase on the work of McLuhan through a “neo-McLuhanesque injunction to understand from the perspective of media” (2010: xxii).

Insofar as this is the case, as well as considering the fact that mediation is the only way that most of us do face it at all, it does not seem far-fetched to claim that what media do and how they do it is critical to our response to terror. This is once more to suggest that they play key parts in our social and cultural processes, both on an individual and on a collective level, of dealing with and learning from, and thus also understanding, the consequences of terrorism. Of course, such a suggestion makes this a subject of universal interest, but although there is much more to say about media in general, enough has been said to now move onwards to the specific medium of the message, or the message, in this study.

Film or cinema, as they will be used as synonyms, is henceforth employed as terms for the art and medium in the more general sense of audiovisual expression, that is whether its means of production or modes of projection are analog or digital and whether its form or format of presentation is that of larger or smaller screens. Simultaneously, it is still used in the specific sense of audiovisual experience, that is a medium that is different and distinct from other more or less related media. In short words, film and cinema here essentially refer to a sense of audiovisual mediation with its own compositions and conditions, temporality and spatiality, and ways of being and doing.

Although it may already be apparent, this work is not about the general relationship between media and terror, nor the numerous research questions surrounding it, but instead somewhat more specific relations between film and terror. Cinematic terror, as Tony Shaw quite vividly titles it, has in no way been considered enough on its own, and thus he correctly makes the case that “it is striking how little sustained attention has been paid over the years to cinema’s relationship to terrorism”, especially when compared “with the extensive work that has been conducted on the nexus between terrorism and the news media” (2015: 4-5). While Shaw himself, like most studies on terrorism and film, writes about the fiction film, his point is well made.<sup>7</sup> Arguably, this seems even more conspicuous when it comes to documentary film, especially so in the case of actual testimony from those affected by terrorism.

Facing, terror, and film are foundational words for this work, yet they will rarely be explored by themselves, but rather through an exploration of the different forms of facing in the encounter between survivors from terrorist attacks and spectators of documentary film. These terms therefore connect to several others, as well as to the theoretical and empirical material of the dissertation, whose three main parts are outlined in the pages that follow.

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<sup>7</sup> To his credit, Shaw does provide a broader perspective with his global and historical view when compared to much previous work done in the field, which both mostly focuses on mainstream cinema as well as limits itself to 9/11. See for example Prince (2009), Birkenstein et al. (2010), and Pollard (2011).

The first part is about *ethics* and *the cinematic face*. Chapter one starts with the source for how the thesis employs these two terms, that is the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Its first section therefore explores his specific ideas on ethics and the face. As per Levinas, the ethical is the essential interpersonal relation of responsibility, our encounter with the alterity of the other, one that emanates from the epiphany of facing the face. This face, in his sense, is both a face and beyond any face; yet, his ethics of the face is an “optics”. Face-to-face with Levinas, the section elaborates these ethics of encounter in terms of a process of teaching and learning with the potential to enhance our understanding of others, ourselves, and the world.

Its second section thereafter explores the relationship between the face and the image. At first, it does so by staying with Levinas and what he has to say in view of the image and the spectator. While he rarely writes about photographic images, and never mentions film, there is explicit skepticism in his work towards aesthetics as a site of ethics, and especially suspicion towards the visual arts as any possible space for the face. As follows, to inform the approach, it then reviews some perspectives on Levinas and imagery from three of the most prominent figures that focus on his philosophy and film, that is Sam Girgus, Sarah Cooper, and Libby Saxton, as well as the crucial viewpoint of Hagi Keenan and his ethics of visuality. Thereupon, its third section, so to further advance the approach while still in dialogue with Levinas, explores the writings of Bela Balázs, Jean Epstein, and Gilles Deleuze on the close-up and the face in film. In the end, theorized through this chapter is an idea about the power and the potential of the cinematic face.<sup>8</sup>

Chapter two continues to explore ethics and the cinematic face through an analysis of *Reconstructing Utøya*. Directed by Carl Javér and released in 2018, this is a documentary that portrays four youths who survived the terrorism at Utøya, Norway on July 22, 2011. In four sections focused on these four survivors and staged inside a black box space, the film lets us as spectators face them as they recount as well as reconstruct their stories through instructing a group of volunteers, and therefore also to take part in their process of reexperiencing terror. *Reconstructing Utøya* was chosen as a case due to its presentation of the cinematic face, as well as the particularity of its construction of space. Both are central to the way it creates a potential for an ethical space of experience for spectators, and thus for how it turns into a constructive reconstruction of terror.

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<sup>8</sup> Works consulted in the first part are largely the following: Levinas 1979, 1981, 1987; Girgus 2010; Cooper 2006, 2007; Downing & Saxton 2010; Kenaan 2011, 2013; Balázs 1924, 1930, 1952; Epstein 1977, 1981; Deleuze 1986, 1989.

The second part is about *documentary reality* and *audiovisual testimony*. In chapter three, its first section therefore explores documentary film. Considering foundational ideas concerning what documentary is and does, or can be and do, and how it relates to reality, it consults some of the most prominent scholars of the area from the last decades. This includes key ideas about documentary form in works from Bill Nichols, Carl Plantinga, Dirk Eitzen, Brian Winston, Michael Renov, Stella Bruzzi, and Vivian Sobchack. Onwards from ontology and epistemology and towards affect and ethics, this is only an opening exploration of the expressive and experiential potential of documenting reality.

Its second section therefore explores the relationship between the real and the image. Relating to the more general sense of a film real, it first revisits the relevance of the idea of cinematic indexicality through Mary Ann Doane and her critical reading of the concept, from which an otherwise approach to referentiality beyond terms of representation is formed. This is then intersected with the writings of Roland Barthes, André Bazin, and Siegfried Kracauer on photographic and cinematic reality, or those existential relations that emerge in encounters between images and spectators, before returning to documentary reality with a certain idea of mediation as realization of ethics. Its third section, then, explores this approach to audiovisual testimonial material, also by way of notions from Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker, as well as Bill Nichols and Michael Renov, on the ethical dimensions of documentaries and of facial close-ups, now also facing Levinas anew. In the end, theorized through this chapter is an idea about the power and potential of audiovisual testimony.<sup>9</sup>

Chapter four keeps exploring documentary reality and audiovisual testimony through an analysis of *Rebirth*. Directed by Jim Whitaker and released in 2011, this is a documentary that presents five people bereaved after the terrorist attacks in New York City and the United States on September 11, 2001. Recording their testimonies through a nine-year period, in nine sections that include some recurring time-lapse footage of the reconstruction at Ground Zero, the film gives us as spectators the chance to repeatedly face these survivors as they cope with terror. *Rebirth* was chosen as a case because it combines a conventional format of audiovisual testimony with additional material, as well as compiles it in cyclical forms of facing through time. This is key to its mode of mediating documentary reality, one that potentially realizes ethics, and therefore how it becomes a resource for reborn resilience.

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<sup>9</sup> Works consulted in the second part are primarily the following: Nichols 1991, 2016, 2017; Plantinga 1997; Eitzen 1995; Winston 1995; Renov 1993, 2004, 2016; Bruzzi 2000; Sobchack 2004; Doane 2007; Barthes 1977, 1981; Bazin 1967, 1971; Kracauer 1960; Sarkar & Walker 2010.

The third part is about *mediated trauma* and *cinematic witnessing*. In chapter four, its first section therefore explores both compounds from the first. Starting with taking on trauma, that is how it can be communicated, how it could be understood, and if it may do some good, it turns to seminal texts in trauma studies from Judith Lewis Herman, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, and Cathy Caruth. While these works open theoretical frameworks that also work through concepts of testimony and witnessing, as well as mediating the traumatic through art, the role of audiovisual mediation as well as the workings of the relationship between images as witnesses and spectators as witnesses is still left to be specified.

Its second section therefore explores the relationship between trauma and the image. Connecting mediated trauma to memory, it first looks to some key notions about memories and media from Marianne Hirsch, Alison Landsberg, and Roxana Waterson, who all develop models on the movements of memory between people, questioning the possibility of any such processes of transmission. Building on and further articulating its approach, it then faces the ethics of the traumatic in the encounter between images and spectators, discussing studies on and different points of view about trauma in film and photography from Janet Walker, Joshua Hirsch, Susan Sontag, and E. Ann Kaplan. Its third section, then, explores witnessing both as a word and a work of mediation, via thoughts about the various consequences and values of doing so from John Durham Peters, Paul Frosh, and Thomas Trezise, turning back towards Levinas and an approach to ethically facing the traumatic through film. In the end, theorized through this chapter is an idea about the power and potential of cinematic witnessing.<sup>10</sup>

Chapter six further explores mediated trauma and cinematic witnessing through an analysis of *The Look of Silence*. Directed by Joshua Oppenheimer and released in 2014, this is a documentary that provides a look into a man living with the murder of his brother and the lasting terror of the mass killings in Indonesia from 1965 to 1966. Structured without sections as such, but set up as a series of sequential overlapping encounters between this one second-generation survivor, other survivors, and the perpetrators, witnessed in and with film through conversations with family, confessions within footage, and confrontations by way of facing, the film beckons us as spectators to bear witness as it breaks the silence and speaks to terror. *The Look of Silence* was chosen as a case due to its distinct and complex matrix of cinematic witnessing that faces us with traumatic ethics and thus potentially a productive act of looking.

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<sup>10</sup> Works consulted in the third part are mainly the following: Herman 1992; Felman & Laub 1992; Caruth 1995, 1996; Radstone & Schwarz 2010; M. Hirsch 2012; Landsberg 2004; Waterson 2007; Walker 2005; J. Hirsch 2004; Sontag 1977, 2003; Kaplan 2005; Peters 2001; Frosh 2009, 2016; Trezise 2013.

So far, this account of its theories, analyses, and terms has outlined the course of the study, but it has made no mention of method. In the more general sense, the dissertation may be described as idea-driven yet case-based. As an open-ended exploration, conceptual theory and close analysis here come together to inform the approach, as it works its way towards developing a more specific perspective on the ethical potential of facing terror through film.

Therefore, even though the intention is not to delimit a field of film theory, there is certainly a film-theoretical perspective. As Marc Furstenau succinctly puts it, “film theory is, fundamentally, a continuous history of debates and arguments about what “film” is, what its nature and effects might be, what its broader social and cultural value is” (2010: 6), and this work indeed wants to delineate some different ideas or directions within this “state of things”. Among other things, one important dimension of film that will be emphasized here is that it opens us up to the world and exposes us to some forms of encounters with the world that would otherwise not come to be. In other words, film is a potential site for teaching and learning. All the while this is certainly not a new idea, yet there is some novelty to the viewpoint on what and how films may teach as well as what and how spectators may learn. My interest lies in exploring the ethical and pedagogical capacity of audiovisual media to teach us something that is different from anything we may learn from other arts and media, and approaching a mode of mediated teaching and learning that may have formative meaning for how we act and who we are in real life. In another turn of phrase, this is therefore also a theoretical reflection around film as a tool for humanist education.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, although the objective is not to articulate a form of film analysis, there is also clearly a film-analytical position. This is a case of one following the other as, like Kristin Thompson writes it, film analysis is always founded on “what we assume films to consist of, how we assume people to watch films, how we believe films relate to the world as a whole, and what we take the purposes of analysis to be” (1988: 3). While it might be obvious that such a point of view is conditioned by my own view of the world, a world that is always, as Friedrich Nietzsche writes so well, “*interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meaning” (1967: 481), still this worldview should never be both beginning and end. This is to say that while some baseline thoughts about images and spectators are necessarily presupposed, findings are not predetermined but instead predicated on the encounter between

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<sup>11</sup> Even though the starting point is both pedagogical and practical, the theoretical exploration of these ethics is philosophical, as what is explored is the foundation for such processes of teaching and learning in the encounter between films and spectators. As for how it is explored, there is therefore a tension between the general and the specific every step of the way, before returning to some possible implications and applications in the conclusion.

ideas theorized and films analyzed. More specifically, that means this is a work that from the start rather strives to sense than to make sense, in this sense taking a cue from Susan Sontag's suggestion "to *see* more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more [...] to show *how it is what it is*, even *that it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means*" (1966: 14). Still, all the analyses share the same fundamental purposes that guide the general approach itself.<sup>12</sup>

As for that approach, then, it shares intents and interests with the interdisciplinary field that often calls itself media aesthetics. To me, first and foremost, this denotes a mode of seeing and doing research that emphasizes the specific manners of any medium of study and thus that the medium matters. This means being aware and attentive to what media do, how they do what they do, and how what they do, in a lot of different ways, makes a difference. This also means to appreciate the relational as well as the relative aspects of media, that is the distinct forms of expression, modes of encounter and orders of experience of different media, and their differential mediated relationships with their spectators. While this understanding is sufficient for my purposes, it is still worthwhile to consult one of the founding figures of this developed perspective, Liv Hausken, who summarizes it as follows:

A proper understanding of and appreciation for media aesthetics would thus introduce a shift from the static concept of medium/media to the dynamic process of mediation; it would move beyond the paradigm of communication to mediation as a perspective of understanding, and it would combine theoretical argument with analysis of individual artworks or media phenomena (Hausken 2013: 33).

Proper or not, such a perspective of understanding is precisely how this work conceptualizes the mediated relationships that it explores. This is furthermore informed by the articulations of critical media aesthetics within the "Face of Terror" research project, of which this one is part, and its process of understanding terrorism from the perspective of media. In addition to similarly dynamic concepts of media and mediation, as well as differentiated approaches to differences between one medium and the other, something that is also emphasized within this framework are the generative, operative, and performative aspects of media. To me, this is an understanding that underlies my ideas on how films, or more specifically the case studies in this study, have the potential to change our way of seeing, feeling, and even being, and thus how we understand others, ourselves, and the world.

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<sup>12</sup> While the fulcrum of the study is my subjective experience, and necessarily so, my belief is still that there is some or other ubiquitous or universal quality to the subject matter that goes beyond myself. In this way, the idea of the spectator here is meant to be more than me, which is also the reason the work always theorizes a potential and then attempts to elucidate and evoke such a potential through its analyses.

Meanwhile, there is also something more to say about what is meant by aesthetics here. The core of this work is the relationship between, or even in-between, aesthetics and ethics, and the approach starts from a certain idea of *aisthesis*. Aisthesis, seen as sensibility, sense-perception, or sensuous exposure to and engagement with the world, is a central basis for the perspective developed throughout the thesis, one that is less interested in the cognitive work of interpretation than in all those corporeal workings of sensation that arguably come before as well as go beyond it. This idea therefore intersects with another important base in *affect*. Affect, seen as affectivity, affective forces and powers that act or interact with our sensorial capabilities to make or materialize states of affection, is a key concept for this work as it approaches those kinds of embodied and becoming moments or movements of feeling that do not quite fit or cannot be fixed within the logic of emotion or models of empathy, but still flutter around, to paraphrase Brian Massumi, in a “sink of passion” (2002: 28).

All the while both affect and aisthesis may be defined or described in many ways, and have their own philosophical or theoretical backgrounds as terms, they are keywords for this approach first and foremost because they create a space for speaking about sensory potentials, relations and realizations, beside the language of representation, reception, and even reason. Still, both terms are employed here in senses that are indebted to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and their conceptualization of the work of art as being “*a bloc of sensations [...] a compound of percepts and affects*” (1994: 164), and the former’s ideas of a radical aisthesis, or an other aesthetic dimension beyond ordinary sensation where the “being of the sensible” (1994: 140-141) becomes an encounter with new expression from which experience itself can be radically changed.<sup>13</sup>

Combined with inspiration from the ethical phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas, this indeed makes for a terminology where the abstract and abstruse come with the territory, but ultimately the choice to use such a vocabulary is because it opens more than it closes for exploring all those encounters with art and media where aesthetics and ethics meet. As such, whether it could be considered methodical or not, what matters is that it allows the work to approach elements of these events that are sensed or felt yet do not make sense. This is the case both for the relationship between affects and ethics and between the medium of film and the medium of the face, and therefore also the ethical potential of facing terror through film.

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, this debt also goes deeper, as Deleuze and Guattari build upon the work of many other thinkers, among which Baruch Spinoza and Henri Bergson are the most important in this context, while the writings of Deleuze is arguably one of the major sources of thought for the later “affective turn” in the humanities.



## Some other introductions

As a sort of conclusion to this introduction to what the study wants and how it works, and to furnish a further guide to readers, there are some more notes to make about the way that the dissertation is written. Thinking about the work like watching a film, three core elements of its composition will be commented on: its form, point of view, and style.

Firstly, as previously outlined, the chapters are organized in a particular manner. This may be categorized in two senses. In one sense, there are three chapters that could be called “theoretical” and three chapters that could be called “analytical”. These alternate with each other and work in different ways. The former explores topics by reviewing, engaging, and deliberating upon academic literature. Even more specifically, these chapters thoroughly review some relevant theoretical and philosophical writing on their key themes, engage with ideas and concepts from different types of thinkers, and deliberate upon these with a view to developing an analytical approach to the film cases that follow. However, the latter explores topics by describing, evoking, and reflecting upon film encounters. This means concretely, these chapters thoroughly describe sights and sounds from the films in focus, attempting to evoke sensations and affections as they may be experienced by spectators, and reflect upon their power, meaning or value as a way of informing the theoretical framework itself.<sup>14</sup>

In another sense, there are rather three parts or pairs of chapters. These are thematic, which means they each emphasize one of the already mentioned connected dimensions that the dissertation explores, namely: the face, reality, and trauma. Therefore, the first two deal with ethics and the cinematic face, the second two with documentary reality and audiovisual testimony, and the last two with mediated trauma and cinematic witnessing. Now, while the outline for this has been introduced before, the reasoning behind doing so has not, and there is a simple answer. Due to the sheer complexity or convolution of the subject, and thus to be able to have a functional structure to the study, undertaking all its propositions and problems at once would be an unusable or at least unusual solution. Instead, having independent yet interconnected parts that are in some ways separate from each other, while they all share a formative idea and inform both one another as well as the approach itself, indeed seems a more viable choice to keep the intention of the work of being an open-ended exploration.

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<sup>14</sup> This also means that both are intentionally theoretical or analytical. One focuses on the ideas themselves and thereby point forward to films to be analyzed, the other focuses on the films themselves and thus point backward to the ideas that were theorized. As the work goes forward, of course, with chapters following up and looking back to former ones, this becomes a more complicated “back and forth”.

Secondly, the work is written from a specific perspective. This is not meant to repeat already mentioned elements of methodology, nor to restate the general idea of mediation as a perspective of understanding, but to refer to premises necessarily built into the writing itself. While the theoretical and analytical chapters are based upon my own point of view as a film researcher and film spectator, respectively emphasizing one aspect over the other, both will speak about “we” and “our”. Firstly, in this context, this is the viewpoint of a “we” that were not there, who do not know what it was like, and who may perhaps never fully understand what happened. As such, the study does in no way claim to speak for survivors or others who were directly affected by these terrorist attacks and their consequences. Rather, it speaks to a “we” that want to understand what happened, want to know more about what it was like, and perhaps also want to be there for those who were. Furthermore, as mentioned before, while this “we” is necessarily embedded in or embodied by a “me”, both in the practical sense of having its starting point in my own personal encounters with these case studies and in the philosophical sense that there can be no “we” if there is not first a “you” and “me”, my belief is still that this approach allows for speaking of something more than myself. Thus, the “us” suggested in the upcoming arguments and analyses has a universal but hypothetical quality, whose basis is always the idea of a potential. Finally, while the most imperative word of the work is otherness, as important are notions of community, sociality and solidarity, and even humanity. Therefore, somewhat going against the grain of similar work, my interest lies not in the specificity of individual sociocultural identities, but rather an intersubjective generality that makes a difference to our identity and individuality, and that may do so in a way that cuts across national, cultural and social backgrounds or boundaries.<sup>15</sup>

Now, although this may seem a difficult position to maintain, the main point is this: explored in this work is what is potentially expressed by films and how this is potentially experienced by spectators, both what and how they may help us see, learn, and understand, that is the ethical potential of these encounters themselves. Even though such a proposition may seem idealistic to some, naïve and perhaps even nonsensical to others, this is a potential that may be realized differently yet is not relative to difference – that is a potential for anyone and all. Therefore, even though the thesis starts from as well as strives to develop a specific point of view in one sense, in another its perspective is also necessarily always general.

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<sup>15</sup> In quite short, this is a sort of spin on Benedict Anderson’s famous “imagined communities” (1991: 6-7), but one that considers such a community within a larger framework than the nation-state and thus rather goes further towards McLuhan’s then futuristic idea of “the new world of the global village” (1964: 101), a world in which the work of art has already gone way beyond Walter Benjamin’s “age of mechanical reproduction” (1968: 217).

Lastly, the writing itself has a particular way about it. This is to say that even though it tries to be both clear and concise, still the prose will often become more poetic than precise. Arguably, this is due to the difficulty of attempting to articulate something abstract that goes, in many ways, beyond the framework of academic writing, or that perhaps belongs to sense and sensibilities beyond words themselves. This is a consequence of exploring something or the idea of a something that is sensed or felt yet does not make sense in any straightforward terms, something that comes “face-to-face” in the encounter between or in-between films and spectators yet is not simply analyzed, and something that can potentially facilitate processes of teaching and learning that may profoundly affect our understanding yet cannot be steadily theorized. Thus, the study uses language that is suggestive and even speculative, hypothetical and even hyperbolic, but whose intentions will hopefully still be understood. Likewise, this is why the work introduces more questions than comes to conclusions, and otherwise again, that is why it employs a vocabulary of equivocal or evocative words and wordings. In sum, this is a case of undertaking whichever way works to explore the nexus between terror, film, ethics, and the face – the ethical potential of facing terror through film.



I:

## FACING FACE

### **Ethics and the cinematic face**

*What's in a face?* As the primary and the most important site for contact and communication in interpersonal relationships or intersubjective encounters, the face is much more than meets the eye. Therefore, the expressive and affective meaning, value and power of a face, and the impact and significance of experiencing faces, has key relevance for a research project that deals with our face-to-face relationships, which to me is necessarily the case for dealing with mediated versions of these relations as well.

Of course, the word “face” itself is a multivocal one. As a noun, face denotes anything ranging from a form or figure, appearance, manifestation or image of someone or something, to an expression or that which is expressive of some or other state of mind or feeling, or even a metonymic proxy for person altogether. Simultaneously, face is a doing word, derivative of such verbal roots as to see, to look, or to gaze, but often designating actions like confronting, dealing with, or turning towards someone or something. Face and facing, in whichever class, are therefore both terms layered with many different meanings. Thus, as mentioned before, they are both employed in many different manners throughout this thesis.

Still, the fundamental case is the human face. Through our lives, faces are one, if not the, most essential way that we relate to others. From our first steps of facial identification and interaction, with research situating this at surprisingly early stages, faces stay a core site for cognition and comprehension, engagement and emotion, identity and individuality, and sociality itself. In other words, the situation of the face is key to both “you” and “me”, or the way that we learn about others and ourselves. Yet, simultaneously, faces remain enigmatic. All the while they show and tell us so much, they retreat as much as they entreat, and they conceal as much as they reveal. Therefore, whether seen as a gestalt, a kind of “dispositif” or sociocultural interface, as window, mirror or mask, or generally something beyond itself, so many dimensions of “face-to-face” relationships are difficult to articulate or understand.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of these paragraphs somewhat paraphrase the work and writing of Jonathan Cole in his fascinating *About Face* (1998), in addition to different types of dictionaries as well as different views of the face in various areas, such as neuroscientific research, philosophy and psychology, and film and media studies.

In this sense, the face is both medium and mystery. Whatever the case may be – or whom it may concern – faces do something to us. This certainly happens on a physical level, a cognitive and emotional level, yet the questions that I would like to ponder are these: Does it also happen on an *ethical* level? If so, what exactly does this entail? Or, to put it simply: What are the ethics of the face? Furthermore, while most studies and thought about faces of course focus on our ordinary face-to-face interactions, faces are just as often encountered in forms of both still and moving images, on smaller and bigger screens, and in different types of media, and such faces surely do something to us too. Thus, some other questions are these: Do faces do the same to us, in this ethical sense, when they are *mediated*? What differences are there between facing a face in everyday life and facing a face through film images – and what difference does the mediation make? What are, if there even is such a thing, the ethics of the cinematic face?

These are the questions this chapter explores, and it does so in the following way. The first section explores the elaboration of specific ideas on ethics and the face in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, with the double intention of delineating and deliberating on his core work around these concepts to better understand his understanding of the ethical face-to-face encounter, as well as introducing the key terms that act as the base for developing some other ideas about the possible ethics of the mediated face. The second section therefore explores the relationship between the face and the image by first contemplating what Levinas has to say about the face in art before then considering how some other scholars, that is specifically Sam Girgus, Sarah Cooper, Libby Saxton and Hagi Keenan, have related his ideas and views to film and media, working towards a proposition about the space in-between the face of the image and the gaze of the spectator as the potential site or situation for these ethics through aesthetics. The third section further explores this emerging perspective on the cinematic face by taking a closer look at some of the most important writing about the close-up and the face in film theory, from Bela Balázs, Jean Epstein, and Gilles Deleuze, that is through elucidating the ideas of these three thinkers while still in a dialogue with those of Levinas, closing in on an otherwise approach to the ethical potential of facing the cinematic face.

## Ethics and the face

As indicated by its title, this section introduces the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, whose ideas about ethics and the face has a foundational place for the approach of this exploration. While there are lots of thinkers that deal with ethics in different senses of the word, important among them some that similarly approach ethical dimensions of encounters between people<sup>2</sup>, Levinas's almost lifelong project of describing and debating the ethical relationship between the self and the other, along with his distinct foregrounding of the figure of the face, arguably makes him the most productive choice for a dialogue about this subject. Employing some of his concepts as well as elaborating on them outside their original context is an enlightening yet a challenging prospect, on the one hand in getting to grips with his theses and themes in themselves, and on the other in developing them in terms of theorizing something else.

Moreover, as mentioned in the introduction, Levinas never wrote about film nor made any comments about the cinematic medium itself. Rather, he steadfastly held a skeptical, and sometimes outright dismissive, view of art and aesthetics in terms of being or becoming a site for ethics. Therefore, even though his thought has increasingly come to the fore in film and media studies during the last decades, especially in the growing field of inquiry that is ethics and cinema, engaging Levinas in face of his own apparent reluctance or resistance to such an endeavor may indeed seem like a somewhat curious choice. Still, this certainly does not mean that Levinas could not, or should not, guide the way for us to say something about film or that relating his ideas to the visual or audiovisual is just some kind of futile venture. Instead, my position is that approaching cinema by way of Levinasian ethics, maybe not only despite but also because of this opposition, may potentially yield some important propositions about film as both expression and experience. Thus, my thesis has its starting point in Levinas's ideas about ethics and the face, or perhaps even more precisely in facing his understanding of the face, and then further plans on taking that towards making new avenues into or ideas about the potential ethics of mediated or cinematic faces. In this sense, there is here both the general intention of exploring the ethics of the relationship between the image and the spectator, or the ethical consequences of coming "face-to-face" with our cinematic other, as well as the specific interest of exploring the ethical potential of facing terror through film.

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<sup>2</sup> This perhaps especially pertains to the philosophies of Martin Buber, and his *I & Thou* (1959), and Mikhail Bakhtin, where his more specific ideas on ethics are first and foremost collected and developed in the writings of *Art and Answerability* (1990) and *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1993).

To do so, it seems informative to start by looking closer at Levinas's "ethics as first philosophy", and specifically his notion of a primordial "ethical" relationship that revolves around "the face" of the other person. According to Levinas, before it can become ontology and epistemology, philosophy must begin with the first human particularity, that is the face-to-face encounter, in which a fundamental ethics is situated. Emphasizing the primacy of this ethical relation, one that emanates from human sociality itself, as what founds existence and transcendence, he argues that humanity is not given but instead discovered through facing the face of the other and the ethical demand of responsibility this puts upon us (Levinas 2003).<sup>3</sup> Therefore, his ethics is not an ethics in any traditional sense, but rather, as Jacques Derrida puts it, an "Ethics of Ethics", that elaborates the essence of the ethical relation in general (1978: 111).<sup>4</sup> Levinasian ethics thus focus on the relationship between human beings, our encounter with the other, and the event of intersubjective responsibility he refers to as "the irreducible structure upon which all the other structures rest" (1979: 79). In this sense, ethics in Levinas reside in the interpersonal relationship itself, yet as a term can neither be easily defined nor exactly confined to any single or specific meaning.

In the case of the face, it also signifies something that is more than itself. For Levinas, a face is indeed a face in its sensible appearance, but simultaneously much more than a face, sense-ably signifying something "beyond" or presenting an opening onto alterity, "the other" and the dimension that he refers to as "infinity". The face exceeds reason and comprehension, refuses to be contained, and cannot really be grasped, since it breaks with any shared world, or what he names "the same" and "totality". This Levinasian face, if you will, presents itself by way of tensions between the concrete and the abstract, visible and invisible, phenomenal and transcendental; it is both given and non-given, both there and not there, through which "the idea of infinity, the infinitely more contained in the less, is concretely produced in the form of a relation with the face" (1979: 196). In simplified terms, this duality of totality and infinity, the same and the other, and often also interiority and exteriority – although they are not synonymous – are complementary domains of experience whose absolute separation emerges from the face that comes before us but remains beyond us in the ethical relation.

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<sup>3</sup> These ideas develop through Levinas's philosophy, in his major works *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, as well as the essays in *Collected Philosophical Papers*; in *Existence and Existents*, *Time and the Other*, *Ethics and Infinity*, *Proper Names*, *Entre Nous*, and *Alterity and Transcendence*, as well as the collection *Humanism of the Other*, which is here given citation. Henceforth, this thesis will restrict its references mostly to these first three mentioned sources, as they are sufficient for its purposes.

<sup>4</sup> From Derrida's essay "Violence and Metaphysics", published in 1967, with thoughts that are restated again 30 years later, in the wake of Levinas's death, in the personal and commemorative *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas*.



Now, as these ideas themselves as well as the language used to articulate them is both equivocal and esoteric, what this means in view of the interpersonal relationship is explained in as many ways as there are secondary literature sources that attempt to understand it. In my interpretation of Levinas, in both a phenomenological and practical sense, these ethics of the face may well be conceptualized as a process that relates to *teaching* and *learning*. Therefore, the remainder of this section will follow his writing along with forwarding its own working outline for the ethical face-to-face encounter in three stages or steps, even if it is by no means a sequential event, to try to explain what may happen there.<sup>5</sup>

Firstly, *the epiphany of the face* is revealed. Levinas describes this epiphanic moment as the emergence of the transcendent other that expresses itself in the sensible appearance of the face: “The face speaks” (1979: 66). This is a face that does not present itself as an object given to perception, as it manifests itself over and beyond any form as well as from behind any theme or meaning belonging to our shared world as such. Still, this absolute other faces us, and does so as the presence of an interlocutor who invites us to relation, a revelation in which “the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp” (ibid. 195-200). The reason why this is epiphanic is because it becomes a shock to our system. Ordinarily, to paraphrase Levinas, each and every phenomenon we encounter is beholden to the power and possession of our own point of view. This means that we self-referentially identify everything by appropriating and assembling it all into categories and concepts, thereby breaking reality down through mechanisms of representation, objectification and thematization. According to Levinas, this is the state of the self being in the world only asking “what” in ways from which it already has the answer itself, thus keeping “entirely within being, in the midst of what it is seeking” (1981: 23-34). In short, “being” is in the eye of the beholder.

However, the face is of another order and contends with our ability to do so, that is the possibility of the other being determined by the same in a way in which its otherness is reduced, or in a sense never even introduced. To use some of Levinas’s chosen words, the very presence of the face thus works as a “disturbance”, one that already escapes us while entering the world, and an “enigma”, that manifests without manifesting itself. In this way, the face is a trace, from another time and space, or an “elsewhen” and “elsewhere”, one that visits us and only leaves behind the “visible invisibility” of infinity, which both overflows our concepts and overwhelms our consciousness (1987: 66-70, 95-103, 119-120).

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<sup>5</sup> This outline will be developed in dialogue with these three terms: “epiphany”, “welcome”, and “teaching”.

Nevertheless, the very expression of this trace of the face emanates immediate, affective experience that impacts us as an epiphany. Essentially, this revelation is that the meaning of the face is ethical, which means that the face-to-face relation is first and foremost one of *responsibility*, and that the face is thus an encounter with infinity presenting itself as a face. This is key to Levinas's first philosophy:

This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, in his face, is the primordial *expression*, is the first word: "you shall not commit murder" [...] There is here a relation not with a very great resistance, but with something absolutely *other*: the resistance of what has no resistance – the ethical resistance (1979: 199).

The powerful connotations of such a turn-of-phrase aside, these lines speak to how Levinas considers the unique signification of the face as inherently and irreducibly ethical, something he underlines and elaborates in later conversations with Philippe Nemo in *Ethics and Infinity*:

The face is signification, and signification without context [...] And all signification in the usual sense of the term is relative to such a context: the meaning of something is in its relation to another thing. Here, to the contrary, the face is meaning all by itself. You are you [...] the relation to the face is straightaway ethical. The face is what one cannot kill, or at least it is that whose *meaning* consists in saying "thou shalt not kill" [...] the appearance in being of these "ethical peculiarities" – the humanity of man – is a rupture of being. It is significant, even if being resumes and recovers itself (1985: 86-87).

Now, this final line is also significant in another way. While the face interrupts or interferes with the self's being in the world, its resistance and its demand for responsibility often lose out to our "ego-logical" powers or procedures, those intentional and totalizing operations of cognition that aim to claim, name and make everything intelligible. Taking on the other for ourselves, as extensions or versions of the self, and giving it meaning from our point of view, would constitute a "knowing" of an unknowable, a "negation" of the other's being, and thus a renunciation of any "understanding". In a more somber tone, Levinas here speaks about the imperialism, violence, and even killing that characterizes what he calls "the ancient triumph of the same over the other" (1979: 87). Still, the other is impossible to kill, if you will, as the face continues to face us, confounds our intentionality by instantaneously commanding our responsibility, and thus confronts the very being of the self by again putting us in question.

On a more positive note, Levinas speaks of this as an appeal to our compassion, hospitality and obligation as well (ibid. 195-200; 1987: 20-23).<sup>6</sup> In this sense, the face is a possibility.

In any case, the epiphany of the face is the revelation that our ethical other is facing and gazing at us, stating that a reality is beyond us, or the face addressing us with a call while awaiting our response. As Levinas himself recapitulates it: “What does it ask? Not to leave it alone. An answer: here I am” (Levinas, in Robbins 2001: 127); or, as phrased in other places, accepting a “taking upon oneself of the fate of the other” and acknowledging “the fact that I cannot let the other die alone” (ibid. 165).<sup>7</sup> From my point of view and thus for my purposes, every face-to-face encounter, or each of these so-called “ethical peculiarities”, is essentially an expressive and affective, pre-reflective event that speaks to us on the level of sensation, that is seeing a concrete and phenomenal face while sensing an abstract and transcendental face which interferes with our self-centered perception and invites us to an otherwise relation. In this sense, this epiphanic moment is perhaps well portrayed as some or other movement, a certain feeling of alterity that is always fleeting and fading away, yet that is the feeling of the presence of another and another meaning that renounces and reproaches our determining it only by reference to ourselves, which therefore breaks with our way of being. Such a feeling is thus a “you” that is facing us and ethically asking us to face it as “you”.

Secondly, then, *the welcome of the face* is required – or rather simultaneously, in that alterity in Levinas’s thinking is really “only possible starting from me” (1979: 40). As has already been mentioned, to encounter the face is to be invited to a relation with the other in which, for its epiphany to resonate, conditions within the recipient are necessary – that is an understanding and a giving (1987: 22). To me, this welcome thus amounts to questions about awareness, approach and answer. Against the background of the self being in the world and having to reckon with aspects of the world that evade and exceed its capacities, recognizing the other *as other* and its reality as infinitely distant from our own becomes the possible path towards transcendence. For Levinas, this recognition is necessary for the reinforcement of the radical separation of the same and the other and for preventing the reconstitution of totality, and therefore what makes interpersonal relation possible at all (1979: 38-43). Where this gets even more complex is the somewhat paradoxical idea that while the beginning of the ethical

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<sup>6</sup> Levinas animates the relations and tensions between totality and infinity, and the same and the other, in many different illustrations, also including but not limited to: freedom, will, justice, truth, dwelling, economy, work, love, eroticism, fecundity, atheism, religion, history, time and death. See: *Totality & Infinity*.

<sup>7</sup> Quotes from two different interviews reprinted in *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, 2001, edited by Jill Robbins. The first one conducted by Christian Chabanis and translated by Bettina Bergo, and the second by R. Formet and A. Gomez, translated by Michael B. Smith.

relationship is a movement from the other to the self, still this relation can only be concretely accomplished starting with the self. However, as Levinas writes, such a movement does not proceed from the “I”, but its “thought”, one that goes outside itself and opens itself to having an idea of infinity:

The idea of infinity is produced as revelation, as a positing of its idea in *me*. It is produced in the improbable feat whereby a separated being fixed in its identity, the same, the I, nonetheless contains in itself what it can neither contain nor receive solely by virtue of its own identity (1979: 26-27).

Simply put, this idea of infinity is a thought which ventures beyond the intentional, beyond the intelligible and beyond itself. Yet, thinking infinity is a difficult task precisely because it makes for a mode of thinking, or even mode of non-thinking, that “at each instant *thinks more than it thinks*” (1979: 62). According to Levinas, this is the state of the self being in the world asking not “what” but “who” in ways to which it has no and can never have the answer itself, a question put to the other through a journey of no return to the self, hence transcending onto becoming “*otherwise than being*” (1981: 3). In short, this “being” is not non-being, but being otherwise, beheld by the gaze from the face of the other.

Levinas evokes such a “contact” through countless metaphors: desire, generosity, conscience, goodness, morality (1979: 33-35, 48-52); sensibility, exposedness, susceptibility, vulnerability, or even substitution (1981: 14-16); affectivity, passivity, intimacy, proximity, and sincerity (1987: 90-94, 116-120, 146-150).<sup>8</sup> However, no matter the metonym employed, this incessantly and inevitably ends in some or other terms of *expression* and *responsibility*. Ideas and thoughts, in this context, denote expressing by facing and taking responsibility for another, entering into relation with others in a way that involves both self-questioning and self-forgetfulness, and therefore really being there for the other. Ethics, as Levinas further argues, is thus a “reversal of subjectivity”, a continual perceptual mutation in our sensible relationship to reality as we are touched by the poetry of the world, or a vision that has no images and language that has no words, all born from the face-to-face (1987: 115-119). In so many words, the very situation here called the welcome of the face may be seen to mean expression *as* responsibility. Levinas forwards both these ideas best in the following lines:

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<sup>8</sup> This points to how the vocabulary used changes between Levinas’s two major works, in what Derrida portrays as a move from “the subject as host” to “the subject as hostage”, with concepts like the home, welcoming and hospitality in the former, in contrast to accusation, trauma and being a hostage in the latter. His collected essays, due to their span in time, contain both domains. See: *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas*, 1999, p. 58.

Responsibility in fact is not a simple attribute of subjectivity, as if the latter already existed in itself, before the ethical relationship. Subjectivity is not for itself; it is, once again, initially for another [...] To say: here I am. To do something for the Other. To give. To be human spirit, that's it (1985: 96-97).

Meanwhile, Levinas also often says that: "ethics is an optics" (1979: 23). Elaborating on this emblematic and enigmatic statement, although thus understood and built upon in a way that is useful for my approach, this may be conceptualized as two modes of perspective, position, or even posture. One is "seeing" what we "want" to see, which means assimilating the otherness of the face to sameness through representation, objectification and thematization, and thereby refusing to meet its gaze and reducing its alterity to thought that we can think. This may also be called turning *from* the face and in this way escaping from the ethical encounter. The other is "seeing" that we "cannot" see, which means accepting the absolute separation between the same and the other through recognition, responsiveness and responsibility, and therefore also both realizing the unique meaning of the face and relating to its alterity through thought that is more than we can think. This may also be called turning *towards* the face and in this way entering into the ethical encounter.

In sum, the welcome of the face is to have a relation with the other, one that only becomes apparent while already effected and that is accomplished before it can be reflected upon, or an ethical optics of the face. As Levinas himself encapsulates it, such a seeing is still "an extravagant response" (1987: 72) of thus entering into a "relation without relation", one that opens from the "*direct and full face* welcome of the other by me" (1979: 80). From my perspective and therefore for my premises, the ethical obligation that comes to us from the face-to-face encounter is never something that we so choose, but it still always brings us a choice of what to do with it. In this sense, while the welcome calls for the complex awareness of having an idea of infinity and the complicated approach of going beyond ourselves by way of sensibility, as such it may also be seen as a simple answer: giving by seeing the face of the other as other and taking responsibility by speaking, or being for the other. Even though the face is an epiphany of a "you", essentially its ethical potential begins and ends with a "me".

Finally, *the teaching of the face* is realized. Without using the word itself, Levinas describes this learning as the bringing of something to or into us that was not there before, which is thus a transcendent, transformative and "true experience of the *new*" (1979: 50). Teaching comes from the other, who is not a theme, yet through its presence and expression as face instead thematizes and teaches phenomena to us. However, these lessons do not refer to any content that is already common to us, but rather always introduce something other or

otherwise that can never be derived from ourselves. This may happen because the idea of infinity breaks totality, and thus provides us with an excess of meaning or puts a surplus of thought into us, which means we now become *more* than ourselves (1987: 53-54). According to Levinas, this is the endless revelation or the education in the ethical relation:

To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression [...] to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught. The relation with the Other [is] an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching (1979: 51).

Here, from the epiphany and the welcome of the face, there is then a teaching, where the key case is that the face of the other potentially awakens the self. Moving our consciousness, by devastating thinking while demanding another mode of thought and by interrupting being while instilling us with an idea of the beyond, it questions our very existence. Opening up to such a questioning is what makes us “pass from phenomenon to being” and takes us to our “final reality” (ibid. 177-178; 1987: 162-163). Or, as Levinas summarizes it elsewhere: “The transcendental I comes from our awakening by and for another” (Levinas, in Robbins 2001: 211), and thus from “the very discovery of the good in the meeting of the other” (ibid. 47).<sup>9</sup> Once more, this speaks to the seemingly perennial or perpetual essence of this process of teaching and learning, which is the reason outlining what may happen there in ordered form is senseless in a way. Still, in this sense, recognizing and responding to the face of the other, and thereby receiving its teaching, becomes the fact of being present to oneself and thus our meaning as beings – in short to be woken to our responsibility.

This awakening, emanating from the ethical relation, is significant on both the level of the particular and of the universal. For one, it opens an inward discourse pointing towards the discovery of our own subjectivity or singularity. Facing our infinite responsibility, one that only increases as it is faced, is simultaneously finding our individuality, or as Levinas phrases it: “the uniqueness of the I is the fact that no one can answer for me” (1987: 97). The face therefore facilitates a confirmation and validation of the self, by not only giving meaning *to* us but giving *us* meaning. This meaning is the ethical meaning of being, or perhaps more precisely the ethical fundament of the self. For another, this opens an outward direction since it is also the discovery of the very foundation of our humanity. Facing the absolutely other is

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<sup>9</sup> Quotes from two different interviews reprinted in *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, 2001, edited by Jill Robbins. The first one conducted by Anne-Catherine Bencheleh and translated by Bettina Bergo, and the second conducted by Francois Poirie and translated by Marcus Coelen and Jill Robbins.

not only facing a “you”, but also facing a “we”, or as Levinas puts it: “the whole of humanity, in the eyes that look at me” (1979: 213). This may be said the following way: in the advent of sociality, the other does not address or approach us solitarily, but does so in solidarity with all other others. Thus, as Levinas argues, the face-to-face encounter is being’s “ultimate event”, as both the beginning of the pluralism of society and the becoming of responsibility for all other human beings (ibid. 220-222; 1987: 184-186). Now, these are some big words, but to me, they basically mean that being for the other is what introduces meaning into being itself, which is then also what makes everything in the world beyond ourselves meaningful. In short, that is the essential teaching of the face and the basis for all the face may teach us.

As sublime and utopian as this sounds, Levinas still writes a lot about the “crisis of humanism in our age” (1987: 127). This is based on the idea that even though responsibility for the other defines us, every one is responsible for their responsibility, and that means there is a chance of evading or avoiding it, whether the cause is the “seduction of irresponsibility”, the “probability of egoism” or the “evil of the absolute freedom of play” (ibid. 137-139). To break this down a bit, this means that in our relation to the other, because of the separation there necessary for having this relation, there is also the likelihood of ignorance, forgetting the prior condition of responsibility or even “losing” the idea of infinity. Here, Levinas uses the figure of a subjectivity that shuts up, a self remaining phenomenal or persisting in being, thus only being a “man of enjoyment”, in lieu of a subjectivity that speaks, a self awakening as transcendent and taking in that which is more or otherwise than being, being a “man open to teaching” (1979: 180-182). To retread some earlier ground, this describes the fact of not facing the face with responsibility and dealing with it like any other phenomenon or any other relationship, determining the other from the grip and the grasp of the self, that is the normal order of things in our way of being in the world.<sup>10</sup>

In the end, the teaching of the face is the realization of both the ethical meaning of the other and therefore also of the self, or an enhanced understanding about the world, others and ourselves. As Levinas himself summarizes it, this is not only us learning from the face “to do more or better than think” (1979: 49) but to be “otherwise and better than being” (1987: 165), or basically to face the fact that: “The word *I* means *here I am*, answering for everything and for everyone” (1981: 114). From my position and thereby for my propositions, this potential

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<sup>10</sup> It is hopefully evident at this point that the sense of repetition in this section is no coincidence, but an effect of the attempt to abridge some central ideas within the writing of Levinas, who, in the words of Derrida, “proceeds with the infinite insistence of waves on a beach: return and repetition, always, of the same wave against the same shore, in which, however, as each return recapitulates itself, it also infinitely renews and enriches itself”, something that thus “would merit an entire separate study itself”. See: *Writing and Difference*, 1978, p. 312.

lesson is embodied in any face-to-face encounter with another, yet its very development from sense and sensibility to idea and ideology and thus both its possible transcendent significance and transformative impact is dependent on us. In this sense, for the epiphany of the face to resonate it requires a welcome through which the teaching of the face may be received, that is from which these optics may be “recollected” and these ethics may be “relearned”. This again would mean that everything the face teaches us is both conditioned by and contingent upon our being ready, willing and able to learn. If we are, however, this is essentially the way the encounter between the face of a “you” and the gaze of a “me” also beckons the space of a “we”, and potentially becomes an enduring ethical experience that can truly change us.

To try to sum up this process in a way that stays philosophical but that may also be more pedagogical, it now seems in order to once again return to the three key terms in my interpretation of Levinas’s ideas on ethics and the face – that is his “extraordinary and everyday event of my responsibility” (1981: 10) – and the outline for the face-to-face encounter in this section. The ethical dimension opens from the expression of the face, through a turning of the other towards us by way of an address and calling into question demanding our answer, that is a sensed *epiphany* of the alterity of another. Recognizing and responding to this otherness involves the openness of a selfless or an otherwise seeing and speaking, through turning towards the other and facing the face with our responsibility, that is a sensuous *welcome* in our being for another. Such an experience of the face thus opens us to receive an excess of potential new meaning that realizes an enhanced understanding of the world, others and ourselves, that is a sensational *teaching* or event of ethical learning from another. In very short, these are the ethics of the face.

Lastly and ultimately, subsequent questions for my purposes are due for restatement: What about when a face is mediated? Can facing a face in an image, or in film, open up such encounters of ethical import? If so, does this happen in the same manner? Or, rather, is there a difference between facing a face in everyday life and facing a face in aesthetic experience? What – if any – are the ethics of the cinematic face? The next sections face these enquiries.



## The face and the image

Returning now to the question of how these ideas on ethics and the face can form a basis for considering audiovisual images, it seems to me that any given approach that relates Levinas to art and aesthetics involves a challenge that may be called “translatability”. Aside from the problem of taking certain parts from within the complex whole of a philosophical framework in general, which always presents the danger of partaking in what Robert Eaglestone notes as a tendency towards oversimplifying Levinas’s thought to make it more workable for oneself (1997: 98), the main issue remains his resistance to the notion that the ethical relation may happen by way of imagery or any other intermediary. In any case, considering Levinas’s idea of the face in relation to the image, thereby moving from philosophy to film, necessarily sets up several challenges that need to be confronted.

The primary one is Levinas’s view of the image. In his work, as has been stated, the epiphany of the face is presence and expression, wherein a being manifests itself and attends its manifestation, addressing whomever it is facing. “This attendance is not the *neutrality* of an image”, but a speaking to us that surmounts “what is necessarily plastic in manifestation”, he writes, before continuing this point in the following:

To manifest oneself as a face is to *impose oneself* above and beyond the manifested and purely phenomenal form, to present oneself in a mode irreducible to manifestation the very straightforwardness of the face to face, without the intermediary of any image (1979: 200).

Although Levinas is predominantly talking about the phenomenal appearance of the face of the other and the mental representation, or the image, projected upon it by our perception, and thus not the photographic image as such, either way the figure of the image is framed to be a mode of mediation that neutralizes the ethical meaning of the face-to-face relation. Looking closer at those rare occasions where he seems to speak about the image for itself, like in his early essay “Reality and its Shadow”, the song remains the same. Images are portrayed as placeholders; they are “shadows” or “allegories” that both obscure reality and relay a fixed vision of their objects, and therefore “every image is in the last analysis plastic” (1987: 8).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This essay was originally published in 1948 and remains indicative of Levinas’s general impression of the image. However, both here and in his later work, his stance on art and aesthetics seems more conflicted than consistent, as he often describes encounters with the ethics of the face through different artworks. For example, see the essays within the collection *Proper Names*, translation Michael B. Smith, 1996.

This analysis merits further analysis. Levinas views the image as plastic because of its fixity of form, in which the face is shown instead of something that allows us to see and silenced instead of something that is allowed to speak. The face *as* image therefore becomes “a form clothing a content”; immobilized, inexpressive, and impersonal, or in one strong word: dead. In contrast, the face *as* face has no form; it presents itself “outside of its plastic image” and is never finite nor fixed, or again in a word: alive (1979: 262-263). Once more, this opposition has most to do with meaning. The way Levinas seems to see it, an image always works to manifest something *as* something, disclosing these somethings along with a spotlight that simultaneously gives their meaning by way of the very access granted. Meanwhile, the face signifies meaning all by itself and cannot be disclosed as neither this nor that because it still remains beyond any idea or any image retained of it. Once again, this position also has to do with being. Whereas any work of art works towards assembling its world in a sort of system, making sense of everything in ways that are immanent to thought and thus assimilating the face into the same or a totality, into being itself, the infinity of the face of the other is rather transcendent to thought, only ascending from an otherwise than being.

“All art is plastic” (1979: 140), says Levinas, to summarize in short. However, does this really mean that there can be no space for the face in any artistic or aesthetic expression? And therefore, that there cannot be any ethical image of the face, or in fact any ethical image at all? Or, that the mediated face-to-face encounter can never be an ethical encounter? In the end, these questions may remain unsatisfactorily, even somewhat contradictorily, answered in Levinas’s writings, yet they provoke some pivotal queries for further study here: Can the face be *revealed* in an image? Can an image *be* a face, that is can images face us as a face, or can images *express* as faces do? Can the image *open up* the ethical dimension to the spectator?

Fittingly, this brings us to its adjacent issue, that is Levinas’s view of the spectator. Within his writing, as has been shown, the welcome of the face is not situated in any ordinary gaze, since vision itself acts as a vehicle for a fixating of the face in “faceless” manifestation, powered and possessed by perception. “Inasmuch as the access to beings concerns vision, it dominates those beings”, he writes, and continues his thought as follows:

The face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed. It is neither seen nor touched – for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the I envelops the alterity of the object, which becomes precisely a content (1979: 194).

While the human face itself may be able to break the spell of this fixation, or this invasion by self-identification, the plastic and the captive manifestation that an image makes, even if this is an image of the human face, will merely reinforce these mechanisms. Therefore, the act or fact of spectating images amounts to a fixed vision that automatically returns to the tendency of the gaze to reduce the face to a representation, object and theme, or to content. Hence, in reading Levinas, to be a spectator is to be silent and still, which incapacitates the ethical optics required for the face-to-face encounter, with the implication here that even if the face may break through its image form and in this way “visit” its own mediation, so to speak, its potential ethics will only remain obstructed by the unresponsive position of its onlookers thus failing to “welcome” its arrival.

In so many words, according to Levinas, being a spectator is basically analogous to being shackled by the gaze and grasp, something that is characterized by an inability to really see, and therefore also to recognize and respond to the face of the other, beckoning an even stronger likelihood of not taking responsibility by approaching and answering its ethical call. This, in due turn, thus introduces another cluster of queries for further survey: Can the face be *recognized* in an image? Can we *see* a face in an image, that is can we face and interact with images as a face, or can images be *experienced* as faces are? Can the spectator *enter into* the ethical dimension through the image?

Both these and the questions posed before them will guide the course for continuing the discussion of the relationship between the face and the image, as well as the gaze and the spectator, in this section, and for exploring more if and how these different tensions could possibly be reconciled. Before going on into that, however, first we should here also consider the way that these two challenges, that is the view of the image and the view of the spectator, crystallize into a third problem that further connects them. This is one of context, a thought process Levinas formulates in a particularly interesting way in a paragraph of his key essay “Meaning and Sense”:

The manifestation of the other is, to be sure, produced from the first conformably with the way every meaning is produced. Another is present in a cultural whole and is illuminated by this whole, as a text by its context. The manifestation of the whole ensures his presence; it is illuminated by the light of the world. The understanding of the other is thus a hermeneutics and exegesis. The other is given in the concreteness of the totality in which he is immanent, and which [...] is expressed and disclosed by our own cultural initiative, by corporeal, linguistic or artistic gestures (1987: 95).

In the unmediated face-to-face, however, any such cultural or mundane or worldly meaning derived from the context around the face of another is disrupted and disturbed by the abstract or absolute meaning that emanates from the face of the other. “This can be put in this way”, Levinas writes about this somewhat paradoxical line of argument, “the *phenomenon* which the apparition of the other is is also a *face*”, since as the face comes towards us, as it enters and expresses, as it signifies and speaks, it breaks through its mediation and manifests itself from behind and beyond the whole of the world of appearances (ibid. 95-100). To both repeat and rephrase a bit, the crux of the issue for Levinas is that the context of the image-spectator relation, in contrast to the face-gaze relation, does not allow the necessary “conversational” space. This is to say that his idea of the plasticity of images means they lack expressiveness while his idea of the passivity of spectators means they lack responsiveness, which therefore means they are not capable of “speaking” with each other. To me, this is key, because if they may be, there is then really no rhyme or reason to delimiting any essential difference between the context bestowed by an image of the mind or by an image of matter, if you will, or by the mediation of a more general cultural expression and the mediation of a specifically cinematic expression. This in the sense of having the “conversation” necessary both to open and engage the other in an ethical relationship, especially since this interaction first and foremost happens on the level of sensation and affection.

Thus, even though transferring or transfiguring these ideas about ethics and the face to mediated relations is still no easy feat, here re-tracing the space between the face and the gaze in aesthetics, that is the relationship between the image and the spectator, with Levinas will arguably provide the most promising course of action for discovering another way in which his noteworthy perspective may become worthwhile for considering the potential ethical case of facing the cinematic face – while attempting to avoid the pitfalls of oversimplification or misappropriation it also opens. Indeed, my stance is therefore not to simply contend that images are more than fixifying, content-clothing forms or simultaneously that spectators are more than objectifying, self-serving observers, and that neither are neutral or neutralizing by necessity, but active or have their own agency – or at the very least *can* be. Instead, my intent here is to explore these hypotheses more by theoretically engaging ideas around what images can also *be* and *do* and how they work *on* and *with* spectators.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Both here and before, the word choice “with” is a willed one. Whereas a lot of research that relates Levinas to art and aesthetics speaks of doing so despite or beside his vantage point, to me it seems key to see this as part of a dialogue or discourse with these ideas or views still in mind, even while developing my own perspective that goes beyond or towards an otherwise than Levinas.

To acknowledge and approach these challenges, then, it may be informative to start with a review of some established viewpoints on Levinas and images from within film and media studies, and the ways in which they deal with the so-called task of translation at hand.

In his book *Levinas and the Cinema of Redemption* (2010), as well as earlier article “Beyond Ontology: Levinas and the Ethical Frame in Film” (2007), Sam B. Girgus sets out to apply “a Levinasian lens” towards examining the way that some films seem to search for “a redeeming ethical experience that centers on the priority of the other” (2010: 5). Taking his starting point in what he chooses to label “the cinema of redemption” – a category of works ranging from pre-war, classical American cinema to post-war, modernist European films – Girgus here looks at different films in conjunction with different concerns and notions he finds in Levinas and then reads them in relation to certain ideas about filmic time, ethics-oriented storytelling, the ethics of the face of both characters or actors, and treatments of the feminine. Generally, his stated goal is to show how works in his established category may be said to enact or dramatize “the struggle to achieve ethical transcendence by subordinating the self to the greater responsibility for the other [...] the struggle for this transformation from being to ethics” (ibid. 5). Specifically, this entails a series of narrative and thematic analyses.

More interesting for this study, however, is that although Girgus underlines the value of a Levinas-inspired understanding of ethics for providing us with insights about film, he at the same time argues that such a usefulness or value may be obtained “in spite of Levinas’s religious and philosophical resistance to the potential idolatry of art”, and thus proclaims that “the controversial nature of his limited view of art and the image illustrates the need to go beyond Levinas to reconsider many of his arguments” (ibid. 17). While this perspective of going beyond Levinas does make sense, as the previous discussion of his contentious position made clear, Girgus’s elucidation of what is perhaps best portrayed as some kind of pattern of ethical attention within film storytelling, one that “repeats” in different historical or cultural settings, does not engage with this most core problematic to any great or meaningful extent, and thus leaves much to be desired when it comes to the ethics of the image-spectator relation itself. That is to say that while his interpretations of what these films are “saying”, by way of narrative dramatizations and thematic messages, are for sure intriguing ones, his lens on the cinematic images themselves lacks sufficient consideration of what they do together with their spectators. For this project, due to seemingly different points of interest, that is potential ethical relationships between characters in filmic space and potential ethical relationships between film images and its spectators, there is arguably not a productive connection to make in the case of approaching the ethics of the cinematic face.

Sarah Cooper, in her introduction to a special issue of the journal *Film-Philosophy* on Levinas and cinema, is similarly aware of the challenge this connection poses when she states that “there is no easy bond to be forged between this philosopher and film”, owing to the fact that his thought “bears a challenging relation to questions of vision and the phenomenological world of appearance, tending toward the anti-ocular and revealing an iconoclastic approach to images” (2007a: i). Nevertheless, she proposes exploring the fruitfulness of reading Levinas and studying film together so to consider “what film might say to, or about, his philosophy, as well as what his work can say to, or about, film” (ibid. ii) – which to me is more relevant.

In her follow-up article in the same issue, “Mortal Ethics: Reading Levinas with the Dardenne Brothers”, Cooper traces a parallel between the project of the Belgian directors and Levinas’s philosophy to show how they give form to a kind of Levinasian ethics. Focusing on narrative or thematic concerns, as well as on production choices and stylistic qualities, in four of their features, she finds these films to “articulate a relation between his ethics and cinema that Levinas himself never envisaged” (2007b: 85). Importantly so, Cooper’s analyses do not only concern dramatization but the embodiment of an ethical optics in the images themselves, as she looks at the framing of faces and the filming of bodies, as well as their positioning of spectators, and thus considers the ethics of the cinematic relation itself. Her key argument here is that certain films create a space for engaging with “the soul of the film” by procuring a spectatorial position of simultaneous proximity and distance that leaves alterity intact, or as Cooper herself writes: “It is the ability *not* to take the place of the characters by identifying with an image, that facilitates recognition of responsibility” (ibid. 85). This recognition of the impossibility or irresponsibility of seeing and feeling as they see and feel aligns with the way this thesis interprets Levinas’s ethical imperative as well as the idea this is something that is made possible by the manner a film mediates the relationship between images and spectators.

Furthermore, while Cooper’s analysis is limited to works by specific filmmakers who explicitly cite Levinas as their source of inspiration, in her book *Selfless Cinema? Ethics and French Documentary* (2006) – and its follow-up article – she extends, or more precisely had already extended, her approach.<sup>13</sup> Central to her theorization here, informed and illustrated by analyses of cinematic strategies from a select group of acclaimed filmmakers, is how the documentary form allows or even “compels” us as spectators to encounter the faces of others

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<sup>13</sup> Even though Cooper only looks at some filmmakers here too, of course, namely Jean Rouch, Chris Marker, Agnès Varda and Raymond Depardon, she to a larger extent also considers the potential ethics embodied in documentary as a mode of filmmaking, and by implication the cinematic medium itself. For her listed article, “Looking Back, Looking Onwards: Selflessness, Ethics, and French Documentary”, see the bibliography.

while ensuring their irreducible distance and difference. She conceptualizes this so-called “ethics of separation” through an idea of images that do “not only escape the control of the film-maker who fashions them but also the spectator” (2006: 6), ones that create an excess that exceeds our grasp and gaze upon them, and thus opens up encounters in which ethics “ruptures the being of documentary film” (ibid. 12). For the most part, however, Cooper seems to view this ethical dimension of documentary from the side of the film. Like in her later analysis, she once again specifically emphasizes the ethical “vision” of the different filmmakers and the way the different films “articulate” some or other relations to alterity through certain “selfless” cinematic gestures that implore a sort of distanced proximity. Details of these practices aside, the pivotal overarching point is basically how film images may facilitate seeing them differently than we ordinarily do, that is they may help us as spectators resist seeing the face of others as our own.

Much like Cooper, this project also suggests that cinematic images have the capability to mediate a mode of spectatorship that can open up an ethical space of experience, as well as follows the line of thinking that documentary form seems the most suitable choice to account for such a potential. However, from my perspective, while the key point remains how images can embody an ethical optics that encourages a position of response and responsibility in their very relation with spectators, neither vision, nor articulation or even intention seems enough for such an encounter to happen. To experience the face through images, or for the face of the image to express itself, the exigency lies upon our way of seeing, and there is therefore more to explore about the ethics from the side of the spectator.

Lastly, to finish this brief review, Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton, in their *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters* (2010)<sup>14</sup>, also situate ethics in the encounter between films and spectators as well as say that cinematic images may directly embody different ethical perspectives. Simultaneously, they indeed seem to give more consideration to spectatorial responsibility, introducing and highlighting ethics as a way of viewing and engaging with the face of the other through film (2010: 1-3). In line with their objective of broadening the scope when it comes to exploring cinema’s potential to constitute an ethical space of experience and in this way taking it towards a more general theorization, their approaches are an eclectic mix that connects diverse thinkers and different themes, ranging from representation and identity politics to spectatorship and the phenomenology of cinema.

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<sup>14</sup> Downing and Saxton also contributed to the aforementioned special edition of *Film-Philosophy*, with both their articles containing ideas and arguments that are further elaborated in mostly similar manners in *Film and Ethics*. In this sense, see also Saxton’s *Haunted Images: Film, Ethics, Testimony and the Holocaust* (2008).

Furthermore, only certain parts of Saxton's contributions, specifically the ones that look closer at the ethics of representing and spectating trauma or suffering on screen, are explicitly related to Levinas. Acknowledging the challenge of placing his ideas in dialogue with film, once again due to his "abiding suspicion of the aesthetic and the visual, which he associates with forms of domination and violence", Saxton argues that Levinasian thought "offers a crucial resource for re-viewing film in ethical terms", precisely because of this antipathy (ibid. 95-96). In her analysis, Saxton therefore explores the connection between Levinas's view on images and vision and the documentary practices of Claude Lanzmann in *Shoah*, where she finds the faces in the film to bear witness to these horrific atrocities while they attest to the limits of representing such traumatic experiences in both their resistance to any definitive readings and their refusal of any thematic revelations. These faces signify, as she writes, "something beyond the visible, something that eludes our vision and escapes our grasp", and thus provide a potential opening to otherness (ibid. 101-102). For this possibility, Saxton foregrounds the role of language and oral testimony, and that these witnesses appear first and foremost as "speaking faces, talking heads" in how the film addresses its spectators or listeners. When a survivor is speaking to us, she here suggests, his or her face, and the film screen itself, "opens onto a face in the Levinasian sense, insofar as it directs attention beyond itself towards an otherness which cannot be recuperated in images", something that charges the gaze with responsibility and changes the relationship between viewing self and imaged other (ibid. 103-105). In that sense, this idea of an ethical process that occurs in the encounter between the image and the spectator is similar to what my own perspective has in mind, yet here it still remains unclear how the spectator relates to and engages this process.

All in all, Cooper and Saxton both provide constructive notions for approaching the productive connective tissues, as well as the issues, between Levinas's philosophy and film, and thus discussing cinema in dialogue with his ideas about ethics and the face. While this is certainly very impressive work on its own, and simultaneously works as a quite fruitful base to further build upon through analogous thoughts about the way that film images embody or so mediate a mode of seeing that may open an ethical optics, for the purposes of this study, these perspectives still do not sufficiently account for the response and the responsibility of those who do the seeing. This means precisely that when it comes to exploring the ethical potential of cinematic *encounters*, the other side of the relation also warrants more attention, if we mean to really deal with the very relationship between (the face of) the image and (the gaze of) the spectator, that is dealing with the meaning of this particular mediated form of "face-to-face".



More appropriate for these concerns is the point of view of philosopher Hagi Kenaan, who relates Levinas's ideas to the image, spectator and the relation between them to explore the ethical potential of the visual. In *The Ethics of Visuality: Levinas and the Contemporary Gaze* (2013), Kenaan constructs a critique of contemporary "screen reality" where he claims that it reduces everything to what he calls "the frontal" of visuality, something that leads to spectators becoming estranged from its ethical dimensions. "The eye seems to have become used to tolerate everything", he writes here, about seeing itself being "subject to a constant manipulation that [...] blunts and depresses its sensitivity to important dimensions of the visual", and therefore no matter the horror or violence presented to it, "nothing can truly shake the eye" (2013: xv). He further sums up this point of departure as follows:

Everything on the screen is always completely available and equally oriented outward toward the eye. But, this availability to sight does not mean sincerity of self-exposure but rather the erasure of the very distinction between inside and outside [...] overt and concealed [...] levels of reality. On the screen, the depth dimension of the visual, the time of the visual, the invisible or the visual's Other, are annulled (2013: xvi-xvii).<sup>15</sup>

In this sense, Kenaan employs the notion of the screen in a metaphorical way for a visual culture where everything is merely shown and seen, which instills a blindness or inability to witness anything, which thus causes the disappearance of the face of the other. Due to this, his purpose is formulating the alternative to such a "rule of the frontal", one that "resists the fundamental condition of the screen". Thus, by way of Levinas's philosophy, he suggests an "ethics of visuality", one that is "sensitive to a dimension of alterity that never converges into the cohesive structure of the packaged 'something' presented to the eye", he writes, about our eyes being opened to seeing the face of the other: "not a seeing of *what* the case is, but of who is facing us – seeing her, seeing him, seeing you" (ibid. xix-xx). In short words, starting from Levinas's idea of the face and going towards the relation between the image and gaze, there is a space for seeing *otherwise*.

At the foundation of this ethical potential is a certain interpretation of the relationship between the face and the image, an understanding that is perhaps most concisely articulated in Kenaan's earlier article "Facing Images" (2011). Through seeing the image as a "unique kind of entity whose uniqueness lies in its manner of being", or the image as a being whose

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<sup>15</sup> Kenaan's intriguing critique of contemporary visual culture, virtual reality and the unethical pull of the eye is, to be sure, not done full justice by this introduction, which is only intended to serve as a summary sufficient to present his perspective in view of the purposes of my own project.

manner of being stays extrovertly visual in the sense of never only being present, but always self-presenting, addressing itself to or turning towards us, he argues that what matters is the way an image opens up visually, or its manner of facing us as spectators (2011: 144-145). Here, by reading Levinas's idea of the face and its enigmatic form of appearance in view of the Hebrew words "panim" (face), "panah" (to face) and "peniyyah" (facing), Kenaan finds that "the face is, in other words, essentially, a facing" and thus concludes that the face-to-face encounter in Levinas is a movement of mutual "turning" (ibid. 154-157). In this way, and in a very similar vein to my own view, as previously described, the face of an image refers to its facing and its manner of facing may reveal the ethical relation.

Furthermore, unlike most other scholars that undertake the task of relating Levinas to visuality, Kenaan does not see the before mentioned "tensions" intrinsic to the face as well as its relationship to the image as necessarily problematic, but rather as something integral to both the expression of the face itself and its presence as part of the dimensions of imagery. Put in a different way, this is to understand the visual and the non-visual aspects of the face as symbiotic in a sense, that is an unreconciled or unresolved state of suspense that is also a relationship necessary for the revelation of the ethical relation. In the image like in the face, as he argues: "The face of the Other is always there, as near as sweat to skin but also further than the moon" (2013: 29). As such, for Kenaan the face is constitutive to and can thus also concretely express itself within the visual space, whether in the sense of the face of sensation or the face of mediation, yet is never just there or found as the object of vision or perception, but comes into the world from a beyond, appearing in the here and now only as a becoming, with an invisibility that is still right there in the midst of the visible (ibid. 30-35). This does indeed make it seem clear that what Kenaan claims for any "imaged" faces is basically what Levinas himself claims for any "real" faces, where the face of the other is a presence to-be-revealed or to-be-recognized, and that we may come to recognize the facing of an image like we may come to recognize the facing of another's face.

The key question, then, is the way that such an otherwise than seeing or seeing otherwise may come to be. According to Kenaan, any potential ethical relationship with the face of the image needs us to somehow move past what comes before our gaze to encounter the who that emerges from behind or from beyond it. Yet, this opening of the eyes, or ears for that matter, as he says, "requires no more than the most elementary of gestures: 'from self to other'; not a mode of thinking or observation, no inner intention but responsibility – a going toward, being for the Other, responding to his or her turning, his or her face – giving" (ibid. 135-136). As such, his suggestion is ultimately another unique, alternative "vision" akin to

Levinas's "optics", where seeing the face, or seeing otherwise, presupposes a certain mode of "seeing" which transcends or transforms the frontal composition of the image and the fixated condition of the gaze to enter into the ethical dimension. In the end, although Keenan does not really go into any specific detail about what an ethical response or responsibility entails for us as spectators or how we may engage to see the face, that is how our giving or going from self to other works, both his well-founded understanding of Levinas and base analogy between the face and the image as well as the gaze and the spectator does lay down some foundational groundwork for approaching facing mediated faces.

Following this line of thinking, for me, the key to opening the spectator's eyes to these mediated ethics does not seem different in any essential sense from doing so in face of its unmediated counterparts. Like in our everyday life, as outlined in the previous section in my interpretation of Levinas, this involves a certain process of teaching and learning. While the face is the revelation of a possibility that provides the potential for an ethical relation, this does not mean this is necessarily realized. This speaks to the fact that although the face has its place in the image, or rather so in the relational space that opens "in-between" the image and the gaze or the spectator, its expression and its experience, and the ethical relationship itself, will necessarily be on a case-by-case basis contingent on both the image's manner of facing a spectator and the spectator's manner of facing an image. This is to say that images may help teach us as spectators to see the face of the other, yet this still demands or depends on that we also learn to do so, which is also to say that such an ethics of the mediated face will require images that allow otherness a space to reveal itself and spectators who have the ability to recognize and respond to its presence. In short, the one and the other are knotted to one another, both thus bound to each other for the ethical "face-to-face" encounter to be.

Even more concretely, ethics on the side of the spectator, whether they be called an ethical optics or otherwise seeing, are therefore first and foremost about our responsibility. This means turning towards the face of the other, and following the obligation to enter the encounter without reestablishing egoistic order by way of the self-oriented mechanisms that only return us to ourselves and our world, and rather open up to be led beyond the intentional processes of identification and interpretation that make sense and meaning *of* another towards seeing and feeling – or even being – *for* another. That precisely means facing not a what or likewise "me", but an otherwise who or "you", encountering their expression and experience as *theirs*, something that seems as simple as difficult to do. Conversely, this also means that we may not take upon ourselves this responsibility, effectively turning away from the face of the other and thus precluding the ethics of the encounter, something even simpler to do.

In the end, the encounter between the face of the image and the gaze of the spectator is hence seen as the potential site for ethics to happen in aesthetics. These mediated ethics, since this perspective is developed specifically as an approach to cinematic interaction, are therefore here, like Asbjørn Grønstad phrases well about ethics and film in a general sense, “located neither in the image nor in the viewer but in the precarious space that they share. The name of this space is cinema” (2016: 234). For a very short return, one in line with my former outline, this is to say that an epiphany of the face may come towards us by way of images, calling for the response and responsibility of a welcome from us as spectators, thus opening an ethical relation in-between us from which a teaching of the face can be learned. That is also to say, as my project always says, this process thus may be, as it is a *potential*.

Finally, thus addressing the questions at the start of the chapter, my claim is simply and straightforwardly that an ethics of the face is not “lost in translation” when mediated. This argument is based upon both the foundational idea that images are not essentially or necessarily different than are faces themselves in terms of intermediaries, although they certainly do involve another degree and different mediation, as well as the following idea that images may also make a difference by the way they emphasize and enhance the experience of a face. In the more general sense, there seems here a case to be made for the mode of seeing mediated by images having the capacity to facilitate some or other “face-to-face” relation, as well as specifically to also elicit potential encounters with faces in ethical terms. Now, as for considering and re-theorizing this cinematic relationship in a dialogue with Levinas’s ideas, confronting his suspicions about such a context while borrowing some thoughts from other thinkers to develop a somewhat otherwise perspective, this may well be a contentious but still productive way to approach the power, value and meaning of facing a face in film. On that last note, the scene is set to explore something more about the specific case of the cinematic face – one now ready for its close-up in the forthcoming section.

## The cinematic face

The face, or more precisely, mediated images of the face presented in the close-up shot, is widely considered to be the most primary or prominent site for our engagement and emotion within the cinematic medium. Indeed, ever since the beginnings of film and the emergence of thinking about film, film theory has explored and expressed the facial close-up as a privileged cinematic dimension, one that is capable of revealing the very “essence” of the face.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, the tenets of this thesis are nothing new but are instead inspired by different thoughts about the face and the close-up from three important philosophers of film.

The first is Béla Balázs, who as early as 1924, in *Visible Man*, wrote about the power of the close-up shot to provide a “deeper gaze” or “magnifying glass”, which he looks upon as something essential to the expressive language of the art form itself (1924: 27-28, 38-41). For Balázs, the close-up extracts the perceptual experience of the face, intensifying as well as subjectivizing its expression, giving the face an expressiveness that transcends space and time and exceeds the limits of the frame. As he further elucidates in his *The Spirit of Film*:

But if we see a face isolated and enlarged, we lose our awareness of space, or of the immediate surroundings. Even if this is a face we have just glimpsed in the midst of a crowd, we now find ourselves alone with it. We may be aware of the specific space within which this face exists, but we do not imagine it for ourselves. For the face acquires expression and meaning without the addition of an imagined spatial context.

The abyss into which a figure peers no doubt *explains* his expression of terror, it does not *create* it. The expression exists even without the explanation. It is not turned into an expression by the addition of an imagined situation.

Confronted by the face, we no longer find ourselves within a space at all. A new dimension opens before our eyes: *physiognomy*. The position of the eyes in the top half of the face, the mouth below; wrinkles now to the right, now to the left – none of this retains its spatial significance. For what we see is merely a *single* expression. We see emotions and thoughts. We see something that does not exist in space. (1930: 100-101).

Interestingly and surprisingly, as these paragraphs attest to, Balázs’s ideas about the face are partially parallel to those of Levinas. Although they certainly can be argued to part ways in their views on the perceptiveness of seeing or sight itself, there is still a related more general sense here in which the face and the imaged face, respectively, takes on a “life” of its own.

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<sup>16</sup> In this work, the focus is on writing about the close-up and the face in early film theory, or film philosophy, but there is also some other great contemporary work on the topic which discusses these classical works as well. See for example: Aumont (1992), Steimatsky (2017), and Doane (2021) in the bibliography.

Such a similarity also becomes apparent in his later *Theory of the Film*, in which he describes the face in close-up to be a configuration that is simultaneously concrete and individual but abstract and universal, both complete and intelligible as well as complex and inaccessible. Balázs thus points to a duality of the facial close-up as something that establishes closeness and creates a distance. Something that makes us feel that “we have suddenly been left alone with this one face to the exclusion of the rest of the world” (1952: 61) and that makes us face the fact that “we can see that there is something there that we cannot see” (ibid. 76). In this sense, the close-up helps us see, since through its revealing of new phenomena, sensations and meanings to us, it both widens and deepens our vision of life itself. Still, this seeing is not simply a seeing, Balázs says: “Good close-ups are lyrical; it is the heart, not the eye, that has perceived them” (ibid. 56). In terms of my approach, there are two key points of agreement to make here. The first is that close-ups allow us to see things anew, both the otherness of what we can see and what we otherwise cannot see, and thus also lets us see that we cannot see. The second is that close-ups are felt as much as they are seen, or sensed affectively as much as they are visually so, thus opening up another mode of seeing. Together this teaches us a certain sensitivity to reality itself that helps us see beyond the sphere of only ourselves.<sup>17</sup>

This same is the case, according to Balázs, with film’s “discovery of the human face” (ibid. 60). As mentioned before, the close-up transposes the face from its context into another dimension, where its standalone expression and experience comes forth. The facial close-up, in this way, turns into a “silent soliloquy” where the face “can speak with the subtlest shades of meaning” in an instinctive or intuitive language that “cannot be suppressed or controlled”, and by which it faces us as spectators from “the bottom of a soul” (ibid. 62-63). In that sense, the close-up helps us see the face, as it reveals a mode of expressiveness that our eyes cannot see as well as cannot be put into words, and thus opens onto the otherness of this most human of manifestations to render a face as if from behind or beyond the face itself – or like Balázs phrases it: “the invisible face visible only to the one person to whom it addresses itself – and to the audience” (ibid. 72-73, 75-76). Even though his point of view and my perspective are somewhat different in their purpose, there is a connected idea here that somehow the close-up of the face, or cinematic face, is a site or situation that turns us towards the face of the other.

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<sup>17</sup> Balázs concludes similarly with a strange but suitable musical analogy: “Before this you looked at your life as a concert-goer ignorant of music listens to an orchestra playing a symphony. All he hears is the leading melody, all the rest is blurred into a general murmur [...] This is how we see life: only its leading melody meets the eye. But a good film with its close-ups reveals the most hidden parts in our polyphonic life, and teaches us to see the intricate visual details of life as one reads an orchestral score” (1952: 55).

If Balázs may be said to basically make the argument that facial close-ups access the transcendent power of the face, Jean Epstein extends this conceptualization to emphasize its transformative quality. Based in his adapted idea of *photogénie*<sup>18</sup>, which is about what may be called the superadded magnification of cinematic mediation, Epstein pictures the close-up shot as something that “transfigures man” (1981: 13). Through such a “photogenic” manner of modification, that is bringing to view “any aspect of things, beings and souls whose moral character is enhanced by filmic reproduction”, the mechanical eye of the camera as well as the creative manipulation of the filmmaker together constitute a different kind of perception that now gives new “life” to whatever or whomever is captured. To paraphrase a bit, Epstein here goes on to poetically describe the capacity of the close-up for elevation and revelation, how the close-up reanimates, reifies and re-perceptualizes the world in ways that uncover or unfold what the human eye is usually not able to see, and hence embodies a mode of seeing that makes the invisible visible, the familiar unfamiliar, and the very ordinary extraordinary (ibid. 20-23). To me, such a transformative form of “seeing”, never fixed but always fleeting, aligns with the way this approach intends to adopt or advance the idea of a seeing otherwise.

More fittingly, Epstein’s quintessential model for this photogenic magnification by mediation is the close-up face. Close-ups, “the soul of the cinema”, do not only magnify the scale or scope of the face but simultaneously intensify its expressive and affective impact. “A head suddenly appears on screen and drama, now face to face, seems to address me personally and swells with an extraordinary intensity” (1977: 9), he first writes about this face-to-face or soul-to-soul, and later amplifies in the following way:

The close-up modifies the drama by the impact of proximity. Pain is within reach. If I stretch out my arm I touch you, and that is intimacy. I can count the eyelashes of this suffering. I would be able to taste the tears. Never before has a face turned to mine in that way. Ever closer it presses against me, and I follow it face to face. It’s not even true that there is air between us; I consume it. It is in me like a sacrament. Maximum visual acuity.

The close-up limits and directs the attention. As an emotional indicator, it overwhelms me. I have neither the right nor the ability to be distracted. It speaks the present imperative of the verb to understand. Just as petroleum potentially exists in the landscape that the engineer gropingly probes, the photogenic and a whole new rhetoric are similarly concealed in the close-up (1977: 13-15).

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<sup>18</sup> Originally repurposed by Louis Delluc and further elaborated by Epstein, *photogénie* is a multifaceted notion about the unique mode of expression and experience cinema provides. One that is, as Mary Ann Doane writes, “usually considered to be theoretically incoherent [as it] is designed to account for that which is inarticulable, that which exceeds language and hence points to the very essence of cinematic specificity” (2003: 89).

His beautifully hyperbolic language notwithstanding, here it seems to me that Epstein also understands the close-up face as some kind of facing, a presence that comes forth before our gaze or turns towards us as to create a space of a close and compelling encounter. Meanwhile, as he writes elsewhere, this magnification works like a distancing as well. In Epstein's view, one of the rarest qualities of cinema is precisely the machine intelligence of the camera eye, the fact of inherently being an eye independent of the eye itself, a characteristic that enables it to escape "*the tyrannical egocentrism of our personal vision*" by destabilizing our subjective center of gravity and disturbing our everyday tendencies of perception, and the close-up thus becomes an instrument for encountering the new, the strange or the other (ibid. 17-20). In this sense, especially since he often refers to it as something "moral", not unlike Levinas's or my position on the matter in different manners, he conceivably touches upon the way in which the cinematic face, or even more generally the cinematic image, has the capacity to confront the self-referential fixation of vision as well as facilitating another optics altogether.

Building upon Balázs and Epstein, while arguably going even further, Gilles Deleuze straightforwardly claims the facial close-up is a face. Opening his chapter on the face and the close-up in *Cinema 1*, he writes: "*The affection-image is the close-up, and the close-up is the face...*" (1986: 87). Elaborating – in Bergson-inspired terms – on an idea of affect, Deleuze conceptualizes two poles of the face, types of face close-ups, and thus forms of face. On the one hand, there are reflexive faces distinguished by their "faceifying" outline that work like reflecting surfaces and express a "quality" common to several different things. On the other, there are intensive faces characterized by "faceicity" that work through micromovements and express a "power" that passes from one quality to another (ibid. 88-91). Now, all the while this speaks to the fact that Deleuze's ideas on the face and the close-up are part of a larger philosophical framework, the most interesting line of reasoning here is that anything that displays these features has been treated like a face, or so has been "faceified", and therefore renders a face without needing to resemble one. In terms of this approach, this is even more interesting when it comes to his view on the face itself, where he indeed repeats that a close-up does not deal with nor treat the face in some or other way, but instead the idea that "there is no close-up of the face, the face is in itself close-up, the close-up is by itself face and both are affect, affection-image" (ibid. 88).<sup>19</sup> Summarizing this is best done by Deleuze himself:

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<sup>19</sup> Sketching these ideas from Deleuze is somewhat problematic, as his two monumental *Cinema*-works are not only extensive on their own, but also intersect with his earlier writings, in particular his and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. However, precisely the same point can also be made for both Balázs's "physiognomy" and Epstein's "photogénie". In any case, this section does not intend to expound these thoughts but only to introduce them into the discourse or dialogue with my own idea of and approach to the cinematic face.



As Balázs has already accurately demonstrated, the close-up does *not* tear away its object from a set of which it would form part, of which it would be part, but on the contrary *it abstracts it from all spatio-temporal co-ordinates*, that is to say it raises it to the state of Entity [...] Firstly, there is a great variety of close-ups of faces: sometimes outline, sometimes feature; sometimes a single face and sometimes several; sometimes successively, sometimes simultaneously. [And] in all these cases, the close-up retains the same power to tear the image away from spatio-temporal co-ordinates in order to call forth the pure affect as the expressed (1986: 95-96).

The affection-image, then, allow us to see, Deleuze writes in Epstein's words, "the 'feeling-thing', the entity" (ibid. 96). Elucidating – in Peirce-indebted categories – such a separated yet dependent set of expression and expressed, Deleuze characterizes this manifestation of face-affect as something that is what it is without relation or reference to anything else, that is what it is for itself and in itself. This has two key meanings. One is that although the close-up is or turns into face itself, it also changes the way the face appears to us. By dismantling the ordinary triple function of faces as individuating, socializing and communicating, it no longer allows for our disclosing of a role or character but opens us onto discovering a haunting or uncanny apparition that bears a "strange resemblance to the other" (ibid. 96-100). The other is that close-up faces express affects as complex entities or "power-qualities", ones that only refer or return us to the very faces that express them. Thus, facing an affection-face becomes an affective event or encounter with not the actual but the possible or possibility of a beyond, the expression of possible sensations and ideas that are felt and not conceived, "potentialities" or "virtualities" or what is always "new" in experience (ibid. 102-107). In this way, the close-up or cinematic face may be seen as turning into or turning us onto facing otherness.

Although Deleuze and Levinas hold different philosophical outlooks and conceptions of the "being" of the face, still there is a fascinating connection between their respective ideas about the "doing" of the face. For both, facing a face becomes an encounter that in essence, while in slightly different senses, expresses and affects us above and beyond codification to reveal singular existence that instills or imbues us with an experiential surplus. For both, this encounter is also potentially ethical, where Levinas sees faces as opening an optics that may reorient our relation to others and ourselves, while Deleuze views cinematic faces, and film images, as a mode of experience with a power to reconnect us with our belief in the world.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This refers to some of Deleuze's writing in *Cinema 2*, and therefore some excerpts from it will be noted here: "The link between man and the world is broken [...] Only belief in the world can reconnect man to what he sees and hears. The cinema must film, not the world, but belief in this world, our only link [...] Restoring our belief in the world – this is the power of modern cinema [...] The question is no longer: does cinema give us the illusion of the world? But: how does cinema restore our belief in the world?" (1989: 171-172; 181-182).

In the end, Balázs, Epstein and Deleuze, whilst offering different interpretations of its specifics, all conceptualize ideas that close-up or cinematic faces become some or other kind of beings of their own, with an expressiveness that profoundly affects spectators' experience beyond the bounds of its audiovisual manifestation. In one way or another, like Mary Ann Doane writes in an essay about the close-up in film theory, all three see the facial close-up as something involving "cinematic difference and specificity [...] the invocation of an otherwise unknown dimension, a radically defamiliarized alterity" (2003: 91). These fundamentals are also key to my own idea about and approach to cinematic faces, both in view of what they may be and what they may do with us. The cinematic face is here a double-faced term that has two different yet interlinked dimensions; one is a face in the sense of being a cinematic image of a face, the other is a face in the sense of cinematic images themselves becoming a facing by the way they open up audiovisually and affectively turn to face us as spectators. For me, these facets together are key for the cinematic face to be or become a site for us to encounter otherness and to emerge as a situation for our seeing otherwise, and therefore for engaging an ethical relationship in the interactive space between film and spectator.

Meanwhile, this certainly does not mean that each cinematic face is or does the same, nor that every cinematic face necessarily engenders any ethical relations. My claim is rather that images *can* express as faces and that spectators *can* experience images as faces, that is *that there is* a potential ethics of the cinematic face. This is a theoretical idea that of course only raises further questions: How does this work in practical terms? What do these ethical relations with cinematic faces concretely mean? And, is it possible to show how there is, or even that there is, such a potential in the film-spectator-relation? These are questions best explored through analysis, analysis that faces specific as well as specifically cinematic faces – something to be faced in the following chapter.

## II:

### RECONSTRUCTING UTØYA

#### Constructively reconstructing terror

Cinematic faces play a prominent role in the documentary film *Reconstructing Utøya*. This is a Scandinavian co-production that premiered in Norway in October 2018 and was directed by Carl Javér and creatively produced by Fredrik Lange, as well as written by these two Swedish filmmakers in cooperation. The film received critical acclaim, winning several awards while being nominated for the Nordic Council Film Prize, but it only had a limited run in cinemas with disappointing audience numbers.

To provide some context to the film, it portrays some of the surviving victims from the terrorist attacks at Utøya on July 22, 2011, where 69 mostly young people that were part of the Workers' Youth League's annual summer camp were killed, the majority by gunshots, while over a hundred more were wounded. In the making of the film, about six years after the fact, four of the survivors from those horrific events – Raket, Mohammed, Jenny, and Torje<sup>1</sup> – are brought to an empty film studio, or a so-called “black box”, in a camp area in Northern Norway, and requested to recount their experiences. Their testimonies take on a very specific form, however, as the survivors are told to themselves “direct” a group of young volunteers in “role-playing” reconstructions of their own memories or stories from that fateful day.

Through four sections respectively devoted to its four survivors, in addition to a short closing section with them all together, *Reconstructing Utøya* follows them before, during and after the reconstructing acts, documenting their oral testimonies as well as their processes of reexperiencing the testimonies that are acted out in front of them, and thus allows spectators, along with the volunteer participants, to be part of their therapeutic activity. Using a mixture of techniques from documentary and drama therapy, where an unseen psychologist was also present for the two-week duration of the project, the stated intention of the film is precisely to help everyone involved as well as everyone watching face, deal with, and understand what happened. As its opening text announces: “The survivors tell their stories for their own sake, but also for ours. For the present, but also for the future. This film documents that process”.

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<sup>1</sup> In order of appearance, as written in the end credits, the full names of these four survivors are the following: Raket Mortensdatter Birkeli, Mohammed Saleh, Jenny Andersen and Torje Hanssen.

This analysis explores precisely how the film documents this process, looking closely at the way in which the survivors and their stories are portrayed through both reconstructing and observing and recounting and narrating, which here together constitute their respective testimonies. This means that it traces the way the film's composition of cinematic faces, ones that face our gaze as spectators, provides conditions to open encounters that may facilitate a process of teaching and learning and lead us into an ethical space of experience. In this sense, this also means that it considers the ethical potential of the relationship between the film and the spectator to mediate a mode of responsibly seeing these survivors, or facing these faces, as other in a manner that may have the capacity to enhance our experience and understanding of terror and its consequences.

As for its practical form, the analysis is organized chronologically, mainly following the mediated relationship between the film and spectators by way of describing, evoking, and reflecting on it through all the different parts of the film as if experiencing it from beginning to end. The intention here is not to try to emulate the position of any hypothetical spectator as such, however, but to outline the encounter with how the film audiovisually opens up to us in terms of what may potentially happen there. Therefore, despite the fact that this is a detailed presentation of the film, one that involves close analysis of many different shots, sequences and scenes in a way that goes beyond what a single or specific viewing experience may yield on the registrable perceptual level, still it suggests the manner in which the very unfolding of its potential cinematic interaction may engage an expressive and affective relationship that makes for an ethical mode of encounter. Meanwhile, even though attention is given to every section and to all four of the survivors, this is not done in equal measure. To carefully analyze the entire film would be an everlasting task, and the analysis will thus first and foremost be limited to what seems necessary to elicit and evince the film's specific manner of mediating "face-to-face" encounters as both an ongoing and overall process throughout. Specifically, the case here is that the testimonies of two of these survivors, faced in the first and final section, make up most of the chapter, while those of the other two, faced in the second and third section, are combined as further illustration of the film's conspicuous and continuous form of doing audiovisual documentation. In short, the purpose of such a structure is to study both the film's presentation of cinematic faces and its "facing" quality as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Although the film has been released on physical format in Sweden, something that is still not the case here in Norway at the time of writing, this analysis is based on first watching the film in cinemas and then several more reference viewings of a screener copy – courtesy of Norwegian co-producer Polarfox AS and distributor Tour de Force. All time codes refer to this copy, which has a total duration of 1:38:08.

## Encountering the face

*Reconstructing Utøya* begins with an already mentioned prefacing text, which in short words sets up the context, topic and motivation for the project it documents. Like with any film, its start acts as a premise that to a certain extent predicates the mediated relation it will establish with the spectator, but here it also thematically prearranges the reality of its material before it even begins. Audiovisually, however, the film opens with a slowly tracking establishing shot of the camp and its surrounding area, displaying a picturesque view of Norwegian nature with snow-covered mountains and frost-covered lakes accompanied only by the sound of the wind, before a musical theme cues us into the film's opening credits. Rolling over black floors lined by white tape which are soon to become the stage for its reconstructions, the credits end with the title of the film superimposed over a long shot of sixteen young people – who are the four survivors and a group of twelve volunteers – encircling a bonfire.

As the name “Rakel” comes on screen, after cutting to another establishing shot of the camp, its first section begins. The film introduces us to her in a shot from behind as she opens the curtains of her sleeping quarters and looks out the window into the surroundings, cuts to a shot of the outside, and then to a close-up profile of her looking out. No words are said in this sequence, but its emphasis on Rakel's face and gaze here functions to introduce her as one of the survivors as well as to indicate the section's focalization with her.<sup>3</sup> Following another cut away from and back to Rakel standing by the window, with her face now in profile from the opposite side, we now see and hear her speaking to someone on the phone about both arriving at the camp and being tense about the challenge the film presents. As the scene continues, we follow Rakel walking from the room to a dining area, through handheld camera shots backing away from her from in front as well as tracking after her from the back, interspersed by some more images of the area and of the other participants, until a cut puts us in frontal close-up of her face. Against an unfocused dark-bluish background, we watch on as she talks about her expectations about the upcoming reconstruction process with, as can probably be figured, two other survivors in a sort of “shot-reverse-shot” without point of view shots. The unfolding of this sequence is very interesting in several ways, thus before looking further into the visual aspects of Rakel's presentation here comes a quote of what she says:

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<sup>3</sup> A term originally coined by literary theorist Gérard Genette in 1972 (see Genette 1980), “focalization” in film refers to the perspective from which its narration relates to the spectator. Although the notion is conceptualized in different ways and refers to different aspects, here it simply means how the film aligns our focus with Rakel.

I am a bit tense about how I am going to manage to explain this to someone else in a way that makes me able to reanimate, or, how should I put it, make real the memory that I have, that I can visualize so vividly. For this memory is so powerful, there is so much emotion connected to it, and I remember it so clearly and detailed. I tried to see this as a training exercise, only psychological. That is, when you exercise, with your body, physically, you break your body down. But when you recover, you come back stronger. So, I am hoping that it is *that* curve one will get from it.<sup>4</sup>

While the mentioned introduction of Rakel is like preliminary exposition, in that it establishes a person and provides spectators with both a name and a face, there is here something more to this second “face-to-face”. In line with how films and spectators are traditionally inclined, this first brief encounter provides an adequate amount of contextual information to allow us to identify Rakel as one of the survivors, at the same time setting up her spatial and temporal surroundings and establishing a narrative alignment with her. This also enables a mechanism of thematization, as these opening images of her give us the means to manifest an image or a representation of her as something graspable, to relate to a something that can be categorized and conceptualized from our position as onlookers, that is with reference to ourselves and our own world. From the initial facial close-up, as well as from the film’s opening text, we as spectators are therefore able to ask and answer ourselves through a sense-making “what”, thus giving Rakel a meaning precisely *as* something: as Rakel, an Utøya-survivor.

This next meeting, however, already starts complicating these habitual mechanisms. As Rakel speaks, where her words express meaning easily related to spectators’ own realities, articulating what or how she feels in accessible terms, all the while the specific memory that she alludes to certainly is not, the expression and the mediation of her face is something else entirely. Spotlit by the nondescript yet stylized features of the frame around it, with the clear grey walls of the room now turned to muddled blue, her face contrasts sharply with the faces of those listening. In the middle of her monologue, when the camera moves even closer into an extreme close-up, her glassy eyes and lively facial movements are intensified. Her face here, in this cinematically expressed facing, already attests to something intangible and affects or at least signals an awareness that there is something there that we cannot see, do not know and thus are unable to relate to, thus permeating her words with a new and excessive meaning. In this way, even if not recognized at this early point, the film’s close-up portrayal of Rakel’s face opens up a space for an otherness that may also prime us for what is to come.

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<sup>4</sup> *Reconstructing Utøya* (Javér 2018), approximately 04:25-05:25. My translation, from the original Norwegian. Henceforth, all following quotes from Rakel are not referenced specifically, but are also all my own translations.

In the following scene, the film opens on a medium frontal close-up of Rakel's face, now looking down, set against a blurred black and blue background and subsequently cuts to an angled, overhead rear shot of her as she draws a circle on a piece of paper. Soon, she starts explaining that she is sketching an outline of the island and then a long overview shot situates her in the empty studio. This shot is quite striking: we see Rakel crouching in the middle of the room, viewed from the side and at a distance while accentuated by the artificial space of blue "floors" and black "walls" that are surrounding her figure. As she then begins recounting her seeing someone being executed, a somewhat sudden cut returns us right back in front of her close-up face, before the scene continues with different images of Rakel lining the black box floors with white tape and ends on a rear shot of the back of her head as she gazes back at the result. After some other intermediate frames, mostly in medium close-ups and medium long shots, of Rakel talking with the director about finding and soon also testing sounds to imitate the sound of gunshots for her reconstruction, the film cuts to a medium frontal close-up of her in the black box. Now switching between this facial close-up, one enveloped in an otherwise black frame, and another profile long shot that again eye-catchingly emphasizes her body in space while standing on the tape-lined surface, we look and listen to her phone call with a friend that was also on the island that day, the first part of which goes as follows:

Hi, I am at the film camp now, at the reconstruction, and I just had a question for you. Do you remember the fence we talked about? And I was like, I jumped over it and got stuck. And we talked a little bit about it a while after, that I had been calling for help and stuff, and that people had been running past, and then you shouted "Sorry, Rakel" and then kept running... Do you remember that?

Prior to Rakel's final question here, after she finishes the previous sentence, there is a marked pause. With an emotionally vague look on her face, she takes a deep breath, before the frame returns to its former profile long shot and holds it for several silent seconds. After the next cut returns us to the frontal close-up, she asks her question again. There is then another pause, in which the camera moves sideways and inwards into a three-quarter close-up, before she upon an affirmative answer continues speaking. When she does, asking her friend for permission to include this moment in her reconstruction session, the camera goes on slowly moving from a three-quarter to frontal close-up and then back again into medium close-up. Capturing while simultaneously reframing her facial expressions, the shot lingers for more than half a minute, before a cut away ends the scene.

These two scenes, in comparable ways of “doing” as the one detailed earlier, arguably effect certain breaches in the sense-making – or in another phrase “same-making” – relations between film and spectators, the starting point for its construction and its disintegration being the presentation of Rakel as a name and a face. As the opening for both these processes is the introduction and identification of a person, something that indeed encourages some stronger senses of engagement and emotion in spectators than do all the abstract numbers and faceless images of victims and survivors of the sort that ordinarily dominates news reports and online information concerning terrorist attacks. Emphasizing specific experiences, personalizing and humanizing its consequences, is thus an important step towards an enhanced understanding of what terror does and what it costs. As the Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgård wrote in his essay “The name and the number”, shortly after the attacks on July 22: “To understand what happened, we only need one name and one face: it happened to you” (Knausgård 2011).<sup>5</sup> At the same time, it is arguably the manner of such a magnification, or indeed the “facingness” of the personalization in this presentation, that makes or breaks or perhaps breaks to make, so to speak, the potential of ethical relations. To genuinely understand what happened, we thus need more than one name and one face: namely the ethical *facing* of the you it happened to.

*Reconstructing Utøya* facilitates such a facing through its portrayal of Rakel. In these scenes, both the images of her face and ones where it is absent seemingly impede spectatorial propensity for self-referentially identifying and interpreting, or so “reading”, her experience. Two aesthetic or affective strategies are especially salient in “renegotiating” these relations. The first is the disjunction between what we see and what we hear, the images shown and the words spoken. Similarly yet inversely to the aforementioned disjointed shot, the facial close-ups within occur promptly at moments of estranging oral testimony. Closely framing Rakel’s face precisely at the point she recounts witnessing an execution, as she eerily cheerily finds a possible sound to emulate gunshots, and perhaps most poignantly when she recalls her friend ignoring her calls for help and consequently so leaving her to die, the relatedness of her face is effectively charged with an alterity attesting to a reality far removed from our own. As for the second one, that is the way the film most often chooses to cut away from her face during moments of possible recognition into unwonted long shots that place her in the strangeness of its artful creation of space, evocatively saturating her with an unfamiliarity or even unworldly quality that further hinders our ability to look at her from the point of view of ourselves.

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<sup>5</sup> Originally read by the author himself as a guest host on a Swedish radio show on August 14, 2011, this quote is taken from a written version of the essay published in the Norwegian newspaper *Klassekampen* on August 20, here translated to English by me.



Simultaneously, of course these scenes also invite us to engage with Rakel, as these strategies are still effectuated alongside a presentation of her and her experience as someone and something that encounters us as spectators both up close and personal. Not surprisingly, again this is cinematically about her face, and it especially concerns two dimensions of how the film's imagery opens up visually, or more concretely audiovisually. On the one hand, this is about proximity. Through predominantly giving spectators access to her and to her face by way of camera positions that are physically close, which here means a nearly exclusive use of close-up as well as medium close-up framing, the film implements a closeness. In addition, through a cinematography that has a distinguished utilization of both movement and duration, one that follows her motion and lingers in her vicinity, the film maintains an attendance. In so many words, it encourages contact. On the other hand, this is simultaneously about intimacy. Through spatial isolation, with shots of other participants few and far between and with the presence of those behind the camera rarely made explicit as well as the already sequestered arrangement of the black box by itself, and temporal seclusion, with no images of the past interlaced into its composition, the film installs a privacy. In short, it encourages exposure. Close-up to but also closed-in with Rakel, positioned to look at her face and listen to her words, as well as its and their absence, these practices coalesce to create a sense, or perhaps rather a sensation, of *being there* with her, in the here and now of cinematic space and time.

In this sense, what is thus argued to be the film's discouragement of assimilatory processes of identification, objectification and thematization does not involve alienation to a degree that severs the relation itself, but indeed the development of an otherness felt, one that still concerns us. Phrased the other way around, this arguably instead amounts to a cinematic encouragement to engage in another mode of encounter. My argument here is therefore that the film, whether this is by intention or just by virtue of its openness towards its subject, from the manner of facing of its images steadily teaches us a manner of facing its images. That is to say that what *Reconstructing Utøya* does through how it makes cinematic faces, reframed in reference to Levinas, is request of us to enter a "relation without relation". As spectators, what we are here asked to do or how we called upon to respond is to learn to have a relation of responsibility. This entails the recognition of Rakel as other and responsiveness towards her otherness of experience as her own, that is the acknowledgement of the impossibility or irresponsibility of thinking and feeling with or into her, as if we were her or as if we were there with her, and the approach of internalizing a seeing and feeling for her, being there as *being for*, that is responsibly facing the face with concern only for her.

All this culminates in the dramatic scene of the reconstruction. Starting with a shot of the studio from the outside, two more of the volunteers walking into the black box follow, at first moving away from and then from the reverse angle coming towards the camera, where the latter pans over into a rear view of Rakel, slowly tracking in on her, before cutting to a frontal close-up of her face now placed right at the edge of the frame. While the preparations begin with Rakel picking a volunteer to be her role-playing stand-in, a series of pans and shot exchanges focus on the faces of these two and other faces in the group as Rakel talks to them about her experience at Utøya in the time before the attacks. “I was 16 years old, and a happy and sporty Finnmarking, and optimistic, I would say. A bit naïve, maybe”, she says, and then has the volunteers do a funny cheer they used to do at her camp about codfish, likely to ease the tension.<sup>6</sup> As the conversation goes on about the excitement of meeting boys and going to a disco, with the group now in a circle on the floor, the mood changes back again when Rakel finally states: “Anyway, we didn’t get to experience the disco that year...”, accompanied by an over-the-shoulder shot of a volunteer as her facial expression turns from smile to frown. The next few images show Rakel instructing the group about the imaginary setting and how frequent the sounds acting like gunshots should be, and then introducing the scene, in another facial close-up, from the moment she first saw the terrorist. Rakel’s last statement before the reconstruction starts, one that is made particularly haunting by the straightforward way it is said, is this: “What we see is Breivik, holding a gun in his hand and executing a boy, a tall boy, there... So, really, everything can start when she starts making the bangs”.<sup>7</sup>

During this display, the film keeps guiding our spectatorial relationship with Rakel. However, while still focalized through her, the introduction of all those other faces, just as much or more to witness her testimony as contribute to it, also provides us an opportunity to follow the volunteers mirroring this process. In this way, they may be said be “placeholders” of sorts, not only as role-playing actors or embodying “props” but also for us through taking part and trying to relate to the presence of alterity. Yet, they are never made a medium for us to substitute ourselves, as they are not given names nor any exposition or exposure, and thus arguably rather work as means to reinforce the relationship with Rakel already established.

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<sup>6</sup> “Finnmarking” refers to the fact that Rakel comes from Finnmark, the northernmost region of Norway. Also, for those interested, the mentioned cheer goes: “Hyse, torsk og sei – Nord-Norge, hei, hei, hei!”, which may be translated as “Cod, cod and cod – Northern-Norway, hey, hey, hey!”, as these are all called codfish in English.

<sup>7</sup> Apart from this one single mention of his surname in its first section, the terrorist himself is only referred to as “he” or “him” throughout the rest of the film. While it is not stated if this is a coincidental or intentional choice, either way it works as somewhat of an erasure of the perpetrator that further supports the film’s crucial focus on the survivors – and those who were murdered – from this atrocious terrorist attack.

Then comes the reconstruction proper, with a duration of just under two minutes, one that is basically structured like a sort of action reaction sequence where the film cuts back and forth between the role-play and Rakel observing the act. Opening with a facial close-up of her in profile, here placed on the right side of the frame against a pitch-black background, in what follows the handheld camera catches her face as well as her body through a variation of both ranges and angles, sometimes moving from one to the other within the same shot.<sup>8</sup> After the act gets to her being left behind, that is the part that was alluded to in her earlier phone call, the next cut takes us to a lingering close-up going almost from profile to frontal at the same time as Rakel turns towards the camera, with her eyes watering and her mouth softly opening into a deep breath. Thereupon, a duo of three-quarter frontal close-ups from the opposite side of the axis capture her seemingly glazed expression in the wake of two shots of her stand-in getting free from the referenced fence and huddling up with a group of survivors – all to the continuous sound of illusory gunshots.

Suddenly, it all just stops. Now an extreme long shot reveals Rakel standing in the background with a group of “dead kids” lying on the floor in front of her. While the shot itself holds steady and stays almost silent, that is only with the ambience of the low “droning” of the ventilation system and the soft but gradually more audible sound of her shoes touching the ground, she slowly walks past them, gazing at them, and towards the camera. In this way, the image “reframes” itself from a long shot to a close-up, where at medium length and the halfway point of this 45-second take, the camera moves in frontally to face her face. Gently nodding her head and looking at the unseen director just off to the side of the lens, Rakel here turns, into profile and then into a rear view, to look back at the “scene”, all the way into an opposite side profile. She lets out a big sigh and runs her hands through her hair, looks back one last time, before turning back and staring into space. This extraordinary shot, the eighth and ultimate one of Rakel during the sequence, is the manifestation of the section’s climactic facing, its most immediate and affective expression of a face in Levinasian terms, and in the vocabulary of my approach its most powerful *cinematic* face. For what do we really see when we see her face here? What does it say to us? What is she thinking? What is she feeling? Or how does her face express her experience of terror? In this face, maybe we do see emotion for itself, as Balázs says; maybe we do gaze upon another soul come to life, as Epstein says; or maybe we perceive affect expressed, like Deleuze says.

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<sup>8</sup> Here for reference, the next three shots of Rakel in the sequence are the following: A three-quarter frontal close-up, a medium shot that moves into a three-quarter frontal close-up, and a long shot of her situated on the left side of the frame watching as the reconstruction is taking place.

In any case, encountering her face here is deeply moving, yet there is no thought or emotion there we can logically comprehend nor empathically apprehend, or perhaps even recognize altogether. Her expression remains enigmatically inaccessible and inscrutable throughout the shot. At first imperceptible due to the framing as well as the fact that Rakel looks away as she walks towards the camera, even as the image moves into frontal close-up her face stays distant and difficult to gauge, before her turning obscures it from view. Still, this cinematic facing is both hauntingly expressive and affective, something that arguably happens not despite its unavailability to our gaze and grasp but rather because of it. The face that manifests itself here is something concretely there before our eyes but simultaneously it is something that stays beyond us and is not there for us to see. During these moments, what faces us or emerges from our encounter with Rakel on the level of sensation, from the side of her face and back of her head as well as from her gentle nod, her body-shaking sigh and her absent-minded eyes, is essentially an epiphany of the face. That is to say that what affects us here is the alterity of a terrorized or traumatic experience that remains unrepresentable within the images themselves, but that somehow may still be sensuously felt and understood. That is also to say that what moves us there, or even what is there, is the overwhelming expression of an otherness that is speaking directly to our sensibility itself.

While this shot on its own is the most striking cinematic face of the section, it remains my claim that this facing may be realized by the way *Reconstructing Utøya* mediates Rakel's face as well as a mode of facing her face already from the very start of the film. For me, its crescendoing power as a cinematic face is founded on the fact that the film has been steadily teaching or leading us as spectators into an ethical space of experience, and simultaneously from us learning to see her face as other. This is also something that is only further illustrated through her reconstruction sequence. Indeed, through positioning us to look at her looking – not to gaze at her face but rather first and foremost to face her gaze – those facial images do not attempt to make her expressions intelligible by aiding interpretation of them. Instead, these expressions present themselves as a particular form of address that questions the value of such a spectatorial response. These cinematic faces or facings bear witness to more than we as spectators can see or hear, expressively speaking to thought, emotion and experience beyond self-referential relation, and thus effectively asking us to bear witness to something that is more than can either be seen or heard. In other words, the film may therefore be said to mediate a “selfless” mode of spectatorship, one that encourages leaving ourselves, or at least our own comfort zones, and learning to experience the encounter “otherwise” – an optics that is key to the realization of its potential ethical relationship and resonance.

This lesson is critical in the rest of the section. In what follows, the film allows us to see and hear Rakel recounting more of her experience, interspersed with reaction shots of the volunteers doing exactly that, looking and listening. In a series of long, medium and close-up shots, capturing her with tears in her eyes and with her voice cracking as she speaks, pausing to try to keep from crying, she here tells everyone about calling her father but having to hang up because the gunshots were coming closer, and seeing the terrorist aiming at her and her friend. The reconstruction then restarts, in a short continuation of the reenacted “Rakel” and “Tarjei” running away from the resounding sounds of shots, whereupon the latter falls out of frame and to the ground while releasing a terrible series of screams.<sup>9</sup> The film now cuts to a profile close-up shot of Rakel, where the camera moves around her into a frontal close-up all the while she forcefully exhales into her hand. She then goes on to describe seeing her friend bleeding in the water ten to fifteen meters below her and deciding to keep running to go find a hiding place. Sitting on the floor beside “herself” in the next shot, she now tells us that she noticed a snail crawling up her boot, noting the following: “It was very strange, because then I realized that life goes on. You could see that nature kept going”. Finally, her testimony ends with the memory of spotting and waving to a friend going by her in a boat, and the mediation of her face smiling, laughing and waving.

Rakel’s happy face ends the reconstructive session, but the section itself finishes with a shot of the group walking back out from the black box, one where she comes out last and goes straight into hugging one of the other survivors waiting for her outside. When the hug is over, after not seeing her face yet hearing every relieved breath, she lets go while the camera simultaneously turns into another and also closing frontal close-up of her face, echoing the exceptional one before. Gently smiling with tears in her eyes, she runs her hands through her hair before again looking off to the side and staring into space. Even though the shot is only some few seconds long, once again this last facial close-up still speaks in volumes without her ever saying anything. Here, everything from her misty eyes and the mild twitch of her lips to her instinctual and idiosyncratic bodily gestures express themselves in a microscopic but magnified and meaningful silent kind of language, something that as the encounter with or the experience of someone else or another becomes louder than words or any single or still image of her face. This is thus another case of the cinematic face as a face and a facing.

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<sup>9</sup> This named “role” refers to Tarjei Jensen Bech, another survivor from the Utøya attack, who has also been an important advocate for solidarity with survivors in its aftermath and a political activist in other areas.

Afterwards, a short epilogue follows. Starting with an establishing shot of the camp area's surroundings, we see images of Rakel fixing and riding a bicycle, getting wood for a bonfire, grilling a hot dog and interacting with the other participants, all located outside the artificial circumstances of the studio and alongside a beautiful musical score. Through this sequence there are no close-ups of her face, nor many close-ups altogether, and there are no clear words spoken, with this mediated presentation functioning primarily to reiterate her reintroduction as "who" – or the otherwise meaning of Rakel, an Utøya-survivor, as *her*. All the while the film's focalization with her now comes to an end, the ethical understanding borne from our encountering her face remains and reverberates.

## Faces beyond faces

The following two sections of *Reconstructing Utøya* do unfold in a quite similar fashion, both opening with new establishing shots of the camp area where the names “Mohammed” and “Jenny” respectively come onto the screen.<sup>10</sup> Even though these sections certainly have their differences, the basic cinematic approach or perhaps rather address of the two correspond both to each other and the section that came before. Thus, the time spent with the survivors prior to the reconstructions is considerably shorter at this point, feasibly because the mediated relationship with the spectator has already been well established, something that again speaks to the film as a process. Still, the prominence and presentation of cinematic faces in both their documented testimonies holds a certain “facingness” that encourages a continued responsible mode of encounter, opening the potential space for the face beyond the face.

In the first section, Mohammed is introduced through medium and medium close-up shots, at first while playing some pool and then showing who we will soon know as Jenny around the setting for his reconstruction. When they walk into the black box, the handheld camera tracks after them from the back, moving around to the front into a close-up two-shot as they momentarily stop, then tracks backwards from the front as they move forward again. All the while, Mohammed is explaining how the white tape lines on the floor represent the interiors of the main building at Utøya and guiding his companion through its layout. The camera stays and moves with them at medium distance as they stop and move, while they share their experiences of where they were and what they remember from when the terrorist first landed, until a cut takes us to an extreme long shot that engulfs the duo in the artificiality of their studio surroundings. When they start talking about jumping out of the window and running away, the film returns to a close-up two-shot, with both faces in profile and looking at one another, and then pans between them in a frontal reframing as they first light-heartedly and then more thoughtfully exchange anecdotes about the one falling into a skateboard ramp and the other seeing someone falling down there while carefully going past it. “Imagine if it was me you saw”, Jenny says while biting her nails. “Yeah, it might be that I saw you there”, Mohammed responds while scratching his neck. As this first scene ends, both their close-up faces have already had a change of expression that sets the stage for what is to come.

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<sup>10</sup> The four sections following the four survivors all have different durations, approximately running between the following points of the film: Raket – 03:00-22:30, Mohammed – 22:30-48:35, Jenny – 48:35-1:04:45, and Torje – 1:04:45-1:32:00. Moreover, the more general closing section runs for about three minutes, before credits roll.

Moving to the next section, Jenny's introduction opens with an extreme long shot of her crouched in the middle of the blue floors of the black box, surrounded by the darkness of its curtain walls and to the sound of tape being rolled out. Bridged by a high-angled profile close-up of her face that tilts down to her hands rolling the tape, it soon returns to a rear long shot of her standing in the middle of her finished, white-lined work, alongside only shadows and the sound of silence. Subsequently, the film relocates to the backstage of the studio and to a long shot of her and the director, sitting and drinking coffee together on a small yellow couch. What follows is a series of frontal close-ups of Jenny's face, closer and closer framed, talking about her nervousness about the upcoming reconstruction. "I want to but, like, I don't know", she says, pausing for a long while, before saying "it is like my body doesn't want to". All close-up, these continuous shots stay in front of her face as she starts crying, holds her hands over her face, lets out a big sigh, and then in an even tighter frame removes them to reveal a face saturated with a stream of tears. Jenny looks down, to one side and the other, and then up, wiping away tears as she does, before the film suddenly cuts to a profile medium close-up shot where she stands up and walks slowly towards and into the black box, while the camera follows her from the back.

Unlike as these introductions are on the face of it, they continue the construction and deconstruction process, that is the way the film keeps facilitating certain relations that breach fixation. While the initially carefree portrayal of the former eventually turns more fraught, the instantly careworn portrayal of the latter reverses her cheery reentry at the end of the previous section, where the two are shown joking around while reflecting on their own experiences by a small lake, both cases sharing a sense of the intangible coming from their changing faces. Once again this is first about naming and facing, albeit technically also happening the other way around with one of them, and then "re-facing", so to speak, with changed relatedness. Identifying, situating and narratively aligning us with the two survivors, what may be called the film's "othering" manner of audiovisually opening up, that is both the way that it faces its faces and the way its faces thus face us as spectators, is simultaneously already in effect from the outset, in a sense facing up to one another through close-ups.

Both sections go on from this with the before, during and after of the reconstruction act itself. Mostly through different close-up variations, we here meet Mohammed and Jenny meeting the volunteers, choosing their stand-ins, and then stepwise narrating their experience and observing the role-play that follows, in a dual structure of reconstructing and recounting their own stories. In the following, the rest of this section traces some illustrative examples of the arguably "facing" quality of these encounters.



During Mohammed's testimony, two particular facings stand out. The first comes to the fore while he watches the volunteers act out his description of what he experienced before hearing the first shot and seeing the terrorist. Making use of the palpable sense of place that was created through his section's introduction, a series of medium close-ups of the actors as they sit and play around is accompanied by a trio of medium close-ups of Mohammed's face, smiling, laughing and joking about the way he was almost carried away to join in. However, as the act continues with Mohammed observing "himself", his friend "Ismail", as well as the other unnamed "roles", his face and the mediation of his face both noticeably *turn*.<sup>11</sup>

Starting with a rear shot tracking after and moving closer to the back of his head while he saunters forward with his left hand grasping his chin, the film cuts to a three-quarter, near-extreme close-up of his face at the right edge of the frame. In juxtaposition with the radiance of this face just seen, his expression is now almost startling in contrast. Inattentively staring and biting his lip, at first his face seems expressively inert or dispirited, and then with a cut away and back distressingly emotive, intensely staring with redly swelled eyes. The camera keeps close as he soon pinches and rubs the bridge of his nose, then his eyes, before running his one hand over his entire face in a motion ending with him resting his cheek on his hand while looking down into the ground. Holding this position for a moment while blinking and breathing, he now looks back up, almost directly at the lens, then steps back, turns away and turns back again into a three-quarter close-up at the left edge of the frame, looking off to the side. Suddenly, or at least surprisingly in a sense, he softly smiles, starts walking forward and speaks: "It almost feels like being a fly on the wall, you know. I see it all again". This last close-up shot lasts over half a minute, with the camera both staying close and moving with Mohammed to frontally come face-to-face, thus mediating the minutest dimensions of his expressions. Emphasizing his face against the dark obscurity of the background, and even fading out the sound of chatter of the act around him as he momentarily abandons observing, it is as if the film insists on spectators not falling into distraction, but on taking in and facing the face appearing before us, and the affect from this audiovisually sustained turning towards us instills even his reemerging smile with a kind of visible invisibility of alterity. He sees it all again, but for us it is rather a turning away from being just flies on the wall and turning towards facing more than we can see that allows the face beyond the image to reveal itself.

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<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that Mohammed is asked by the volunteer assigned to stand in for "Ismail" who he was, to which he answers that he was a close friend who died on the island. This refers to Ismail Haji Ahmed, who is also later introduced by face when Mohammed shows the volunteers pictures of him during a backstage break – Ismail was 19 years old when he was killed on Utøya.

The second one follows the end of his reconstruction. Finishing with his role-playing stand-in checking if the group of kids lying by a rock prop are still “alive”, only to the sound of her distressed panting and their deafening silence, the film cuts to Mohammed’s close-up face. With an expression that is grave yet glazed, as if his mind is somewhere else, he twice softly closes both his eyes, blows air into his cheeks to forcefully exhale, rubs his watering eyes and then his entire face, before he engrossedly looks back up. Now, following a medium close-up rear shot of him looking back out to the “scene” – in a quite striking image with the imaginarily “dead kids” lying there right in front of him in the foreground while several other volunteers are watching on in the background – another cut returns us to his face, staring and slightly nodding before walking up to his stand-in. Looking at her, in a two-shot with her in unfocused profile and him in a clear frontal close-up, he says: “It is just that this image is so powerful. The way they are lying there is, like, so spot-on. It is like they have seen that image and are imitating it. It seemed like those three stayed together, that they shared a lot of love”. As he utters the last line, the film cuts to a shot of the deceased trio leaning against the rock, and then back to Mohammed again rubbing his eyes and his face, sighing and snuffling, the camera staying with him as he turns away from and then back to frontal, in both directions, while his stand-in moves into frame to comfort him.

Next, the mood and his face both turn once again. Here, the camera follows him around while he now “wakes” them up and moves into another facial close-up as he says: “It should have been this easy there as well”. Smiling and laughing, his expression sharply contrasts those immediately preceding it, as he continues: “It was a good feeling, actually”. In a three-quarter close-up encompassed by the stage curtains of the black box, one akin to similarly composed shots before it, Mohammed looks over to the off-screen director and says he feels like joining the rest of the group – “just to be there”. Then he does just that, with his stand-in following suit, and the session comes to an end with a long shot of them all together; sitting on and around the mock rock, without speaking to each other – just being there.

Being faced by Mohammed’s expression, or the close-up cinematic facing of his own seeing the revisualized imagery of his – to us – inaccessible and incomprehensible memories, one that now also becomes a formidable expression of solidarity and togetherness, once more forcefully obliges a response and responsibility to another world of experience. Encountering Mohammed here, and soon Jenny too, the film mediates a mode of seeing that may indeed be seen as an ethical optics or perspective, as Cooper and Saxton would perhaps also put it, one that, as Kanaan would perhaps also phrase it, may open us onto an otherwise seeing. That is our own open-eyed facing of faces beyond faces.

In Jenny's testimony, two moments of face mediation are also especially engaging. One develops from the group reconstructing the chaos that arose when Jenny and the other people around her in the main building on the island first heard gunshots. Starting off with close-up shots of her narrating how she and her boyfriend, previously named as Tommy, ran outside hand-in-hand, her following call for action sets in motion a series of back-and-forth shots and quick cuts between the volunteers running and screaming and her clapping to make sounds of "shots". Coming back to a profile close-up of her face, this for the third time, the handheld camera now slowly moves around her to frame her frontally, staring out at the act, before cutting to a shot of her hands and her anxiously fidgeting fingers that pans back up to her profiled face. Accompanied by silence, the shot lingeringly unveils her earlier vigilant stare turned vacant, tracking in close and then towards a frontal close-up as she blinks, almost closes her eyes but looks out into ostensible nothingness.

Afterwards, when she continues to recount, the film now cuts between frontal and rear medium close-ups, with the rest of the group in front of her in the background of the frame, in which she talks about waiting and looking for her boyfriend after he stopped to help someone else, but having to keep running as she heard the shots closing in on her position. The act then starts again, and it does so with shots of her stand-in coming across a group of "dead kids" on the floor and yelling at them to wake up before running away. In what follows, a profile come frontal come opposite side profile close-up of Jenny's face is intercut with a shot of the actors feigning lifelessness, abruptly returning to her gaze as she averts her eyes, looks down into the ground, starts to cry and places her hand over her face. Once more to resounding silence, with the camera stationed close-up in front, her snuffle as she uncovers her contorting face and looks up towards the ceiling and her deep breath as she looks back out towards the stage echoes out. Connected by a long shot of the illusory pile of corpses, the scene ends with two two-shots of Jenny comforting "herself", the first showing her hand caressing her stand-in's shoulder and the second framing their faces in an embrace where Jenny's solemn expression gives way to a sideways glance and smile at her designated double. Through its presentation emphasizing Jenny seeing and speaking, not immersing us in the act but engrossing us in how she faces it being acted out, this entire scene presents itself as an address from her affected face as it affectively confronts us with its otherness.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Unlike *Utøya: July 22*, Erik Poppe's fiction film released in the same year, which cinematically recreates the experience of being on the island as the terrorist attack happened – appearing to its audience as if shot in a single take and in real time – *Reconstructing Utøya* focuses less on any immersive dimension of reconstruction than on the more affective dimension of witnessing the reconstructive process itself. This scene is one example of that.

Another affecting and salient facing opens up in the ending part of Jenny's section, where she recounts her memories of what happened when she had gotten safely off the island. Following a shot sequence of her stand-in and her as they visually reimagine floating on their backs in the water, head-to-head, one ending in a gorgeous overhead extreme long shot joined by the lovely sound of string instruments, the film quite abruptly cuts to a close-up of Jenny's crying face. With her eyes filled with tears, she heavily inhales and exhales before she begins telling the volunteers about being brought into an ambulance and borrowing a medic's phone. As she recounts calling her mom and hearing her scream her name at the sound of her voice – "That was probably the best thing I have ever heard", she says – the gravity of her expression is instantly alleviated. From almost being unable to even speak, while snuffling and wiping away tears running down her face in medium close-ups only broken up by opposite ones of the reactive faces of different volunteers, the mere mention of her mother instills a light in her eyes as well as elicits a smile that soon also becomes a soft laughter. Still wiping away tears, her speech is now subtended by a buoyant tone and her face by a joyous look, both of which remain throughout the rest of her storytelling.

Moreover, on top of Jenny's effervescent facial expression, its mediation as a facing only intensifies. As she now continues speaking, the film cuts to an extreme close-up, here closely framing the contours of her face in a lingering take where her disposition grows even sunnier while she reminisces about reuniting with her boyfriend. Describing how she was on a bus coming up to a meeting point for survivors and saw him waiting there for her, and how she then started banging on the window, with the rest of the passengers following suit, her face beams and she happily laughs as she bangs on an imaginary window. Afterwards, the volunteers act out this very moment and finish the roleplay with a long hug between the two actors standing in for Jenny and Tommy, while the scene itself ends with a trio of close-ups of Jenny looking on, softly nodding, smiling widely, and releasing a relieved, delighted sigh.

As these examples attest to, the expressions that emerge in face of Jenny are certainly more overtly emotional than both the survivors portrayed before her. Yet, the mediated mode of encounter that has been developed, following the more enigmatically arresting cinematic faces that we have already faced, arguably help lead us away from empathically reading her emotion by any reductive presumption of feeling what she feels, and rather lead us towards ethically bearing her emotion – feeling sad for her sadness and happy for her happiness. The face beyond her face, one that gazes at us and states its otherness from us, resists sharing and possession and elicits caring and compassion – thus encouraging our embrace of the face.

## Embracing the face

Like the preceding three, the fourth section of *Reconstructing Utøya* starts with a name on the screen – “Torje” – and shortly thereafter a face. Opening with close-up shots of hands playing the piano and unfocused, profiled extreme close-ups of a face, its first frontal facial close-up is an image of an image. More concretely, it is a photograph of a child’s face, that of a young, smiling, red-haired and blue-eyed boy lying in a bed of anemones, as seen inside a scrapbook. Subsequently cutting to a three-quarter close-up of its adult equivalent, namely Torje and his gently smiling face, and then returning to the photograph as he removes it from its pocket, the film lingers on his hands holding the image in close-up, as he starts speaking:

I liked everything, I thought everything was exciting. I felt content in the world. And I liked new things every day and wanted to be new things every week. I wanted to be a circus artist, astronaut, director, musician, sumo wrestler. Everything between heaven and earth, really. I joined AUF [the Workers’ Youth League] when I was 9, all on my own actually. I was going to be prime minister, you see.<sup>13</sup>

While Torje talks, we watch him flipping through pages as well as taking out photographs to look closer at them. Interspersed with another couple of close-up shots of his face, we can see several pictures of his childhood. After a while, he points out his older brother Viljar in one of the photos, whereupon a cut to another close-up photo of the two takes place, one in which their two heads are poking up just over the top of a wall of concrete with the sea behind them. Torje flips the first to reveal a second, then a third, and finally a fourth, one where his brother is gone and he is alone. This image of an image now ends the introduction scene.

In addition to focalizing the section with Torje, in contrast with earlier preliminary expositional parts, this scene also provides spectators with a larger amount of what we may well call background information. It does not solely introduce Torje as one of the survivors, but gives a view into his childhood, his family, and his personality. Through a stronger focus on relatable aspects in establishing him as a person, thereby also allowing for a deeper sense of engagement from the spectatorial point of view from the beginning, the film runs the risk, or rather increases the probability, of also making him into a character. A characterization by way of images that may be grasped and represented in the self-referential sense of these terms – a manifestation as a “what”, as a something: Torje, the Utøya-survivor.

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<sup>13</sup> *Reconstructing Utøya* (Javér 2018), approximately 01:05:20-01:06:05. As in the other parts of this analysis, all following quotes from Torje are not referenced specifically but are all my own translations from Norwegian.

However, if by intention or not, this greater degree of identification, one that arguably more readily invites processes of thematization and even objectification, is soon counteracted by the sheer intensity and impenetrability of Torje's face. Immediately following this scene, the setting now relocates back to the black box, where his reconstruction soon gets going too. This next sequence begins with a rear medium close-up, where the camera moves towards the back of his head and around him to his face, revealing the volunteers walking in behind him before he turns away. Cut to a series of shots of Torje as well as several faces from the group as he commandingly picks out role-playing stand-ins for himself and his big brother, and then into a longer frontal close-up of his face as he provides a brief primer to "himself" about his experience on the island. "I was about yaa small. I was 14, but I probably looked like I was 12", he says and goes on: "So, uh, my role at Utøya was sort of like a mascot, because I was much younger than everyone else". As he speaks, set against the dark background, Torje's face is radiantly animated. First looking up and down, smiling and laughing, his expressions turn more somber, his mannerisms calmer and his face harder, as he is questioned about his relationship to his brother. "My relationship to him was very good. He really took care of me and, eh", he says and then stops, while the film cuts away to a close-up of his stand-in and her anxious face. In the next series of shots, mostly composed of medium and medium close-ups ones, we see and hear Torje setting the scene, explaining his tape lines and the scenario of his story to the group, and shocking them by pointing out a spot where ten people were executed. After a short convo with the off-screen director about sounds, the preparations end with a new frontal close-up of Torje's now steely expression, blankly staring downwards into space before he calls out action and looks back up, while the jumbled rumblings of footsteps surround him, and the reconstruction proper begins.

Already, the cinematic presentation of Torje's changing face is affective and effective, as these enthusiastic expressions drastically clash with those enigmatic expressions seemingly roused by the thought of his brother. First prefigured by the disquieting signs of his brother's photographic disappearance, if you will, and thereafter pronounced by Torje's almost visceral facial reaction to speaking about him, his face amounts to a facing that alerts us as spectators to the fact that there is something beyond what we can see. Thus, any early attempt at relating to or making sense of him as a "personage", that is to say as something that is categorizable and comprehensible from our personal frame of reference, is later sensuously unsettled by the audiovisual mediation of his face in that it reveals the presence of an otherness that also calls for another kind of sensibility.

Set up generally in the same manner as its antecedents, here the act itself opens on a medium close-up of Torje that pans over to become a close-up of his hand as he conducts the first couple of “gunshot” sounds, but it also differs from the form of “action-reaction” of the others through his more active participation in the proceedings. At first, the scene advances forward similarly to the rapid pans and sudden cuts of action cinematography, where Torje joins in on the action to direct what happens and where his symphonic finesse soon turns into forceful arm thrusts to symbolically “shoot” the volunteers down. He then steps away and puts his arms behind his back and thus stops the bangs. From a medium shot position, the camera moves in towards his face as he simultaneously turns towards it as well, combining into frontal close-up, before he walks out of frame while the film cuts to a two-shot of his chosen stand-ins on the floor looking emotionally shaken. Afterwards, things nearly play out in reverse, with Torje performatively narrating and the actors reacting. Before looking closer at how this scene opens up to spectators in a cinematic sense, this is what Torje says:

While all this is happening, people start jumping down. When I saw that people were doing that, I wanted me and Viljar to do it too. So, I say: “We need to jump”. Viljar says: “No, we stay here”. After another two, three seconds, I say: “Yes, we have to jump”. What happens then is that... I jump down. *You* are shot down. You get back up. Get shot. Get back up. Get shot. Get back up. And get shot. While you are doing that, *you* stand there watching, without being able to move... What *you* do, the last time you are shot... This time you are shot in the head. Then, you wave your hands and try to get me to swim away. And that’s what I do... And you stay down. While I swim around the cape... here.

Torje’s monologue begins off-screen, bridging the aforementioned two-shot of the volunteers and a subsequent three-quarter close-up of his face, after which the film for two plus minutes cuts back and forth between his facial close-up and close-up shots of the role-playing “Viljar” and “Torje”.<sup>14</sup> Taking up about half its duration, the first part is comprised by a forty-second close-up that holds steady on Torje as he recounts his memories of these events. Once more against an encompassing black background, this long-lasting and intimate take captures and accentuates the expressive movements of his face as he speaks, broken up by some audial pauses filled with ventilation droning, and then abruptly steps back, puts his hand to his nose as he snuffles, while his face turns redder and his eyes well up, and puts his hand to his chest.

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<sup>14</sup> For reference, after the soon to be mentioned long take close-up, the film returns to the same or similar three-quarter close-up shots of Torje’s face three more times, respectively following opposite profile close-ups of his brother’s stand-in, the second of which also pans to turn into a two-shot focusing on his own stand-in’s face.

Torje's close-up face, the cinematic face that emerges from this image, is astounding. Even though its power is probably magnified by all the faces or the overall faciality that we have already faced, it is at the same time as if this facing abstracts itself from its context. If we here only consider storytelling or stylistic continuity, his gaze and intense stare, as well as his words, is certainly directed at the volunteers that are sitting before him. Yet, this situation is completely lost to us in the moment, at once removed from its spatial and temporal place. As spectators we are alone with his face, or at least we feel like we are alone with this face. Both through its scale and its span, this facial close-up creates a relation of closeness, but through those unrelatable sensations from the face it lets us see and speech it lets us hear, it simultaneously demands a relation of distance. Here, to rephrase Béla Balázs, we are left alone with a face to really feel the "there" that transcends the limits of the frame itself. There, by way of the cinematic mediation of his face, Torje's face turns and faces us, and gazes at us with its expression of otherness. Here, there and everywhere, this is an encounter with an overwhelming sensuousness of sorts only perceived by a responsible sensibility, by seeing or feeling otherwise, by our *facing* the face.

Furthermore, this affective facing is not really mitigated by the "reintroduction" of space and time. As touched upon, in the second part of the sequence, just as Torje shifts to using second person addresses towards the actors directly, the film conjoins reaction shots of his addressees. However, by returning to Torje's close-up face at its most dramatic points, as he recalls his brother thrice being shot and then a fourth time in the head, such abstraction is reiterated with each return. The faces of "Viljar" and "Torje" provide no leeway either, as they are saturated with faces not of their own, but instead lending face to the invoked *you* of the spoken testimony. In this sense, the words Torje says and the saying of his face combine to provide a language that speaks to and therefore gives face to a reality of experience that is not identifiably similar, nor intelligibly different, but that is absolutely *other* than ours.

Thereafter, as Torje also starts demonstrating, almost startingly dropping out of frame with the camera quickly tilting down and following suit as he twice simulates getting halfway back up while flailing his arms before falling back down, he asks: "Do you understand...?". Following an affirmative answer from the volunteer, Torje stands back up and signals for the reconstruction to resume once more, but the question still endures. Neither actor nor spectator can understand, yet something is understood. None of us can relate to his reality, yet there is relation. We can see that we cannot see, yet we can sense another way of seeing.



When the act eventually restarts, it duly returns to the sound of bangs and the sight of action shots of the actors playing out the scene as was just described. Cutting to a close-up of his hand conducting the gunshots and then panning over to a close-up of his face, repeating in reverse, the film also uncovers new images of his resolute, almost confrontational expression. Repositioning into a long shot of “Viljar” and “Torje”, here on the floor holding each other with other volunteers in the background, we as spectators are now positioned to watch on, in one take, as they act out the terrorizing crescendo of the recounted memory. “Torje” stands up and runs out of the frame, “Viljar” attempts to do the same. However, he is shot down. He is shot again and again, struggling to get back up while flailing his arms just like the motions of Torje’s demonstration, and then again, this last time staying down. After finally cutting, the ensuing shot is a rear close-up of Torje, one that follows him as he walks as the handheld camera tracks after him until he turns around to face the lens again. His face is blurred and out of focus, but comes back into focus just as he says “Good”. Ever so slightly nodding his head while turning into profile, the camera now moves around frontally to “re-face” his face. Seemingly paler than he was before, yet redder in the cheeks as well as the eyes, he stares into space as if staring into nothingness. He blinks. He blinks again. His lip shivers. Every microscopic movement of his countenance emanant with affective sensations. Suddenly, he turns, steps back, then forward, and turns back to face us. He bites his lips. His face tightens. His eyes focus. Finally, like a jolt, he looks up at the director just off to the side of the frame, commandingly asking before turning away: “Can I see it one more time?”.

These shots and this end question speak to something that gives *Reconstructing Utøya* a quite unique quality, one which the director himself after its cinema release spoke about in words that work almost like a mission statement for the film:

In the media, the focus on the terrorist was very strong, like he had seized the memory of what the terror at Utøya was, and thus for me there was a need and a will to turn the focus so that when we remember Utøya it is not him we see, but the survivors and the youth. They are the rightful bearers of the story. So, already from the beginning there was this idea to focus on the survivors, to let them control the course of events and to control their own stories – compared to 2011, when they were there on Utøya and had no control [...] There is a great strength in testimony [...] The witness was there and this witness experienced what happened [...] If there is anything this film shows, it is the courage of these survivors, and the power of youth. An important part of the process for me as a director was to take a step back and not direct too much, but to let them be the directors of their own story (Javér 2018).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Quotes from an interview conducted by Atli Bjarnason and published in *Rushprint*, October 17, 2018.

Another restart then starts, again to resounding bangs and the two now closer framed stand-ins. Cut to a medium close-up of Torje, once more vigorously lunging his arm with an expression on his face nearing the unnerving in its intensity, its determination, its willfulness, as he keeps repeating the gesture. Five times, six times, seven times. However, his movement then slows down and his facial expression, as his eyes lose their acute focus, seems to soften. Eight times, nine times, ten times. As the motion goes on, his expression looks increasingly like one of enervation as well as rumination. Eleven times, twelve times, thirteen times. Now, upon the last one, the film cuts to another profile close-up of Torje's face, right at the edge of the frame, as he ceases "fire", while nodding or perhaps even shaking, and turns away to end the act with a shot of the back of his head.<sup>16</sup>

Once more, through this scene, the film images trace Torje's changing face in a way that captures an expressivity that is interchangeably engaging and estranging. Its framing and filming certainly establish intimate contact or connection, but simultaneously they ceaselessly encumber mechanisms of self-centered involvement by the way these very techniques make aesthetically and affectively vivid, in heightened close-up detail, the innately strange, maybe even uncanny, alterity of his facial articulations. In doing so, like in the previous sections, the film arguably mediates another manner of spectatorship of mode of seeing, one that evokes Levinas's other-oriented optics in that it relationally educates us on how to encounter its cinematic faces ethically. That is to say that cinematically facing his face thus guides us to turn away from a gaze that reduces through representation and towards a gaze that recognizes its responsibility, turning towards a way of facing where we indeed do not identify with or imaginatively "live into" Torje and his experience, not in the moment nor in memory, but instead attend to and compassionately "take upon" ourselves the reality of his testimony.

Such a call to duty is further reaffirmed shortly afterwards, as we come back into the black box to see Torje and "Torje" sitting on the studio floor talking about the reconstruction. All close-up, she asks how he feels, and he answers: "For me, it is like I am able to feel it for half a second and then there is a machinery in me that gets going right away, that stops me from... taking it in. So, it just stops". When she then asks if this is something that has always been this way, he answers that it started after he came back from Utøya, reiterating the sensed recklessness of collating or comparing his lived experience with our conceptual referentiality.

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<sup>16</sup> One complication of doing close analysis of the cinematography of a film with this subject is the fact that it does involve a lot of mentions of the word "shot". While its inclusion is necessary for the sake of terminology, especially since a film analysis would basically not be a film analysis without using it, still it is my hope that it does not come across as inappropriate or insensitive.

This is not only done through words, as this short moment simultaneously makes a stronger point through images. Before his reply, Torje smiles, sighs and shakes his head softly, looks down and then up, and breathes heavily as his gentle face turns grave. Now, as we await his answer, the camera stays in a frontal close-up of his face in an extended silent period before he starts talking and moves further in towards his face when he pauses. After he finishes his statement, there is a cut to a close-up of his hands, anxiously clasping one another in his lap, and then a cut straight back to a frontal close-up of his face. These images say as much, and maybe much more too, than the words themselves do, as they do not work as an explanation of how he feels but rather as an expression of the inexplicable feeling of how it all must feel.

Meanwhile, this conversation is also like a brief intermission from the reconstruction itself, one that continues with shots of the volunteers hanging out in the backstage area of the studio, where two of them soon yell out for a group hug and then run into a huddle. After a while, Torje joins the long shot as well as the hug, before a tracking close-up of him holding hands with his stand-in walks the whole group and us as spectators back into the black box.

In the scene that follows, Torje carries on his testimony with the group around him. Alongside images of him speaking, demonstrating and instructing his stand-in, we hear him talking about swimming to find a cave to hide in, while having no recollection of his brother being shot, moving into a close-up as he shows how he tried to look as young as possible in the hope the terrorist would not kill him if he did. His story now takes another dramatic turn when he talks about swimming back out towards a boat only for it to be shot at and turning around to “see *him* running towards where I am”. While he speaks, lingering close-ups of Torje’s face, only split by a shot of “Torje” listening, accompany his description of drowning but throwing himself back up just as he was about to, and him showing how he gasped for air. As the act restarts again, the scene is almost solely made up by a series of exchanging close-ups of Torje and “Torje”. When the latter role-plays swimming, diving under and swallowing water, and motionlessly drowning, the former soon crouches down and observes in silence, and when the latter swiftly pushes herself upwards while gasping for air, the former similarly raises his head and softly mimics her movements. Lastly, coming in over a tracking shot from the back of “Torje” and “Viljar” comforting each other as they walk out from the black box, the film’s musical theme gently plays while the studio’s black entrance curtain fills the frame.

During a further short intermission, in a two-shot composition of Torje and “Torje” now back outside and only broken up by a single long shot of the area’s leafless trees and snowy mountains, she asks him if he thinks about the dead. Sitting with his back against a container with his hands clasped in front of him, he stays silent and stares into the distance,

while the soft sound of the wind almost turns thunderous, before he looks at her and answers: “A day has never passed without me thinking about those who died”. These words further resound in the concluding section of the reconstruction process. Opening here on a medium close-up of Torje, holding a blanket, and smiling and laughing when he wraps it around his role-playing stand-in, he soon continues to recount, the first part of which is here quoted:

I arrived on land and then I got a blanket, a white, like, blanket around me [...] So, when I look around, I see many others also with blankets around them. So, my only idea of what was happening or what I was to do is that I am now a part of the blanket people, and we who have blankets are going that way, because that is where all those who have blankets go.

In this scene, in another shot reverse shot without point of view shots, the film interchanges between different close-ups of Torje’s face and different faces within the group of volunteers. To start off, due to the funny anecdote cited, these are all relatively cheerful faces. However, as soon as Torje mentions his brother’s name in the following sentence, with his face also becoming more serious, their faces become stressful faces. Then, as he describes waiting for Viljar to arrive while sitting on a bench outside the hotel where survivors were lodged and looking at the sad faces of the other arrivals, as well as meeting and hugging the people he knew only to be told that his brother was shot in the head, they now all turn into mournful faces. Ending on a tracking frontal close-up of Torje as he steps back and walks around the volunteers, and then another one moving towards his noticeably devastated stand-in, here the camera also parallels their faces by shifting its focus to first show his face in the background and then back to her face in the foreground.

Thereafter, the act itself restarts a final time, in a short reenactment of the last part of the testimonial reconstruction. Interspersed with images of the volunteers as they cry and hug each other, primarily focusing on “Torje” with tears streaming down her face, the film keeps on cutting back to a three-quarter close-up of Torje. Five times over, we look at him looking. Attentively gazing with his eyes welling up and his mouth taking heavier and heavier breaths, his face almost seems to be shaking – he looks to be on the verge of tears but does not cry – before he seemingly gathers himself and stands up and thus also goes out of frame. The shot does not follow, and the film instead cuts to another two-shot of Torje holding and consoling “himself”, one that marks the end of the action.

In the immediate aftermath of the reconstruction, we are returned to Torje speaking to everyone to finish up his story, and due to the conclusive material of this last oral testimonial part, this passage will be recited as a whole:

I thought I would tell you a bit more. After mom and dad arrived at Sundvollen, mom called all the hospitals south of Trondheim, and, after a few hours of that, they called from Ullevål and told us they had identified Viljar. He was operated on and was in a coma. The feedback we get is that things are looking bleak for Viljar. Uhm, so he was operated on, almost every day, and they told us that if he woke up he was going to be severely brain damaged, and they told us that they had to amputate his arm. They told us he was going to stay at Ullevål for three months, if everything went well, and then a year of rehabilitation... Viljar was at Ullevål for three weeks, had rehabilitation for two months. He scored at Mensa-level on their IQ-tests. And we were back home after four months in Oslo. He lives fully and well, and he is my best friend. Also, he didn't have to amputate his arm... I thought it might be good for you to know that.<sup>17,18</sup>

Once more in montage of close-ups of Torje's face and the faces of the volunteers, his words are affectively accompanied by the audiovisual unfolding of the images. First, because of the horror that they have acted out and the story being told, as well as the solemn expression on the face that tells it, these are all sorrowful faces. But as soon as Torje mentions his brother's remarkable recovery, his face also turning or returning to vibrant expressions like from before the reconstruction began, their faces become hopeful faces. Then, as he finally announces his brother's status, they all just burst into joyful faces. Torje's close-up face, wryly come widely smiling, now turns to us surrounded by the sight and sound of the tear-soaked, cry-laughing, almost convulsively sobbing faces of the volunteers, as he contently declares that it is now his turn to shout out for a group hug. Closing on a line-up of facial frames in a hug huddle, the entire sequence ends with Torje's face: the face of a smiling red-haired and blue-eyed boy standing in a circle of friends – recalling the face that began the section.

In this scene, shot for shot, the film allows spectators to see sad faces turn into happy faces, hear tears of sorrow turn into tears of joy, and feel palpable tension turn into cathartic relief. Above and beyond the narrative “pay-off” of finding out that his brother also survived the attack, the exceptional affects emanating from these moments come from their power as another climactic cinematic facing. Emerging through an evolving audiovisual presentation

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<sup>17</sup> Sundvollen refers to a small town in close vicinity to Utøya, the location of the hotel that acted as care center for survivors and their relatives in the aftermath of the attack; Ullevål refers to the university hospital in Oslo.

<sup>18</sup> As a side note, the story of Viljar and Torje is also portrayed as one of the major parts of Paul Greengrass' film *22 July* (2018), a fictionalized dramatization of the events before, during and after the attacks.

of facial expressions with Torje's at its gravitational center, one that conversely echoes the altering expressions of the preceding scenes and is also furthermore charged by the mirroring contagion from the faces of the volunteers as well as the "facing" quality of the composition, we are in the end faced by the expressive and affective cinematic face of Torje.

Once again, then, key questions here are therefore: What does this face express? What do we see and feel when we face him? How does this cinematic facing affect us? In my view, it seems the case that from these close-up face sensations comes the experience of expression that is more than we can see or hear, one of otherness, but that is still sense-able through the film's facilitation of a close-knit, otherwise cinematic space and thus also the advent of affect turned affection through our welcome of the face. This concretely means that we may see and hear more than his face and words, and feel something profoundly more touching or moving than anything only self-referentially felt – our very being moved to resurface Levinas one last time – if we responsibly bear witness to the way his face "re-faces" from terrorized trauma to contented calm. In this sense, we are left feeling good not as the effect of feeling the same as Torje, but rather as the result of the affect of feeling for Torje. We are therefore left feeling good from and for another, by our discovering the good of encountering and embracing the face of the other; ethically facing Torje, the Utøya-survivor, as "who", as someone, as *him*.

Finally, in the section's epilogue, we first see a volunteer forcefully throw the iron rod used to make gunshot sounds far into the woods, letting out a huge sigh of after doing so, and then some shots of the volunteers in an intimate pile on the floor in the studio backstage area, before Torje is reintroduced sitting in a chair beside them. Changing between a frontal close-up of his face and the faces of the volunteers, he then says, in words that work almost like a reason for being for the film: "If the hell we have reconstructed inside can help people care for each other and love each other, and if that provides more insight... that makes it so much easier to bear. For me. If it can help others". In the end, that is precisely what the film and his cinematic face itself may have potentially done – a doing to be considered in the concluding part of this analysis.

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*Reconstructing Utøya* ends with a short section wherein all the survivors and volunteers are together. Opening with an extreme long shot of this group of sixteen standing and holding hands around a bonfire, in an image like the one that was the title backdrop in the beginning, we twice see them doing a celebratory cheer. Following some frames of them in a party-like setting with muffled music in the background, the film jumps to a series of close-ups of the survivors again lining the black box floors with white tape. Soon, Jenny invites the rest to “Come dance on the new dancefloor”, as we hear Torje humorously announce that “It is a surprise reconstruction”. While the music picks up, the film cuts to medium close-ups of the survivors and volunteers dancing and singing along to the song’s thematically fitting lyrics, intermixed with frontal close-ups of the faces of the four smiling and laughing. Then comes an outstanding long shot that, from behind the studio’s black curtains as they open to show them all dancing inside a tape-lined square under the lights of a disco ball, acts as a bridge to a montage or barrage of facial close-ups of Rakel, Mohammed, Jenny, and Torje.

These close-ups, the carefree faces of these four survivors, with bright eyes and wide smiles elevated by magnifying framing and intensifying lighting, once again face us as the cinematic faces of four absolute others, “whos” or “yous”, or the expressions of people and experiences that cannot be captured by the images of the film or the images of the spectator. These faces express themselves through affects that, while also meaningfully prefaced by all the testimonies we have witnessed, speak in excess of their context as expressed testaments to resistance, recovery and resilience beyond our concepts. In this sense, our ethical relationship to otherness mediated by the film through its process of teaching and learning thus potentially culminates in a powerful impression of hopefulness.<sup>19</sup> Yet, the film’s expressions of hope as its expressions of terror, and the idea of one overcoming the other, are in a sense meaningless without a sense of the unique meaning of the face and our responsibility for the other. This is the new and true meaning and sense the ethics of the cinematic face help open to us or us to: a transcendent and transformative understanding that being for the other or otherwise than being is the foundation of both our humanity and ourselves. Ethically facing the faces of Rakel, Mohammed, Jenny, and Torje, encountering and embracing the face beyond the face, is thus a humanizing undertaking with the potential for an enduring and empowering lesson.

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<sup>19</sup> On the front of the film’s homepage, *Reconstructing Utøya* is appropriately called “A documentary about how four survivors turned terror into hope” ([www.rekonstruksjonutoya.no](http://www.rekonstruksjonutoya.no)), something that from the point of view of this analysis thus beautifully sums up what the project and process through its constructive reconstructive work have potentially also done for us as spectators.

In the end, the film concludes not with a close-up face but with a facing long shot. As the music stops, the camera stays behind the now shadowy figures of all those introduced as they move – or more precisely walk, run, dance, somersault and piggyback while cheering – out from the studio black box into the daylight outside. At the same time, they move out of frame to leave us with an image of the empty space, onto which the film's title is once more superimposed, before a final cut bring us to the final shot, an aerial one of the area with the group walking down the road in the distance accompanied by the returning musical theme and the rolling end credits.

As this analysis elucidates, cinematic faces play a prominent and profound role in *Reconstructing Utøya*. Starting from the facingness of its use of facial close-ups and thus also the facing quality of its audiovisual testimonies, the film opens the necessary space for us to potentially face the survivors as others. Facilitating cinematic relationships that expressively and affectively discourage our living into their experiences and being there with them and rather encourage taking upon ourselves their experiences and being there for them, it teaches us a manner of responsibly encountering otherness. Embracing this mode of spectatorship, or even these embodied optics, therefore means to engage in ethics and to learn to see otherwise, and this is the way facing the face may found an understanding of the alterity of their reality, thus also the terror and trauma they have lived through – or terror and its consequences. Sensed and felt not from ourselves but for another to be understood comes a powerful and profound ethical meaning that has the potential to change us and do us good.

Thus, as a documentary film about surviving, confronting and coping with traumatic experiences, one that addresses us as spectators in audiovisual testimonies about recalling, recounting, and even reliving terrorized memories, *Reconstructing Utøya* constructively reconstructs terror to revitalize a sense of responsibility as well as resilience. Through its cinematic mediation of the survivors telling their stories for their own sake and for ours, the project realizes its potential to help everyone involved in its documented process face, deal with and understand what happened on that day.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Although its way of doing has a quite unique quality, the film is not alone in helping us better understand July 22 through audiovisual testimony. As mentioned in the preface, already in the first year after the attacks, short documentaries like Svein Børen's *22.07* (2012) and especially Tommy Gulliksen's *Terror Island* (2011) and its two follow-ups *A New Life* (2012) and *Back to Utøya* (2012), as well as one full-length documentary that also ended up becoming partially about the events, Kari Anne Moe's *Bravehearts* (2012), all faced us as spectators with the faces of survivors. While the production of such documentaries almost seemed to stop, there was a restart alongside the ten-year anniversary of the attacks with the premiere of Aslaug Holm and Signe Endresen's cinema documentary *Generation Utøya* (2021) while Gulliksen's again followed up his work in the episodic television documentary *The Legacy After July 22* (2021), both of which face us with survivors working through its long-term aftermath. In different ways, all these works arguably have similar potential.



### III:

## FACING REALITY

### Documentary reality and audiovisual testimony

*What does documentary do?* Although this is certainly not to say that fiction film does not have a similar yet different potential, documentary film is cinematically distinct in being a more direct form of audiovisual mediation of the real, or manner of facing reality. Therefore, the expressive and affective meaning, value and power of documentary as well as the impact and significance of documentary experience is pertinent when the case is a research project that pertains to spectatorial relationships with real others through film.

As a word, documentary involves several dimensions that are interesting for this dissertation. On the one hand, its noun form is enounced in the Oxford English Dictionary as well as Norwegian Bilingual Dictionary quite straightforwardly as “documentary film”. On the other hand, however, its adjective form is more richly defined. Both mentioned resources here approximately formulate this as something that includes or that itself “documents” and something that builds upon “factual” or is based on “real” events. Moreover, the anglophone glossary boasts two additional denotations, that is the sense of providing evidence or being “evidential” and the sense of being informative and instructive or “relating to teaching”. Even though this chapter does not really deal in semantics as such, these different meanings are relevant to keep in mind since it still deals with the potential meaning of documentary film as being some or other mode of documenting, evidencing or even teaching reality. As a term, documentary as discussed in documentary film theory is thus more crucial then. From the appropriate starting point of John Grierson, arguably so one of the founding documentary filmmakers, and his famous or for some infamous coining and characterization of the form as “the creative treatment of actuality”, this dual status of documentary, like John Corner puts it, “as aesthetic artefact and as referential record”, has functioned as a cue for countless studies that describe and debate the relationship between documentary and reality.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For references to the full entries in these dictionaries, see the bibliography. As for Grierson’s fuller quote, it originally goes as follows: “Documentary, or the creative treatment of actuality, is a new art with no such background in the story and the stage as the studio product so glibly possesses” – from “The Documentary Producer”, *Cinema Quarterly*, 2:1, 1933: 7-9. Lastly, Corner is here cited from his book *The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary*, 1996: 11.

For this study, whatever documentary film is considered to be as to dealing with the real, actual or factual by whichever creative, aesthetic or artistic means, the most important matter here is the implication of such a signification for the way that we as spectators may approach, understand or learn about the world through documentary. Documentaries surely do something to us, but it is still difficult to articulate what this “doing” involves. Thus, the questions I would like to consider are these: Do documentaries document the real? So too, what can documentary film images be and do? In so many words: What *conditions* does documentary form provide? Moreover, even though documentary film is a distinct form of film, its foundation is arguably like all films still the cinematic image and its mediation or relation to the real, all the while documentaries are distinguished by its different forms of documenting real other people, dimensions that here call for both some more general and more specific consideration as well. Therefore, other relevant questions are these: How exactly do film images themselves relate to reality? In any case, what does this potentially mean for documentary film in an *ethical* sense? Even more specifically, what are the ethics of audiovisual testimony?

These are the questions this chapter explores, and it does so in the following way. The first section explores documentary form in relation to the idea of documenting reality through film by consulting and comparing some influential positions on the subject in documentary film theory, that is from Bill Nichols, Carl Plantinga, Dirk Eitzen, Brian Winston, Michael Renov, Stella Bruzzi, and Vivian Sobchack, with a view to review what documentary is and does, or can be and do, as to consider the doing of documentary film images in their relations to reality and with spectators. The second section thereafter explores the relationship between the real and the image more generally, by tracking back to both the key concept of cinematic indexicality alongside thoughts from Mary Ann Doane as well as ideas about the existential reality of imagery from Roland Barthes, André Bazin, and Siegfried Kracauer, all with the aim of advancing an approach to mediation as the means for a certain relation of realization that is especially relevant for the meaning of ethics in documentary. The third section then specifically explores the documentary mode of audiovisual testimony with such an ethical lens, here also looking at some notions from Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker as well as some more from Bill Nichols and Michael Renov, so coming back to the case of the face in terms of a perspective on the ethical potential of facing the reality of audiovisual testimony.

## Documenting reality

Like its heading already designates, this section concerns relations between documentary film and the world, that is theoretical ideas about how documentaries relate to reality and thus also what this does or what they do in their relationship to spectators. Considering such a “doing” of documentary in the specific terms of the ethics of facing the real, this also calls for a more general consideration around the “being” of documentary. Such questions surrounding what documentaries may be claimed to be and to do, especially in relation to reality, have of course been discussed by different thinkers from different fields and with different focuses both after and before audiovisual studies became an academic discipline, but for my purposes, returning to the discourse on these fundamentals between some of the most prominent documentary film scholars during these last three decades seems the most productive course of action.

One of those is Bill Nichols, who in his first full-length account about documentary film, *Representing Reality*, pronounces the status of documentary film doubly as “*evidence from the world*” and “*discourse about the world*”, or visible evidence and rhetorical form (1991: ix-x). As for a definition of documentary film, he operates with a triple one involving the point of view of filmmakers, the films themselves, and their spectators, or in his words its community of practitioners, corpus of texts, and consequential mode of engagement, but in any case argues documentary is foundationally “a discourse of the real” (ibid. 10). Thus, the clearest view of the way that Nichols understands documentary perhaps comes when he later writes that documentaries always make some or other “*argument about the historical world*” (ibid. 110), and then follows up with: “This is indeed *the world we see* but it is also *a world*, or more exactly, *a view of the world*” (ibid. 115). In one sense, this means that documentary distinguishes and differentiates itself from fiction film in looking at the actual world that we live in. In another sense, this also means the distinction between documentaries and fiction is basically demarcated by the material from which filmmakers make a point or take a point of view. In very short, a documentary film is decided and defined by its representation of reality.

This central thesis and tensions are repeated and elaborated in Nichols’s subsequent work on the documentary form. In his twice updated *Introduction to Documentary*<sup>2</sup>, he once again opens with this twin notion, that is to say that although no absolute boundaries neither could nor should be made between the two terms, the fundamental difference between fiction

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<sup>2</sup> First published back in 2001, a revised second edition then came out in 2010 before this revised third edition was released in 2017. This chapter uses the most recent one since Nichols does indeed update all its chapters.

film and documentary film is still that the former addresses an imaginary world and the latter addresses the historical world. A documentary is thus, as he puts it, “a fiction (un)like any other” (2017: xi). Here, Nichols further suggests that a careful definition of documentary is not crucial and can never be clear-cut, yet he formulates three commonsense assumptions that characterize the form as such: Documentaries are about the real world, about real people, and about real events (ibid. 5-8). This delimits what is cinematically referenced or represented, then, which he thereafter delineates with a certain idea of how to further conceptualize his commonsense propositions:

*Documentary film speaks about situations and events involving real people (social actors) who present themselves within a framework. This frame conveys a plausible perspective on the lives, situations, and events portrayed. The distinct point of view of the filmmaker shapes the film into a way of understanding the historical world directly rather than through a fictional allegory* (2017: 10).

The keywords to be noted within this statement are the following ones: speaks and shapes. These two terms lead into Nichols’s most important, or at least most well-known, concepts when it comes to documentary film. One is his idea of documentary “voices”, which in his own words is “each film’s specific way of expressing its way of seeing the world” (ibid. 50). Of course, this only means that documentaries speak in different ways through sounds and images, with different structures and styles, and from altogether different points of view, a speaking by way of the composition of elements of mise-en-scène, cinematography, sound and editing, which is obviously something that any film does. In short words, the voice of a film is figured as its form of address. For Nichols, where documentary voices set themselves apart is by addressing their spectators from a framed view of and within our common world, that is a creative vision or way of seeing the world of collective experience – the real world – in which coming across such a form of address also allows us to acknowledge that any given film is a documentary and often some or other type of documentary too (ibid. 50-53). To me, these vocal boundaries thus ultimately amount to not giving us or addressing an audiovisual world but rather giving audiovisual shape to our world as an address to us.

The other is his idea of documentary “modes”, which he categorizes in the following seven: poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, performative, interactive.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> These modes point to how Nichols develops his genealogy of documentary as something ongoing. Beginning with a distinction between direct and indirect address in *Ideology and the Image* (1981), a typology of four ten years later, in *Representing Reality*, turned into five with *Blurred Boundaries* (1994), then became six before seven with the different versions of *Introduction to Documentary*.

Nichols discusses these different modalities at length and in detail, but for the purposes of this study a much shorter summary seems more than sufficient. Therefore: the “poetic” mode emphasizes visual, tonal or rhythmic qualities through form and style; the “expository” mode emphasizes a problem through a logic of argument or commentary; the “observational” mode emphasizes direct engagement through its unobtrusive observation; the “participatory” mode emphasizes direct involvement or interaction between filmmakers and their subjects; the “reflexive” mode emphasizes its own process of documenting or its filmmaking itself; the “performative mode” emphasizes subjective and expressive aspects or engagement; and the “interactive” mode emphasizes direct participation from spectators through digital means. Like Nichols himself introduces them, all these modes are general frameworks that often interlap and intermingle with each other and may be mixed and matched in any individual documentary film (ibid. 22-23). In this sense, this means these modes are mainly historical classifications that trace traditions as well as variations of the form in the past to provide us with a frame of reference for the present – all the way from the precursory documentation before the turn of the century and pre-war avantgarde and institutionalized documentary, to post-war developments and the plurality of forms and formats that may be labeled modern or postmodern documentary film and video.<sup>4</sup> Whether the specific term used is voices, modes or frameworks, the central premise and crucial point is indeed that documentary film neither is nor has ever been any one “thing”, if it can be claimed as any “thing” at all, but is instead a case-by-case and work-in-progress kind of “thing”.

For a conclusion to Nichols, in the introduction to his essay collection *Speaking Truth with Film*, he first rhetorically asks himself “What makes a documentary a documentary?” (2016: 9) and later repeatedly answers that it has most to do with a certain “Hey, you!” (ibid. 74). That is the shaping of a perspective and speaking of a proposition – a view to an address about *the* world. Thus, in sum, documentary is duly a discourse of the real in which a film argues something about and asks spectators to answer to reality.

Another documentary film scholar with a comprehensive conceptualization of what it is, is Carl Plantinga. In his *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film*, he opens with the non-fixity of non-fiction, as to that “nonfiction moving pictures, like photography in general, have no unitary ideological effect, central function, or singular purpose, but a multitude of effects and purposes, depending on use, context, audience, and other factors” (1997: 4).

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<sup>4</sup> This sentence is enough here, as it does not seem necessary to elaborate on central developments in the history of documentary film in this study. For those interested in more, see for example Nichols’s own descriptions or the well-known works of Barsam (1974/1992), Barnouw (1974/1993), or more recently Ellis & McLane (2005).

However, his main idea about the being of documentary is also connected to the world, or perhaps more precisely worlds and how they are “projected”. What Plantinga argues is that films project worlds in conjunction with discursive “stances”, where a fiction film would make a “fictive stance” while a documentary film would take an “assertive stance”, that is one will proffer an allegorical world and the other will profess the historical world for our consideration.<sup>5</sup> According to Plantinga, documentaries fundamentally “assert a belief that given objects, entities, states of affairs, events, or situations actually occur(red) or exist(ed) in the actual world as portrayed”, communicating that something is true about something, or thus making “truth claims”, and mediating active relationships to extra-filmic reality instead of merely “passive reflections of the real” (ibid. 18-19, 37-39, 43-46). This seems to me to say that documentaries assert something about reality with different rhetorical propositions that may then be assessed from different spectatorial positions, which arguably is a way of understanding documentary as first and foremost a rational discourse between the intentions of filmmakers and the interpretations of spectators. Of course, this is only a baseline within a larger framework on the “pragmatics” of nonfiction film, one that he sums up in short as:

The nonfiction film is a physical text used for communication, including an abstract discourse that presents projected world information, and a “voice” that expresses that information from a certain perspective (1997: 100).

As an additional coda, Plantinga followed up on his thoughts in the later article “What a Documentary Is, After All”, in which he once again repudiates any traditional definition of documentary yet also reiterates that all films of the form have a characteristic in common, that is not the fact that they actually are truthful but rather the fact that they are distinguished by a claiming to be and aiming to be taken as such. Thus, what a “documentary is, after all” is what he calls “an assertive veridical representation” (2005: 110-115). Adding this to the previous assertions or assumptions, then, for Plantinga the what and how of documentary may be found in the projected world and purposive discourse of a film, that is the stance it takes and claims it makes, which in this case is taking an *assertive* stance towards or making some or other truth claim about *the* world.

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<sup>5</sup> Plantinga builds upon the ideas and vocabulary of philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff in his *Works and Worlds of Art* (1980). In short, Wolterstorff argues that all artworks are made up by actions, first and foremost what he calls “world projection”. Artists project worlds through their works, worlds that present certain states of affairs, and they do so with different stances. The world of a work of art, then, is an act of projection and proposition.

For both Nichols and Plantinga, although in somewhat simplified short, documentary is discourse about reality. That is to say that documentary films are representations of reality that rhetorically take perspectives and points of view on and make arguments and assertions about the world as such, ones that visibly evidence or visually evince their veracity through different cinematic means or modes, and thus compose different forms of address or voices that speak to us as spectators. From my position, all the while a bit wary of the way this also seems to say the most important dimension of documentary itself is its communication on an intentional and intelligible level, these accounts are all well and good on their own, but even though implicit they arguably understate or underappreciate the importance of what and how documentaries are understood to be and do. A film is not a film expression before it becomes a film experience for spectators, and thus the very space where documentary being and doing take place merits some more explicit consideration.

Such a critique is also what Dirk Eitzen touches on in his “When Is a Documentary?”, in which he subtends the discussion about what documentary is precisely with a discussion of when it is, something that is what it is if and when it can be asked the question: “Might it be lying?” (1995: 81). His contention is principally that defining the form in theory based on certain features or formulations, or as films that make arguments or assertions about reality, makes little sense when the films are rarely perceived to do so in practice, and he therefore claims that any sensible definition of documentary has to do with what we as spectators believe it to be. Turning around to focus on trust as much as truth, Eitzen thus suggests that maybe the most fundamental dimension or distinction of documentary film is the fact that it rather is *presumed* to be truthful (ibid. 82-88). A documentary is a documentary, then, when or whether it opens a frame of reference that actualizes potential questions of veracity and mendacity, truth or lies, which in Eitzen’s words is also to argue that “documentary is what people are accustomed to make of it, no more and no less” (ibid. 98).<sup>6</sup> In my view, even while not so in line otherwise, the most interesting thought here is thinking about documentary as distinct because of its mode of encounter, that is due to its relationship with spectators.

Taking a similar position but going further still, in his *Claiming the Real*, Brian Winston debates Grierson’s definition of documentary as the creative treatment of actuality while making the case that this phrase negatively colors the notion of documentary itself:

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<sup>6</sup> Published in *Cinema Journal* (35,1), Plantinga and Eitzen had a short debate in the same journal a year later (36,1). Plantinga here countered that to “define a kind of reception is just as problematic as defining a kind of film” (1996: 95), whereas Eitzen restates his belief that documentaries are first and foremost defined in a sense of “not that they claim to tell the truth but, rather, that they are supposed not to lie” (1996: 96).

The application of the adjective ‘documentary’ to film [...] most appositely flags the fact that, despite claims to artistic legitimacy [‘creativity’] and dramatic structuring [‘treatment’], when dealing with this film form we are essentially and most critically in the realm of evidence and witness [‘actuality’] (1995: 10)

Winston later basically claims that such claims of “the real” is paralytic for documentary, that is filmmakers, scholars, and audiences alike, causing everything and everyone to be stuck in a sort of truth claim “quagmire”. Through what is arguably an attack on the so-called “realist” tradition of documentary film altogether, inscriptive or evidentiary qualities aside, he takes his confrontational argument towards the thought that there is not any one “real” to document as well as an apparent conceptualization of documentary as best grounded in reception. Even more concretely, Winston suggests that documentaries do not make truth claims themselves but rather that audiences make such truth claims for them, which means that any “meaning” of the mediated reality of documentaries rests with its spectators, and therefore in the end that documentary is all in our heads (ibid. 253-259). Taken to the extreme extent, this would thus seem to say there is no reality to documentary other than the one that spectators themselves will ascribe to any given film, which in this sense means documentary’s seal of documenting the real comes undone and becomes all but a relativistic construct.<sup>7</sup> This is simultaneously a provoking thought and thought-provoking, but to me there is a key difference between there being reality to the films and this becoming realized through their relations with spectators.

For both Eitzen and Winston, then, while in somewhat problematic ways, the mode of reception or the role of spectators is therefore central to whatever and however documentary may be claimed to be and do. From my perspective, emphasizing our engagement with and our experience of documentaries, that is interaction or relation between films and spectators, is as key as it is necessary to conceptualize both its being and doing. In this space, thus also moving onto a middle ground of sorts or the in-between of these ideas, there may well be a place for arguments in Nichols’s sense, for assertions in Plantinga’s sense, for presumptions in Eitzen’s sense, and for “head-claims” in Winston’s sense. Meanwhile, from my position, this does not seem enough to reckon with documentary’s mediation of reality or relation to spectators, as all these terms still delimit a frame that does not sufficiently account for the fundamental expressive and affective dimensions of documentaries as cinematic encounters.

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<sup>7</sup> It is certainly not my intention to circumscribe Winston’s comprehensive work on documentary film, whose critiques and concepts both here and in the second edition, *Claiming the Real II* (2008), as well as *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentary* (2000) and several articles, are more complex than noted in this point of contention.



One appropriate source for taking this aspect into account is another key documentary scholar, namely Michael Renov, who through his extensive work on the form puts more of a spotlight on the reality that documentaries express in excess of representational and rhetorical address in any straightforward sense. At the start of his seminal edited anthology *Theorizing Documentary*, he argues that the aesthetic dimension of documentary, that is to say the way that documentaries work to audiovisually document and thus more or less artfully reshape or change reality, is something that is both foundational and too often overlooked (1993: 5-6). Therefore, such a dimension is also central when he in his later article in the same collection outlines a certain “poetics” of documentary film discourse, where he delineates and describes four documentary modalities or motivations:

1. to record, reveal, or preserve
  2. to persuade or promote
  3. to analyze or interrogate
  4. to express
- (1993: 20)

These are contingent forms or modes of compositions and conditions, or different ways of doing, that may well be rephrased as evidencing reality, engendering belief, encouraging response, and emanating affect, from which Renov also introduces the intriguing notion of documentary as potentially being “pleasurable learning” (ibid. 35). Now, without delving further into his elaborations, these notions or this nascent framework altogether is again one of overlapping and interchanging elements that may have conceptual relevance for any given film and especially documentary film, in varying degrees, yet this emphasis on the expressive and affective as integral is important.

However, it is in Renov’s later essay collection, *The Subject of Documentary*, that he really engages with expressivity and affectivity as key dimensions of documentary. There, from the departure point that documentary film has seen a certain “return to subjectivity, to the exploration of a seeing, feeling, even healing self expressed cinematically”, where the “subject *in* documentary has, to a surprising degree, become the subject *of* documentary” (2004: xxiv), he simultaneously also explores the subject or this subjectivity in relation to spectatorship and here makes two points that merit some more consideration. The first one is that our relationships to documentary reality necessarily happen on several levels through a mix of “conscious and unconscious components” (ibid. 100), ones that crucially relate to desire and affect as much as reason and knowledge. The second one is that the very existence

of this other side of documentary engagement also necessitates another understanding of and ways of approaching documentary expression and experience than all the more dominant cognitive and rational models open for us, where he also suggests that turning towards ethical aspects instead of only talking about ontological and epistemological ones could open new avenues for analytical exploration and thus could also have “important consequences for documentary theory” (ibid. 159).<sup>8</sup> Even though the main agenda of his anthology is the more particular domain of autobiographical documentary material, and thus the subject in question is most often the filmmaker as such, for me Renov’s argument itself also further concerns questions of subjects in the sense of people and faces encountered through films and thus his thought process connects to the line of thinking of this project.

To consider this some more from what may be called the point of view of the films themselves, an adjacent angle comes from documentary theorist Stella Bruzzi, who in her book *New Documentary* emphasizes that a foundational and too often forgotten aspect of documentaries are that they are performative or perform reality. Appropriately subtitled with the moniker “a critical introduction”, she here takes to task academic writing both about film generally as well as documentary more specifically for what she deems the shortcomings of its preoccupations, that is especially falling back to dichotomous notions about documenting the real as something that is either immanent or impossible, and thus rather sets out to think about this relationship in another way. Her case here, in her own words, has its base in the fact that “the pact between documentary, reality and spectator is far more straightforward than these theorists make out: that a documentary will never be reality nor will it erase or invalidate that reality by being representational” (2000: 3-5). Bruzzi thus argues that reality and the reality of documentary are real in different senses, and that documentary reality itself arises in “a performative exchange between subjects, filmmakers/apparatus and spectators”. Documentary films are therefore performative acts that perpetually negotiate the dialectical relationship between reality, the image and the spectator, where the emergence of the real is the processual result of filmic interaction and cinematic encounters (ibid. 6-10). Documentary reality emanates from relation, and thus both at “the heart” and “the truth” of documentaries lies the “performance of reality”, or an expressive and performative mediation of the real (ibid. 123-126). Although Bruzzi primarily focuses on performance in documentary as such,

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<sup>8</sup> Renov here relates to Levinas and his ideas of ethics to pose these open problems yet does not follow up much on his questioning nor on his suggestion of the possible consequences of doing so, but we will return to the way he links such an ethical dimension to documentary expression and experience in the last section of the chapter.

this performativity seems to me to be key to the very doing of documentary in both a general sense and the more specific one this approach intends to further explore.

To also consider this more so from what may be called the perspective of spectators, some coinciding apposite thoughts come from Vivian Sobchack, who although not first and foremost a documentary scholar develops some intriguing concepts about the experience of reality in documentary in a couple of essays published or republished in her *Carnal Thoughts*. One is the idea that documentary space as well as the double nature of the documentary gaze are always ethically embodied because of their inevitable relationship to the real world and therefore real other people. First writing about documentary in relation to representation and death, she argues this limit case in a way that also suggests a more general conceptualization that both the act of filming and the act of looking at documentary images become charged with a sense of responsiveness and responsibility to reality (2004: 244-249). Then following up further on this charge of the real, or really in an essay written two decades later, she there introduces the notion of a so-called “documentary consciousness”, something described as a distinctive mode of embodied and ethical spectatorship (ibid. 260-261). For Sobchack, what makes a documentary a documentary is a form of engagement or investment that takes place on the preconscious level, where documentary provides conditions for us to thus be charged, by way of sensorial or corporeal affects and effects that exceed and frame its compositions within a different axiological order than does fiction, “with an *embodied* and *subjective* sense of what counts as the *existential* and *objective* “real”” (ibid. 268-273). Even though Sobchack here considers the intersections between the unreal and the real as a possibility in every film experience, the implications for our encounters with documentary are most crucial since it certainly is the case that documentaries indeed open more space for the further development of such a consciousness, or what may perhaps instead be called a “documentary conscience”.

From Renov, Bruzzi, and Sobchack, then, come different ideas that in complementary manners contribute to a broadened framework and conceptual vocabulary for understanding the distinct modes of doing and therefore also the being of documentary. That is to say that while our positions are different, they all still help my perspective speak about the what and how of documentary compositions and conditions, or in other words its poetics and optics, in terms of something more, beyond or otherwise than everything within the frame of reference of representation as rational communication. Whether seen as the way documentaries may express, perform or embody reality, or through a different lens, to me the key lies in opening onto other dimensions of documentary as an encounter and an experience, and therefore also another approach to both its mediation of reality and relation to spectators.

All in all, this consultation and comparison of different thinkers unsurprisingly yields different ideas about the properties and possibilities of documentary form and therefore also the specific conditions it provides. Still, there seems a sort of common ground for all these points of view in the sense that documentaries are understood to be some or other discourse of the real and that documentary reality also does something real to us. For my perspective, together these thoughts first and foremost serve as a theoretical and terminological base from which to make a tentative case about what documentary film images can be and do and how they work on and with spectators. Yet, there is so much more to explore when it comes to questions around what documenting the real through film may potentially record and reveal, and what facing this reality may realize.

As this section ends, then, it seems relevant to repose some of its beginning questions ahead of more elaboration and exploration in the next one: What exactly is the deal with the real of documentary? How does this relate to the relationship between the real and the image? Moreover, what does this mean for documentary reality in terms of cinematic expression and experience? And how do ethical dimensions really emerge from documentary encounters? What, in a more specific sense, are the ethics of audiovisual testimony? The next sections make real these enquiries.

## The real and the image

Following now the question of what reality there is to documentary or how documentary film relates to reality, it seems to me that perspectives on such a subject call for a quick perusal of certain problems concerning the senses of these terms, what “reality” means and what may thus constitute this cinematic or mediated “real”. Instead of delving into any discussion about notions around subjective and objective reality, or ideas of existence itself, suffice to say here that my premise or position is that reality is indeed real, always duly related to but never fully reduced to relative human experience, and that we therefore can speak of some or other world of collective experience or even “our” reality as such. However, considering documentary or more generally cinematic reality – the real of the reel – brings with it a recurring set of issues that require further survey.

Firstly, this is about images, or the reality of film as expression. Here, the central idea seems to be that films deal in the representation of the real. Images, then, are constitutionally seen to be something “standing for” something else. Secondly, this is about spectators, or the reality of film as experience. Hereto, the core notion as so follows looks to be that spectators deal in the interpretation of this represented real. Images, thereby, are fundamentally viewed to do something “standing to” someone else. Lastly, this is about mediation, or the reality of film as encounter. Here too, as signaled the key concept appears to be that mediations deal in the signification of the real. Images, thus, are ultimately perceived as “standing in” between any some or other one. In simple short: the image stands as sign, which is interpreted by that which is represented; it is the project of an intentional, intelligible, intellectual process.<sup>9</sup> To be sure, images represent and spectators interpret within a sign mediation situation. Yet, this certainly begs the question: Is that all there is to it? Can that be everything there really is to the encounter that takes place, to the expression and the experience that enters this space, and therefore to the cinematic reality that opens for us to face? As has been proposed here before, there is potentially *more* to it all, so rather than belabor the point anymore better now to move onwards to specifically explore this more, beginning with the tenets to which cinematically representing reality relates.

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<sup>9</sup> Representation, interpretation, and signification are three terms that may be defined in somewhat different ways, derived from their own comprehensive, complex, and contested theoretical and philosophical histories. Exact meaning aside, in a practical sense these systems of sorts first and foremost seem to be employed to speak to means to extract meaning according to reason. In that sense, this approach explores potential dimensions of image expression and spectator experience that somehow come before, beside or beyond these domains.

Evidently, this stems from the semeiotics of C. S. Peirce. Specifically, it refers to his seminal triadic terms of signs as pertains to representational relationships to real phenomena, as icons, indices, or symbols, where the image or photography may involve all three relations at once. To be sure, nothing is new under the sun here, as this is something established in film and media theory to the extent that the terms are mostly employed without any explication or explicit mention.<sup>10</sup> Within this triad, the idea of “indexicality” is the most central for speaking about the relationship between the image and the real. Images can obviously be iconic, that is have a likeness to, imitate or simulate and thus resemble the real. Images can of course also be symbolic, that is they can use codes and conventions of audiovisual communication or cinematic language to reflect the real. Yet, it is the idea that images are indexical, that is have an existential connection or contiguity with or reference the real, that is in most theory seen as the key to the interrelatedness between the real and the image.

According to Mary Ann Doane, in opening remarks to a special edition of the journal *Differences* on indexicality and cinema, the connection between them has been considered to preserve a certain referentiality in “relation to a unique and contingent reality” (2007a: 1-2). In recent decades, however, the advent of digital media and the move from the chemical to the algorithmic, or from “grain” to “pixel”, has posed a technological challenge and prompted new theoretical attention to the cinematic index, reopening fundamental questions around the status of the cinematic image as trace and sign and provoking sharp proclamations about such an indexical bond.<sup>11</sup> “At the heart of all of these questions is the vexed issue of referentiality in representation”, says Doane, with a view to investigate anew the “viability of indexicality as a concept, an expectation, and a crucial cultural and semiotic *force*” (ibid. 6). She does so in her subsequent essay, “The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity”, wherein she traces indexicality alongside ideas of the specificity of cinema as artform and medium, while pointing to the signification and significance of the index. That is to say that she here elaborates on how the index is conceptualized as direct and denotative, determined by “a certain singularity and uniqueness”, dependent upon “certain unique contingencies”, and ultimately signifies as “pure indication, pure assurance of existence” (2007b: 133-135).

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<sup>10</sup> As implemented in film and media studies, the semeiotics of Peirce as well as the semiology of Ferdinand de Saussure act as bases for an eclectic semiotics of the image. As concerns the relation between the image and the real, the former has a more lasting impact through this triad, and it is only in this specific context and secondary sources this will be considered. For Peirce’s own writings, see for example the collections *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings Vol 1 & Vol 2*.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Manovich (2001) and Rosen (2001), who among many others provide opposing propositions about the cessation and continuation of indexicality in digital cinema, respectively, as well as Fossati (2009) for, referentially, a more general delineation of debates on digitization and digitalization in film and media theory.

Doane then interestingly connects the indexicality of the cinematic image to the “frame”, and contends that “the pertinence of the photographic and cinematographic frame [...] is that it coordinates and necessitates the dialectic of Peirce’s two, seemingly incompatible, definitions of the index, as trace and deixis”, a dynamic she further elucidates as follows:

The frame directs the spectator to look here, now, while the trace reconfirms that something exists to be looked at. There are two temporalities at work here. While the index as imprint, as trace (as photographic image) endures, the “this” [the frame as its cinematic equivalent] exhausts itself in its own present [...] The dialectic of the trace (the “once” or pastness) and deixis (the now or presence) produces the conviction of the index. In a way that Peirce did not anticipate, the two understandings of the index collude to buttress an almost theological faith or certitude in the image (2007b: 140).

Although there is arguably much more to unpack here too, for me this may be understood in the way that the cinematic image both emanates a “here-ness” that attends to a reality framed, by the framing of traces, as well as emanates a “there-ness” that attests to a reality traced, by the tracing of frames. My further suggestion is thus that these functions of the image together may potentially emancipate a certain “being-ness” that affects us as a reality faced, which is simultaneously to say that in this sense of being or realizing certain “signs of life”, images become real expressions and experiences of reality.

Now, insofar as cinema is such a sign system at all and one that does indeed merge all three dimensions of the aforementioned triadic model, the indexical aspect is paramount in that it engages a veridical relationship between the image, what or who is imaged, and those it images towards. To be sure, both its iconicity and symbolicity are forceful too, but it is thus its indexicality that sustains and supports this power. In a sense, the viability and vitality of the index of the image is verily – particularly rather than universally speaking, as far as cinema relates to reality – its faculty to haunt us. As the index is haunted by that which it indicates, the image is also haunted by that which it indexes, or in some other words: the real haunts the image. In this sense, there is therefore no rest for the index in digital media either, since no matter its concrete or abstract materiality what matters the most is the very way the image makes present a past reality in the present reality of mediation itself, which in this case may be seen as the “making real” of the cinematic medium.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This is most crucial to the power of documentary film, and the indexical “bond”, “force” or “sign-status” of its images, to here reference Nichols (1991: 5), Plantinga (1997: 59) and Renov (1993: 29) on referentiality, yet is also key to the power of fiction film. Arguably, such haunting is a “quality” of any cinematic image.

Such a conceptualization or configuration of indexicality, reference or relation, opens new possible roads of exploration into the potential reality of cinematic interaction, ones that now also puts the emphasis upon other thoughts for exposition and on questions like these: Can the real be *revealed* in an image? Can images *release* reality, that is can images emanate reality, or perhaps rather, can images *express* reality? Can the image *realize* reality for the spectator? Furthermore, these queries certainly have a complementary side as well: Can the real be *believed* in an image? Can we *receive* reality through images, that is can we encounter reality through images, or in other words, can we *experience* reality through images? Can the spectator *realize* reality from the image? As should be apparent by now, these are basically different articulations, repetitions and variations of the overall problem, that is an interlinked line of inquiry that also connects back to all the questions formulated before, and whose key intents and purposes are still to explore the potentially “more” of the mediated reality of the interactive relationship between images and spectators.

One way to do so is by considering the writing of Roland Barthes, who famously so in “The Photographic Message” proclaimed the status of the photographic image as “*a message without a code*”, one whose transmission is that of “the scene itself, the literal reality”. The image thus denotes the reality it images. Now, this is one part of a double proposition, as the photographic image at the same time artistically acts on this scene and adds to this message, which the spectator also does. The image thus connotes the reality imaged. In this sense, images therefore involve a kind of co-existence of two messages, one with and the other without a so-called code, where the latter acts as a base for the development of the former, something Barthes more or less terms “the photographic paradox” (1977: 16-20). Whether given names like primary and secondary, the literal and the symbolic, or any of the other notions within his rich framework, one pivotal twofold point can be followed throughout: images engage processes of codification, ones co-constituted by its creators and spectators, but they simultaneously also emanate key uncoded elements, something Barthes later calls the “traumatic” effect of the image, one that remains inversely proportional to its constructed “mythological” effect. Images are thus always “polysemous, as he elucidates in “Rhetoric of the Image”; they harbor ebbs and flows in a chain of signification, including the unfixity that is “the terror of uncertain signs”, which the logic of representation attempts to fix yet that is still there and inexorably has consequences for the message as such (ibid. 25-32, 38-44). In simple terms, this indeed seems to mean that in the image there emerges aspects of reality that effect a resistance instead of a readiness to our means of meaning-making.



Furthermore, this conceptualization arguably connects to another duo of dualities, that of the “obvious” and the “obtuse” meaning, which in a break with his typical dyadic structure Barthes also names “the third meaning” in the essay thus entitled, and later the “studium” and the “punctum”. Beginning with this first pairing, on the one side there are intelligible signs, signification as representation and interpretation, with an obvious “about-ness”, and on the other there are intractable signs, “signifiante” that exceeds any referential motif to open the field of meaning infinitely, or an obtuse “this-ness” (ibid. 52-55). This third meaning, then, is “a signifier without a signified”, that cannot be described as it does not represent anything yet one that remains within discourse as that which comes and goes as “an *accent*, the very form of emergence” (ibid. 60-63). Once more, for me this means that expression itself, or perhaps more precisely the way that images express themselves to us as spectators beside or beyond fixed or fixated boundaries, is what may potentially solicit encounters of this third kind.

Moving on to the second pair, Barthes further elucidates such an expressiveness in his *Camera Lucida* as the experiential difference between his two notions of the studium and the punctum. The one refers to the rational communication mediated through images that invites general application and participation which incites certain affinities derived from “an *average* affect”. The other suggests the something that punctuates such a communication and thus the consciousness involved and turns its very tables. Like he writes, that is “this element which rises from the scene, shoots out like an arrow, and pierces me [...] this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument [...] that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (1981: 25-27). Such a “something”, little “shock” or small “detail” – or perhaps someone, as his examples are almost all faces of other people – is potentially both a rare “quality” of images and intense “mutation” of the interest of spectators. A something that for Barthes is realized through “what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*”, which is revealed as “a kind of subtle *beyond* [...] the absolute excellence of a being, body and soul together (ibid. 49, 55, 59). Breaking this down a bit, whereas the studium transfigures reality according to some or other rhyme or reason, the reality of the punctum traverses and transcends the image, which in that way may be seen as a kind of irrational interruption that faces the spectator with an immediate and remarkable affect of the real that transforms the relationship between them.

Studium and punctum are co-existent, the one ultimately always coded and the other never so, and thus Barthes’s conceptualization of the paradoxical nature of the photographic image comes full circle. That is to say that all these ideas of connoted and denoted messages, obvious and obtuse meanings, and “studious” and “punctious” mediations, even though they

of course are compound doubles that connect and contrast with each other in complex ways, in the end seem to converge in a certain idea about how the image relates to the real and how this relates to the spectator. Barthes perhaps most concretely explicates this relationship, one we may well also name referentiality or even indexicality, when he writes:

I call “photographic referent” not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph [...] I can never deny that *the thing has been there*. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past [...] what I see has been here, in this place which extends between infinity and the subject [...] it has been here, and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred (1981: 76-77).

From this expression and experience, as Barthes phrases it himself, there emerges a meeting with “the truth of the image, the reality of its origin” and feeling of “truth and reality in a unique emotion”. Such an encounter is therefore one where a presence or being in the here and now presents itself as both someone that has been real and really has been seen “*in flesh and blood, or again in person*”, something that produces “a new, somehow experiential order of proof” that induces “belief that it is alive”, and thus also effectuates “a *certainty* [...] not a question of exactitude, but of reality”. Now, this is how and why the photographic image, in his words, “is literally an emanation of the referent” (ibid. 77-80). For me, the key case here is really a sense of reality. That is to say that although we ordinarily take this fact for granted or face it with ignorance and indifference, since conventions and codifications imposed upon the image from both sides conceal such a real, when this affective sense is triggered in us or even comes to strike us it opens an encounter that upends the usual order of things.

However, Barthes’s work mostly concerns itself with photographic images and not cinematic ones, which certainly also has implications for his specific ideas about the being and doing of the image. Moreover, while his periodic mentions of cinema differ, his overall proposition is that there is a phenomenological or philosophical opposition between one and the other.<sup>13</sup> Thus, a certain uncertainty when it comes to such a clear separation aside, still this suggestion is a suitable cue to segue onto more specific ideas about the moving image.

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<sup>13</sup> In very short, Barthes differentiates between photography and cinema on the basis of the experience of time and presence. Whereas the photographic image is “an illogical conjunction between the *here-now* and the *there-then* [...] its reality that of the *having-been-there*” – “*this is how it was*” or “*this is so*” – the cinematic image is instead distinguished by a “*being-there*” (1977: 44-45). Furthermore, while the photograph is full and “*without future*”, film, and fortunately so he says, is rather in flux and with future, “like life” or “the real world” (1981: 89-90). To be sure, there is here much more to uncover, but this still suffices as an illustration of his distinction.

Moving from photography to cinematography, then, the ideas of André Bazin stand out for these concerns as he certainly also elaborated a special relationship between the image and the real. To get straight to the key point, this is most notably presented in some eloquent and equivocal passages of his essay “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”, which for a proper view on the conceptualization are here quoted at length:

Photography affects us like a phenomenon in nature, like a flower or a snowflake whose vegetable or earthly origins are an inseparable part of their beauty.

This production by automatic means has radically affected our psychology of the image [...] we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re*-presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space [...] in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction.

A very faithful drawing may actually tell us more about the model but despite the promptings of our critical intelligence it will never have the irrational power of the photograph to bear away our faith.

[...] The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model (1967: 13-14).

Unsurprisingly, but still curious when considering his actual and crucial articulation of such a relation, Bazin has in subsequent critique all too often been adjudged to be stuck within some naïve confusion or strange illusion where he sees the image as essentially unmediated reality itself. To be sure, partially hyperbolic phrases around the objective nature of photography, the creative intervention of man and the instrumentality of imaging abound in his poetic writing and thus may summon such suspicions. However, as this quotation attests to, his argument is arguably both more involute and intriguing than may support such suppositions, as its basis is not the image for itself but rather its relationship with spectators. Considering his follow-up claims about the way cinematic images charge us as “change mummified” with a revelatory and resonant capacity “to lay bare the realities”, this is clearly both a matter of aesthetics and a certain “relief” as well as affect and a certain “belief”, a situational reality where the image and the spectator interface (ibid. 15-16). That is to say that, from my point of view, Bazin is here speaking to the very mediation of reality, where the technological production and the contribution of cinematic technique creates a projection that bears a hallucinatory yet factual reality, one that is not a substitute for but rather a transfiguration of reality that also realizes a transmutation of spectatorship.

“All that matters”, says Bazin, “is that the spectator can say at one and the same time that the basic material of the film is authentic while the film is also truly cinema” (ibid. 48), something that implies a certain idea about cinematic reality that is made even clearer in his essays about theater and cinema and painting and cinema. There, he claims that images are not of any object or person but their tracing, that is a “veritable luminous impression in light”, something that carries with it a kind of identity beyond mere likeness. Therefore, in his view, film does “something strangely paradoxical” in the way that it makes a mold of existents and marks their existence in time and space, and thus sculpts the past and puts it present to sense “as if in the time-space perimeter which is the definition of presence”. Thereto, for Bazin the cinematic frame or screen is “centrifugal” and not “centripetal” in the way that it masks not a part of reality polarized inwards but makes present reality prolonged outwards, indefinitely or infinitely (ibid. 96-98, 166-168).<sup>14</sup> In short and simplified terms, to me this basically means that the cinematic image expresses a “being” and a “beyond” that when experienced through sensation and affection may create new existential relations to the real, something that once again seems to speak to a possible or potential realization of reality.

As such, it should come as no shock that Bazin considers the potency or potentiality of cinematic reality as first and foremost a problem of aesthetic expression, or that in his own words “the flesh and blood of reality”, like he writes in his essay “An Aesthetic of Reality”, may then really “only be achieved in one way – through artifice”. He argues here that cinema is founded on the fundamental contradiction as well as combination of artificiality and reality, and therefore that cinematic form and style, choices and techniques, and general composition may either “magnify or neutralize” such conditions of the real, or reduce or enhance a certain “measure of reality” (1971: 25-27). This is to say that while all films involve the illusory and imaginary in some way, any film also necessarily engages with reality in another way, and therefore the key to the real of the cinematic image is each and every film’s specific manner of mediating these relationships with spectators. In the end, realism, realist and realistic are really all elaborations and elucidations that meld and mix within Bazin’s writing to provide the framework to speak to what may here well be called a certain emancipation of reality in cinema. Here the cinematic image refers to a mediation of relation to the real that can open before us to be or become more powerfully and profoundly real than mere representation.

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<sup>14</sup> This specific idea of presence is also foundational for Bazin’s further conceptualizations of cinematic realism. Viewed as a unique illusion without delusion, an expression come impression where: “The world of the screen cannot be juxtaposed [...] For a time, a film is the Universe, the world, or if you like, Nature” (1967: 108-109). Even though the scope here precludes heading down the slope of his conceptions fully, it remains crucial to note that its turns concern the reality of illusion just as much as any illusion of reality.

Finally, similarly apposite ideas for this investigation are those of Siegfried Kracauer, who in his *Theory of Film* argues that cinematic images have a unique capacity to record and reveal the real, in some form or other expressing “aspects of physical reality with a view to making us experience them” (ibid. 40).<sup>15</sup> Kracauer thus furthers what he dubs the recording and the revealing functions of the medium, in which the former is required for but does not automatically result in the latter, and elucidates this as three specific kinds. The first of these is “things normally unseen”, that which in regular circumstances eludes us whether due to its size, transience, or our own habits and prejudices – “blind spots of the mind” – in everything from the microexpressions of faces to new formations of matter in things we take for granted. The second is “phenomena overwhelming consciousness”, that which in the world is just too much or is absorbed by agitation due to its magnitude, as in the case of catastrophe, violence, war, terror, or death. Finally, the third is “special modes of reality”, that which belongs to the state of mind of others, thus exposing a different view of reality allowing us to acknowledge the alterity of another (ibid. 46-59). Therefore, film expression helps open our own eyes to what we would not experience otherwise.

In this sense, from the exploration of “the visible world as it surrounds us here and now”, in Kracauer’s words, the expressive result of the combined efforts of the recording and revealing function of the cinematic medium, comes a spectatorial experience and relationship to reality “where sense impressions are all-important”. Through sensorial affinities – four of which Kracauer describes as shared with photography while the fifth is specific only to film – with “the unstaged” in transmitting the raw material of nature, “the fortuitous” in accenting its chance qualities, “endlessness” in suggesting the continuum of physical existence, “the indeterminable” in transfusing its multiple and inscrutable meanings, and the “flow of life” in expressing the very open-endedness of phenomenal experience, cinematic images have potent imprints or impacts on spectatorial affectivities (ibid. 60-74, 157-159). To me, this seems to mean that these potential cinematic revelations create powerful sense reverberations on the level of sensibility. These stem from the sheer presence of reality they seem to render, from which come affects that act on our corporeal and visceral rather than logical and intellectual faculties, which may in this way engage a special form of affection or mode of spectatorship that specifically opens new dimensions of the real.

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<sup>15</sup> It should here be noted, however, that Kracauer deems “cinematic” films only those who do, and therefore not all films, making the case that cinema is aesthetic and artful but the cinematic is found in the ground of physical reality. Hence, as he writes: “in defining them as art, it must always be kept in mind that even the most creative film maker is much less independent of nature in the raw than the painter or poet; that his creativity manifests itself in letting nature in and penetrating it” (1960: 40).

Meanwhile, in the end, these revelations and reverberations beget reflections, and Kracauer begins his epilogue of the book with the explicit presentation of the key question that has been implicit throughout his theorization: “what is the good of film experience?” (ibid. 285). Even though he provides a prolonged response and proposition there, here its epitome may still be shortened into this description:

Film renders visible what we did not, or perhaps even could not, see [...] It effectively assists us in discovering the material world with its psychophysical correspondences. We literally redeem this world from its dormant state, its state of virtual nonexistence, by endeavoring to experience it through the camera [...] The cinema can be defined as a medium particularly equipped to promote the redemption of physical reality [...] the flow of material life (1960: 300).

The cinematic image, then, by way of its capacities to record and reveal may thus reacquaint us with the real through repositioning us to confront our common ideas about them, and the good of film expression and experience is therefore that they can make us see, feel and even understand our lifeworld better than before. As strange as it sounds, cinema may thus make reality itself become realer to us.

To connect the conceptual dots, Barthes, Bazin and Kracauer all, conceivably rather than coincidentally so, refer special existential relationships between the real and the image. While their ideations are different, still they seem to share a certain idea, which is to say that whether termed emanation, emancipation or even redemption, these three thinkers seemingly all speak to mediation as a relation that may elicit what this thesis will call “realization”.<sup>16</sup> From and for my perspective, this is also to say that the real of the image exists in the very encounter between expression and experience, in the end as something that emerges from the interaction between images and spectators and that evokes a “life of signs” in dimensions that exceed any basic sense of representation, interpretation or even signification itself. In simple terms that turn back towards the start of the section: the image stands as sign, yet this stance indicates and implicates more than that which is represented and then interpreted, as this is potentially just as much the project of an instinctual, inscrutable but instructional process – the real stands not only to reason. Before connecting other theoretical dots, one should note that while Barthes primarily writes about photography, Bazin and Kracauer both mostly focus on the fiction film, which therefore beckons a return to the reality of documentary.

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<sup>16</sup> Perhaps more than these three thinkers indeed speak to certain “reality effects” and the “impression of reality” of images, as is often attributed in later discussions of their works, they instead seem to speak to certain “reality affects” and the “expression of reality” of images. This slight yet critical distinction is really one to consider.

Documentaries do distinguish themselves, of course, in their foregrounding of reality, with an actual foundation in the factual and without the fixings of the fictional that arguably makes them cinematically distinct as both a more direct form of audiovisual mediation of the real and relation for our facing this real. All the while the different possible compositions and conditions of documentary are covered and discussed in the foregone section, there seems more to explore as far as consequences are concerned. Because documentary films, to briefly retrace a bit, deal with the real world, with real events, and most importantly with real people, the very realization of existence in mediation, this interrelation between forms of expression and modes of experience, the image and the spectator, may in documentaries thus arguably be exponentially and exceptionally actualized. This has most to do with the contact, or maybe even the “contract”, drawn when it comes to documentary reality. Whereas any so-called “suspension of disbelief” is required within fiction, there is rather a “supposition of belief” acquired in documentary. This is only a question of truth as much as it at the same time is a question of trust. As so follows, insofar as any so-called “paradox of fiction” is at play in the one pact, there is sooner an “axiom of documentary” at work in the other accord. Once again, this may be a matter of evidence only as far as it also becomes a matter of belief. Wherein, documentary makes a deal of the real in its images that spectators more readily expect and accept, and that really takes effect as affect. Documentary film reality, then, bears unique signs or signatures of sorts that amount to an axiomatic foundation or potential for more powerful and profound encounters.

Now, from my point of view, this necessarily so also has to do with ethics, precisely in the specific ethical sense faced in chapters past. Because the expressive and affective basis of this ethical relationship, both in Levinas’s philosophy and in terms of this approach, pertains to the existential presence of real others presenting themselves, even if not the only cinematic encounter with likewise potential, the fact that documentary attests to an existence that exigently attends the face as it appears before us has significant impact on its reality as an otherwise space for the expression and experience of ethics. In another phrase, what all this really asserts is that in the case of documentary the immanent metrics of mediation in themselves potentially also facilitate a transcendent ethics of realization. On the other hand, of course, realization is a teaching. This is to say that the way documentary images relate to the real and thus to the spectator precisely depends on the manner they mediate, realize and essentially teach reality, through teaching that may have ethical potential, yet this is one that also depends on our own realizing or learning.

Ultimately, turning to crucial particular questions previously articulated, my claim is basically that documentary images can be and do lots of different things, work on and with spectators in many different ways, and thus provide us different situations of encounter. My further case is that one such documentary mode of doing or even manner of being is ethics. To be sure, this is only an open idea on the ethical potential of documentary film altogether, but arguably it still usefully turns us onto further exploration into the potential realization of ethics from and through its more specific format or framework of audiovisual testimony – now to be further elucidated here in the upcoming section.



## Audiovisual testimony

Testimony, or more precisely the mediation of personal testimonial material, is a prominent domain of documentary film. The subsequent use of the term audiovisual testimony, then, thus builds upon its formulations in documentary theory, without any thorough gouging of the words on their own, to focus on its articulations in cinematic imagery. Whatever the case, as far as short or shorthand definitions go, this involves people who recount, bear witness or testify to memory, history or reality, and whose account, witnessing or testimony is portrayed or presented by way of cinematic means.<sup>17</sup>

In the introduction to the anthology *Documentary Testimonies*, editors Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker adjudge that audiovisual testimony can be found in documentary film ever since the coming of sound, but that a proliferation of contributions to this particular form can be followed all over the world in recent decades. Furthermore, they assess these projects and processes of documenting, distributing and disseminating such material to “participate in the creation of ethical communities by bringing testifiers and testimonial witnesses together at the audiovisual interface” (2010: 1). Sarkar and Walker therefore advance the expressive and ethical, or even activist, potential of audiovisual testimony to ameliorate social suffering, to activate local and global senses of solidarity, as well as to advocate human rights (ibid. 2-4). While their collection has a wider scope as to consider archival assemblages and institutional initiatives, contexts past the present concerns, they also make several interesting points about mediated testimonial relations in themselves, like the following:

the most intimate manifestation of the survivor-witness relationship [...] *moving testimonies*: the faces and voices that emanate from close or distant locations; the sounds and images that animate our ubiquitous screens [...] that compel us to bear witness, move us to anger or tears, and possibly mobilize us to action for social justice (2010: 5).

Audiovisual testimony is thus argued to be a powerful mode of mediation that may not just move but mobilize us. Their relationship with their spectators is therefore seen to have some form of ethical outcomes, which is certainly a conclusion that coincides with the position of this approach but simultaneously begs further questions as to what and how this happens.

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<sup>17</sup> Even though it might as well be termed cinematic testimony, thereby in line with the other terms of this thesis, audiovisual is more commonly used and seems more suitable than frontwords like documentary or video. As for testimony, it will be given more consideration in the upcoming chapters in the mode and moniker of witnessing.

Continuing to outline testimonial form, as part of a so-called “testimonial apparatus”, Sarkar and Walker focus on the meaning of the format of the “talking head” or the interview documentary. Here, they underline the important agency of both the interlocutor as an “actant and proxy” for its spectators, that is the fact that “the head *only seems* to be alone”, and of the subject as speaking to spectators by itself. In this way, audiovisual testimony thus constitutes a double mode of address that is simultaneously human and cyborgian, one which comprises those who testify and the mediation that testifies to this testifying act, through a collaborative project that performs memory as a process of encounter (ibid. 8-10). Such an encounter, then, is suggested to be a source for a sense of ethical community that may bring about both an individual and collective working through as well as instructive and constructive human interaction (ibid. 20-25). Now, while neither they nor the essays that follow really delineate many specifics when it comes to these testimonial ethics of encounter, the conceptualization of audiovisual testimony as some or other performative cinematic mode that somehow moves spectators into or mobilizes an ethical form of communication with both itself and its subjects is something that also provides new terms for my perspective.

Moving closer onto these ethics, then, it seems appropriate to once again connect this to ideas from other documentary theorists. Notwithstanding that most of those seem to mainly concern themselves respectively with ethical aspects of the relationship between filmmakers and subjects or between filmmakers and spectators, still there are some that more so consider ethical dimensions of these relations as a kind of tripartite interaction.<sup>18</sup> Almost like all things documentary, one comes from Bill Nichols and his appositely called “axiographics”, which approach “the implantation of values in the configuration of space, in the constitution of the gaze, and in the relation of observer to observed” (1991: 77-78). His argument here is that within a documentary’s relationship to reality lies an ethics and politics that implicate the filmmaker almost like an indexical bond that exists between the expressions of the images and the ethics behind them, one that therefore makes important ethical impressions on its spectators. For Nichols, so to paraphrase, these ethics seem primarily a case of what he calls the code of filmmakers, that is how ideology embeds itself by way of images and sounds that present themselves for inspection or interpretation by spectators (ibid. 79-80). Axiographics is thus an open-ended framework that in the end is applied towards a rational frame of mind.

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<sup>18</sup> For examples of the former, see the excellent yet extraneous discussions in contributions to collections like *Collecting Visible Evidence* (Gaines & Renov 1999), *New Challenges for Documentary* (Rosenthal & Corner 2005), or *Rethinking Documentary* (Austin & De Jong 2008). As examples of the latter, see the mentioned thoughts from Cooper and Saxton as well as from Renov and Sobchack.

Although my position is also that ethics are situated in the audiovisual ways in which the image opens a space and gaze, as well as relation to face the spectator, it simultaneously argues that such encounters in documentaries room more, of a more considerable importance, than is limited to these reasons of mediator and spectator. However, Nichols's axiographical thoughts take on another dimension, one more akin to my line of thinking, if put into dialogue with his own later discussion of "magnitude", in which he almost starts by summing up:

Questions of magnitude are always questions that run not so much against the grain as beyond it, outside the constraints of any given system [...] Questions of magnitude return us to the problem of the relationship between a sign and its referent [...] Questions of magnitude pertain to our experience of a text rather than its formal structure or cognitive comprehension (1991: 230-232).

Nichols here elucidates these magnitudes as situated in tensions between representation and represented, where expression and experience of the latter exceed the former. This is then elaborated as elicited by "vivification", a certain evocation or invocation that renders "a different order of engagement", in terms that remain "emotional, experiential, visceral" and ties that release an "awareness of difference". Such vivified magnitude produces a powerful sense that "reality now comes before us", in opening "orders of magnitude experienced as though for the first time" through such magnitudes as "the unimaginable, the unwatchable, the unbearable" (ibid. 233-237).<sup>19</sup> This is quite the mouthful, but to me this is really about the way the reality of documentary becomes more real in moments when it comes before us with an alterity that is both unintelligible and unrepresentable, or expressive meaning and affective experience that goes beyond the capacity and control of both image and spectator. Questions of magnitude are thus also fundamental questions of mediation.

The next question, then, is how documentary images may open us as spectators onto the discovery of this order that is beyond themselves and ourselves. In Nichols's view, this is a case of cinematic strategies and stylistic choices that may in different ways reveal the gap between imaged referent and what images represent, which paraphrased has much to do with referentiality, reflexivity and realism, or so rephrased in one word from my own view: reality. In any case, this may happen by way of the expression and experience of excess, as he states:

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<sup>19</sup> There is here another unmentioned connection between our perspective too, as Nichols among some other documentary examples is speaking about the audiovisual testimony of *Shoah*, and like many do specifically describes cinematically encountering Abraham Bomba, or in his words "the Israeli barber", as one moment where reality comes before us in vivified orders of magnitude.

Questions of magnitude carry us into the realm of ideology, contradiction, paradox, and excess [...] not merely the flat announcement of something more that escapes the frame, but the subjective experience of excess, the discovery – usually unanticipated, sudden, or dialectical – of a magnitude of existence beyond containment [...] a crisis moment where the vivification of magnitude can take place (1991: 262-263).

Beyond any one logic or code or any discursive frame, as Nichols concludes, such moments in the end lead towards radical defamiliarization and heightened awareness (ibid. 265-266). From and for my perspective, this seems to speak to a dimension of documentary mediation that transcends its representational state and transforms its relational space, that is the very relationship between image and spectator itself, and thus may also open us onto encounters with otherness. Questions of magnitude are therefore also essentially questions of ethics.

Turning away from this somewhat more general documentary film theory and back to its more specific form of audiovisual testimony, two points are once more worth making or taking on. One is that these critical moments where vivification or realization may happen are not caused by any cognitive dissonance but rather so by affective resonance, which is also to say these excesses of expression are experienced by way of being sensed or felt and not made sense or figured out. The other is that one powerful site or situation for this potent momentum is facing the reality of other people, which is also to claim that in maybe no other place does this becoming come more to the fore in film than in the ethical potential of the face-to-face encounter. To sum up the juxtaposition, audiovisual testimony vivifies the magnitude, or in my terms realizes the ethics, of the alterity of reality. In that way, this may therefore be seen as an axiographics somewhat otherwise, which aims to approach the realization of ethics in the creation of space, the mediation of a gaze, and the relation of spectator to an imaged face – and thus we turn back to face the cinematic face.

So too does Michael Renov, who in his conference paper come anthology essay “The Facial Close-Up in Audio-Visual Testimony” also couples the images of documentary film, Levinas’s ideas on ethics and the face, and Balázs’s ideas about the close-up to look closer at audiovisual testimony.<sup>20</sup> What he examines here is the facial close-up as a framing template for testimonial footage as to further explore “the profound impact audio-visual testimonial material can have on its audience” (2016: 238-239). Namely, he makes the case:

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<sup>20</sup> This mentioned connection is coincidental, as is the fact that Renov ends this essay with an example from the documentary film that is my case study in the upcoming chapter. In any case, to me this is a positive link, since it seems a both companionable and complementary pairing of paths towards exploring the ethical potential of facing audiovisual testimony.

But in general [...] formal elements, not just framing but lighting, mise-en-scène and musical accompaniment, if obtrusive, are thought to distract the eye or ear from the testimonial being related which is often fragile, painful, elliptical. The emphasis is placed on maximum receptivity and open listening which is felt to be at odds with formal or stylistic elements that may seem to take center stage. And yet I want argue that the close-up – not the even-keeled, pseudo-objective medium shot but rather the facial close-up – is the compositional choice best suited to strengthening the bonds of engagement and compassion that may arise from audio-visual testimony (2016: 240).

Renov then goes on to propose that the emphatic facial close-up empowers a deeper sense of the face-to-face encounter through the way that the face itself embodies reality. Employing phrases and terms from Balázs about the “polyphony” of facial expression and Levinas about the “proximity” of facial experience, he argues that the face of audiovisual testimony through the power of embodied memory also potentially becomes for us “a visceral and enduring [...] vehicle for understanding and ethical encounter”. His point here, to paraphrase, is that from the close-up face of survivors comes the embodiment of expressive and emotive modalities that convey grief and loss, suffering and trauma, as well as bravery, strength and resilience, in a way that words alone would never capture. Another point there is that coming up-close to the faces of survivors also sets us as spectators in front of “the ethical necessity of opening ourselves up to audio-visual testimonies” (ibid. 244-246). What is the main point here for me is thus how the presentation of the cinematic face also puts us in a more vulnerable and even woundable position to face, thus opening the necessary space for our facing the face.

Now, while this short text opens a framework that seemingly conforms with my own approach, there seems contrasts if compared to other points from Renov’s already mentioned collection of essays. On the one hand, he there argues that documentary is or rather can be a “media-specific work of mourning”, due to its preservation, amplification, and circulation of audiovisual testimony, one that is capable of bringing forth “new therapeutic communities” and becoming “a limited but resilient source of reconciliation of our private losses and public tragedies” (2004: 127-129). On the other hand, he simultaneously argues that documentary does not or rather cannot do ethics in the Levinasian sense and the “ethical standards of the encounter”, due to its production, mediation, and projection of audiovisual testimony, and in this way is not capable of achieving “transcendental moral status” and thus arriving onto “that order of experience higher than knowing” (ibid. 157-159). Renov therefore openly questions the idea of the ethical face-to-face encounter in any mediated form, yet still poses this as an open question that his later work responds to otherwise. Once more, this very tension is both the core problem and potential my project has and will continue to explore in the following.

To recalibrate, Sarkar and Walker, Nichols, and Renov, although formulated through some quite different arguments, all suggest towards a productive capacity within audiovisual testimonial material to support a constructive facility. In one way or another, they each really speak to the importance of the fact that what spectators encounter are real people testifying to real events or perhaps, in lack of better phrases, how the faces we face are real. Furthermore, they also speak to the impact of the act that what spectators bear witness to are testaments to the real of this very world or maybe, in lieu of other words, how the reality faced is one that stands in face of our own. Bringing together these thoughts or notions to further build a basis for my own approach, thus audiovisual testimony is proposed to be a specific form or mode of documentary and to do something with reality that actualizes a special potential through its relationship to spectators. In other words, the key idea for me is that audiovisual testimony opens up a relation of reality that potentially realizes an ethics of encounter.

Meanwhile, this is not to argue that all spectatorial relations to testimonial mediations end in ethical realization in any clear and certain terms, nor as such to assert that audiovisual testimonies necessarily so are or do the same to us. My aim is rather to advance the case that *there can be* this kind of ethicality to documentary as testimony. To be sure, this is thus only a theoretical idea of a potential that possibly comes to be realized through specific cinematic expression and experience, whose both what and how, and even where and when, cannot be articulated in advance or elaborated independent of cinematic relation or interaction in itself. Hence, the next and necessary step here is to attend to such a potential by way of analytical exploration of cinematically realizing reality – to be realized in the next chapter.

## IV:

### REBIRTH

#### **Terrible bereavement reborn**

Audiovisual testimony is the pivotal documentary format of *Rebirth*, a 2011 film directed and produced, alongside David Solomon, by Jim Whitaker. Initially premiering at Sundance film festival in January, it first had a limited cinema release in late August and was then broadcast by Showtime together with the ten-year anniversary of the events of September 11, 2001. The film won critical acclaim, as well as a Peabody Award, and its testimonial material has since been employed in the exhibit at the National 9/11 Memorial & Museum at Ground Zero.

To give some more context to the film, it was produced as a part of Project Rebirth, a non-profit organization to which all its profits were allocated and whose central mission is to forward learning, foster healing and form resilience. Such efforts are focused in particular on first responders, military and veterans, educators and other community leaders, but also more in general offers the tools to help facilitate understanding for anyone and everyone. The film itself remains a key component of the work, through its presentation of five people bereaved in different ways by a terrible series of attacks that resulted in 2977 fatalities and over 25 000 injuries – strictly speaking the single deadliest terrorist attack in history.

Organized in nine respective sections, with introducing and closing parts as well as yearly and biyearly black-screen transition points, *Rebirth* follows the five bereaved, that is victims and witnesses or survivors, as this chapter refers to them as from now on, over time. Filming their interviews and their situations in every year since 2001, recorded at or close to the anniversaries of the attacks over a nine-year period, the film documents both their going back in the past and their going on in the present, documenting their processes of coping with loss. Editing its testimonial and its additional footage in accordance with a progressive order, the film thus opens frequent and recurrent encounters with these five survivors – Ling, Brian, Tim, Tanya, and Nick<sup>1</sup> – for its spectators through interchanging and interlacing both faces and voices. All the while, alongside its audiovisual testimonial material, an intermittent time-lapse montage shows the reconstruction of the very site of destruction: Ground Zero.

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<sup>1</sup> Alphabetically ordered in the end credits, the full names of these five survivors are: Tim Brown, Nicholas Chirls, Brian Lyons, Tanya Villanueva-Tepper and Ling Young.

This analysis explores this documentation, looking closer at how these survivors are portrayed and their stories presented in connection with one another, as well as the way these are juxtaposed with the automatically captured montages of rebuilding mentioned. Therefore, it studies the audiovisual testimonial material of the film, thus its use of facial close-ups, and what may be called its audiovisual “transitional” material, thus its use of time-lapses. Hence, what it deals with is the way the film cinematically deals with, relates to or mediates reality. Furthermore, the analysis focuses on how such a reality, these processes of mourning and coping, recollecting and recounting, changing and facing, encounters us as spectators in a mode, manner or relation that potentially also realizes an ethics.

For this reason, the analysis is organized thematically, mostly following the mediated relationship between the film and spectators by way of describing, evoking, and reflecting on this as made up of encounters with these survivors, that is the process of one or the other also as an outline for the overall process of the film. As such, it strays from the chronology of the film, but arguably still stays true to the film both as cinematic expression and experience by closely looking into how it unfolds for us almost like some kind of cyclical encountering, all the while certainly also delving into dimensions of its audiovisual testimonial and transitional material that surpass that which any given spectator may sense or seize on a single viewing.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, although the analysis does attend to all survivors and all sections in the film, this attention necessarily varies too. As elaborating on each and every scene and sequence or charting the complete composition of the project would be close to impossible, the scope here is first and foremost to attest to the film as a process of realizing reality. Specifically, in the case of its testimonial material, this means that the testimonies of two of these survivors, the first and last that we face, are provided the most depth of detail and thus made the focus of the chapter, while those of the other three make for some more evidence of the mode of encounter evoked through this testimony. Similarly, in the case of its transitional material, this means that two specific transitions are discussed the most, while others are more often mentioned as additional examples of these transitional edited meeting points. Additionally, the beginning and the end section are both emphasized, due to their importance for how the film works altogether. In sum, the purpose of such a structure is to account both for the way the film documents the real as well as its “reality” as a realized cinematic encounter.

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<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, no opportunities or options to watch the film in cinemas have come. Therefore, this analysis is based on multiple viewings on video, as distributed by Oscilloscope Laboratories, as supplementary to an initial viewing over five years ago. All time citations refer to this copy, which has a total running time of 1:44:42.



## Reality as recorded

*Rebirth* begins with the sight of a black screen and the sound of radio news. As we hear the announcer say “Good morning. Sixty-four degrees at 8 o’clock. It’s Tuesday, September 11”, the words “September 11, 2001” fade in as white text while the announcer talks about what is happening in New York City on the day. This short prologue sets the scene, from the very start establishing the theme and the veridical premises of the mediation of the film, thereby also prefiguring its relationship to spectators.

Soon a face appears, the face of a woman. Framed close-up, in front of a pitch-black background and in contrast lighting, with only her head and shoulders visible in the shot, she is talking about chatting and drinking tea with someone and that someone saying that a plane just went into the building. As she does, she raises her hand to adjust her glasses to let us see it is bandaged, and then removes it while turning her head slightly to let us see that she has burn wounds along the right side of her face – on her forehead, her cheek, her ear, her chin, and her neck. Early and immediately, a clear and certain sense of reality is related. She was there, really there then, and her face attests to this very fact. As she goes on speaking about seeing paper flying around, hearing glass cracking and feeling heat come towards her, such a simple act of documenting endows the film as disseminating tangible lived experience.

After this first encounter, other faces also follow. First a second face appears, the face of a man. Framed the same, he is talking about being in a meeting and getting a message that the twin towers had been hit, and then going up through the office building and seeing the north tower engulfed in flame and smoke. Then a third face appears, another face of a man. Closely framed still, he is talking about the streets almost looking like they were a war zone, watching things falling apart and crashing down and seeing bodies drop to the ground. With their eyes set to the side of the camera lens, presumably so at the off-screen interviewer or director, both faces are stark yet animated as they recount in short shots before the screen goes back to black. Once more, the voice of a radio announcer sounds out: “This just in, to our newsroom... A plane has crashed into the World Trade Center”. Fading back in, now a fourth face appears, another face of a woman. She is talking about calling her mother, her fiancé’s mother, and the firehouse. Then a fifth face appears, the face of a man. He is talking about his mother working at the World Trade Center. Here we thus see another two, different faces in similar frames, prior to the screen going black again while accompanied by another news announcement: “The New York City Fire Department is issuing a call for a total recall of all officers and firefighters”.

Following these five brief encounters, encountering us as documentation of the real, these people and these faces return in turn. First the second, talking about how he knew his brother was on duty as a firefighter that day. Then the third, talking about being off duty as a firefighter but putting on his helmet and equipment to go to work. And the first, talking about how she was in the building trying to decide what to do as an explosion took place, and only remembering getting up from under debris just to see people lying all around her. Again, the screen blackens, as we hear a man's voice announce: "It is horrific. A second plane the size of a passenger jet... flying into the second tower of the World Trade Center". Now, the third face, speaking of another firefighter and friend, about the two hugging and exchanging words of love and goodbyes. Then the first, about trying to get out of the building. Then back to the third, about running towards the towers, and hearing the south tower start to come down. And the fourth, about watching as it all came down. Once more, the image goes black alongside a sound recording of a phone call: "Oh, my God! The building fell!", a woman screams, and repeats in a softer tone: "Oh, my God. The building just fell. The entire World Trade Center on the south building just fell".

Images and words go on, as these close-up faces come back. The third, about holding on and hoping as the tower collapsed. Then the fourth, about questioning whether her fiancé was in there. And the first, about getting out of the building just in time to see its tail end crash into the ground. Another black image fills up the frame: "A situation that started bad just gets worse and worse and worse". Now the fifth face again, about knowing that his mom worked in the north tower. Then the third, about watching this tower start to fall as well. Cut back to black, over which a man asks: "Is that the second building of the World Trade Center going down?", while a woman answers: "Yes, that is the second tower. That is the second tower".<sup>3</sup> Now we see the second face, talking about heading down to the site, and then soon the fourth, about not hearing anything from her fiancé. The second once more, about all the chaos down at the site, and then the fifth, talking about his father saying that he did not think his mother made it. Then the third, about holding his friend's wife while being unable to tell her that her husband was alive, and the fifth again, about crying together with his siblings about the likelihood that their mother was dead. Finally, we see the fourth face, crying while she talks about how her fiancé's fellow firefighters came over to her house with food.

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<sup>3</sup> Even though those heard here term it the second tower, they presumably speak of the first tower, considering the timeline of events. In short: The first plane crashed into the north tower (1 WTC) at 8:46, while the second plane crashed into the south tower (2 WTC) at 9:03. Consequently, the second or south tower collapsed at 9:59, 56 minutes later, while the first or north tower collapsed at 10:28, 102 minutes after impact – all times EDT.

After this many-faced sequence, the screen gradually fades to black and fades back to an opaque image of what looks like pieces of paper swirling around in the air. This is the start of a montage of shots of streets, firefighters, debris, helpers, and finally a cityscape saturated by smoke, all in slow-motion and to the sound of a musical score. Upon this last image, the film's title is superimposed, before it fades back to black.

This just over nine minutes long introduction section crucially guides the film as an experience. Firstly, by introducing its documentary being, it induces a foundation of trust. In the sequence, five faces appear to speak to us as spectators, on both sides of blank images and bare sounds that mark a time and a place. By these means – a black-screened, “sound-proof”, face-framed evocation of the events of the day – these images and sounds “record” a moment of specific recognition and recollection, a real world event with special significance to most of us. Simultaneously, the images and sounds evidence real people, believed to be real people as well. Thus, it also institutes a function of truth. In other words, truthfully and trustworthily, it documents the real.<sup>4</sup> This is to say that no matter how practically obvious or theoretically contentious, this is nonetheless consequential in the way such a concrete documentary form of encounter also encourages a distinct mode of engagement. Differently than fiction, we are here not invited to identify with any character, interpret any dramatized narrative, or imagine any allegorical theme-world – basically, to suspend our disbelief in its unreality. Distinctly as documentary, we are rather incited to be recognizant of persons, receptive to memories, and responsive to real-world testimonies – essentially, to suppose our belief in its reality. Thus, from the film's address opens a sort of axiomatic potential that lays the groundwork for our approach to its cinematic faces.

To be sure, this may be postulated as a sort of proposition made, but more than any arguments or assertions about being a discourse of the real, the real of this introductory doing rather takes effect as affect. Encountered by a series of emerging images of eyewitness faces and sounds of earwitness voices, we as spectators think less about *if* that which we here see and hear is real than we feel this seen and heard *as* real. This real, more than any assumptions or judgments about lying or laying down hypothetical claims, is thus effective as affective. So, in this specific sense: seeing and hearing, or perhaps more precisely, feeling *is* believing. That belief relates to people, to the relation the film sets up with the survivors and beckons us as spectators to have with them, a relationship that may well be called a contract of sorts.

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<sup>4</sup> To clarify, such a notion of truth is one of affective faces, which motions towards what Werner Herzog calls a “deeper strata of truth in cinema [...] poetic, ecstatic truth” (1999), and not any indisputable facts, since like Errol Morris says: “Truth isn't guaranteed by style or expression. It isn't guaranteed by anything” (1989: 17).

Here, a certain deal of the real is therefore sealed, where there is not a “burden of proof” for our consideration but sooner an onus to take in considerable “sensible evidence” before us. While there is always the chance that we do not sign this agreement, this seems like much ado about almost nothing as that is something we rarely do. Encountering real people who speak to their reality, a substantial point which is surprisingly understated in documentary film scholarship, we really do believe they *are*. This real or existential belief also relates to what we *do* with people, to the relation we as spectators end up in with the survivors helped begot by the film, a relationship that in an ethical sense may well be called a contact of sorts. Here, a certain gaze of the face demands to be embraced, something that is a matter of both the compositions or “poetics” of documenting and conditions or “optics” of witnessing. All the while there is never the choice for us as spectators to cue such a situation, our recognition and response or responsibility is anything but automatic, since this is something we are barely wont to do: encountering real people who face with their reality as *them*.

This is to say that by way of its introduction of the cinematic faces of five survivors, the film mediates a particular manner of interaction. Real faces and strange affects appear and disappear, come into close-up and go onto other close-up shots, or to black-out cuts, only to do it all over again. We are constantly faced since no space is taken for characterization or thematization and no time is given for identification or interpretation. We are ceaselessly faced, with no quarter for anticipation, assimilation or appropriation.<sup>5</sup> Face to face, this sets the tone for how we relate as the film thereupon lets us see and hear more from them; face by face, that relation is therefore what potentially comes to resonate as the film moves forward.

Afterwards, nine minutes into *Rebirth*, white words on a black frame spell out “First Year”. In what follows, in the film, we re-encounter these five people on and on in sections respectively titled with “2003”, “2004”, and “2005”. In what follows, in this section, we re-encounter these five survivors one by one, thus unlike their unfolding in the film, to focus on our respective encounters with their faces.

The first person that faced us was Ling. She meets us again in an image, an image of a photograph, lying in a hospital bed with her eyes closed shut, as we hear her speak about her severe burn injuries in a sound bridge to her close-up face, and she leaves us in another image of a photograph, sitting in a hospital room with her eyes wide open and looking at the lens.

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<sup>5</sup> One interesting note is that these are faces without names. Three of these five survivors are named during the film itself, two in name tags within a shot (Tim and Tanya) and one by mentioning his name when recounting (Nick), while two are merely named in the end credits of the film (Brian and Ling). However, for an easier read, they will be called by their name from now on.

When she returns, both in the same and in the following two sections, the film continues its conjunction between her facial close-up and voice-over narration. In one segment, a cut takes us from her close-up face to her bandaged-up hands, where she crosses her fingers for further operations to help her regain more everyday function. From her close-up fingers, the camera tilts up to her face, as she there shakes her head, looks down to the ground, looks back up and says: “I don’t know what my future will be”. In another one, cuts between her face and hands, at times panning along her burn wounds and scar tissue as she describes them not healing like they should, ends on a facial close-up facing her scarred face, her eyes wet and red, and her expression full of frustration and unhappiness, as she says: “I feel useless sometimes”.

There is something traumatic to these moments, something almost meaningless about its sensations as significations. Besides the information we as spectators receive about Ling’s situation, about her surgeries and injuries, the lingering images of the latter before us seem to make no meaning beyond themselves. What they represent, or what they are about, only turns vaguer, more obscure and more obtuse; in so many words, connotation stops short as to what they have to say. Yet, these images do speak, they signify and have a meaning of their very own, as there remains a certain denotation to its uncertain signs, something quite meaningful indeed there, this as signifiers clearly sensed. What they express, what “this” is there, turns only stronger, more poignant and more profound; in Barthes’s played-on words, punctuation here surges sudden as to just how they do say. Thus, subtly beyond the situation pictured before us as spectators, encountering her wounds in these moments are somehow wounding encounters. As her face appears and addresses, as well as accents and arrests, its affective facing – in this sense immediately and even literally – remarkably relates reality.

Another one then really pricks. Here she is speaking about an unsuccessful surgery and thus not having any solution for her problem, not any hope. In a striking facial close-up, she says: “Well, I guess I try to cope”. The shot stays close to her face, as she pauses, turns away and turns back to say: “I know I can’t change it”. Afterwards, we see some images of her being treated at the hospital, and we hear the words, first in voice-over and then face-on:

I think our biggest problem, all of us who got hurt in 9/11; they do get the family support, but it’s just very difficult for them to understand. I mean, my husband, he thinks I’m still the same person. But I’m not the same... Even though you say: “I feel”, “I know how you feel”, blah blah blah, all these other things. But not really... Cause you’re not there.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Rebirth* (Whitaker 2011), approximately 39:25-40:05. My transcription. Other referenced quotes from Ling in this section are from different segments from interview sessions held in 2001-2002, 2003, 2004, and in 2005.

Returning up-close when she pauses, seeing her face bleak and hearing her voice break as she utters the last clause, this almost unfolds like a close-up confrontation of us. Even though her words strike a chord on their own, it is her facing while she says them that makes them pierce and ring true. It is very difficult for us to understand, we do not know how she feels, and we were and are not there. But this is what we can understand, that we can never know how it feels, that we can only be there now, there *for* her, without her ever knowing that we were.

On the level of sensation, her face acts as a call to face these facts. While this brings things normally unseen and points to phenomena overwhelming consciousness, it is a sheer or deep sense of a special mode of reality that this recorded real reveals. Her face exposes us to, sooner than exposed to us, another world of lived experience, as the alterity of a reality of terror and trauma. This is to argue that rather than provide us access to her state of mind or promote the fallacy of feeling our way into her, this expressive facing provokes an excess and prompts our feeling aspects or affects of reality whose experience is other than any sense we already know. In this sense, her face does “redeem” reality, lively flowing in a different way than the materiality highlighted by Kracauer, where its redeeming quality is precisely that of opening our eyes to see the clear necessity of a certain “blindness”, one with responsibility to witness the otherness of the real – an ethical optics of encounter.

If we do, when we meet Ling again, her apparent change in demeanor becomes even more affecting. This scene mirrors previous segments, here switching between her face and arms as well as between her face and images of her at the doctor’s office, while she in voice-over talks about having successful surgeries. In some bodily close-ups, she shows us how her mobility has improved. In more facial close-ups, she afterwards mentions that she has also lost some of her increased function. Still, she smiles, her eyes lighting up and her expression softening as she says: “But then I say: “You know what? Then use the other hand” ... So, I’m learning to cope with everything I have”. In this scene, albeit in another sense than in the way that Bazin may have intended the phrase, we really face “change mummified”. This changing facing, audiovisually and artificially magnified by mediation from its authentic and material basis, also changes its very affect. Her face indeed affects us like a phenomenon in nature, but one unlike any others, not any something but rather the experience of a someone, facing her face as *hers*. Whereas her cinematic face is still made of images, these moving images still make faces, hence also making our facing the change of her face, not as embalmed but embraced in encounter, a moving experience that affectively emancipates its reality.

So too for the four other faces and people we encountered and subsequently encounter anew. Brian, who lost his brother Michael<sup>7</sup>, in facial close-ups intercut with home photos of his brother as well as him on the reconstruction site, first recounts taking part in search and rescue, digging through ruins and rubble to find his brother's firefighter crowbar, something he cites as an important moment of closure, and then speaks about his work on the restoration project and notes that his brother would be proud of him. However, when we see him next, here opening with a time-lapse montage of a graveyard before cutting to his close-up face, he seems different and speaks differently about having dreams and flashbacks of finding human remains and feeling empty inside. In a close-framed long take, with his shoulders shrugged, his hands over his mouth, his face all tensed up, and his eyes vacantly staring, he solemnly says: "I don't think I even started to heal yet [...] I think I got a ways to go". We then meet Brian again, straightaway framed and faced close, as he says he was diagnosed with "post-dramatic stress syndrome". In the following back and forth, here between his affected face and footage of him around the city, he tells us that he is on medication, goes to therapy and struggles with anger issues, but also that he is now back at the site to help the rebuild and every day looks down to "the pit" where he found his brother to provide him purpose.

Tim, who lost his fellow firefighters and friends Terry and Patty, first recounts how the wife of the former found out she was pregnant only two days after he died, and chuckles in facial close-up as he tells us he helped paint their daughter's room pink in the last week, and in another close-up, after images of him at work at homeland security in Washington, speaks of feeling guilty when he remembers that all his friends back there are dead. When we see him again, in which he talks about his close relationship with Terry, the film cuts away from his face in close-up and then back even closer as he soon recounts facing Terry's wife and telling her why he was not with him. As he does, his voice pauses and stutters, his lips begin to shiver, and his wide-eyed gaze glistens, as he says: "I felt horribly guilty... And I, I, I feel like, you know, I should have [...] I should have been there with him... in death". We meet Tim in testimonial format once more, after images of him back in New York and photos of Patty and sound recordings of his dispatch call, and we here see his face turn pale, his eyes wet, and a tear rolling down his cheek. After cuts between this close-up and a series of photos of him and his colleagues lost, the shot holds on his face as he looks up, down, back up, back down, and back towards the camera to say that maybe he is still running away from the hurt.

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<sup>7</sup> This names Michael J. Lyons, one of the deceased that the survivors we encounter were bereaved, while the names of the others are Terence S. Hatton, Patrick J. Brown, Sergio G. Villanueva, and Catherine E. Chirls.

Tanya, who lost her fiancé Sergio, while in facial close-up wiping away tears, first recounts not accepting he was gone for several weeks before coming to terms with his death. We come back to her in images where she is putting up commemorative posters and tokens to his memory, while her voice-over describes these memories, but as we hear her voice break the film cuts over to her tear-filled face. Wiping away tears streaming down, she snuffles and struggles to speak about having to move on and not wanting to, but she pushes the words out before turning away crying. When we see her again, her crying face changes with footage of her at home and home footage while she talks about being unwilling to picture family life without him, and later in another teary-eyed, voice-cracking close-up she talks about her feelings of envy and self-pity and her need to get away from it all, before another one lingers on her expressions as she tells us about making the painful decision to start dating again. However, in the next encounter, now with tears under her eyes and her hand over her mouth, a little smile shines in-between her fingers as she soon reveals that she has gotten engaged, but just as soon she talks about fearing the pain it may cause and breaks down crying. She stops and looks down, cleans and covers her eyes, and tries to speak but stays silent, before she then looks back up through a stream of tears and in a steadily breaking voice says: “It’s time now. It’s time to let that part go [...] it’s just to, to... let go without... letting go”.

The last person that faced us was Nick. He now meets us in some interchanging shots between a medium close-up in a home video, giving a speech at his gone mother’s memorial service, and in close-up testimonial format. In the former, when he utters the word “mother”, a bird flies into frame and lands on his head, upon which a quick cut takes us to the latter and his teary-eyed and laughing face. Back to the former, we see him lift his hand up, pick up this baby sparrow, hold and look at it and then let it fly away, before we in a cut back to the latter hear him say: “There is no doubt in my mind that my mom was there”. When he returns, both in the same and two next sections, the mood has changed. In one segment, the film cuts to his close-up and stays close to his stricken face as he shifts in his seat, shakes his head and averts his tense gaze while his eyes tear up, takes a deep breath and then looks back towards us and intensely stares, before his voice cracks while he says: “You know, I’m just angry at a lot – a lot of people”. In another one, following some home footage of him and his mother together, his closely framed expressions go from cheery to severe as he recounts feeling so lonely and empty. Over a shot of him walking, all alone across a college campus, the film comes back to his face as he describes a vivid dream:



Maybe it was some sort of, like, kind of a memorial dinner for my mom. And, all of a sudden, she just shows up. And, um, she doesn't even, she doesn't say anything. And all that happens is I just go up to her and... I just hug her... Like really, really, really tight, for a long time... It was just so nice, you know. Just to hug her, just to grab her. You know?... You know, and just, like, put my face in her hair, just like smell her...<sup>8</sup>

On either side of another home video of a hug between him and his mother, we face his face as he speaks, and it speaks. Suddenly, he stops and goes silent, looks off to the distance, and then goes on from that position. Just as suddenly, he stops again, looks back in our direction, and then repeats his question: "You know?". While he likely here asks the interviewer, and even though it is not necessarily even a question, there is a sense that we are asked as well, to which we have no good answer since we do not really know. Yet, we do feel and understand something. Describing this very scene as "exemplary of the emotional and ethical force of the close-up", according to Michael Renov this something has to do with heightened engagement and empathy with his expression of grief and loss by the way this facial-close up acts as an "entrée" into the unique and concrete experience of a survivor (2016: 247-248). However, to somewhat contend, such a something has more to do with a someone, and less so to do with empathy than with an ethics. This is to say it is indeed precisely not our self-oriented, even self-obsessed, entering into his experiences but instead ethically opening up to confronting its concreteness, understanding its uniqueness, and thus encountering these expressions in their otherness, facing his face as *his*, that is the affective power of these close-ups.

This is even more striking when yet another moment comes. Framed in close-up once again, Nick here talks about having no contact with his father, living on his own and getting some money due to his mother's death, to which he says: "The money exists because my mom was, you know, murdered in a terrorist attack. You know?". We see the slight twitches of his emotionally enigmatic expressions, as he continues: "You know what I mean? It feels like dirty money to me. Bloody money. It's bloody money". We do not really know what he means yet we do understand the meaning of how he feels through the ethical meaningfulness of his face. This endures during his next return, as we face him recount doing the same work his mother did before stopping and staring at the floor, and then slowly nodding his head and softly saying: "Yeah, I really, really miss her". Suddenly looking up, he quickly turns towards us just to as quickly turn away again to say: "I really do". Afterwards, he says no more, but his face alone, in the resounding moment of silence that follows, still speaks volumes.

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<sup>8</sup> *Rebirth* (Whitaker 2011), approximately 23:35-24:35. My transcription. As with the four others, other citations from Nick stem from yearly interviews held with him, in the first five years after the events of 9/11.

Facing Nick, as with Ling, Brian, Tim, and Tanya, what is recorded or rather who is revealed in these images speaks to a reality other than and beyond one we as spectators may really understand by identifying or empathizing with or even by interpreting and representing to ourselves as such. Therefore, these cinematic faces are transcendent; expression breaks on through representation opening potential experience of another order altogether, that is reality comes before us otherwise. This is to say that in this relationship to real people and real faces, through moments of new senses and affects that move us towards newfound sensibilities and affectivities, we face being that surpasses, surges above, or cuts across these documentary images themselves and those images we make for ourselves. Thus, these cinematic faces are traumatic; existence confronts us in excess and elicits a crisis that may also lead the way to self-questioning, that is reality comes to a head, or really to a face, in real encounters with otherness. That is simultaneously to say this scene is exemplary of the affective and ethical potential of the facial close-up, but in another manner than most often bestowed on it, by the way it has an extraordinary audiovisual power to, in the words of Nichols, evocatively vivify magnitude, or in my own terms: ethically realize reality.

Encountering reality as recorded in *Rebirth*, a recurrent occurrence of encounters born from its mode of mediating testimonies and its manner of facing survivors, thus encourages a mode or manner of engagement, relationship or spectatorship. By its project of documenting, the film thus involves us in a process that invokes a potential for understanding and enduring and perhaps even pleasurable ethical learning. This teaching is a realization, the meaning of which is not to learn about but to learn from these people, learn to really face them, and in this way realizing the real thus realizes or teaches us to realize ethics. In such an educational sense, the faces of the film, arguably so essentially teach reality. Audiovisual testimony itself accommodates the main subject of these lessons, but some more complementary material also contributes to the curriculum.

## Real time testaments

As mentioned, at passage points around its own particular mode of documenting audiovisual testimony, *Rebirth* also documents what can be dubbed as “audiovisual transitional material”. This includes both its time-lapse footage as well as many additional montages and moments that separate themselves from the more prominent testimonial form mostly employed.

Following the film’s title sequence, the first of these transitions happens in the middle of the second section. Opening with a close-up shot of Ground Zero, the images soon turn into a montage of ruins and rubble, one that closes with a long shot showing the American flag blowing in the wind. At the end of the same section, a series of time-lapse images of New York focus in on the site and its surroundings; on the tall buildings around the short foundations of the restoration project, light and shadow reflecting off skyscrapers from sunrises and sunsets, the rapid flashes of cars and boats traveling on by, and small dots of people moving around within the frame. Cut to a shot of the sky, which tilts down along the cityscape all the way to a large crowd of people. Over this image, a superimposed white text which reads “September 11, 2002” comes into view. We now see a lot of people marching in the street, holding up photos and posters, and hear people reading out a number of names. Soon a large banner comes into shot, one with the words “We Will Never Forget”. After this, the montage then carries on with faces; mindful, crying and mournful faces, images of faces holding one another, hugging each other, and holding other images of faces. Lastly, a long shot shows a big blow-up American flag that first blows into and then blows out of frame.

This montage introduces the one-year anniversary memorial for the events of 9/11, with transitional material that illuminates the film’s discernible, likewise reality: a dimension of “real time”. Although the composition is of course iconic and symbolic too, what generates an added measure of reality is indeed its incessant indexicality.<sup>9</sup> These shots of the site not only bear traces of what was filmed on the day, but what was and happened the year before, that to which memory is designated. These images of faces not only bear traces of who was there to be filmed on the day, but also who once were and perished a year before, those to whom the memorial is dedicated. These time-lapses are framed indexical traces of time, and what they index is so-called “historical” time, the time of the world as collective, communal

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<sup>9</sup> A note on that note: *Rebirth* was shot on film. More specifically, its time-lapse material was filmed by way of fourteen 35mm cameras installed around the area of the site, automatically captured at frame rates as low as one every five minutes and then compositionally adapted to the standard 24 frames per second. Thus, these images are photographic and not digital, yet this material aspect does not really matter to the matter of indexical affect.

and contextual, as well as the passage of this particular time, or in a word: change. While its edited result is evidently not in technical real-time, still it evidences “real time”, the time of shared reality. By way of such transitional material, then, the film frames and traces a past reality that again traces earlier past reality, and thereby presents or perhaps makes present a specific sense of reality to us as spectators by emphasizing or exclaiming its recorded real. Sensationally, reality lapses before our very eyes at the speed of twenty-four times a second.

However, its testimonial material, in a somewhat paradoxical way, simultaneously engages a different temporality. Through audiovisual testimony, the film both frames and traces faces, positioning us in close-up, face-to-face situations with all these five individual survivors, but each of these encounters are potentially interrupted by a different, otherwise reality: a dimension of “face time”. This means that these cinematic faces themselves entail a certain indexical relationship, even another indexicality, in-between the face of the image and the gaze of the spectator, which means that these facial close-up shots not only bear traces of the five people filmed but also by their faces bear the indexical trace of the face.

This is just to say there are here several temporalities at play. In the encounters, what is expressed is a face of someone real that, similar to Barthes’s sense, has been there. People are presented, or perhaps rather so present themselves, as having-been-there and having been real, there and then. There is here an emanation of “there-ness”, a reality past, one that creates belief in and certainty of their reality. Concurrently, what is experienced in these encounters is a face of someone real that, similar to Bazin’s and Kracauer’s senses, also is here. People presenting themselves, situated before us, and thus visually and viscerally surrounding our senses as spectators, both in space and in time, as being-there and being real, here and now. Here there is an emanation of “here-ness”, a reality present, one that lays bare aspects of and bears away belief in their reality. Together, then, what emerges from those encounters is an existence. Here and there, now and then, we as spectators therefore face an emancipation of “being-ness”, a reality present and past, a sensed presence and absence, their believed reality of being. Moreover, to circle back to certain ideas about the cinematic face, this being is also always a becoming, and while this, for thinkers like Balázs, Epstein, and Deleuze, implies a transcending of space-time, abstraction from the spatiotemporal, or even timeless intensity, this still also implicates a reality to come, to be real, thus a future. In the encounter with the cinematic face, time is unruly, its limits undermined, but it does not fully come undone.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This paragraph rephrases or paraphrases several previous references. For more on Barthes, Bazin, and Kracauer, see chapter two. For more on Balázs, Epstein, and Deleuze, see chapter one.

Rather, in the face, time like space takes on another dimension altogether. Tracking back to the face as trace, and vice versa, these tracks indeed lead back to the ideas of Levinas. Facing the being or the otherwise than being of a face, what faces us is not of our own time. It is instead another time, the time of the other; indeed, as mentioned before, the face not only faces us from “elsewhere” but also “elsewhen”. To elaborate a bit more on this, this when of the face has “otherwhile” temporality in three senses or tenses. Firstly, its past is there while never imaginable, or “immemorial”. Secondly, its present is here yet always ephemeral, only “enigmatic” or “epiphanic”. Thirdly, its future will become but is unknown, or “unforeseen”. In other words, the time of the face testifies to the invisibility and infinity of time, but still is in its own time a testimony to a time of responsibility, which in simpler terms means that this alterity of time may not be represented by our way of reference yet it may be responded to by another way of relation. For the purposes of this study, this is understood as “intersubjective” time, that is the time of encounter or the potential time of facing the face in film. Framed and traced in faces, a past, present and future, otherwise than ours and all at once, “superimpose” themselves upon us and onto our time, and thus disturb, disrupt or discontinue our continuity, our self-oriented sense of what has been, what is and what will be, through introducing to us a sense or an idea of the otherness of time.<sup>11</sup>

As purely conceptual and conjectural as this may well sound, it arguably has a more concrete ground from which documentary film can make a case. A documentary face, here connecting back to what documentaries do with people as well as what spectators do with documentaries, faces as a real face. In documentary films, unlike fiction, we face the actual faces of factual subjects, that is specific people who have specific lived experiences, and thus our encounters there are with people who present themselves as themselves. In documentary films, unlike fiction, we face actual subjects with factual pasts, presents and futures, and thus our encounters here on the face of it present us with openings towards intersubjective time. Making this case, such a potential is foundational, if not unique, to documentary as a form of cinematic expression and experience, and furthermore even more fundamental to audiovisual testimony as a format of documentary film. As it is a mode of face-to-face mediation with a distinctive spectatorial address, in which subjects appear to face and speak to us, addressing and appearing to be facing and speaking to us as if from any space and time, its encounters

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<sup>11</sup> These passages also harken back to chapter one and the ideas of Levinas. At the same time, it should also be noted that he has a lot more to say about such temporality than what is touched on either there or here. As with most all of his ideas, this dimension too runs through his philosophy, but it has particular duration in *Time and the Other, Otherwise than Being*, and parts of *Collected Philosophical Papers*.

turn us into, or perhaps more precisely through effecting a feeling of being, the very subject of address, which also has consequences for its affective and ethical potential.<sup>12</sup>

To return to the survivors of *Rebirth*, there are here not two but three temporalities at work. For one, there is a past traced, based in memory. What we face are faces from the past, faces of people who recollect and whose expression therefore evokes antecedent past. For another, there is a present framed, based in testimony. What we face are faces from the past that are also in the present, faces of people who recount and whose experience therefore emerges in our presence. And for one more another, there is a future faced, one ultimately based in documentary. What we face are faces from the past that also have another present and thus a future, faces of people who recommence and whose existence therefore endures in our absence. Through our facing the faces of the film's audiovisual testimony, we are faced with an axiomatic yet paradoxical amalgamation of indexical reality and temporal alterity, which is clearly not something that we as spectators apprehend in any event of encounter yet is certainly something that affects us all the same. Thus, the argument is this intersubjective time is indeed a time that ticks on the level of sensation and affection.

To return to the sum of *Rebirth*, there are three temporalities at work in another sense as well. That is to say that its suggested dialectical relationship between intersubjective and historical time also relates to a third temporal framework or tracework, which is the time of the film. To elucidate this a bit more, that is as a notion about the coming together of time as encountered in its audiovisual testimonial material and in its audiovisual transitional material, now seems a good time to travel back again from the former to the latter temporality as well as towards the one time when the two come to be contemporary.

In general, several shorter segues unfold as the film continues. Time-lapse imagery of the construction or reconstruction work at the site returns both at the end of the third and the fourth section, the latter one juxtaposed with shots of the five survivors. Similarly, another one comes at the end of the fifth section, but this time the musically accompanied time-lapse of the area itself, changing between night and day, winter and summer, snow, fog, rain and sun, slides over to shots of the survivors, and then to the text "September 11, 2006". This marks the commemoration of the five-year anniversary. All the while, it also introduces a sixth section comprised almost entirely of such transitional testimonial material, one that starts like the one that introduced the one-year anniversary, that is with a montage of faces.

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<sup>12</sup> This is to say that such a potential for intersubjectivity or "interfaciality" may be one profound dimension of facing a face in documentary, but not to say this is not a possibility in fiction film. My aim is not to claim any such absolute boundary, but simply to say there is still a key difference between facing documentary and fiction.

Once again, we are presented with the sight of faces and the sound of names, with the faces of people listening to the reading of the names of their lost loved ones with pictures of their faces on their person. However, what is different this time around is the noticeable presence of the encountered survivors in their midst, as we here see longer and closer shots, at times in slow-motion, of Brian, Tim, and Nick in the crowd, of Tanya on the stage reading out names, and cuts of Ling not there but at home. In the middle of the same section, the time-lapse goes on, from the early beginnings of the construction of the new One World Trade Center – then called the Freedom Tower<sup>13</sup> – where we see a succession of shots of foundations gradually rising from the ground as days and weeks pass by. So too at its close, where the tower grows taller in the light of day and the darkness of night, ending with a shining light almost like a beacon coming from what is gradually becoming its reconstructed structure, before the screen eventually fades to black.

This sequence reintroduces the five survivors conjoined with the five-year anniversary of the events, and memorial for the dead, of 9/11. Consequently, through such a conjunction of its testimonial and transitional material, it illustrates the film's distinctive, timewise reality: a dimension of "film time". Following all the foregrounding of close-up faces in testimonial format, and soon again going back to spotlighting this facial form, this montage connects and contrasts in a manner that makes for another way of facing. The shots of the survivors do not only situate them as individuals spanned in space; for the first time, they situate them tied in time. Along with the one-year one, the title and end sequence, this five-year transition is its most accentuated. Among the others, it stands out by its broadening of space and bridging in time: intersubjective time and space combine or collide with historical site and past.

Analytically, this crystallizes what may be called its "cinematic" time. Theoretically, in the same sense as images and spectators interact within a shared cinematic space, images and spectators also interact within a shared cinematic time. On the one hand, this designates the cinematically mediated space and time of any given film as a compositional whole, or a "macro-filmic" dimension. On the other hand, the term also denominates the cinematically mediated space-time of any given shot within a film, or the "micro-filmic" dimension. In short, in the case of the cinematic image, while the frame acts as a spatial limit, the cut duly acts as a temporal one. Expressively and experientially, however, it is the intermediate or

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<sup>13</sup> Construction on the tower began in April 2006, over two years after its official groundbreaking and laying of its symbolic cornerstone on the Fourth of July in 2004. Construction was completed with the final finishes on its spire in May 2013, before the tower officially opened on November 3, 2014. Standing tall at a monumental and memorial height of 1776 feet, it is the tallest building in the U.S. and the seventh tallest building in the world.

“middle-level” dimension of segments, scenes and sequences that is most fundamental to the way that films create and relate space and time to us as spectators. Although the actual units of the frame and the cut are the ones to assemble and accumulate, structure and sustain, all the shots and takes that make them up, those virtual units in turn make up how a film unfolds, and thus also how its space-time is framed and cut for us. As so follows, it is the organization of those parts that produces the overarching composition of and provides overall conditions for cinematic interaction in space and time.<sup>14</sup>

Axiographically, just as considerable in this case as the configuration of space is the construction and convolution of time, in how both contribute to the constitution of a gaze turning us towards the cinematic face. Cinematic space and time in *Rebirth* are encountered through coherence and incoherence, continuity and discontinuity, through the film’s constant interchange between “a” and “any” space-time. Where and when is set up only to there and then be broken back up by an elsewhere and elsewhere – again and again – which means time is instituted then interrupted, space is established then evacuated. Such a tense spatiotemporal relation plays a central part in the cinematic realization, that is both in terms of presentation and sensation, of reality and its alterity. Essentially, this temporality is ethical, or even more specifically the cinematic time, like the cinematic space, mediated by the film, also facilitates a potential for ethical relation. All these timely real time testaments, then, serve to suggest both realness and otherness in face of the survivors’ testimonies, and thus stand as support not just for realizing reality but also for realizing ethics.

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<sup>14</sup> As this is ultimately the basic stuff of film studies, and since this is not any study of cinematic time in itself, insofar as my inclusion of the idea is only for specific purposes, no full analytical nor any further theoretical exploration seems necessary. For those interested in more beyond the basics, see here the comprehensive and complex work of Mary Ann Doane in *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (2002).



## Reality as recovered

*Rebirth* begins its latter parts with a mix of materials. We see Tanya getting married on the beach and enjoying her honeymoon in beautiful landscapes, look at Brian and Tim doing their respective jobs in construction works and security services, and watch Nick graduating from college with an economics degree. Meanwhile, a while before this sixth section finishes with Ling walking into the hospital again, as the only one of the five, we do face her face-on through audiovisual testimony. Starting like our former interactions, with the film switching between her facial close-up and images of her in the hospital as she is talking about giving herself “one last chance”, a quite abrupt cut takes us to her laughing face. “It didn’t do a damn thing, but I expected it”, she says with a smile, before talking about just accepting things as they now are:

You know what? People have worse condition than I have. And the thing that really made me turn around is the burn conference... That turned my attitude completely different. You see some of the patients that have been burned, and you have to say to yourself: “I’m very, very lucky”. So, since then, I look at myself at a very different attitude.

All the while interspersed with images of her with other burn victims, once more mirroring both the similar yet disparate scenes in the previous sections, she shows us her wounds. First the ones on her hands, and then those on her face. As she elaborates how the scar tissue pulls her eye and thus skews her vision, in more striking facial close-ups to close the moment, her expressions are fittingly serious. Yet, these are different or perhaps more precisely differently sensed than those that came before. Unlike the one, they do not face us as severe, not sensibly full of frustration or even feelings of uselessness. Alike while adding to the other, they rather face us as serene, affectively filled with some kind of fulfilment or a feeling of hopefulness. As her face here speaks, so now her new expression, or “mummified” change of face to wrap in other words, continues its evolution in an encounter that reinforces “reborn” relations.

Subsequently, we meet Ling two more times. The first time we do, the film opens on a rear shot of her walking through her home, humming and holding a baby, before her voice-over laugh bridges a cut to a facial close-up. Returning to her face, again and again, from images of her feeding, carrying and showing off her granddaughter at a family celebration, her expressions are almost exuberant. We hear her talk about not wanting any more surgeries, not worrying about her injuries, and rather having people just indulge her inability to make

full turns, while we see her lively and smiley face. The second time we do, the film opens on a rear shot of her walking out from the hospital, here together with her son. Her voice-over again bridges into her facial close-up. Coming back to her face, over and over, from different images of her mostly just doing everyday things, her expressions are altogether exultant. We hear her talk about deciding to not have any more operations, after over forty in the last eight years, joking about posing for photographs with her face at the right angle, and feeling good about that being good enough. Once again too, we see her both smile and laugh before some shots of her going to a burn conference and meeting and hugging other burn victims, over which another voice-over sounds out:

It happened, but I'm alive. That's the only thing I kind of tell people... I was, like, given a second chance. That I really could have died that day. Somehow, somewhere, along the line, I came back... I'm glad I'm alive. I am very, very glad I'm alive. So, I'm gonna go, I'm gonna go do things. One day at a time, I'm gonna do things. Okay, so we're gonna plan a party next. I can't wait to do it.<sup>15</sup>

In the last return to her face, as the last face of the section and the last time that she faces us, thus also closing its loop of facial close-ups facing Ling, the film cuts back to her face just as she says that she is happy to be alive. As it does, simultaneously her face quite suddenly turns from seemingly solemn to beamingly buoyant, here brightly grinning and lightly giggling as she is speaking. When she finishes, the shot lingers on her radiant face to give face to the expression she leaves us with, thus making a last facing that leaves a lasting impression.

This impression, in the original sense of the word, is of reality. What is pressing, both pressed upon us and perhaps also pressed into us, is a who, one that lives on. Basically, her framed presence acts not only as a traced past but is fundamentally also a faced future. The impression before us is that of another or an other person that points not only to how she has been but also what will become of her. Her happy face here indeed works as an indexical indication of sorts, that is an imprint whose impact as well as import lies in its imperative implication: seeing, feeling for, and believing in her reality. Her “happy ending”, in this sense, instead becomes a kind of beginning of being, that is an existence whose evidential and experiential basis is ethical.

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<sup>15</sup> *Rebirth* (Whitaker 2011), approximately 1:34:35-1:35:25. My transcription from her 2009 interview session. As for the last page's quote: approximately 1:05:05-1:05:35. My transcription from her 2006 interview session.

After the uniquely arranged section surrounding the five-year anniversary, we soon recurrently encounter anew the other survivors as well – in audiovisual testimonial close-up – as they return in two more sections introduced by the title cards “2007” and “2009”. Hereto, the form is likewise, yet here too the feeling is otherwise. In these encounters, there is change with an affective potential to change, or moments of special realization that “recover” reality.

Brian first meets us again in images of him with his family, then in a voice-over come close-up where he tells us he is out of therapy and off medication, feeling that he is healing. Just as the film cuts to his face, he chuckles as he says: “It’s a curable thing, which is a good thing”. What follows is another back and forth, between his face and him with his daughter, in which we see him wearing his brother’s fireman coat and showing her a map of the place where he was found while explaining the importance of both getting over and remembering his brother’s death. Somewhat later another one follows, from his face to him with his wife and kids, where he speaks about how thankful he is for them. Brian then last meets us again in a facial close-up. In the shots that follow, we look upon his face while he talks about not thinking that much about it anymore and trying not to focus on only one thing but rather the rest of his life, before we listen to his voice over more images of him with his family saying how grateful he is for everything that remains.

Tim re-meets us in images of him instructing his colleagues while we in voice-over hear him talk about running an organization for first responders and about doing research on 9/11. As a cut takes us to his face, he describes reliving everything and learning where, when and how all his friends died. We now see images of both Terry and Patty and hear the voice of the latter through another dispatch recording, before we return to his face as he speaks to their bravery and his pride towards them as we see his jaw tense up and his eyes tear up until he mindfully looks away from the lens. Tim finally meets us once more in voice and then in a face-to-face. In this segment, he tells us that he is done thinking and feeling guilty about not being there: “I can’t live, I can’t live there. I can’t live in that place... I want to live in this place”. Looking almost directly at the camera, he stops speaking for a long time as his eyes and his jaw shift around, then taking a big breath before he looks back at us as he says: “I’m, I’m, I guess I’m pretty happy to be alive”.

Tanya first meets us again in a montage with her newborn baby girl and her husband. After a while, she returns in testimonial facial close-up. In this scene, through an interchange between her close-up face and shots of her at home with her family, she cries and holds her hand to her face as she talks about the process of taking down pictures of her old life and trying to move on. Tanya then meets us again in images with her family, visiting her late

fiancé's family, revealing she is pregnant with her second child. Cut to her face, we see tears slowly roll down her cheek and hear her speak about feeling a certain bittersweetness to her newfound happiness but keeping her grief private. Finally, a bit later, we last meet her at a memorial wall putting up pictures. Over these images, she narrates moving forward in the present without forgetting the past, leaving us with these words: "And so, the saga continues, I guess. I think it is a lifelong thing [...] it's something that's... always there, you know, just kind of like... it's there".

Finally, when we face Nick again, there is a marked difference. He appears different to us, not only because he now wears glasses and has tweaked his hair and beard, but since he seems to face us differently. In contrast to the close-ups in the former parts, coming back to his face from home footage of him with his mother while he tells us that he remembers less of her and that he quit his job doing what she did to be happy, his expressions have emphatically changed. His mannerisms are calmer, his demeanor peaceful, and even his face seems more settled, as he goes on to say:

Most of the time I think about it, like, I'm happy that I'm thinking about it, because I just, like, loved her, you know? I just loved her. So, when I think about her... it's just comforting at this point [...] I guess that's really when, I guess, you can start coming to terms with something like that... You know, when you start, like, letting go of the anger and the, you know... terror, kind of, I guess, of that day.

The facial close-up that accompanies those words is quite astounding. Almost like a frontal-viewed mirror image of our previous meetings, where rage and resentment are now somehow overcome or overtaken somewhat by ease and endearment, a clear and certain renewed sense of reality is related. In a way, like the light that reflects from his eyeglasses to the lens when he stops speaking, looks intently and softly nods, this encounter reflects a "rebirth" for our relationship with him. That is to say that his changed face affects us not just because it seems or is seen to be different but also because the face itself makes a difference, as this cinematic facing effects a feeling that once again changes our way of facing.

Consequently, we meet Nick four more times. The first time we do, the shot itself opens on his hands while he types, alongside his voice-over about writing a book about his mother, and then pans up to his face. Coming back to his face, he looks contented as he tells us that he has realized what he wants to do with his life as well as has recognized that his mother would be proud of him whatever he does. The second time we do, the film rather

opens with a medium shot of him and his father, where his voice-over bridges a cut to his face in close-up in which he talks about the two of them now having weekly dinners together. In a duo of facial close-ups, on either side of more images of father and son, he recounts both their confrontation and reconciliation, and through several gentle facial expressions tells us his father finally said he was sorry and that he has come to understand his father was also just trying to heal from the loss of a loved one. As later follows, the third time we encounter him is by voice alone, in which he over more home footage of his mother and of her last birthday celebration speaks about how his family was broken apart by her death but found a way to come back together without her. The fourth time we do, however, we once more encounter him face-to-face, as the only one of the five during the film's closing sequence, where we first hear him say:

I don't think I would be where I am now without going through all of the different steps of the process. If you accept that process, I think you end up in a much better spot, land on your feet... I think I've landed on my feet.<sup>16</sup>

Suddenly, quickly cut to in the short pause before the last transcribed sentence, we see Nick's face in testimonial close-up. His face appears to us, framed as before in front of a pitch-black background and backed up by contrast lighting, with only his head and shoulders visible in the shot. As he slightly tilts his head and shrugs his shoulders, he seems to softly smile and stare straight at us. This is the expression that he as well as the film itself, since it is its last facial close-up, leaves us with.

There is something ecstatic to this moment, some momentous and meaningful feeling of relieved hope. Beyond the information we as spectators receive as to Nick's situation from his spoken testimony, these momentary close-up images of his face again bear meaning all by themselves. What they represent, what they say, makes any sense whatever. However, how they express, how they say, still powerfully and profusely signify. That is to say that all these uncertain signs face us not only with a sense of terror but with a certain sensation of wonder. There, through the expressions of this cinematic face, our encountering of recovery somehow also becomes a recovering encounter, as his face and its affects come and go to in the end realize the recovered alterity of the reality of his lived experience. Here his face, his changed face – our facing *him* – sensorially relates a reality of resilience.

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<sup>16</sup> *Rebirth* (Whitaker 2011), approximately 1:36:25-1:36:45. My transcription. From his 2009 interview session. As for the last page's quote: approximately 1:11:55-1:13:05. My transcription from his 2007 interview session.

Facing Nick, like with Tanya, Tim, Brian, and Ling, what is recovered or who is realized in these images, by way of all these cinematic faces, speaks to a reality that really matters, which also beckons the matter of responsibility. In this sense, through the power of the facial close-up and the potential of audiovisual testimony, reality is realized as ethicality. Aesthetically, there is arguably not anything out of the ordinary to these aspects of the real as recorded through these images themselves; ethically, however, there is evidently something extraordinary to the affects of the real as recovered by these faces. Encountering the survivors as the faces of five real others, who lived and live on, who lost but work to work through and move on, or people whose lives, stories and worlds go on beyond our cinematic encounters with them, become encounters of human consequence. That is to say that it matters what they do, it matters what is done with them, and it matters what we do with them. This also means that both cinematic mediation and spectatorial relation, or the manner of how they face us and manner of how we face them, essentially become matters of ethics. That is to say that while such a potential has much to do with documentary form or its being itself, the realization of this potential still necessitates both one and the other at once and thus has most to do with the doing of documentary as a mode of encounter, or even more precisely the modalities of what the film may be said to do as fundamental to what it may be said to be.

As a documentary film expression, *Rebirth* is a multimodal one. To briefly reconsider those seven previously mentioned and summarized “modes” outlined by Nichols, the film is first and foremost “participatory”. Through its direct interaction with these five survivors by way of numerous studio interview sessions, which are of course turned into monologues by cutting out any questions asked, the most prominent compositional form of its audiovisual testimonial material is thus comparable to the broad documentary format often called “talking heads”. Likewise, through its directorial involvement with the situations of these survivors by following their everyday lives over a long period of time and presenting them through staged and edited observation, the film also takes part in their processes of dealing with and healing from bereavement. Simultaneously, albeit perhaps secondarily, the film is both “poetic” and “reflexive” as well. While there are not many cuts, camera movements or musical cues during the testimonials themselves, those previously described transitional parts unfold in a visual and aural cinematic language that significantly highlights stylistic and rhythmic elements. Also, while no views of the production itself are provided as such, aspects like for example the prevalence of black screens and radio sounds chosen ahead of archival footage of the events of the day certainly emphasize the filmmaking itself. In a way, such a process of documenting does directly involve us as spectators in its interactions with the survivors.

Furthermore, that is also the basis for the following argument that the film is both “performative” and “interactive” as well. However, here these elements denote somewhat other senses of the terms than is designated in the mentioned framework. When it comes to performance, the performativity of the film is less about the personality of the filmmaker and more about the powerful expressivity personified by the survivors’ testimonies themselves. Just in such a sense, the film returns to subjectivity, as its mediation of audiovisual testimony and thus its mediation of memory acts as a sort of evocation of the subjective experiences of these survivors. Hence, to rephrase Renov, the mediated relation the film establishes is also a kind of exploration of some “self”, but the who explored here is indeed not the seeing, feeling and even healing self of a filmmaker and instead the speaking, facing and even healing selves of these five survivors, expressed yet expressing themselves cinematically through the film’s poetics itself. Surprisingly as such, this turns the thesis towards another or opposite order, in which one may arguably say the subject of documentary becomes the subject in documentary. Additionally, the actualizing or authenticating quality of the film as documentary embodies or empowers these expressions with, to repropose Sobchack, a “charge” of the real, through the way that this performance of documenting the real charges and engages or even changes our gaze to one that opens from a responsive and responsible consciousness or conscience, opening onto an optics on another axiological or axiographical order. Thus, we may here say that documented testimonies and testimonial documentation come together in a double mode of sorts to really, to repurpose Bruzzi, “perform” documentary reality through a relationship in which images enact or act on us while asking us to react, act back or participate to allow this reality to relate and resonate.<sup>17</sup>

Where interaction is then concerned, the interactivity of the film lies precisely in that this doing does depend on us as spectators too, that is what we do with people. On the side of the film, it faces us with survivors as subjects, real people facing, not by showing and telling but rather by letting speak and helping see, leading us into or teaching a certain relation, and thus the way that it acts makes us the subject of address and affects, or perhaps even subjects us, to these survivors. Still, on the side of the spectator, this activity is subject to our ability to be addressed and affected, and thus the way we react to or perhaps rather act upon our being subjected to these survivors, is what makes for this potential interactive capability. Such an interaction means to face the survivors as subjects, facing real people, not by knowing or quelling but rather by adjusting our eyes to see and attuning our ears to hear, us taking upon

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<sup>17</sup> For terms and theories from Nichols, Renov, Sobchack, and Bruzzi in their original context, see chapter three.

or learning a certain relation. Of course, such a mode of interactivity does not involve any medial interface in the technical or technological sense of the term, one by which we control the process itself. However, the film still activates as an interfacial mediator in another sense, one through which we come to participate in the process of performing mediated face-to-face encounters. In so many words, the film turns interactive through images that incessantly and indexically face us with the face of these five survivors while immediately and imperatively facilitating that we face them, whether this very task is taken or not. This is really all to say that the film's cinematic faces also act as potential interfaces within a tripartite interaction, opening a possible interactivity, interfaciality or even intersubjectivity that points to the way that its audiovisual testimony is best understood not as "talking heads", but much better as "speaking faces". To me this is both an important difference and distinction, since the film really speaks through its presentation of cinematic faces or facings, a speaking that happens on another level than or the other side of the survivors' oral testimonies on their own, and in which the faces of the survivors themselves have a performative agency to speak to us. This is to say that its audiovisual testimonial material is not based in heads talking, but rather in faces speaking through images and to us as spectators, and this interfacing interaction is the way the film emanates affect, encourages response, engenders belief, and evidences reality.

All these modes in different ways point to dimensions of what *Rebirth* is and does. Yet, there is another outstanding mode that simultaneously both ties and transcends all the others: the mode of the ethical. Now, this may be elaborated more by the thought that ethics both is and is not a mode as such. In one sense, it is an emergence of something or someone that exists, is expressed and is experienced, in encounter. In another sense, it is an event that may never be modeled or modified beforehand neither by film nor spectator, and there is therefore no designated "voice" or deliberated "choice" that is ethical as such. Nonetheless, ethics are done, that is they can be done in some or other way, manner or mode of encounter, which is to say that any ethical mode is a potential one, as it ever only exists as a mode of encounter. Thus, in the domain of documentary, it always has double dimensionality as compositional and conditional, a poetics and an optics, a form of expression and form of experience, or in short and simple terms: a mediated relationship. Above and beyond any deal of the real, contact or contract of sorts, there may also be an "entente" of ethics whose terms of engagement are never signed or sealed but rather accepted as, or when and if so, we are affected. For me, such a strange and surprising power or potential is also perhaps the most important basis for the something which the director himself realized was happening through the film's meetings with its first spectators, a process he talks about in parts in the following:



The film in many respects is about grief and healing, and ultimately it's about the resilience of the human spirit. How people get over and move through their grief. So I decide to choose five subjects who had experienced that loss, to include their journeys, to really explore the challenge of going through grief and coming out the other end [...] Again, the whole project has been this surprising evolution. It started with the time-lapse installation, evolved into a larger film, and at a certain point I was showing the film in a reduced form to people and I started to see that it was affecting them in a way. I began to realize that we could be helping people, because it was kind of cathartic for them [...] So I realized actually the power in what we had was the ability to learn from grief and then to be able to transfer that knowledge into teaching and learning tools [...] (Whitaker 2011).<sup>18</sup>

While the terms themselves are definitely employed in different senses, this expressive and affective and ultimately educational power or potential is also both why and how witnessing the film's audiovisual testimonies indeed realizes, or at least may realize, an ethical process of teaching and learning. That is what really makes them become "moving testimonies", as Sarkar and Walker phrase it, but they potentially do so much more than just move us to anger or tears and possibly mobilize us to action, since instead they most so move and mobilize *us*. Nor does this occur in ordered form with one following the other, but rather through some ongoing loop of sorts, moving us to be mobilized while further mobilizing us to be moved. Therefore, what moves and mobilizes is *our* mode of seeing, feeling, or even being, itself, and thus it is us as moveable subjects or moveable objects, and our sense of responsibility and resiliency, that is awakened as capable of movement. This is a double move that is made from both otherness and ourselves at once, as we do have to move to really be moved, or else we are only and not really moving ourselves. *We* are made to move in a veritable rebirth of ethics in which our very ethical self may become reborn.

Ethics as a mode of documentary and a mode of audiovisual testimony, again if we may even call it modal at all, is done in a mode of its own – one that is otherwise than any other. Whether or not any given documentary film is poetic or expository, observational or participatory, or reflexive, performative and interactive, this ethical modality does not overlap and intermingle, but rather interrupts and overflows all these frameworks. Thus, documentary ethics is always a form of doing and never a form of being, yet this doing is foundational or fundamental to its being. This is to say that although the ethical dimension may take no part in what makes a documentary a documentary, yet it remains a presence and possibility in a documentary's relationship with reality and its spectators and thus may take on a paramount role in what documentary can make happen or "make real" as documentary.

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<sup>18</sup> Quotes from an interview conducted by Theo Spielberg and published in *HuffPost*, January 24, 2011.

As a documentary film experience, *Rebirth* is a multifaceted one, the utmost of which is ultimately that it is “multifaced”. It is by way of giving cinematic face to these survivors through its form of audiovisual testimony, facing before us while mediating a mode of facing for us as spectators, that the film therefore may relate reality as recorded and thereby realize reality as recovered. This potentially interactive facing is also precisely the situation for the emergence of its ethics. In this sense, hence traversing all the theoretical turns and analytical avenues traveled to attempt to articulate the expressive and experiential real of its reel, in the end the film is best perhaps encapsulated as, adding on an otherwise dimension to Grierson’s definition of documentary: an ethical treatment of reality. Reality as ethically treated in the mediated relationship called cinema – to be contemplated in the last part of this analysis.

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*Rebirth* ends with the sight of the sun and the sound of music. Again fading in from black, a montage of rising buildings above and buzzing life below shortly follows, in real-time and in time-lapse, and over the images the voices of the survivors come in with some choice words. “Everyone heals in a completely different way”, we hear Nick say, before his expression fills the screen in a final close-up face. From this face, the film proceeds with images of the five survivors living their lives, without what or who they were bereaved yet with everything that remains, and still with their voice-overs following auditive suit. “I have hope. It’s all gonna work... It’s all gonna be good at the end of the day”, says Brian. “I’ll always grieve. But it doesn’t stop me from still living a life of joy”, says Tanya. All words spoken over images of them with their loved one and their lovely faces. Meanwhile, we also see the construction or reconstruction of the new One World Trade Center. In extended time-lapse montage, with a steadily increasing musical score, we look on as the tower grows bigger and bigger, taller and taller, ever stronger as a sight to behold. In the very end, this series of shots closes in on the tower itself and tilts up towards the sky. As the frame fills with blue skies and white clouds, the music hits its crescendo and orchestral horns sound out, before the screen at last turns black and returns back with the film’s end credits.<sup>19</sup>

This is the last of the film’s audiovisual testimonial material. Following our recurrent encounters with these survivors, now these people and these speaking faces no longer return, yet these facings do not fade away but are rather made to endure. Facing these survivors as real others and the otherness of their lived reality of dealing with and healing from terrible bereavement or their working through and moving towards resilient betterment, finds ethical resonance in our felt sense of responsibility and perhaps even our sense of feeling resiliency, and in that sense these faces may face us with a potential realization of ourselves. Meanwhile, this is also the last of the film’s audiovisual transitional material. Although it does not end up a transition to anything else within the film itself, arguably it still transitions us as spectators further towards an otherwise awareness of another past, present and future, the unknown of real people whose lives go on beyond our encounters in the now of the film as well as the known of the real world. That means that while its face images speak to a uncertain alterity, its time images speak to a certain reality, and the power of the two together as both recorded and recovered real may therefore realize or take us towards realizing the alterity of reality and the reality of alterity, the last realization of an ethics that has lasting after-effects.

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<sup>19</sup> The end credits open with the text: “Proceeds from *Rebirth* will help first responders and others support communities that are impacted by trauma and future disasters. Learn more and find out how you can help”, something that also points to the potential impact of facing these survivors and the film itself may have on us.

As this analysis has elaborated, audiovisual testimony is the key form or format of *Rebirth*. From the beginning, the film both presents itself as being a documentary as well as performs itself as doing such a documentation through its testimonials – through audiovisual testaments of face – while simultaneously documenting itself through its transitions – through audiovisual testaments of time. Encountering us through a combination of the cinematic faces of five survivors as well as its changing facing over time, the film thus faces us with a sort of juxtaposition between a clear and certain sense of reality and unclear and uncertain sense of alterity, ones that together establish a specific mediated relationship and encourage a special mode of spectatorship. In this sense, the film relationally opens both ethical space and ethical time, as its cinematic space-time, the compositions and conditions of the film as expression and experience, opens for and opens us to ethics. This is the foundation for the potential of the film’s moving testimonies to otherness to become testimonies that move us otherwise by mobilizing a being for others, and thus moving us towards an enhanced understanding of both the human outcome and the overwhelming human power to overcome trauma and tragedy.

Thus, as a documentary film about both living through and living on from terror itself, *Rebirth* indeed rebirths terrible bereavement to instead bear testified resilience. By way of its manner of dealing with reality or documenting audiovisual testimony through the mediation of a relation or realization of a process of potential ethical teaching and learning, the project reaches its goal of being about reborn resilience and becoming a resilience resource.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> While the film definitely has distinctive characteristics, there are other documentaries about survivors, victims and witnesses from 9/11 that are interesting in some similar ways. Such a list includes the perhaps most famous example in James Hanlon, Gédéon and Jules Naudet’s *9/11* (2002) as well as *9/11: Ten Years Later* (2011), now released in new editions in connection with the twenty-year anniversary of the attacks, but simultaneously also more recent examples like *Generation 9/11* (Liz Mermin 2021), the six-part series *9/11: One Day in America* (Daniel Bogado 2021), as well as Spike Lee’s limited series *NYC Epicenters 9/11-2021 ½* (2021), all of which realize distinct forms of testimony and distances to memory from real people. Works like these arguably make possible modes of encounter with the reality of terror and its consequences in wholly different ways than do more commercial fictional counterparts like for example *United 93* (Paul Greengrass 2006) and *World Trade Center* (Oliver Stone 2006), especially in the specific ethical sense here explored.

V:

## FACING TRAUMA

### Mediated trauma and cinematic witnessing

*What good is trauma?* Approaching trauma is troublesome altogether, but asking how facing trauma for those who have not been traumatized may be done, and also if it may do us good, does open several other problems to confront. The expressive and affective meaning, value and power of trauma, and the impact and significance of experiencing the traumatic through mediation, is therefore central to my research project as the case stays our potential cinematic encounters with other people who have been traumatized by terror.

The word “trauma”, as derived from Greek, denotes a “wound”. Originally, the term was only used to name external or physical injuries, but has in the last couple of centuries or so, with the advent of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, simultaneously come to name internal or psychological injuries. This characterization of psychological trauma in terms of wounding experiences is explicit in early theorizations from the likes of Albert Eulenberg, Pierre Janet, Josef Breuer, Sigmund Freud, and William James, and has since been described and defined in different ways, especially so in recent decades. Common to almost all accounts, however, whether in clinical, academic or colloquial senses, and whether seen first and foremost as an event, experience or effect, trauma still connotes some or other idea of a wound, something that wounds or some kind of wounding.<sup>1</sup>

All the while this chapter does not deal with the pathology of trauma as such, trauma is still a key word for its further terms and themes and thus it reviews and discusses relevant thoughts on trauma first to work its way towards a theoretical and an analytical framework to approach the traumatic through film. Building on the more recent academic field most often called trauma studies, by considering a central selection of theories that remain a reference point for later research in the field and certain theorists whose work therefore provides an informative introduction to many of its theses and tenets, for this reason it will still primarily delimit its perspective here to trauma or the traumatic in relation to aesthetic art and media.

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<sup>1</sup> As for more specific characterizations, since the introduction of “post-traumatic stress disorder” as a diagnostic category in 1980, the two most cited clinical classifications, the DSM and the ICD, respectively define trauma as exposure to situations of “actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence” (APA 2013: 271) or as situations of “exceptionally threatening or catastrophic nature, which is likely to cause pervasive distress in almost anyone” (WHO 2016: 309).

To be sure, trauma comes from a powerful event and has a profound effect on those primarily affected or wounded in some way or another, one which is difficult to work out and work through. But still the beginning argument here is that such traumatic experiences also do something or are also affecting when secondarily expressed to its “woundless” witnesses, that is even when such an exposure to wounds is only encountered through the memories and the testimonies of others. Yet, articulating what that may be or how it may happen is another matter altogether. Thus, the questions I would like to contemplate are these: Do testimonies to trauma help us understand? If so, what does bearing witness to the traumatic bear with it? And ultimately too: What *good* can trauma do? Furthermore, here considering the fact that most of us only come to face the traumatic through different forms of media, this certainly also calls for more consideration of all the possible marks trauma makes within specifically mediated sites and situations. Therefore, other apposite questions are: May the same terms also then be true in relation to audiovisual mediation of trauma? If that is the case, what relationship between images and spectators can potentially have such an *ethical* stress? What, in the end, are the ethics of cinematic witnessing?

These are the questions this chapter explores, and it does so in the following way. The first section takes on the term trauma, here traversing what it means and the way it works in mediation, how it can be communicated and consequences of doing so, through a thorough delineation and detailed investigation of some of the most important thoughts on the topic from a choice of different influential trauma scholars, that is Judith Lewis Herman, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, and Cathy Caruth, thus laying instrumental groundwork to further consider specifically mediated trauma and testimony. The second section therefore explores the relationship between trauma and the image, working its way forward further from the mediation of traumatic memory and testimony, reviewing concepts from Marianne Hirsch, Alison Landsberg and Roxana Waterson, towards the traumatic and ethical potential of the encounter between images and spectators, discussing several fitting yet differing positions from Janet Walker, Joshua Hirsch, Susan Sontag, and E. Ann Kaplan, moreover developing a perspective on mediated testimonies to trauma and witnessing the traumatic through film. The third section then explores cinematic witnessing and its ethics, also going into dialogue with ideas from John Durham Peters, Paul Frosh, and Thomas Trezise, thus framing an analytical approach to the ethical potential of facing trauma with cinematic witnessing.

## Mediating trauma

As its caption announces, this section concerns the relation between trauma and mediation, with an interest precisely in the problematic of the possibilities of mediating and relating to the traumatic. Starting from the experience of trauma, these are questions of its expression, how it can potentially be unfolded and understood, ones that necessarily connect to concepts of testimony and witnessing. When it comes to such a survey, it seems productive to consult seminal works in the interdisciplinary field of trauma studies, thus also considering several multidimensional ideas about and approaches to mediated trauma from some of its most notable scholars, and putting different ways of dealing with trauma into dialogue.

One of those comes from psychiatrist and researcher Judith Lewis Herman, who in important ways helped recontextualize and even reconceptualize trauma as such. In her book *Trauma and Recovery*, building on both the assembled testimony of trauma survivors and the history of trauma studies, she underlines the critical importance of the trauma *story*. Seeing such stories as both at the heart of the central dialectic of psychological trauma and one of the fundamental stages of recovery, she makes a point that: “Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (1992: 1).<sup>2</sup> Such traumatic truths, however, commonly and continuously struggle, on a private level, to be told, and simultaneously, on a public level, to take hold, because denial, repression, and dissociation are at work on both sides. This reconstruction of trauma stories, and their recognition, is crucial to an understanding for survivors, and of survivors for others, but the process of communication itself is a difficult undertaking (ibid. 1-3). Here, there is a need for relation that necessitates mediation.

The trouble of understanding traumatic experiences stems from the underlying trouble of understanding traumatic events. In every sense of the word, these are overwhelming events that override the ordinary sense-making systems of those affected, and thereby, in this sense, these events and experiences are extraordinary. As they most often involve a “close personal encounter with violence and death”, ones that “confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe”, and ones that lead to lasting “changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory” (ibid. 33-35), telling the story of trauma to others and listening to such a story from others are both difficult to do.

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<sup>2</sup> To note in further quote: This trauma dialectic is the “conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud”, and these recovery stages are “establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community” (1992: 1, 3).

Furthermore, these are also undermining events that trouble the foundations of truth and trust for those afflicted, and hence fundamentals of human sociality. Since they most often inflict upon “the psychological structures of the self”, ones that shake “the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community”, and ones that lead to losing “the belief that one can *be oneself* in relation to others” (ibid. 51-53), thus the trouble of communicating the traumatic is double. For Herman, such “troubles” is what “traumatization” means, and is for her as for me the reason disseminating trauma remains a demanding yet demanded endeavor.

All the while this is certainly not to claim that trauma is the same from one person to another, it is to say that a commonality between traumatized people is precisely the necessity of facing and sharing their traumatic experience with others (ibid. 69-70). To break it down a bit more, this means there is both a need to recollect and recount to others as well as need for response and responsibility from others. To help with recovery, in few words, survivors need help. What is needed is relation, and therefore who is needed is someone for them to speak to, someone to hear them, someone to be there for them. As phrased earlier, for those facing the traumatic, necessary is relation and necessarily also mediation, to the end of having a sense of meaning returned to themselves. On the other end of this relation, there is certainly senses of meaning as well, which from my point of view also begs questions of what it may potentially do to be that someone there, that someone to listen, that someone to be spoken to – and if facing and caring about the traumatic experience of others can help us too.

“Trauma is contagious”, Herman writes (ibid. 140). Like it overwhelms those who bear witness to it, so it comes to overwhelm those who witness this bearing witness. In some cases, this may take the form of or project through transference and countertransference, or what is often called “vicarious traumatization”, that is as affliction “from” those traumatized. In other cases, however, this may rather make for a mode or process within which witnessing traumatization opens onto commemoration and commiseration, that is as affection for those traumatized. Before “an open-minded, compassionate witness”, as she argues, survivors can then confront and communicate their traumatic past, consequently also causing it to be “more present and more real” to both participants, and thus also transform their traumatic memory into a story, one that through its very telling “becomes a testimony” (ibid. 180-181). Here the very “action of telling a story”, as Herman puts it, ends up with “renewed hope and energy”, and is a key step in dealing with and healing from trauma, a crucial turn from the past to the present and future and therefore core work of reconnection and recovery (ibid. 195-197). We may thus understand witnessing in both ways as helpful for survivors themselves, but coming



back to questions of what such witnessing can potentially do to all its other witnesses, if and how it can also be helpful for us, she later suggests that it can ultimately help us understand:

Survivors understand full well that the natural human response to horrible events is to put them out of mind [...] Survivors also understand that those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it [...] Survivors undertake to speak about the unspeakable in public in the belief that this will help others (1992: 208).

Whereas Herman does not elaborate more on this mode of mediated trauma, since the one she considers in most of her work here first and foremost concerns the survivors' psychology and the situation of psychotherapy, there also seems a sense that the story, or perhaps testimony, remains the same, or retains some of the same potential, in otherwise mediated frameworks. This is meant to ask: Can the action of telling a story through media carry the same reaction?

Through their formative collaborative work on testimony, entitled so too, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub examine the capability and practicability of mediating trauma through testimony, and mediating testimony through art. For them, bearing witness to trauma involves not only witnesses but simultaneously *crises* of witnessing. Trauma, as a "dimension of the real", is of a scale that exceeds our frames of reference, our categories or our concepts, and thereby confronts our very perception of reality. Trauma, as an "encounter with the real", is thus of a magnitude that "leads to the experience of an existential crisis in all those involved". Hence, they set out to analyze such crises and theorize a "yet uncharted, nonrepresentational but performative, relationship" concerning how art can implement mediated forms or modes of witnessing the traumatic, or how in their words: "art inscribes (artistically bears witness to) *what we do not yet know of our lived historical relation to events of our times*" (1992: xv-xx). They go on to do so in connected ways in different chapters authored by the one or other.

In the first of these, Felman relates witnessing to teaching. Here, questioning the ways that trauma can instruct teaching and that teaching can illuminate trauma, she argues that the witness is a medium, that the testimonial situation is mediated relation from the start, but also that further mediation is a crucial mode of relation for those who witness. Testimonies, in the sense of performative speech acts that address, and thus address us with, "*action* that exceeds any substantialized significance" and simultaneously "*impact* that dynamically explodes any conceptual reifications and any constative delimitations", thereby bear a and also our relation to memory, reality and "the traumas of contemporary history" (ibid. 1-5). From these points, Felman goes on to indicate an intimate relationship between writing and bearing witness as well as reading and facing horror, one which bears upon the educational situation.

Testimony is ultimately, in her account, understood as a “mode of *truth’s realization* beyond what is available as statement [...] not as a mode of *statement of*, but rather as a mode of *access to*, that truth” (ibid. 15-16), but when it comes to precisely what and how such truth is taught, Felman speculates by way of a personal anecdote about one of her classes. Through reading and watching mediated testimonial material about trauma and from trauma survivors, what happened was, as she writes, both for her students and her, “an unpredictable vicissitude of teaching”. Because of these vivifying expressions, the class went into crisis, and from such a crisis, because of their witnessing experience, the class learned a lesson; acknowledging the “trauma they had gone through” and then appreciating “the significance of their assuming the position of the witness”, the course thus changed them (ibid. 47-52).<sup>3</sup> Curiously, even though her own retelling does enounce that this turn of events occurred first in the encounter with the audiovisual testimony of Holocaust survivors, not much is said about its audiovisuality, but rather it is their words that she here seems to argue worked as a catalyst which coupled with literary ones had a profound impact on the class. Without disregarding her own interpretation, to me it seems that such a power had much to do with the audiovisual testimonial form itself. Whichever it was, the key lesson that Felman emphasizes here, or the one that to me should be emphasized in her interpretation of events, is precisely that something new came to be realized through witnessing, in a mediated relationship that transcended the given as well as transformed frames of meaning. As such, thus these testimonies came to teach through trauma – an “event” of testimonial teaching (ibid. 53-55). In this sense, her testimony here, as she calls it herself, for me speaks to a potential that art can mediate the trauma of survivors and simultaneously a mode of witnessing for spectators as well. Yet, this potential certainly remains open for more clear-cut exploration.

In the two following ones, Laub relates witnessing to listening. There, writing of the ways that listening to traumatic testimony is simultaneously letting it turn into testimony, he submits that witnessing trauma entails a unique situation of mediation. Testimonies to trauma are testaments, he writes here, to “a record that has yet to be made”, that “has not been truly witnessed yet”, but “comes to be inscribed for the first time” through the testimony (ibid. 57). From those points, he soon proposes that such a position of the witness to the witness, if you will, is a pivotal but particular one, and even a peculiar one – summed up in the following:

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<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the pedagogical experience that Felman shares is from teaching a graduate course about literature and testimony at Yale University during the fall of 1984, and while there are certainly elements of dramatization and narrativization in her retelling of it, which have subsequently been criticized and presumably also rightly so, the anecdote is still telling.

The listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself. He has to address [this], if he is to carry out his function as a listener, and if trauma is to emerge, so that its henceforth impossible witnessing can indeed take place. The listener, therefore, by definition partakes of the struggle of the victim with the memories and residues of his or her traumatic past [...] so that they can assume the form of testimony (1992: 57-58).

From my perspective, what is the most important point here is that witnessing itself is only possible as a process that involves at the minimum two distinct positions, where the second witness is constitutive to the way that the traumatic memory of the first witness may be mediated as testimony. As for the role of the former, another summary will now follow:

The listener [...] nonetheless does not become the victim – he preserves his own separate place, position and perspective; a battleground for forces raging in himself, to which he has to pay attention and respect if he is to properly carry out his task. The listener, therefore, has to be at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and a witness to himself. It is only in this way, through his simultaneous awareness of the continuous flow of those inner hazards both in the trauma witness and in himself, that he can become the enabler of the testimony [...] (1992: 57-58).

For my purposes, what remains the major point altogether is that witnessing relies on ethics, both the capacity and responsibility to maintain the difference and distance between oneself and the other even in the face of encounters that feel traumatic, and in this way facilitate the difficult expression and experience by which trauma becomes testimony. According to Laub, it remains only through workings of a witnessing process of recognition, reconstruction and “re-externalizing” that the traumatic internalized repetition, repression and “re-experiencing” of the reality of its terror can potentially be overcome (ibid. 68-70).<sup>4</sup> All the while he writes his listener as within a relationship of an immediate vicinity and not any mediate virtuality, these key ideas also pertain to another level of mediation, a secondary second, so to speak, or a third witness. Audiovisual testimony, he also suggests, is another way for the articulation to and acknowledgement from another, “another medium which provides a listener to trauma, another medium of re-externalization”, where the witness can find another to witness and be witnessed as an other, so that their testimony can therefore be told to somebody (ibid. 70-71).

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<sup>4</sup> This is also the crucial line of argument in Laub’s formulation that the Holocaust was, in such a specific sense, “an event without a witness”. In the incommensurability, inhumanity, even impossibility, of its historical reality, there was no longer the philosophical possibility of an other to bear witness – or the “very possibility of address, the possibility of appealing, or of turning to, another” – and therefore no longer the possibility to bear witness to oneself (1992: 80-82). In a more general sense: without another to witness trauma cannot be witnessed at all.

Once more, however, the “somebody” or the other listener he focuses in on is the interviewer, something that concerns his own personal experience with interviewing Holocaust survivors<sup>5</sup>, and he does not consider all those other “somebodies” that also come to be involved in these encounters in their role as spectators.

Still, there seems to be a sense that similar vicissitudes of this process of “listening”, albeit certainly different as discourse, may also be extrapolated to the act of witnessing the testimonial situation through audiovisual mediation. “We”, as Laub writes, are scared to face trauma survivors, we are “profoundly terrified to truly face the traumas of our history, much like the survivor and the listener are”, but it is through facing this fear, as he continues, that we may all potentially “learn from the trauma, from the testimony and from the very process of our listening” – an “event” of testimonial learning (ibid. 72-74). For me, once more his central lesson is that being a witness to an other is also being a witness to oneself; it is both a confrontation with otherness and with ourselves. Whatever may be the case, to me witnessing really seems to mean to be ready to hear and realize our fear, to not turn away but truly face what they say, and thus also facing our very way of gazing. Audiovisually mediating trauma through testimony, the fact of facing us with the traumatic through film, would thus arguably be to multiply the possibility of a witnessing modality for its spectators.

In the last of these chapters, Felman continues this line of thinking, as she certainly seems to relate witnessing to spectating itself. Here, in a substantial analysis of Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, she elaborates on her own earlier theorization as well as that of Laub and proposes that cinematic mediation can be a witness as well as can help the spectator be a witness. In its introduction, she writes that the film is not simply about witnessing, that is the “*relation between history and witnessing*” and the “*relation between art and witnessing*”, but itself bears witness in a way that expands the expression and experience of witnessing by giving us to witness “*a historical crisis of witnessing*” (ibid. 205-206). As these arguments continue to be formulated throughout the text, however, despite her opening question about the ways the film calls upon witnessing by “seeing” and as a “visual” medium, it stays words and voices rather than images or faces that claim the core of Felman’s idea of what it means to witness its audiovisual testimonies for us as spectators.

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<sup>5</sup> As a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Laub was of course one of the founders and facilitators of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, at Yale University. Formed in 1979, this pioneer project has been a source for academic study and documentary films, and today consists of over 4400, or about 12 000 hours of, recorded testimonies. It is one of the most comprehensive testimony collections in the world and is now also digitized, so therefore accessible remotely for researchers, students, and the public.

Indeed, it is thematic metaphors that predominantly call on vision and visuality to play their parts, in the way the film works to occlude or preclude the possibility of optics and “makes us *see* concretely – makes us *witness*” the limit case of the Holocaust as “*an event without a witness*”. Instead, it is translated meanings of language and listening that makes possible the film’s “performance of *its* cinematic witnessing”, one that is moreover “recapitulated on the level of the viewers of the film” (ibid. 207-213). *Shoah*, she writes, declares the “*necessity of testimony*” as it dramatizes the “*impossibility of testimony*” to enact the traumatic impact of an unbearable event and its erasure of witnessing itself. “The very testimony of the film”, then, is to confront us as spectators with how it even would or ever could be possible to witness for ourselves, from the outside, impossible testimonies to trauma from the inside, “*from inside Otherness*” (ibid. 224-231). Without circumscribing the complexity of her conceptualization, to Felman it seems neither seeing or images themselves can help us understand, but rather they necessitate a certain reception or reading that can then reveal their significance – here also in line with the rest of her essays.<sup>6</sup> In the end, her “the return of the voice” is of course also the return of the face, yet Felman ultimately argues that witnessing the uniqueness and otherness of the returning witness is not any haunted seeing but a haunting singing, one that is sung over and over again as an open question to us – so the songs of the film embody the testimony of the other, they enable our witnessing and hauntingly leave us “empowered, and condemned, to *hearing*” (ibid. 280-282). Therefore, once more the potential of the cinematic image for itself seems left to explore.

Another one of the scholars who has been central to establishing trauma theory as a research area is Cathy Caruth.<sup>7</sup> Through a duo of studies, she there makes the case that art can tell traumatic stories and treat traumatic testimonies, and through this teach new ways of relating and responding to the traumas of others, but that any such lessons remain contingent on our own approach as well as always comes along with a core problem of communication,

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<sup>6</sup> Felman is first and foremost a literary researcher and in addition to her referenced chapter she also makes up the remainder of the book with three others on writing, two on the works of Camus and one on the work Paul de Man. This is her only analysis of film, one that is arguably quite literary in its approach too.

<sup>7</sup> As introduced before, at least in culturally focused trauma studies, Caruth, Felman and Laub are among the foremost foundational figures, the two latter also contributing to the former’s influential collection and most recently her interview project called *Listening to Trauma* (2014), and the two former both continuing their conceptualizations elsewhere for example in the anthology *The Future of Testimony* (Kilby & Rowland 2014). However, there are of course also many other important scholars and works in this context, see for example: Langer (1991), who studied testimonies from the Fortunoff Video Archive; Hartman (1994, 1996, 2016), who was also one of the founders of that archive; LaCapra (1994, 1998), who has directly debated the theories of the three mentioned; and finally Leys (2000) as well as Radstone (2007), both of whom have respectively written critical overviews and reviews of their work.

and mediation. Trauma, she writes in her preface to the anthology *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, involves “recognition of realities that most of us have not begun to face”, which is why in any encounter with trauma we “continue to face a crucial problem at the heart of this unique and difficult phenomenon”. This means our trying to understand trauma and suffering without reducing the “force and truth of the reality that trauma survivors face and quite often try to transmit to us”, facing the “unthinkable realities to which traumatic experience bears witness” (1995: vii-ix). From my position, this core problem thus concerns the witnesses to the witnesses, whether therapists, writers and readers, filmmakers and spectators, or any others, and how we may acknowledge the particularity of traumatic memory; at its core, this is a problem that concerns our responsibility.

For Caruth, encountering trauma challenges us in that it takes us to the limits of our understanding, and while she says that she is less interested in defining the phenomenon than deliberating its impact, she suggests what has turned into an impactful definition. Trauma, or more concretely post-traumatic stress disorder, has a pathology that cannot be defined by the event itself or as “a *distortion* of the event”, but rather by “the *structure of its experience*” in its belatedness and “its repeated *possession*” of those who experience it. To be traumatized, she argues, is thus “to be possessed by an image or event” (ibid. 4-5). Trauma, as she further argues, this possession by the past and return of the event, is the principal and paradoxical characteristic of the survivor experience. Furthermore, traumatic memories therefore do not work as “a simple memory”, as “testimony to an event” or “record of the past”, but is rather witness to an event that was “never fully experienced as it occurred” as well as an experience that is “not yet fully owned” as memorial past (ibid. 151-152) – neither as story nor history. If this account of the experience of trauma is accurate, this certainly seems to implicate an impasse with significant consequences for its expression, which is further convoluted in her continued argument concerning the unrepresentable and unknowable nature of the traumatic.

However, this impossibility is indeed also the site of possibility, whose foundations are found in Caruth’s subsequent return to the Freudian figure of the wound. Beginning her book *Unclaimed Experience*, she there conceptualizes trauma as “a wound that cries out”, one trying to tell us about “a reality or truth that is not otherwise available”, one whose realities and truths constitute a crisis that both “defies and demands our witness”. To tell the story of trauma is thus also to ask a question, she argues, one asked through “a language that continuously defies, even as it simultaneously claims, our understanding” and spoken through a story that “stubbornly persists in bearing witness to some forgotten wound” (1996: 3-5).

According to Caruth, such language is always literary, curiously so even when it concerns imagery<sup>8</sup>, and ultimately a language that is literally an urgent question, or in her own words:

At the core of these stories [...] is thus a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival. These two stories, both incompatible and absolutely inextricable, ultimately define the complexity of what I refer to as *history* [...] it is the inextricability of the story of one's life from the story of a death, an impossible and necessary double telling, that constitutes their historical witness (1996: 7-8).

This connects back to what to me is the most interesting aspect of Caruth's conceptualization, since the encounter with this oscillation and crying wound is an encounter with an *other*. The traumatic telling or testimony to trauma, as she writes, opens the possibility of our "listening to another's wound", to the voice of the other that speaks through it, to a speaking that would not otherwise be possible. It is precisely this impossible address, "this plea by an other who is asking to be seen and heard" and "this call by which the other commands us to awaken", that requires a new mode of listening to – or indeed witnessing – impossibility (ibid. 8-9). Trauma is thus, in such a sense, a communicative wound, and hearing or heeding its cry is up to us.

Caruth, Felman and Laub, in short summary, all articulate the traumatic as a particular paradox. On either side of mediating trauma lies a simultaneous necessity and precarity, and a difficulty but productivity, both of bearing and being a witness, of witnessing itself. That is to say that for any part of processes of witnessing, whether that of the teller of the testimony, the immediate mediator, or a mediate listener, reader or spectator, there is work to do. Now, that is also true for Herman's account of trauma, but unlike hers, here there is arguably a turn of language away from reconstruction and recovery towards crisis and impossibility. This also has the ostensible consequence of a turning of focus from the action of telling a story as an encounter between the ongoing agency of those who testify and the open approach of those who witness, to testimonial transmissions by way of a special or specialist interpretation of sorts. Furthermore, and more problematically, there seems to be more conspicuously blurred boundaries between vicarious trauma and witnessing trauma and consequently between the unilaterality of trauma and an almost universality of trauma in this turned conceptualization.

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<sup>8</sup> Caruth, like Felman, also focuses on literature in her book. This seems to have the consequence that her single film analysis is, even more than Felman, primarily interested in language. Basically, what it investigates is the spoken and written dimensions of the film's script in lieu of any other visual dimensions of the film's images.

Those concerns notwithstanding, together these theorists form a formative theoretical framework to subsequently say something about what the work of relaying and relating to trauma through aesthetic mediation may mean. Moreover, and most importantly, there is a clear emphasis on the possibilities of these crises, how testimonies to trauma can teach us all something if we learn how to witness. For me, this also opens the way towards the crucial point of how witnessing the traumatic can help us understand something about others as well as ourselves – and do good. Meanwhile, what yet remains unclear is precisely the ways the workings of these possible processes of teaching and learning can be realized generally and especially in relation to audiovisual mediation. This is specifically to say that the relationship between trauma and the image certainly necessitates more consideration, essentially when it comes to witnessing and its potential for ethics, relations that certainly ask more unanswered questions. Here, on the one hand, these are questions of how images, like Francis Guerin and Roger Hallas ask it, may “capture ethically the magnitude of the suffering of trauma victims” (2007: 6-7), and the other, questions of how witnessing may happen with us as spectators – what makes us witness or what it takes for us to witness.

At the end of this section, then, it seems pertinent to repeat some of the questions that started it to segue into otherwise points of exploration in the following one: What does this mean for audiovisually mediated trauma? By which means can both images and spectators be or become witness to the traumatic? Furthermore, how does this relate to ethical dimensions of testimonies to trauma? May there be a way of ethically understanding through seeing? What – in specific terms – are the ethics of cinematic witnessing? The next sections bear witness to these enquiries.



## Trauma and the image

Continuing this questioning of witnessing trauma by way of mediation, as well as confronting some of the propositions in the previous section around the idea that traumatic memory only emerges when enabled by listening to become testimony and build understanding, two more groups of questions immediately come to the fore. From one side of this possible interaction: Can the traumatic be *communicated* in an image? Can images *teach* us about trauma, that is, can images show or speak to trauma, or can images *express* trauma? In short: Can the image *witness* trauma to the spectator? Likewise, from the other side of this potential situation: Can the traumatic be *confronted* in an image? Can we *learn* about trauma in images, that is, can we look or listen to trauma in images, or can we *experience* trauma in images? In short: Can the spectator *witness* trauma through the image? All these questions are indeed variations of those asked and approached before, yet they are not meant as mere repetitions but instead specifications that helpfully build a base as the exploration moves through many frameworks.

Namely, inasmuch as trauma is also a sort of abnormal form of remembering, it seems necessary to somewhat also explore the connected concept of memory. “Memory”, as well as its study in memory studies, takes many forms, and this study does not intend to include any comprehensive nor compact discussion of the term itself or its conceptualization discourse. The reason for this is both indeed because this is such a substantial and multifaceted subject area that it may by no means be summed up in short, and that my interest here instead limits itself to the relation between traumatic memories and audiovisual mediation. Like Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz write quite well, “there is no singular, clear-cut phenomenon” that may be dubbed memory, but rather the meaning of memory “has signified, and continues to signify, different phenomena in different historical situations, and within different theoretical or disciplinary paradigms”. Thus, there is a “multiplicity of memory” (2010: 7).<sup>9</sup> Within the multiple, my singular interest lies with the intersections between memory and mediation, or more specifically imagery, which means the possibility of some or other multiplication of memories through media – from one to another. In this context, while the roads not taken still outnumber the ones taken, of course, there are especially three apposite and adjoining concepts that will be considered in the following.

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<sup>9</sup> For those interested in the field itself, some central works are Maurice Halbwachs’ foundational *On Collective Memory* (1992); both Jan and Aleida Assmann’s respective *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization* (2011) and *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization* (2011); as well as Radstone and Schwarz’ comprehensive mentioned collection, *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, which follows the field of research from the middle ages to modernity within many different fields and with its old and new conceptualizations and controversies.

Starting with images in general, the first of those is from Marianne Hirsch and her concept of “postmemory”. Her theorization approaches the workings of traumatic memories of the past as well as the possibilities of any sort of transmission of such memories to people in the present, and in this way the “ethics and aesthetics of remembrance in the aftermath of catastrophe” (2012: 1-3). As to the term itself, she defines it like this:

“Postmemory” describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up (2012: 5).

This is the short definition and one that she has also developed over several decades, from its first introduction over thirty years ago, through her book *Family Frames* (1997), and in many other works since. While both its scale and scope have changed, its key points have remained the same. To approach the core of her conceptualization, however, there are here two other quoted keywords that should be further explored.

One of them is remembering, which is here considered the consequence of affective connections born from the resonant aftereffects of traumatic memories in others as well as borne through processes that allow them “to be shared across individuals and generations”. To be sure, such memories are not literal memories in the sense that the lived experience of one person can be transferred or transformed into that of another, rather it is an experience that somewhat “approximates memory in its affective force and its psychic effects”. Phrased in a different way, this remembering is based in relations to the presence of the past from the expressed embodied experience of others, between those who were there and those who were not, and therefore some sort of recognition or recollection at a remove (ibid. 31-34). In short, according to Hirsch, postmemory is made up by the memories of someone else, most often as mediated by modes of testimony and technology, yet these mediations potentially affect us so powerfully that they seem to be our memories.

Meanwhile, the generation after, as the earlier definition evinces, in the strictest sense refers to the children of trauma survivors, the second generation, yet further elucidation also makes sure to say this also includes survivors’ other immediate relatives and descendants. In the general sense, however, Hirsch also extends and expands the idea of postmemory beyond the borders of the “familial” to that of the “affiliative”. Postmemories are therefore involved in both intergenerational and intragenerational processes, ones that are “embedded in multiple forms of mediation” of private as well as public archives of images and narratives, and ones

that can thus “encompass a larger collective in an organic web of transmission” (ibid. 34-36). The very idea of postmemory, then, concerns the possibility of someone’s personal traumatic memory being able to generate or be generated as memories in other mediate individuals.

This complex web of memorization, if you will, becomes even more complicated by the way that Hirsch also simultaneously articulates postmemory as a “connective art”. That is to say that its webbing of experience and expression are ever-expanding, here in the specific sense that someone’s memories may first be made the postmemories of another within some familial relations and from there be made the postmemories of others within some affiliative relations by way of mediations. This power or process of postmemorialization can therefore perhaps be seen as media making memories as a sort of procreation. When it comes to how this happens, according to Hirsch the key memory-making mediator is imagery. Photography, she claims, remains the most central medium of postmemory since photographic images take forms which both closely mimic the form of memories themselves and due to a simultaneous referentiality and reproducibility thus mirror the “movement from memory to postmemory” (ibid. 36-39). All the while it is curious that cinema, whose audiovisual formats seem even closer to the form that memories take, is given little attention here since while Hirsch does engage with film in her writing she does not consider what difference the cinematic image makes<sup>10</sup>, the important takeaway is still the general idea that postmemories are effects of mediations and especially the affects of images.

Ultimately, with conditions and contingencies and in a conceptual way, Hirsch indeed proposes that we can remember the memories of other people, and that the traumatic can have a lasting impact on those who were not there, who do not have any memories of the traumatic events themselves, but who connect with the traumatic memories of those who were and who do. The project and process of postmemorialization, in so many words, is at its foundations a framework of remembrance that is facilitated by mediation, both an artform and an aesthetic mode of appreciation, and a structure of sorts to communicate trauma from one to the other, and thus from individuals to the collective, community or society. In this way, postmemory is a certain work in which memories are made and multiplied, yet there is certainly a lot more to work out about these memories – what and whose they are, and why call them that at all.

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<sup>10</sup> Arguably, Hirsch therefore seems to be part of a theoretical tradition that Susannah Radstone points out as privileging some particular “analogy between memory and still images” over any “analogy with the moving image” (2010: 327). For more on various theorizations of the relationship between cinema and memory, see Radstone’s chapter in her aforementioned co-edited anthology, where she further discusses three distinct and different paradigms that she entitles “memory as cinema”, “cinema as memory”, and “cinema/memory”.

Moving from images generally to film more specifically, a second theorization around the communication and collectivization of memory can perhaps help make the picture clearer, namely that of Alison Landsberg and her concept “prosthetic memory”. With a starting point in a similar research question about how people may be impacted by memories of events that they were not there to experience themselves, she proposes a particular idea concerning forms of public cultural memory that are constituted through media technology and mass culture in modern society. Introducing this idea, she writes:

This new form of memory, which I call *prosthetic memory*, emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum. In this moment of contact, an experience occurs [...] the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history [and] the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person’s subjectivity and politics (2004: 2).<sup>11</sup>

Simply enough, prosthetic memories are mediated ones that emanate from our spectatorial engagement with certain media treatments of historical experiences. Even more specifically, Landsberg also further argues that such processes allow “prosthetic memories of traumatic events”, unlike traditional forms of memory, “to be acquired by anyone”, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, and thus can act “as the grounds for unexpected alliances across chasms of difference” (ibid. 2-3). Therefore, these memory-making technologies and mass-mediated memories, among which cinema is most often her medium of preference, construct imagined communities beyond ethnic, cultural or national identities and they do so through the power of affect and the creation of conditions for ethical thinking, “precisely by encouraging people to feel connected to, while recognizing the alterity of, the “other”” (ibid. 8-9). Film, to follow her favored example, facilitates this process by opening up worlds of images, or even worlds of experiences, that are exterior to the lived experience of the spectator. Furthermore, what comes from such a process are nonessentialist, not socially constructed but rather “privately felt public memories”, artificially derived from technology but sensuously worn on the body; “prosthetic” memories that thus blur boundaries between individual and collective memory (ibid. 18-21). In this way, while there is yet more to say about it, history becomes memory.

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<sup>11</sup> Such ideas of certain relations between media and prosthesis and memory are not something new, of course, among which Marshall McLuhan’s more critical employment of the concept in his work or its conceptualization in the complex writings of Bernard Stiegler are two quite famous examples. As for prosthetic memory in film specifically, Landsberg’s self-declared utopian usage has been contrasted by scholars also focusing on its more dystopian dimensions, like Robert Burgoyne in his *Film Nation* (2010).

Unfortunately, Landsberg does not often go into detail on the way these processes of prostheses, so to speak, work or how their workings come to move from an experiential mode on to some memorial form. Moreover, when she does elaborate, which she first and foremost does in analyses of historical fiction films and not so much forms of audiovisual testimony, arguably her conceptually rich proposition is quite problematic in practice. From one side, her theorization seems too simplistic when it comes to interactions between images and spectators, a critique also forwarded by Radstone in her previously mentioned chapter as seemingly the straightforward “implantation of memory” into us as “passive spectators” (2010: 335). From the other, her idea of prosthesis looks more like possession, one where spectators immerse or imagine themselves within a world of history as to apperceive and appropriate someone else’s memories as their own, something that certainly seems like a contrast to her commendable proclamations on opening to otherness and engaging in ethics.

For me, this is also why it is somewhat surprising when Landsberg, in her epilogue, introduces Levinas and his ideas about ethics and responsibility as the basis for her central argument that prosthetic memory allows us to “see through another’s eyes” and to apprehend “the feelings of others”, and thus also “teaches ethical thinking by fostering empathy” (2004: 148-149). On the contrary, such a conceptualization seems in a sense close to antithetical to his philosophical approach, something only exacerbated by her examples of the ostensible ethical virtues of imagining oneself as or projecting one’s own images onto those who lost their lives during the Holocaust. Such covetous activity, suturing into or taking on memories, to use her own terms, appears less a taking upon ourselves than our taking over, the blurred boundaries or the slippery slopes of which, at least when it comes to memories of traumatic experience, come troublingly close to erasure. Therefore, for me, there seems a dissonance between the intentions and the implications of her so-called radical practice of memory.

Even though both postmemory and prosthetic memory are compelling concepts, there is arguably a crucial issue with both Hirsch and Landsberg’s terms, namely the foundational idea that the traumatic memories of others may emerge as memories of trauma in us through our engaging with or entering into these memories. Although I would agree we as spectators may encounter these memories, I would also argue against the thought those memories in any way become our own, and that even if they could the ethical value of such a “remembrance” seems a spurious one. This is not to accuse either account of suggesting that this transmission is any literal “re-memorization”, as both scholars make sure to say this is not the case, but thinking in terms of spectatorial relations to mediations of memory as if we can secondarily “remember” traumatic events that happened to someone else remains a problem.

To me, staying with film but turning from fiction to documentary, a more operative third concept that involves the movements of memory stems from Roxana Waterson and her nascent theorization of the “trajectories of memory”. Similarly approaching the possibilities around how private memories can inform or instruct public memorialization, she articulates a certain idea about the ways that cinema may come to work as both a vehicle of memory and a vital form of witnessing. This is to say, to use her own words, that she explores “three crucial dimensions of memory – as *trace*, as *event* and as *trajectory* – as these are embodied in film” (2007: 52-53) – or what may be called dimensions of discourse in documentaries.

Firstly, the dimension of memories as traces relates to images. Documentary imagery is a form of historical, recorded evidence that opens new ways of seeing the past that would otherwise not be possible to see, and thus it has multiplying capabilities that may ultimately “broaden our understanding of historical events” (ibid. 60). Secondly, these traces take on another dimension of memories as events when related in testimonies. Audiovisual testimony is a format for dialogical, performative exchange that makes present an ongoing sense that it is happening in the here and now, and thereby presents itself as “part of the dynamics of the real world” (ibid. 65). Lastly, the dimension of memories as trajectories relates to spectators. Documentary spectatorship is a mode of social, responsible engagement that also demands a future tense for memory work to endure beyond the moment of testimony, and therefore puts onus upon “us as spectators to do our share of the work” (ibid. 70). In very short, traces of memory enhanced by mediated events of testimony may extend its trajectories as history.

As an introductory article with an open-ended conceptualization, Waterson does not fully discuss all its constituents nor its consequences, yet there seems an important takeaway within this idea of memory’s trajectory, one that my approach intends to borrow as well as build further upon. That is first and foremost that it contributes to crystallize the case that the transmission of memories made possible by means of mediation is not a transmission of the memories themselves; instead: the memory experienced is a memory of a memory expressed. Now, this is neither meant to be repetition nor repartee, but it is intended to make clearer a critical distinction, precisely that all those memories that emerge and endure for spectators when encountering testimonies to trauma are indeed not memories of traumatic events, but instead memories of encounters. Whatever we choose to call them, the central point remains that we cannot remember the memories of someone else. However, we can remember our encounters with the memories of those others – and it is these encounters with the traumatic, in the sense of cinema, that will be further explored in what follows.

Janet Walker, in her *Trauma Cinema*, articulates such a relationship between trauma and cinema in terms of “the ability of certain films and videos to externalize, publicize, and historicize traumatic material that would otherwise remain at the level of internal, individual psychology”. What she explores, as she says, is more specifically “a vanguard group of films and videos that adopt catastrophe as their subject and formations of trauma as their aesthetic”, or furthermore how, in her own other words, “traumatic events are remembered awkwardly – “disremembered” [...] by people who live through them or experience them vicariously and, crucially, by the films and videos that result” (2005: xix-xxii). With a double thematic focus on incest and the Holocaust, she “reads” these cinematic works – that is a mix of fiction and documentary, forms and modes, genres and cinemas – to find that certain strategies and style choices are most suited for such an evocation of memory. Based in these select analyses, she comes to conclude that an “aesthetics of disremembering”, or even “the traumatic aesthetic”, are the aesthetics that obliquely represent reality through fragmentary, sensory, and abstract images and sounds that in turn conjure mental correlatives in spectators that transmit trauma (ibid. 189-190). For Walker, in short, images project trauma.

Joshua Hirsch, in his *Afterimage*, similarly approaches relations between trauma and cinema in terms of films that “articulate in one way or another a paradox [...] the paradox of trying to visualize and narrate a trauma that could not be captured in an image; of trying to remember an absence; of trying to represent the unrepresentable”. What he explores, he says, is “a posttraumatic cinema”, that is specifically “paradigmatic documentary and fiction films” that concern themselves with the traumatic historical events of the Holocaust, moreover one that, in his words, “attempts to embody and reproduce the trauma for the spectators through its form of narration” (2004: x-xii). With an emphasis on the boundary between avant-garde and mainstream filmmaking, he valorizes what he considers post-modernist and “non-realist” narrative forms – in certain terms of chronology, perspective, and self-consciousness – which more readily may relay traumatic memory. From this specific theorization, he then goes forth to show how these films work to opaquely represent the crisis of representing reality through images and sounds that carry “a traumatic potential”, one that is subsequently reproduced in encounters with spectators in a variety of “experiences of vicarious trauma”, and thus leave us “a traumatic afterimage” (ibid. 13-20).<sup>12</sup> For Hirsch, in sum, images produce trauma.

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<sup>12</sup> This is only a short introduction to book-length studies, of course, but it suffices as summaries of these two frameworks. For their own shorter introductions, see Walker’s “The Vicissitudes of Traumatic Memory and the Postmodern History Film” and Hirsch’s “Post-traumatic Cinema and the Holocaust Documentary”, which can both be found in the form of anthology chapters in *Trauma and Cinema* (Kaplan & Wang 2004).

While both Walker and Hirsch provide interesting perspectives with a sensitivity to the specifics of cinema's relationship to trauma, arguably their accounts conform to what this approach considers some typical and somewhat troubling points or tendencies in the way that trauma theory has entered and been employed within film theory. One of these is precisely, as mentioned before, the proposition that images provoke – evoke as recollection or embody as reproduction – various experiences of vicarious traumatization in or for its spectators. Even though the thought is presumably not meant to say that spectators themselves are traumatized, such a thinking in terms of cinema as traumatizing is semantically problematic. That concern notwithstanding, another is a categorization of the traumatic or the posttraumatic in cinematic expression as embedded in or encapsulated by specific forms or frames – the traumatic as an aesthetic or narration – that perform trauma in a particular way. Although it is probably not meant as categorical, such an encasing is analytically problematic. This concerns images that are not opaque or oblique, or not overtly so, in many cinematic treatments of trauma and most audiovisual testimonial material: encounters with memory and testimony which position us to look while questioning our looking or, if you will, images staring us straight in the face.

In that regard, a somewhat more direct confrontation with the present concerns of this work – going more general to get more specific – are the writings of Susan Sontag, especially in *Regarding the Pain of Others*. In the latter parts of the book, with her signature poetic and paradoxical style, she reflects on the relationship between images, memories, and spectators. Here, she argues that although “there is no such thing as collective memory”, still “there is collective instruction”, and that while images therefore cannot embed in us the individual memories of others, what they can do is emphasize the importance of those memories for us (2003: 85-86). What imagery can do, in this sense, is make testimony to traumatic memory more real to us, and this realization does lead to a form of remembering.<sup>13</sup> “To remember is, more and more, not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture”, Sontag writes, but this mode of photographic recollection, she worries, “eclipses other forms of understanding, and remembering”, and spells out the crux of her concern or contention: “Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us” (ibid. 88-89). Here my contention would be, and fundamentally so, that such a haunting is a form of understanding and that its eclipsing is arguably of ethical value as regards the pain of others.

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<sup>13</sup> This also builds upon arguments Sontag makes in the former parts of the book: “Awareness of the suffering [...] happening elsewhere is something constructed [...] The understanding of war among people who have not experienced war is now chiefly a product of the impact of these images. Something becomes real – to those who are elsewhere, following it as “news” – by being photographed” (2003: 20-21).



Paradoxically, such an argument simultaneously seems to be supported by Sontag, at least in a sense, thinking with some of her previous thoughts on photography. Specifically, in *On Photography*, in a conflicted relationship with the acquisitive and appropriative capacities of photographic capture, she proposes that images teach us how to see, both by being a sort of code of what is worth looking at and at what we have a right to look, but also that images are “even more importantly, an ethics of seeing” (1977: 3-4). Consider here her famous anecdote:

One’s first encounter with the photographic inventory of ultimate horror is a kind of revelation, the prototypically modern revelation: a negative epiphany. For me, it was photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau which I came across by chance in a bookstore in Santa Monica in July 1945. Nothing I have seen – in photographs or in real life – ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. Indeed, it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after, though it was several years before I understood fully what they were about. What good was served by seeing them? They were only photographs – of an event I had scarcely heard of and could do nothing to affect, of suffering I could hardly imagine and could do nothing to relieve. When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying (1977: 19-20).<sup>14</sup>

Against interpretation that presents this passage to portray a case of vicarious trauma, several of which are found in works referenced earlier in this section, Sontag seems to say something else about witnessing the traumatic through images. Seeing these images became a realization for her, regarding the pain of others made the meaning of trauma itself real, affected her like a wound and began to haunt her. Likewise, for the open question of what good this could do, she later also looks to have found the answer. “Let the atrocious images haunt us”, she says, as they say to us: “This is what human beings are capable of doing [...] Don’t forget” – thus producing a haunted remembrance, one that essentially “*is* an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself” (2003: 115-116). Sontag arguably concludes with something closer to my own claims, that such haunting is an otherwise seeing, an ethical one whose eclipse can do good: ““We” [...] don’t understand. We don’t get it. We truly can’t imagine what it was like [...] Can’t understand, can’t imagine [...] And they are right (ibid. 125-126). For me, she is right, but we can be haunted, if we witness these images, and that *is* to understand.

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<sup>14</sup> To also note, in some contrast with the last note, and not often noted alongside this often cited quote, Sontag soon follows with: “An event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs [...] But after repeated exposure to images it also becomes less real [...] The ethical content of photographs is fragile” (1977: 20-21).

Now, whereas Sontag clearly speaks of atrocious images of suffering itself and even more specifically, in her examples, the dead or those who died in wars or other horrors, there are certainly related arguments to make about the living or those who survived to tell stories of terror and trauma, in cinematic images that are precarious in another way and perhaps even more ethically pressing. Both are traumatic images concerning the pain of others and people who have gone through limit experiences that go beyond our experiential frames of reference. Both confront us with mortality, vulnerability, and humanity, as with reality and alterity that demand a certain sense of responsibility, and therefore beckon encounters that can potentially become the source or site of some or other haunting understanding. Such an understanding, as here argued, is not something that any image “makes” or a spectator “takes” but is born from, or “meets” in, if you like, the encounter itself. Much like those conceptualizations mentioned on the relationship between images and memory, these referenced theoretical perspectives on the relations between images and trauma seem to speak to, and repeat in a sense, ideas about different forms of sensation, distinct modes of spectatorship, or even divergent positions of seeing, yet all invoke the notion of witnessing. Once more witnessing, or witnessing trauma, as a word that concerns both mediating and spectating the suffering of others through images and the ethics of doing so, comes to encompass a generality through which it becomes a quite equivocal term, and therefore also seemingly one in need of more specificity.<sup>15</sup>

Informative for such a purpose is the work of E. Ann Kaplan who, particularly in her *Trauma Culture*, a broad study “about the impact of trauma both on individuals and on entire cultures and nations and about the need to share and “translate” such traumatic impact”, takes a more differential view on both the concept of trauma itself as well as the idea of witnessing its mediation. While she here widens the range of what may be called traumatic by including secondary forms that do not necessarily take the shape nor the characteristics of trauma as is classically articulated, she also crucially distinguishes between any direct types of trauma and its many distant cousins, more specifically in the sense that “most people encounter trauma through the media” (2005: 1-2). Although questions about using the word trauma still follow suit, what is interesting is her wording of the workings of witnessing, that is her proposition that our mediated encounter with trauma is a particular type of traumatic situation in which communication both conditions and is conditional on our own position.

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<sup>15</sup> Even when specified, however, witnessing as well as mediated witnessing indeed still denotes some different and differing ideas about looking or watching – or not looking and watching – in other interesting works on this very topic. For those interested, see here for example *Distant Suffering* (Boltanski 1999) and *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (Chouliaraki 2006), as well as writings from the later philosophical project of Judith Butler, perhaps especially the essays collected in *Precarious Life* (2004) and *Frames of War* (2009).

One of these positions is being vicariously traumatized. Vicarious trauma basically stems from our imagining ourselves to be in some similar state, if not the same, as someone else; “to feel the pain evoked by empathy” in degrees relative to our own ostensible traumatic experiences. For Kaplan, such a response may have its benefits, but simultaneously runs the risk of becoming nothing more than “empty empathy”, a sentimental or melancholic reaction. This position of empathically sharing, and even overidentification, is most often a byproduct of traumatic mediations where spectators are “encouraged to identify with specific people – to enter their personal lives” (ibid. 90-95). Arguably, it is also just as much a consequence of how we as spectators encounter such mediations, mechanisms of which are reinforced and not created by media treatments of trauma. Another position altogether is being a witness to the traumatic. Witnessing essentially has to do with images encouraging as well as spectators encountering trauma with a sense of responsibility; with a “deliberate ethical consciousness” that recognizes and is responsive to the otherness of traumatic experiences. From Kaplan’s view, the key difference between this responsivity and vicarious ones is in its maintaining of distance, where the former is dependent on distance within proximity that engages a larger ethical framework whereas the latter is driven only by empathic closeness (ibid. 122-123). She describes the different results of these responses as follows:

“Witnessing” is [...] prompting an ethical response that will perhaps transform the way someone views the world, or thinks about justice. Vicarious traumatization may be a component of witnessing, but instead of only intensifying the desire to help an individual in front of one, witnessing leads to a broader understanding of the meaning of what has been done to victims, of the politics of trauma being possible (2005: 123).

In short, according to Kaplan the opposition between these positions has to do with the way a work engages us in the traumatic situation and enables our attention not only to the suffering of individuals but leads us to ethically take the subjectivity of the other as “a starting point”, thus positioning us to witness the trauma of someone specific while provoking a responsible sociopolitical response. This witnessing position, she concludes, is born from “keeping the wound open” in encountering traumatic experience in aesthetic expression that “leaves the wound open” – a relation that becomes mediation that powerfully guides us to participate in processes where people “begin the task of working through via mourning” (ibid. 125, 135)<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> *Trauma Culture* expands and elaborates on many of the ideas that were also explicated in shorter form in the already mentioned anthology *Trauma and Cinema* (Kaplan & Wang 2004), and both point to other positions that may come into play in the cinematic encounter with trauma, but in this context these are the main ones.

Now, even though her focus is on how we as spectators are prompted or positioned, this surely also involves our own positioning and how we open ourselves up to the trauma of others – how we open up to be wounded.

The connections Kaplan formulates between witnessing trauma and working through, as well as its contrasts to vicarious trauma and the concept of acting out, are quite helpful for specifically considering witnessing as a response and as responsibility and its consequences for the ethical potential of the relationship between trauma and the image, and the spectator. Yet, to a certain extent, she also seems to formulate some explicit and implicit dichotomies between deliberate and accidental, thinking and feeling, as well as individual and universal, the boundaries of which seem much less clear-cut when it comes to witnessing or working through the wounding qualities of the traumatic. If witnessing is a position of responsiveness to an other, that necessarily means it is a space for affective, personal and chance encounters and a gaze that is open to otherness and perceptive to, as Judith Butler words it, inspired by Levinas, “the precariousness of life that is at stake” (2004: 151). Likewise, if witnessing is a situation that builds towards broader understanding that may transform our view of the world, that necessarily means it is a site for something understood otherwise. This is less a critique than a claim, of course, once more put forward to point to the complexity of the very concept of witnessing – as modes of encounter between forms of expression and experience.

Lastly, returning to queries posed before, my claim is simply enough that witnessing is at work in the relationship between trauma and the image, and the spectator. Moreover, this witnessing position, or even process, is a mode of encounter as well as way of engaging with audiovisual testimonial material that necessarily also involves ethical dimensions or potential. However, for all the words about witnessing in both these preceding sections, how it works, what it does, and even what it may be, still remains somewhat vague when it comes to media, and especially cinema, which calls for some further consideration of both the concept itself and the specifics and ethics of mediated and specifically cinematic witnessing – something to be explored in the final section.

## Cinematic witnessing

Witnessing, or bearing and being a witness in both senses, trauma in and through images – in a day and an age which arguably still has the aura of what Annette Wieviorka has called “the era of the witness” (2006: xv) – is a crucial cinematic concern. Cinematic witnessing, as here understood and in the continued use of the term, builds upon various conceptualizations about and around witnessing that were previously discussed, while simultaneously further putting focus on witnessing through audiovisual mediation.<sup>17</sup> However, to do so, it first seems both necessary and beneficial to begin with the term itself and its terminology.

In his well-known etymologically exploratory essay on the word itself, John Durham Peters writes that witnessing is “a common but rarely examined term in both the professional performance and academic analysis of media events”, that is both a polysemic concept and a complicated practice full of moral and cultural force which also raises fundamental questions about mediated communication as such (2001: 707-709). Setting out to address these, he thus breaks down the historical as well as grammatical dimensions of the term, wherein he defines the meaning of witness in the following ways:

As a noun, *witness* is intricate. [It] involves all three points of a basic communication triangle: (1) the agent who bears witness, (2) the utterance of the text itself, (3) the audience who witnesses [...] As a verb, to *witness* has a double aspect. To witness can be a sensory experience – the witnessing of an event with one’s own eyes and ears [...] But witnessing is also the discursive act of stating one’s experience for the benefit of an audience that was not present at the event [...] (2001: 709).

Witnessing, in short sum, is a term that refers in different ways to who sees and is seen, who speaks and is spoken to, who listens and is listened to, and what is seen, said and heard, as well as the ways in which this relation or mediation is created in communication. Central to all of this is necessarily the notion of a medium, but in his attempt to untangle the compound nature of the word, Peters also further articulates witnessing as something which “has two faces: the passive one of *seeing* and the active one of *saying*”, ones that come face to face in “the difficult juncture between experience and discourse” (ibid. 709-710). Witnessing, in this sense or senses, is an encounter between testimonial expression and sensorial experience.

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<sup>17</sup> While the term referred to by the works reviewed is media witnessing in a more general sense, the preferred term in this work is still cinematic witnessing in a more specific sense, precisely because there are several key differentiations to be made between what it means to be a witness through different media – among which film is a distinct one – since media witnessing in the plural is not equivalent to media witnessing in the singular.

According to Peters, this is precisely the problematic of witnessing, especially in the sense of what he calls the precarious veracity gap of the process. Witnessing always involves some or other journey from one to others fraught with issues of truth, trust and understanding, one that is only augmented further through media as an analogous communication situation. Questioning both whether and how media can sustain any practice of witnessing, he discusses the differences of dubious binaries between liveness and recordings, facts and fictions, and events and stories. From these points, he then systematizes witnessing as a sort of typology:

Of four basic types of relations to an event, three can sustain the attitude of a witness. To be there, present at the event in space and time is the paradigm case. To be present in time but removed in space is the condition of liveness [...] To be present in space but removed in time is the condition of historical representation [...] To be absent in both time and space but still have access to an event via its traces is the condition of recording: the profane zone in which the attitude of witnessing is hardest to sustain (2001: 720).

However, within this reasoning, there is a central caveat that in-between also lies a “small but gigantic gap, that of testimony”, as well as the mostly unexplored follow-up that beyond the epistemological what matters in witnessing, in the end, is the ethical. Witnessing the pain of others involves obligation and our responsibility. Yet, in the words of Peters, here a different kind of “liveness” makes the difference: “Living people’s pain is news; dead people’s pain is history” (ibid. 720-721). Once again, his argument is one of dual oppositions and boundaries, but within the bounds of this study there seems a problematic virtuality gap to his approach, precisely that of the potential of recorded testimony and the responsibility there of witnessing other people’s pain – dead or alive. This is to say that, within this worthwhile consideration and concretization of what it means to witness, still there seems to be a blind spot of sorts towards the power of the conditions of recording and its real presence of traces, or, in other words, the profound zone of cinematic witnessing.

An analogous critique is formulated by Paul Frosh in his chapter within the anthology *Media Witnessing* (Frosh & Pinchevski 2009).<sup>18</sup> Here, he argues that audiovisual media have “substantially augmented, if not transformed, what it means to witness”, increasing both the amount of witnesses in both respects as well as changing the mediated relationships between these witnesses, and therefore proposes that media witnessing has become a phenomenon that poses new questions about a range of media, around recording as well as reception (ibid. 50).

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<sup>18</sup> Frosh here also builds upon the work and position of John Ellis in *Seeing Things* (2000), which Peters also cites and arguably critiques in his essay, both of which restate and revise their positions within the anthology.

In my perspective, opening responses to such questions is one key point of the exploration. For this reason, Frosh says, making the veracity gap as central as Peters does not only lessens the scale of such witnessing, but limits the study of witnessing and thus also “risks *reducing* communicative aspects to – often insoluble – questions of being and knowing”, and therefore our possibilities for how witnessing may be conceptualized and understood. Rather, his own suggestion is that we see witnessing by way of media as events and experiences that “expand our capacity to witness” (ibid. 51-57). From these points, he goes on to develop an expansive concept of contemporary media witnessing, specifically as “an act performed not by a witness but by a witnessing text” and also “an expanded and generalized mode of receptivity to these witnessing texts by their addressees” (ibid. 60). This somewhat double-edged notion aside, one that is clearly powerful for theorizing around the idea of mass-mediated witnessing yet certainly also problematic in dealing with the specific witnesses involved on both ends of the mediation, his main contention is that “bearing witness” is not beholden to “being there”.

“Being there matters”, Peters responds to Frosh, in an afterword to his original article in the same anthology, where he yet again emphasizes the veracity gap, and there especially the way that mediation necessarily changes the reality of bearing witness. Witnessing, as he writes, remains “tied in some fragile way to the mortal limits of the human sensorium”, while second-hand witnessing, as he names it, remains “crucial to the human repertoire, but it is a derivative form” (2009: 45). His skepticism here seems to be that seeing witnessing as a sort of reception, a mode of interaction with media, circumscribes the precariousness of its form of transmission, its tensive relations to what is real and what is not and intensive relationship “to the fragile stuff of reality, especially our fleshy beings” (ibid. 47-48). However, Peters indeed does concede that there may be more to witnessing through media than he thought in his earlier work and consequently reconsiders and recomposes some of its concluding points. Firstly, that we have a responsibility to witness those living and those who no longer do; and, finally, that: “What seems like an epistemological conundrum, the veracity gap, is actually an ethical problem of how to witness experience that is not our own” (ibid. 48). Although this approach takes another position on the potential of witnessing in a mediated context, Peters’ general call for more precise definition and wariness towards the dilution of witnessing as a term is a welcome corrective.<sup>19</sup> Still, once more, he does not explore his end note on ethics, nor what it means for the possibilities of mediated witnessing.

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<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that Peters’ overall proposition is not that witnessing cannot take place outside the paradigm case, but instead is in opposition to witnessing becoming any kind of theoretical “catch-all” term.

On the other hand, Frosh appositely does so in a later conference paper and anthology essay, “Survivor Testimony and the Ethics of Digital Interfaces” (2016). Opening with none other than Peters and his conceptualization of the double face of witnessing, that is seeing and saying or experience and discourse to use his terms, as well as with the starting point that acts of bearing witness are always already mediated in some or other way, he makes the perhaps self-evident case that the specific mechanisms and conditions of this mediation are central to how these faces come to face one another in any testimonial situation. His articulation of such circumstances in the context of audiovisual mediation, however, invites more consideration:

In the case of mediation by communication technologies, however, the framing context is radically destabilized as it is distended through time and space across at least two separate encounters: between a witness and a recording technology, and between a media device and an audience. The underlying intentions of the former encounter cannot be guaranteed to determine the communicative effects of the latter: the ethical engagement of an addressee does not emerge fully-formed and properly attired from the horrific character of the events recounted, the purposes of the witnesses themselves, or even from the overt historical, ethical and pedagogical missions of those who produce and document the giving of testimony and organize its dissemination (2016: 188).

In audiovisual testimony, he continues, the technological apparatus produces an “audiovisual unconscious”. This means that the media technology facilitates the transmission of traumatic experience not primarily through intentional verbal discourse, but rather by “inadvertently documented vocal, facial and gestural behaviors”. That is to say they generate aesthetic and affective qualities that “by the sensuous, embodied interactions with the media devices that construct and convey survivor testimony” shape the ethical relationships of these encounters (ibid. 189-190).<sup>20</sup> As eloquent and persuasive as Frosh’s elaboration is, most of which is also similar to the suggestions of my approach, there remains an interesting counterargument to make, which is that what cinematic mediation can do is rather a spatiotemporal “re-framing” that doubles these encounters into one close and connected encounter. Instead of two or more different witnessing encounters, this may be elucidated as intertwining at least three different levels of witnessing in the encounter: the witnessing of the survivor, the witnessing of the film, and the witnessing of the spectator.

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<sup>20</sup> Frosh here also follows the work of his co-editor in the aforementioned collection, Amit Pinchevski, and it is perhaps their joint articulation in its introduction that best sums up his definition of media witnessing, that is as: “witnessing performed *in, by, and through* the media” (2009: 1). This understanding thus includes the idea of a tripartite distinction within mediated witnessing, yet it does not consider that it is also a tripartite interaction.



In any case, as in many debates, or perhaps theoretical gaps, there seems a productive middle path between Peters' and Frosh's perspectives. For me, all the while the latter is right to argue that media or more specifically cinema may become a kind of witnessing experience, or expand our possibilities to witness, I would simultaneously agree with the former that an emphasis on witnessing as a relation primarily between media and spectator may lose sight of the witness expression, and therefore also what makes witnessing so powerful: the encounter with the other. Double face or face-to-face, immediate or mediate, such an encountering is essential to the ethical potential of the testimonial situation: that is witnessing the witnessing.

Coincidentally, this wording is close to a similar one of Thomas Trezise and his book titled precisely *Witnessing Witnessing*, where he theorizes the reception of survivor testimony from the Holocaust. Engaging with this reception, that is the encounter between the various situations in which survivors may witness and the varying positions in which spectators – or listeners – may then witness, he emphasizes the way that witnessing is dependent on hearing – or seeing – ourselves (2013: 1-3). Trezise's study is quite substantial in scope, debating different academic work and deliberating different aesthetic works on trauma and testimony, but it is its conclusion, in the end, that makes his main points most purposefully. Witnessing, he writes here, is an interaction that necessarily involves “a fundamental and indispensable tension between its participants”, and continues:

Even though in most cases there is no face-to-face encounter with survivors but rather one that is mediated by a recording of some kind, so that we can at best [...] act as the trustees of their testimony by ensuring its continued reception, we are presumably always concerned, whether as listeners, readers, or viewers, with their reconstruction of a sense of self and community. Thus, whatever specific social, political, historical or other purposes this trusteeship may serve, receiving testimony is first of all an ethical exigency that tests our ability to empathize. At the same time, this exigency entails a constraint [...] Indeed, although it is generally assumed that what witnesses have had most to fear is public indifference or hostility, I would stress that, however it may be motivated, the overidentification with survivors or the appropriation of their experiences as our own can prove just as silencing [...] witnesses of witnessing are required to maintain a balance of empathy and reserve, to tolerate a tension between identification and estrangement, to recognize and respect the irreducible otherness of survivors while, in effect, welcoming them back into the larger community (2013: 223-224).

Although this long quote seems justified to illustrate Trezise's core and conclusive line of argument, some comments on its argumentation and articulation seems in order. While my approach would somewhat question such a notion of the “exercise of a tempered empathy”

and even substitute it for the exigency of an ethical responsibility, which is surprisingly downplayed in this summarized conceptualization of witnessing considering the otherwise clear presence of the thought process of Levinas in the work itself, these points resonate. Likewise, Trezise's point of view aligns with mine when he continues with that we, through our witnessing, can learn to listen better and better understand trauma survivors, but that each witness to witness encounter will necessarily bear these very tensions. Tension, in this sense, "between" and "within" the witnesses, which is why being a witness to a witness "entails an education of *both* the heart and the mind" (ibid. 225). In my opinion, the demanding position of witnessing the witnessing indeed both involves the welcome of an other and therefore also wounding ourselves, but instead of being more about the balancing act of active engagement, being a witness in a mediated face-to-face encounter most of all invokes our very openness and willingness to learn an ethical way of seeing otherwise.

All the while taking into account the points of Peters, Frosh and Trezise, this key tenet is where my approach will position itself going forward. When it comes to our possibility of witnessing the traumatic through media, this is a different and difficult witnessing position, one that opens through a tripartite interaction between survivor, film, and spectator within a reframed spatiotemporal framework. Media, or more specifically cinema and especially so in the paramount case of audiovisual testimony, may enhance or expand our capacity to witness, yet our very ability to do so is contingent on both our facing the other and ourselves. That is to say that cinematic witnessing is a mode of encounter, a responsiveness and responsibility in the relationship between testimonial expression and sensorial experience, and therefore a certain way of facing whose core is once again the cinematic face.

Meanwhile, this is definitely not to say that such a witnessing is neither deliberate nor determined before it takes place. My claim is, as it ever was, *that there is* an ethical potential to cinematic witnessing and that our engaging with mediated trauma through the encounter with the cinematic faces of survivors in audiovisual testimonies entails an ethics of relation. Now, of course this is only a theoretical idea of an idealistic potentiality, one that necessarily remains on a case-to-case basis as it depends on the interaction, or even tension, between survivor, film, and spectator, and thus within each situation. Therefore, such a possibility should be explored through specific analysis of cinematically witnessing the witnessing – which will be testified to in the chapter to come.

## VI:

### THE LOOK OF SILENCE

#### Breaking terrorizing silence

Cinematic witnessing is distinctly implemented in Joshua Oppenheimer's internationally co-produced and anonymously co-directed documentary *The Look of Silence*, the follow-up film to his horrifying and astonishing *The Act of Killing*. Premiering and winning the Grand Jury Prize at the Venice film festival in August 2014, the film had a long run in cinemas and at festivals worldwide in the following year, to large audience numbers, critical acclaim and awards, including being nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature.

To provide some context to the film, it follows a middle-aged man and optometrist named Adi, as well as his family, whose older brother Ramli was brutally murdered during the Indonesian terror and genocide of 1965 and 1966.<sup>1</sup> In that period, following a coup, the new military dictatorship in the country, by way of both the army and paramilitary civilian groups, was responsible for the mass killings of people on a massive scale. In the aftermath, these killers have never been reckoned with nor prosecuted for their crimes; on the contrary, these horrors have nearly been normalized within Indonesian history, and many of the people behind them have also been able to stay prominent figures within Indonesian society all the while the relatives of the victims have continued to be silenced and stigmatized. This is the half-century-long background of the documentary project that Oppenheimer and his crew worked on for over a decade, one the short introductory text of the film itself sums up well: "In less than a year, over one million 'communists' were murdered – and the perpetrators still hold power throughout the country".

While *The Act of Killing* was Oppenheimer's quite original way of looking at the perpetrators and their lack of remorse, repercussions or responsibility for their actions, *The Look of Silence* daringly looks at those same atrocities from the other side. Organized in overlapping sections of Adi witnessing video footage of the killers recounting their crimes, interviews between him and perpetrators, and everyday imagery of his family life, the film breaks nearly fifty years of silence by giving a voice and face to victims and survivors.

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<sup>1</sup> Adi Rukun, as he is credited in the film, is a cover name due to the dangers of the project, one that had the film team make precautions and contingency plans throughout production and help Adi and his family move after the film was finished. This is also the reason that many others involved in the film have remained anonymous.

This analysis explores specifically how the film thus faces trauma and speaks out, that is to say the way the multifaceted witnessing of the film as expression and experience works. This here means that it traces the manner in which the film itself faces one survivor who is facing the traumatic task of breaking the silence of terror and opening the wound of his brother's murder and his family's suffering, or how it looks and listens to the trauma story of a singular family to simultaneously testify to the history of victims and survivors from the mass killings or genocide in Indonesia in the sixties. By looking closely at its unique forms of audiovisual testimony, Adi's witnessing of perpetrators and the film's witnessing of Adi, it further explores how they together therefore also set up possible constructive situations of cinematic witnessing for us as spectators, traumatic encounters with ethical potential.

Now practically speaking, the analysis is structured partially so in line with the film itself, with the first and final section elucidating what is arguably the film's two major parts, which are split up by returning to its title image, while its middle section elaborates the ways of witnessing encountered in both the part beforehand and the one coming afterwards. In this sense, the analysis is organized chronologically and thematically, or what may be claimed to be "cinematically" as well, exploring the mediated relationship between the film and us as spectators by predominantly describing and evoking the film expression and experience in the first and third sections and primarily reflecting upon this through the second. In some terms soon to be re-introduced, basically the proximate section faces Adi's witnessing as seeing and the ultimate section faces Adi's witnessing as saying, while the intermediate one crystallizes and differentiates these different modes of witnessing and their dimensions. To be sure, this is only an outline and guide, as the analysis of course lifts its view in the beginning, in-between, and end of its close-up focus on shots and scenes, both tracking back to theoretical points and opening a perspective on the context and consequences of the film. Meanwhile, like my other film analyses, this one too does close analysis of aspects that may not be perceptible without multiple viewings yet that my approach still argues is sensible.<sup>2</sup> Yet, even if the intention was to include as many detailed impressions of the film's elements as possible, analyzing every important moment is obviously impossible, and the approach is mostly limited to witnessing in the case of Adi, the film, and for us as spectators. In short, the purpose of this structure is studying how the film faces us with a traumatic ethics that opens a productive act of looking.

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<sup>2</sup> My first time viewing *The Look of Silence* was at a film festival in January 2015, and I saw the film in cinemas two more times after that as well. In addition, this analysis is based on several viewings of the video edition that was released, in the box set alongside *The Act of Killing*, by Dogwoof in late 2015. All subtitle quotes and time codes refer to this copy, which has a total duration of 1:39:22.

## The look of trauma

*The Look of Silence* opens by looking. At first, the frame is filled by the face of an older man, in an extreme close-up from his upper lip to his lower forehead. Looking directly into the lens with eyes that are encircled by optometry equipment, black and white glasses with red circles that guide our look straight to his gaze, the shot lingers on his face as he blinks and twitches in a silence only surrounded by the sound of a chorus of crickets, before it cuts away to a title card. This face will change meaning as the film moves forth, and this short but conspicuous shot and choice of shot is something we shall return to later in the analysis.

Shortly after these opening shots, and following the mentioned title card that fades in over a shot of jumping beans on an unfocused surface that comes in by sound bridge, another face appears. This face is the face of a younger man, shot in a three-quarter close-up with his head and neck visible in the left side of the frame. We know nothing of who this is, nor does he say anything. Instead, here we as spectators watch his severe expression and intense look off to the right side of the lens, still with the sound of chirps but otherwise in silence, until an off-screen voice chimes in and we soon after that can see that he is looking at film footage on a small screen in front of him. On the screen, a man wearing a pink shirt is singing a song, and when he sings the line “Why should I remember if remembering only breaks my heart?” the film cuts back to the face of the man we will later know as Adi, looking and listening with tight lips and what seems to be sadness in his eyes. What now follows is a shot reverse shot between Adi’s close-up face, still intently looking and listening, and the man on the screen telling us the story about the gruesome murder of a man named Ali Sumito, laughing about choking him out, cracking his skull, and ripping his body up. The scene then ends with the face of Adi and his surprisingly unflinching but still unmistakably affected expression.

Afterwards, the film cuts to a static night-time long shot of a road, with some cars driving closer and closer towards the camera in slow-motion, while the previously mentioned introductory text fades in line by line to provide us with some context for the project:

In 1965, the Indonesian government was overthrown by the military. Anyone opposed to the military dictatorship could be accused of being a communist: union members, landless farmers and intellectuals. In less than a year, over one million ‘communists’ were murdered – and the perpetrators still hold power throughout the country.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Look of Silence* (Oppenheimer 2014), approximately 03:00-03:45. Directly transcribed from the text. Further referenced quotes in this chapter are transcriptions of the English subtitle translations of Indonesian spoken language, according to the film copy.

This opening sequence is intriguing in several ways for us as spectators and sets up its first mode of witnessing. All the while Adi is not yet introduced as being a survivor, nor is he even named, the focus on his face here still focalizes him for us at the core of the film's story. Albeit without any spatiotemporal exposition, but only with a nondescript site and unfocused background space, both his person and the personal situation are still presented. Although we so far know nothing about him or about his story, or how it later will link up to the traumatic material shown on the screen, we can see or even feel in his face and from his gaze, perhaps not what he is going through but precisely that he is going through it. The scene itself and the intensified close-up within is striking, and even though we lack context we still connect to the expression of his face; our face-to-face encounter with his look of silence, or face of trauma, establishes the opening to an experience of witnessing. This form of audiovisual testimony, Adi's silent and still witnessing, and our witnessing this witnessing, is mirrored in the film many times going forward and the power of this witnessing interaction or relationship only further increases as we face his face again and as we understand more about the traumatic situation and story, thus as the film teaches us how to look and we learn how to witness.

However, the way or the order this is all introduced is also important, as we start off with his close-up face and what may be called witnessing session, watching his expressions as he looks and listens to the telling of a brutal murder of one man, doubly on an individual level, before we are introduced to the textual cue of context about a collective mass-murder. Meanwhile, this is also the case for the face of the older man at the very start of the film, who for spectators remains a mystery at this early stage. We are here faced with two faces and have to take them in close up without any other guide or way to get a grasp than the faces by themselves. While the film does already give us a general indication about its topic and tone, we get no grip to make sense of the situation. Even with the introduction text, we only get a short historical cue for the documentary project as such, but still do not know what is what or who is who, neither who the older nor the younger man are, separately or to each other, and we can only assume that both of them somehow relate to the mentioned Indonesian genocide. This is part of the challenge for us as spectators in *The Look of Silence*, not only at the start but all through the film, that is the change in our viewpoints or witnessing positions, as we later come to learn more contextual information and learn through our cinematic interaction.

Like already mentioned, some of that context may come from Joshua Oppenheimer's project generally and *The Act of Killing* specifically, which is a reference frame preface that of course also may predispose our way of seeing *The Look of Silence*. Arriving in Indonesia in 2001, Oppenheimer was first part of a documentary film project about palm oil plantations,

while doing so also learning more about the mass killings as well as the killing of Ramli. He met Adi, his parents and other survivors in 2003, and on their suggestion subsequently started finding and filming perpetrators for the next few years, material which makes up most of the footage that Adi is watching in this film. Spending the period from up towards 2010 shooting and then editing *The Act of Killing*, he returned to Adi to shoot *The Look of Silence* in 2012, finishing the latter film before even releasing the former because he could not come back to Indonesia afterwards. These documentary works are therefore companion pieces in both the practical and thematic sense of those words, and watching one before the other may certainly illuminate modalities of meaning for our cinematic interaction. Still, *The Look of Silence* is clearly also another and separate film expression and experience, and thus also process of encounter for us as spectators, which means its way of witnessing stands on its own.

Returning to the film itself and its beginning road shot, its latter part is accompanied by a sound bridge taking us to the next scene. Here we hear a woman saying: “Your mom misses you, Ramli. I haven’t seen you for so long. I still see you in my dreams. You can see me, but I can’t see you. I wish I could see you”. The film then softly cuts to a medium close-up shot of a very scrawny and wrinkly old man washing himself and being washed by an old woman, and then to a profile close-up of the woman, as the voice over continues: “You’re my son. I raised you. I miss you”. The camera now moves between them while the voice that we may assume is hers goes on to tell us that her son was tortured and dumped in the river, that his father is blind, crippled and deaf, and that she herself is sick too. A further cut takes us to a close-up of another old woman, then a long shot that shows us the woman in a chair with an optometrist squatting beside her, before a medium close-up reveals this is the man we met in the beginning: Adi. He starts asking her questions about the past, like where she was in the mid-sixties and if she knows about people killed in their region, but she claims she knows nothing about it and tells him that he is asking too many questions, upon which they both smile and laugh in a seemingly uncomfortable moment.

The next three scenes continue to explore who Adi is and why he is interested in digging up the past. In the first, we see him playing with a young girl and boy and like that we are introduced to his children. In the second, we see him together with the old man and woman from before and like that we are introduced to his parents and therefore also learn that the murdered Ramli was in fact his older brother. In the third, we see Adi and his mother and listen to her tell him about how his dad lost his teeth and would not speak, while she could not eat or sleep, after his brother was killed, as well as how Adi looks just like him and was the answer to all her prayers when he was born two years after his brother’s death.

We learn a lot of narrative information from these scenes, and they build a foundation for the traumatic testimony, story and history the film tells, because we understand this is the individual and intimate telling of the story of a family of victims and survivors: the traumatic story of Adi, the murder of this older brother Ramli, and the impact of this terrorizing act of killing on his mother and his father, and on himself.<sup>4</sup> Simultaneously, we affectively learn a lot from the way they are set up, by way of audiovisual presentation, something the last scene really exemplifies well. Starting off with an exquisite long shot, with his mother sitting down while Adi is crouching down right beside her, the staging lets us see them side by side as well as face to face, surrounded by a beautiful landscape dense with saturated colors and beaming lighting and soundscape detailing insects buzzing and birds chirping. Then cutting between this shot, onto close-ups of the two looking off-screen at each other with serious while soft expressions on their faces, as well as double close-up two-shots of mother and son looking straight at one another, the scene ends in a cut away to a lingering twenty-second long shot of Adi standing on his head in a shed. In this sense, the film combines exposition with creative expression, by poetic but sometimes peculiar compositions that engage and make strange at the same time, in the same cinematic space connecting us more to Adi and his family while also focusing on the unfamiliarity of their personal story of suffering, opening an otherness that enhances our encounter with their witnessing and therefore our cinematic witnessing.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, around seven or so minutes later, and only about eleven minutes into the film, as what sounds like a marching drum snare abruptly bridges a cut back to a close-up of Adi's face back in the same room watching footage on the screen, the interaction or relationship is different. Within almost the same frame, and with a similar look on his face, we look at him looking at an American news report from 1967. While the reporter speaks about the terror as the single biggest defeat of communism anywhere, we here see images of war machinery and weaponry, military beating civilians and marching in the street, and people in prison camps,

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<sup>4</sup> Although not all clarified in the film itself, but also its additional materials, Adi was born in 1968 to his mother Rohani and father Rukun, where he was the youngest of eight children, while Ramli was the eldest son and over 20 years his senior. According to Oppenheimer, Adi's siblings as well as other survivors that he spoke to were threatened or terrorized as to not participate in the film, but also spoke about the story of Ramli almost like a symbol and synonym for the mass murder in North Sumatra, as his death was public and had many witnesses. As for Adi, this was largely his own idea and he wanted to go on in spite of its risks.

<sup>5</sup> This is one of otherwise many scenes that demonstrate Joshua Oppenheimer's well-known and self-proclaimed "magical realism" documentary style of filmmaking. Although it does not approach the almost fever-dream-like aesthetics of *The Act of Killing*, of course due to the differences in material and mode, *The Look of Silence* also has several partly hyperreal and haunting poetic shots that speak in silence yet still beckon to break the silence.



as the reporter almost proudly says: “And the purge continues to this day”.<sup>6</sup> Cutting back and forth between the screen and Adi’s close-up face, still he sits with his look of silence and his indecipherable gaze, but suddenly his head has tilted sideways and then is tilted back upright; all the while his face stays the same, with his eyes staying fixed and his mouth staying closed, and without saying a word.

Following this scene, the film repeats its structure with a couple of scenes illustrating more about Adi, his family and their community. In the one, we see his son in the classroom and listen to the teacher spout propaganda about how the “communists” and their descendants are surely gruesome and godless people who must be suppressed in the past and the present, and having the students echo and endorse these extreme views. In the other, in a shot reverse shot, we see and hear the son repeat to his father what he was taught about the “heroes” who made the country a “democracy”, re-telling with similar brutal detail but a nervous smile on his face, then Adi responding that anything his teacher says is lies, mentioning the million innocent people murdered by the army and paramilitary groups.<sup>7</sup> Once more these short few scenes expose some key elements of the story of terror and trauma here being told, through the juxtaposition showing how the propaganda of the perpetrators from the past still persists in the present, and how the history of lies about the genocide is indoctrinated into the future generations – painting a cruel picture of a crying wound and crisis of witnessing.

Another seven minutes after, we are back at the screen and now looking at the same man from the first screen encounter. We see him demonstrate and hear him talk about the way his victims were blindfolded and handcuffed, crying and paralyzed with fear, before he began cutting them with his machete. Cut to a facial close-up of Adi, once again framed the same and in the same place and with a similar look on his face. However, as we cut back to the screen, he now breaks his look of silence and speaks. First, he asks Oppenheimer when the footage was filmed and gets the answer that it was in April of 2003. Then, following a return to his close-up face, now from profile angle in even closer frame with his gaze still fixed on the screen off-screen, he says with long and lingering pauses between his sentences: “Maybe he acts this way... because... he regrets what he did... He regrets killing people”.

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<sup>6</sup> There is no doubt that Oppenheimer with this scene also wanted to point to U.S. involvement in the Indonesian terror. As later declassified documents disclose, both the United States and United Kingdom central government sponsored and supported this so-called “anti-communist purge”, as part of the Cold War and campaign against Communism and other self-interested reasons, a role for which neither country has yet to apologize.

<sup>7</sup> While both Adi and the film itself maintain that over a million people were killed, the number murdered under the Suharto-instigated massacre is still unknown due to lack of documentation. Estimates range from minimum half a million and to over two million, in what secret intelligence reports have categorized as one of the worst mass murders of the 20th century.

The film soon cuts back to the screen, but Adi continues: “Because he feels guilty when he re-enacts the killings. He’s completely numb”. On the screen, and now shown in full-screen format for us as spectators, the man demonstrates on his own wife what he did to the women, lifting her shirt and pretending to cut her to show how he stabbed and sliced them, while she laughs but soon loses her smile and looks serious and sad.

Following this interestingly contrasting scene, the pattern of exposition repeats. Starting with shots of Adi’s mother cutting up some yellow fruits or vegetables, she tells us how the killers got rich stealing from their victims, killed the husbands and took their wives, before Adi’s off-screen voice asks her about how she feels living surrounded by and seeing her son’s killers every day. Part and part in both lingering close-up and long shot, in the same garden we saw her and Adi earlier, she stays silent and keeps cutting for a while until we hear her voice-over say: “It is horrible. When we meet in the village, we don’t speak. I hate them”. The film now cuts to a three-quarter facial close-up of her face, switching with Adi’s in a shot reverse shot, in which she does not say anything while her solemn expression and sorrowful eyes still in a way say everything. The silence goes on and over into a close-up of her hands, distraughtly rubbing them both together, before she once more speaks: “In the afterlife, their victims will take revenge. They will suffer later. There’s no use raising it now”.<sup>8</sup> This scene once more speaks to both the silent resentment and suffering of the survivors, in the mother, but the one before shows how and why Adi as part of the generation after and as her son is the one who can take upon himself the traumatic task of speaking out for all his others.

Now, we once again return to the screen, but this time in an interesting extended and interlinked sequence of scenes. Opening with the television set in the middle of the frame, we see two men walking down the street while talking about loading people onto trucks and then driving them to the so-called “Snake River”. A text soon appears, one that identifies the men as Amir Hasan and Inong, “leaders of the village death squad”. Cut to facial close-up of Adi, framed as before, that is almost like the format we often call “talking head”, yet in this case the head is only silently looking. We follow his expression as the off-screen voices describe how their victims screamed, cried and begged, and how they beat them all so badly they were unable to run away. Cut back to the screen, now in full-screen format, the two men continue telling us about their memories from “Komando Aksi” and acting out on each other the way

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<sup>8</sup> Just to note, the severity of the traumatic themes of the film is often also interspersed with moments of levity. One example comes right after this scene, as Adi asks his mother how old his parents are, to which she replies she is around 100 and his dad is about 140 years old, even though his ID card says 103 and he says he is 16 or 17, and then also tells him they can’t sleep together anymore because he smells like pee and tries to tickle her.

they hit and harried their victims, tied their hands, and dragged them down to the riverbank. The shot reverse shot goes on with another close-up of Adi's face, listening with blank eyes while biting his inner lip and looking disturbed or disgusted, but still staying silent and quite difficult to discern. Even so, we can see and feel many sensations from his face and his gaze, and the return and the recurrence of this or his look of silence only increases its intensity.

Then, the film changes its stage and we see Adi and a man with a hat walking down another street. A new text appears that names the other man as Kemat, "survivor from Snake River". In a backwards tracking shot that simultaneously moves back and forth between and into close-ups of them both as well as some two-shots of the two with Adi's son by their side, Kemat describes how the village death squad lined him and others up and then forced them onto trucks. Adi then asks him if this is where Ramli understood he was about to be killed, and Kemat answers that he was screaming for help and shouting that they were going to kill them all. The seemingly handheld shot now pans over to Adi and his son, as he says to him: "So, this is where Ramli was hacked up". Once again, his calm demeanor while doing so is close to chilling, and the same can also be said about Kemat's answer to how he feels coming back to where he managed to jump off the truck and run away, and thus escape the massacre: "The past is past. I've accepted it. I don't want to remember. It's just asking for trouble. It's covered up. Why open it again?". At first hearing his words off-screen, the camera now cuts to a three-quarter close-up of his red-sprung eyes and uneasy and upset face, as we here see and hear him say: "The wound has healed".

In what follows, we come back to the footage, where we see the two old men help each other get down the grassy hill that leads to the river, while they describe how they would drag or throw their victims down there. Prodded by the director's questions, the two continue acting out their recollections, with one screaming for help and mercy while the other pretends to beat him and drag him down towards what they call the killing spot, where they show the camera how they would execute their victims by hacking off their heads and then kicking them into the river, watching the bodies float away.<sup>9</sup> The scene thereupon ends with a new close-up of Adi, his silent face staying as strict and still with his same incessant stare.

Lastly, the film cuts back to Adi and Kemat, and we see the former guide the latter down the same grassy hill as the two perpetrators in the footage did before, coming towards the camera and going to the riverbank. While the two are walking the path, we hear Kemat

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<sup>9</sup> There is also some absurdity to all the footage we are shown here, among other moments when the two death squad members stop to smell the flowers or just take a closer look at the scenery around them, while surrounded by sunlight and saturated coloring, as one of the many other jarring contrasts that continue to happen in the film.

softly repeat some words, perhaps even chanting, pleading for peace for those who died there and punishment for those responsible for their death. This whole back and forth sequence then comes to an end with two different expressive and extended shots that also make up a poignant combination: one is a stunning slow shot of the river as it runs by the camera, and the other a similarly striking shot of a square lit up by a darkly clouded and bloody red sky.

A little over half an hour in, the film's exploration of terror and trauma in repeating cycles of us observing Adi looking and listening to screen testimonies and learning more of these events through scenes from his family and community, has been leading us spectators towards a distinct witnessing position. Even though we have been watching testimonies from the perpetrators, we are encouraged to encounter the traumatic testimony of Adi's face and witness his witnessing. There is here, to rework Felman and Laub's terminology, a crisis of witnessing. In this case, that concerns not only the crises of communication involved with the traumatic transmission from memory into testimony, but simultaneously the crisis of who gets to speak and who is going to listen. All the while there is certainly a will to testify to the terrible events among the perpetrators, the killers themselves, in testimonies filled with lies, fantasies and propaganda that erase or efface the traumatic truth of mass terror and genocide, still the stories of the survivors are silenced and suppressed. There is thus also, to repurpose Caruth's recurring figure too, a crying wound. In this case, the wound is not forgotten but forgone, unspeakable not only due to its unbearable reality but also because of the fear of reprisals and repercussions. For these survivors, to be possessed by the trauma of the past is also to be repressed by the terror of the present, a specific double telling which constitutes the impossibility of testimony and its crisis of witnessing. Tracing back to Herman's theorization, remembering and telling the truth about such terrible and traumatic events is the necessary and essential component for dealing with and even healing from them – here this becomes a recognition and reconstruction of a trauma story that has never happened.

This is why opening and witnessing the wound is both Adi's and the film's mission. He is the witness for his family and his community, the one to look and listen and let their story turn into testimony, the one to be and bear witness to the terror and trauma, or the one to heed the call and the cry to break on through the crisis and break the silence. The film is, and we as spectators are, the witness to his witness, in a witnessing the witnessing that soon takes the form of facing his face as he starts facing terror and the perpetrators.

Now facing the first confrontation, we return to the face that started the film itself. The scene opens with a long shot of a garden with a man and monkey in the background. We see the man walking the monkey while a text appears naming him as Inong, "leader of

the village death squad”, and after a shot of Adi walking in, the next is a close-up of the man, whose name and face now lets us recognize him as one of the men from the footage we have seen. A two-shot reveals that Adi is there for an optometry appointment with Inong as he puts his glasses on him, the two soon sitting down in two pink plastic chairs. The rest of the scene is set up like a sort of shot reverse shot that changes frames between frontal, three-quarter and profile close-ups of their faces, and medium to close two-shots of the two sitting there, side by side and face to face, while having a conversation that switches between helping with his eyesight and asking about the past. Here, we get a close-up look at Inong’s twitching face as we listen to him mumbling through missing teeth, responding to questions and telling us that he is 72 years old and met Oppenheimer seven years ago, interspersed with close-ups of Adi looking and listening with his composed determined expression. Suddenly and seemingly without any prompt, Inong soon startlingly says:

If we didn’t drink human blood, we’d go crazy. Many went crazy [...] Some killed so many people, they went crazy [...] There’s only one way you can avoid it: drink your victim’s blood, or go crazy. But if you drink blood, you can do anything! Both salty and sweet, human blood [...] Human blood is salty and sweet.

Between these last two lines, the film cuts to Adi’s seemingly uneasy face as he asks him to repeat what he said, yet he still keeps his dignified and calm demeanor even when Inong now without any hesitation goes on to describe his deeds in more grotesque detail, talking about how it looks if you cut off a woman’s breast and how to best hack a human being to death. However, this whole dynamic changes when Adi starts questioning Inong about who these “communists” were, pushing back on the lies and propaganda he is spouting. In close-ups of Inong’s face, we see him get both more unsettled and unruly by Adi’s challenges, until the conversation turns into a full-blown confrontation. Moving from a profile close-up of Inong, the camera now pans over to Adi when he is about to ask something else, but he is suddenly interrupted by Inong’s hand coming into the frame while asking in anger why he is asking these difficult questions, upon which the camera quickly pans back to him again. Close-up, we see him looking at Adi and then in the direction of the camera, and then yell: “Are you trying to make me angry?”. In an intense back and forth between close-ups of Inong, acting flustered and frustrated with sudden shifts, and of Adi remaining calm, nodding and holding his hand on his chin while looking him right in the eyes, he rambles on that he knows what he is trying to do, threatens to go, and repeats that Adi’s questions are too “deep” and “political” – with the film itself also following suit through more fast-paced movements and cuts.

Afterwards, the situation calms down. In a close-up, we see Adi almost looking sorry for this man and former killer, as he says “I see” and starts talking about his eyesight again, before asking him how he sees these events. In another close-up, we see Inong still looking clearly shaken as he deeply swallows and says “It’s over”, with a stiff face and blank eyes. Cut to a two-shot of both men together sitting there, side by side and face to face once again, while he continues: “The past is past. Luckily, I drank blood. If not, I’d be crazy”. Once more in close-up, we now see Adi take a deep breath and look away in apparent disgust before he turns back to Inong and tells him that he is disturbed by their history being distorted and his own story being full of destructive lies. This causes the situation to flare up again, upon which the next close-up shows us Inong yelling about Adi talking “politics”, waving his hands and pointing his finger, while looking straight at the camera and telling Oppenheimer to stop filming. Another shot reverse shot follows, one which goes from Inong looking away from the lens and back, to Adi’s still poised and silently looking face and gaze, and finally to a lingering facial close-up of Inong looking incensed, his face twitching while pushing his tongue in and out almost like a nervous tick of sorts.

The scene therefore ends on the face, although not the actual shot, that opened the film itself. Staring at us in silence, the face has now changed its meaning from someone we knew nothing about to a known mass killer whose look of silence says something different – the sense of this face is both traumatic and traumatized, but its question for us seems if we are looking at a monster or a scared and shameful old man.<sup>10</sup> This enduring close-up, which seemingly ends the first part or half of the film as it now cuts back to the jumping beans from the title shot to start the second half or latter part, marks the end of the first confrontation and the first culmination of the film’s crisis of witnessing and crying wound. Simultaneously, it also becomes the beginning of a new mode of witnessing, the start for Adi’s look of silence and face of trauma now turned into a traumatic act of facing as well as breaking the silence, both of which are further analyzed in the upcoming sections.

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<sup>10</sup> The choice to use Inong’s close-up face as the opening shot of the film is a curious but compelling one, as it simultaneously becomes a visual metaphor for the willing blindness of the perpetrators and “microcosmos” for their look of silence in the film when they are confronted and thus forced to face the truth of their acts of killing.

## **Witness for the traumatic**

All the while it has already been and will be described in the previous and following sections, *The Look of Silence* demonstrates a complex matrix of cinematic witnessing that constitutes several levels, relations and interactions. Therefore, in this section, the idea and the objective is to try to break down and discuss the different witnessing positions or points of view that are presented both in and by the film itself, and thus also the potential witnessing processes that it opens up for us as spectators. Even though it certainly is not that easily delimited into separate categories, with its oscillating and often also overwhelming audiovisual testimonial material, still it may be theorized in terms of a kind of communication tripartition.

The first level there is the witnessing of the survivors. Here we may begin with Adi himself, whose focalization in the film and central role in conversations and confrontations outwardly makes him its prime witness. In this way, he also works as the nexus for the other testimonies and witnesses in the film, and we may also further outline this as two distinctive forms or modes of witnessing set up in three different sorts or styles of scenes or shots.

One mode is his seeing, intently staring or silently looking and steadfastly hearing or listening – at and to the testimonies of others. This form of witnessing is exemplified by the different scenes of him observing footage that Oppenheimer has filmed of the confessional boasting of perpetrators in the space of the screen. In these scenes – half of which have been described in the former while the remaining are to be described in the next section – he is of course not witnessing the events themselves but rather watching audiovisual testimonies to the killings by the killers, in the form of meta-cinematic second-hand witnessing – one that we are going to return to again shortly.

In another recurring scene type, Adi is together with and witnessing his mother and father, which also brings us to the witnessing of his parents. His parents, Rohani and Rukun, were first-hand witnesses to parts of what took place during these mass genocidal murders, and of course particularly so to the killing of Ramli, not his moment of death but the bloody, mutilated body of their son as he escaped and came back home, only to be taken away by the perpetrators to meet his brutal death. All the while Rukun struggles to remember his son and the story of his killing, Rohani testifies to this memory as well as its aftermath for Adi in the film – something his parents and his other siblings have probably done several times in his life. While she witnesses in words, there is also testimony in the expressions on her face, her wrinkled lines, her furrowed brow and her wounded eyes, and so there is too in the father's old and worn body and face and his blinded and weary gaze, even in their loving relationship.

However, with only a couple of exceptions, Adi is always there in the space, if not the frame itself, during these moments of memory and testimony, and is therefore acting both as proxy and the witness to which they witness. This is also true for the scenes together with Kemat, another survivor and first-hand witness, and whose testimony and tracing of his own trauma comes prompted by Adi's witnessing presence. In this sense, for the film and thus for us as spectators, his witnessing becomes the link between other witnesses, and he our key witness.

The last repeating scene version is Adi's confrontational witnessing of the killers or their families, which also brings us to the witnessing of the perpetrators. Even though these scenes involve witnesses with different experiences and distances to events, many of them were first-hand witnesses to or have first-hand knowledge about the mass killings in their involvement with the death squads. This would of course include Amir Hasan and Inong, who in the strict etymological sense of the word paradoxically and provocatively were the paradigm witnesses to the killing of Ramli, and his moment of death, since they were not only there but they were the ones who actually murdered him – and while the former is now dead, the latter still lives as the last “eye-witness”. However, their terrible testimonies to the killing itself, like those of several other killings by several other killers, rather take place in the meta-cinematic space, in which they are witnessed by Adi's close-up face and silent gaze. In the more general sense, considering both these face-to-film confessions and face-to-face confrontations, the witnessing of the perpetrators is an integral part of the film in many ways. One is the simple fact that they testify to the horror of the past and the terror and trauma that continues to haunt the present. Another is that looking and listening at and to them enjoy the escapism and falsity of fantasy, boasting and gloating about the brutal and gruesome crimes they committed with impunity, and then lie, deny and defend themselves, or lash out, threaten and terrorize, whenever accused of any wrongdoing, in a strange way reveals they are not monsters but men who have suppressed or suspended their morality – human beings riddled with guilt and shame, unable to face the truth about themselves and their acts of atrocity.<sup>11</sup> A last one is that they both work as the antagonist for Adi's testimonial project but also the main catalyst for our witnessing his witnessing, as he once more becomes the motor and the mirror of sorts as our protagonist in facing the terror and terrible silence of the perpetrators.

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<sup>11</sup> While my work is focused on the cinematic faces and cinematic witnessing of the survivors, there is certainly an interesting perspective in also looking at the faces and listening to the testimonies of the perpetrators. In this case, that was reduced in this analysis of *The Look of Silence* after the realization that it would involve a scope of discussion that would take away too much from the point and purpose of my overall project, and in any case would rather be more appropriate for analyzing *The Act of Killing*. Many have done just that, but to go straight to the source for more here, see among others Joshua Oppenheimer's analyses in two chapters of his own co-edited anthology *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory, and the Performance of Violence* (2012).



The other is his saying, that is his own testimony. This mode or form of witnessing does happen in all of the mentioned scene repetitions, because he speaks in some way in each of them – from discussing with his mother what he is doing and has discovered to sometimes commenting on footage he is watching – and because his face speaks on its own, something that should be apparent in this approach, but in the perhaps more ordinary sense this is most prevalent in the conversations or confrontations with the perpetrators. As we see in the first confrontation during the first part of the film as described in the former section, and will see in the other five confrontations during the second part of the film described in the following section, Adi's witnessing also comes from the act of speaking out. His mission is, by his own admission, not only confronting the perpetrators and therefore challenging their propaganda, having them apologize or at least acknowledge their atrocious transgressions as that and not as some righteous act, thus also re-claiming the truth or even the real itself. Simultaneously, his objective is bringing forth the suffering of survivors and breaking the silence in the hope of finding their humanity and building a bridge towards forgiveness and future reconciliation. He does so by meeting them face-to-face, by here questioning them and hearing them speak, but also by looking at them and helping them see – even metaphorically so, helping to fix their eyesight and in another more figurative way also helping with their willing blindness.

While this distinction between seeing and saying follows Durham Peters' so-called double face of witnessing, here these modes do not align with his sharp divide of passive and active witnessing. This means that although there are clearly differences between Adi silently observing and speaking out, his look and his act of trauma, there is certainly both agency and activity in his face and gaze alone. For me, in his cinematic face seeing and saying always go hand in hand, or so face to face, both as compound and complementary ways of witnessing that compose him as an agent being and bearing witness. Moreover, Adi interestingly also challenges the concept of witnessing itself. As noted, he did not see nor hear or experience the events themselves as he was not even born yet, but he both grew up with the stories and testimonies of his parents, siblings and relatives and has looked and listened to its aftermath and aftereffects within his family, community and society through his life. Being from the generation after, his memory is made up in part by that of his parents and the perpetrators, what he witnesses from his family and what he witnesses from Oppenheimer's footage, and his traumatic testimony therefore, in somewhat remixed senses of Hirsch and Landsberg's terms, involves a combination of postmemories and prosthetic memories. While misguided definitions may not even consider him a witness, in my opinion this arguably makes him a paramount one – both as witness for himself and witnessing vehicle for others.

Now, the second level is the witnessing of the film. While some parts of this have already been touched upon, the main and most obvious point is the fact that the film itself facilitates witnessing. In this case, we may further outline the film's two different ways of doing so, while looking closer at how this cinematic doing is also its own work of witnessing, as well as follow how it does so through its medium specific techniques and technologies.

One is what may be called the film's internal facilitation, the way it facilitates the described witnessing of its survivors. This is universally true for audiovisual testimonial material of course, in the sense that the camera and the director work as witnesses for the witnesses, but is a bit more complicated in this specific film. With Oppenheimer's project, these conversations or confrontations with perpetrators would be impossible without his professional and personal connections after documenting in Indonesia for a decade, working alongside former killers still in power on the national stage and so welcomed by these local or lower-level perpetrators. Filming these encounters between survivor and perpetrators, Adi coming face-to-face with those involved with his brother's killing, none of which have yet to be held accountable nor brought to justice for their role in the genocidal atrocities, is almost unprecedented in cinema. Furthermore, the confessional and controversial footage that he has shot featuring confessions from the perpetrators is also fundamental to Adi's own witnessing in the film. In this way, the film not only expands our capacity to witness and so extends the trajectory of memory into testimony onto witnessing, as Frosh and Waterson together might say, but is the very medium of possibility for this witnessing.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, the mode or manner of mediation here, the way the film both forms and frames the witnessing, or the cinematic "in-between", certainly remains central. This means that its witnessing is not just its documentation and distribution of audiovisual testimony, but of course simultaneously its aesthetic and also even ethical "re-framing" or "re-forming" of its material in cinematic encounters between testimonial expression and sensorial experience. That is to say the film's choices, its own ways of witnessing, all foundationally matter. On the one hand, it continuously uses facial close-ups shots, and often static ones similar to what this work has called formats of "speaking faces". On the other hand, these are set up in scenes with shots that repeatedly cut or move away from the speaker to instead focus on the face and gaze of the onlooker, as well as off-screen presences, lingering pauses and enduring silences – thus hauntingly evoking the unseen and the unspoken. Together this therefore mediates and enhances a space of distance within closeness that engages and estranges at the same time.

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<sup>12</sup> The uniqueness and unusualness of Oppenheimer's overall project and process should thus not be understated.

Furthermore, the structure of the film mediates a flow of information and thus fluctuating interaction that is arguably itself traumatic, where the journey through merciless memories and terrible testimonies just gets more unsettling and upsetting as we go further and further into the dark history of the killings as well as the devastating story of what they still do to all the victims and survivors. Finally, the overall poetics of the film also otherwise mediates our spectatorial optics. Sensible yet sensuous close-ups both combined and contrasted by several creatively staged two- and long shots framing some awesome tableaux, in visual composition illuminated by stylish light and saturated colors, and an auditive one intermingling evocative silence with ambient and atmospheric sound effects, create the film's expressive framework. The film works as witness in ways that specifically would only be possible within cinema, by acting as a magnifying glass and megaphone through audiovisual testimony while artistically making strange in a face-first traumatic aesthetic, one doing so differently than in Walker and Hirsch's definitions – opening a particular experiential potential for cinematic witnessing.

The other is therefore what may be called the film's external facilitation, the way it facilitates witnessing for its spectators. Here most of the key points have already been made, but this indeed brings us on to the third level, that is thus to the witnessing of us as spectators. All the while the first and second level drastically and necessarily guide this tentative third, there is more to explore about the possibility and power of our own cinematic witnessing.

Following up on those numbers, if we henceforth consider survivors as "first" witness and the film itself as "second" witness, that subsequently means we as spectators therefore become "third" witness. In this sense, we are witnessing the witnessing of them both in turn, the mediated witnessing of witnessing, or even witnessing the witnessing of witnessing. Now this breakdown is only a technical or theoretical way to look closer at third level witnessing, because when it comes down to the mode that matters, our encounter with and spectatorial engagement in witnessing the witnessing, these become one. While the film sets up a series of potential witnessing encounters and even though each of these interactions really include three separate encounters – encounters between survivors and film, encounters between film and spectators, and thus encounters between survivors and spectators – in the encounter, we are witnessing *the* witnessing. This is to say that, in *The Look of Silence*, while the film itself functions as the medium of possibility, as the constitutive and conductive maker and mediator of both Adi's witnessing and our witnessing, the witnessing encounter it facilitates is still a cinematic face-to-face between one and the other. This may be elaborated by the meaning of witnessing itself, both what it entails to be and bear witness and the ethics of this witnessing.

In this sense, here we once again philosophically face Levinas. Facing the cinematic face of Adi only becomes ethically facing him if we are witnessing the witnessing of the other – in otherwise words, if we are witness not only *to* his testimony to trauma but simultaneously *for* his traumatic otherness. Similar in some ways to what he is doing in the film himself, bearing witness to his own trauma story but also for the traumatic testimonies of others, we may well be a witness to the traumatic in his face and his gaze, through his seeing and saying, but our being a witness for *him* is not to relate his trauma to ourselves but ourselves being there and bearing witness for *his* witness. While seemingly complicated, this is no more or no less than the elementary yet exigent fact of facing a face, opening up to our wounding from and thus welcoming our ethical responsibility for the other – which *is* witnessing the witnessing.<sup>13</sup>

In this film, with some more practical and straightforward terms, we spectators are potentially witnessing the traumatic testimonies of Adi, his parents, and other survivors, as well as the terroristic testimonies of all the perpetrators, which therefore creates a complex meta-cinematic matrix of witnessing interfacing who looks and is looked at, who speaks and is spoken to, who listens and is listened to, and what is seen, said and heard. Yet beyond the borders here, the potential ethics of cinematic witnessing is thus a question of encounter, the position and the process of not what we are witness to but who we are witnessing for, which beckons openness and willingness of seeing otherwise and ourselves, being there for the other with both heart and mind to become the trustees of the testimony – like Trezise has written it – with a look and an act of witnessing.

All in all, *The Look of Silence* creates and constitutes a precarious and profound zone of cinematic witnessing, one in which audiovisual traces and testimonies to terror and trauma and close encounters with cinematic faces together form and frame witnessing expressions to a traumatic otherness, and thus simultaneously one which also potentially facilitates ethical witnessing experiences for us as spectators.

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<sup>13</sup> Here the ideas of Levinas track back to chapter one, and his many metaphorical metonyms, yet there other terms were most often chosen to elude too much language confusion later. In short words, the face of the other as trauma, face-to-face encounter as testimonial situation, and the ethical self as an awakening to bear witness, are ideas written in different ways in his different works, but first and foremost a focus in *Otherwise than Being* – where the ethical encounter entails “the risky uncovering of oneself”, “exposure to traumas”, and “exposing oneself to outrage, to insults and to wounding” (1981: 48-49). For my purposes, this may be simply understood and summarized in that facing a face is a recurring traumatic haunting, wherein bearing witness for the other means viscerally being vulnerable and becoming wounded by responsibility – an ethical witnessing again best phrased as: “here I am”, which is paradoxically also the way to an otherwise understanding.

## The act of trauma

At the start of the second part of the film, we return to the jumping beans from the title shot in the beginning, and soon a shot of Adi riding a bicycle down a dirt road, with his mother sitting on the back, is accompanied by her off-screen voice saying:

‘Mom, mom!’ ‘Is that you, Ramli? Have you come back?’ ‘Yes, mom. Come here, mom.’ I kissed him. I took off his clothes. He was covered in blood. He was ripped open. ‘Mom, can I have coffee?’ But when the water boiled, they came to take him away. They said they were taking him to the hospital. Of course, they weren’t taking him to the hospital. After all, he was running away from them. I kissed him... ‘Goodbye, mom.’ ‘They won’t let me come with you, Ramli.’ Pray that the killers’ children suffer. Their children and their grandchildren. The people who killed you... Pray they get killed. May they suffer... The ones who killed you.<sup>14</sup>

For the last few lines, the film cuts to a close-up shot of the mother’s face, and then to one of Adi solemnly looking down, before ending on a long and lingering shot of Adi and Rohani walking hand in hand away from the camera and into the surrounding nature. This is then followed by some close and intimate shots of Adi shaving his father while he sings another song. Thus, the trauma story of this singular family, the gruesome murder of Ramli in the past and their enduring suffering as survivors in the present, is summed up once more.

Following the first confrontation at the end of the first, most screen time in the second part of *The Look of Silence* is devoted to and divided between five more confrontations and footage witnessing sessions. That is to say Adi’s witnessing as seeing and saying, or looking in silence and speaking out, and this section will look closely at them both together, lifting its vantage point upon and onto the film’s context or consequences in-between. While this will be the main focus here, it needs mention that his further conversations and the film’s cycle of exposition of course also conditions the coming mediated expression and thus our experience.

Back in the film itself, we are soon back with Adi looking at the screen. Here we see a man in a green chair with several other men behind him, before a text names him Amir Siahaan, “commander of Snake River death squads”, and we return to Adi’s close-up face. We close-up look at him listen to the man’s off-screen voice talk about killing “communists” day and night for months, coming back to him on the screen as he continues telling us that they dug holes to bury them alive. Same as before, the scene is set up in shot reverse shot

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<sup>14</sup> *The Look of Silence* (Oppenheimer 2014), approximately 43:20-45:10. Transcribed from the subtitles to show her speaking in place of her son and herself in the past as well as to her testimony to the memory in the present.

between the screen and Adi's silently looking face, looking and listening to Oppenheimer ask questions and the man saying how they should be rewarded for the purge with a paid vacation to America – the now medium shot holding on the footage and on his satisfied and smug face. A somewhat abrupt cut then puts us in a two-shot of Adi sitting with some old man, who is playing a keyboard and singing a love song, and soon a close-up of the man that we now may surely recognize as the same man from the footage we just saw. Changing between his close-up, Adi's close-up, and two-shots of them, we see and hear Adi ask Amir if he became rich and powerful due to what he did and he answers that it was the result of his good deeds and "heroic struggle". The film now switches between some more three-quarter close-ups of both men, when Adi tells Amir his brother was killed and since he commanded the killings... but is then interrupted by Amir interjecting that it was not really him and he is not to blame.

Interestingly, the composition of the scene once again intensifies as the confrontation does, as the camera begins cutting quicker and quickly panning between Adi accusing Amir while Amir denies responsibility. As we again cut back to Adi's face in close-up, he now looks more animated and angrier, when he says: "Every killer that I meet... None of them feel responsible. They don't even feel regret". Cut back to Amir's face, scowling back at him while Adi continues his challenge, he now starts asking him, with a quite aggressive voice, in which village his family lives, to which Adi replies eloquently that he has to hide his identity since the killers are still in power and look at themselves like heroes – succinctly and suitably pointing at the man and the perpetrator right in front of him. This confrontational and close-up exchange continues with Amir accusing Adi of subversion and secret communist activity while telling him he cannot imagine what hell would happen to him if he did this during the dictatorship. Then this tense scene ends with us seeing Adi's sad eyes and silent look away and Amir's sadistic piercing stare as he menacingly asks to "go on" and "keep going".

With this confrontation, we are certainly well into the second mode of witnessing, that is specifically Adi's saying, the film sets up and the challenge to bear witness that it presents for us as spectators. Again faced with two faces, we are still encouraged to encounter and witness Adi's witnessing, but to face them both. This is an uncomfortable position, not only due to how unsafe and unstable Adi's precarious situation of facing the perpetrator makes us feel, but also because we here see that we have nowhere to hide. Facing his face in sensation, our looking and listening to him being terrorized is also traumatic for us as spectators. This is not because we somehow become traumatized, his trauma does not also become ours, but rather because his face of trauma remains something that we cannot relate to or make sense of for ourselves – a traumatic encounter, which is further explored in the following.

The film then cuts straight to full-screen footage of Inong and Amir Hasan showing the best spot to chop someone's head off, while the next cut takes us to another close-up of Adi with a steady yet severe expression on this face. On the screen, the two perpetrators now show how they would rip off a penis with a machete, and then one says "That's like Ramli!", before we return to Adi's troubled face. Once more on the screen, Oppenheimer's voice now soon asks: "Wait, what happened to Ramli?", a question the killers answer by first directing how to film it and then both showing and telling him the gruesome story of Ramli's murder:

So, we cut Ramli again and again... and stabbed him like this until he looked dead. Then I pushed him in the river. He clung to the tree roots, begging: 'Help me! Help me! Help me!'. So we fished him out, and killed him by cutting off his penis.<sup>15</sup>

During this "demonstration", the film cuts to Adi's close-up expressions three more times, letting us clearly see his still remarkably calm gaze soon gradually turning more and more disturbed and disgusted, ending with a devastated look on and devastating look at his face, looking at him slowly take a small breath and deeply swallow with visible tears in his eyes. While he knows the story, Adi here witnesses it directly from the two men who killed his brother with impunity and inhumanity, and witnessing his wounded face also wounds us.<sup>16</sup>

Returning to the first mode of witnessing, the meta-cinematic space of the screen and Adi's silent look, or his seeing, but simultaneously also guided by the second, the double face of the confrontations and Adi's speaking out, or his saying, this almost becomes a crossroads that crystallizes the crucial but difficult cinematic witnessing position or point of view we as spectators are put in or presented with by the film. We have now been introduced to Adi as a survivor, by following him and facing his seeing of screen confessions from and his saying in scene confrontations with his brother's as well as others' killers, and learning more about his personal situation and traumatic story. As we once again come face to face with his look of silence and face of trauma – witnessing his witnessing of a key piece of context that gives us an even stronger grip on both the specific and the general story and history of the horrible genocide – this becomes another culmination for the crying wound and crisis of witnessing but also an affecting and profound encounter whose power has only been increased and intensified by our better terms of understanding.

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<sup>15</sup> The one telling the story is Amir Hasan while Inong is physically and verbally agreeing, both confirming the events of what happened and seemingly confirming that these two men are the ones who killed Ramli.

<sup>16</sup> Adi watched this footage before many other parts of the film were made, and it was a big part of the basis for him wanting Oppenheimer to keep filming the terrible testimonies of the perpetrators, and to face them himself.

Meanwhile, this is likewise a crossroads for how we as spectators come to position ourselves. Even though now more informed, we still do not have a grasp or comprehension of what he is going through, his terror and his trauma is just as unrelatable and unrepresentable and takes us to the limit of our understanding. Yet there is a relation in such tension, and this is why this cinematic witnessing is also traumatic for us. That does not mean this is based in a projection or a production of pseudo-trauma, which is a way of looking and listening from the world of our own categories and concepts that would take us down the wrong path. That is to say, here also rewording Kaplan, in a vicarious traumatization caused by overidentification, the sentimental and empty self-serving empathy caused by overactive imagination, and the false escapist fantasy caused by an overbearing interpretation, or any other terms of acting out and taking over. That is rather to say, here reworking Sontag as well, this is an encounter with the expression of another's trauma, or testimony to traumatic memory, set in terms of a traumatic facing, haunting or wounding emergent from the other that makes the meaning of trauma itself more real or realized. This is also why our witnessing becomes an ethical lesson, working through an otherwise understanding towards an experience of taking upon ourselves a traumatic otherness. Of course, this is still a tall and taxing task to do for us all. In other words, the way the film teaches us and that we may learn to witness is to be the someone to look and listen and let Adi's terror and trauma story turn into testimony, moreover therefore becoming the someone who bears responsibility to witness his unbearable witnessing for him – welcoming our witnessing of witnessing.

The film provides no rest from such a troublesome position, as it and we immediately go straight into other confrontations. Opening with a shot of an official-looking building, we hear Adi's off-screen voice addressing someone as the chief of Komando Aksi and asking him if he ordered the mass killings at Snake River, and then see the close-up face of a man as he answers that the killings were the spontaneous action of the people. Cut to Adi's close-up, pressing him on how army officials and police escorts taking prisoners to be killed would be the will of its people, and back to a close-up of the man with a text naming him M.Y. Basrun, "speaker of the regional legislature", claiming he is only attempting to set the record straight. "I'm not Rambo", he says, contending his innocence as the commando secretary general just doing his job, and when Adi interjects that a million people were killed, he merely responds "That's politics", laughing and asking Adi: "Right?". Coming back to his close-up while Adi continues his challenge, asking him how he can do politics surrounded by the families of all the people he killed, we see Basrun leaning back in his chair and looking out into nothing. Soon the film cuts over to a two-shot of both Adi and Basrun, side by side and face to face



like in the former confrontations. Back in the close-up shot reverse shot, Adi tells his story about the killing of Ramli, which seems to become the catalyst for the confrontation turning into threats and intimidation. Now, Basrun asks if the families of the victims want the killings to happen again, threateningly pointing his finger as he aggressively says that if they keep on making the past a problem in the present, sooner or later history will come to repeat itself. All the while, Adi's close-up face seems more discouraged and distraught for each cut back.

Some moments of respite follow; a beautiful shot of the river flowing below a bridge with a twilight sky filling the background and short intimate scenes of Adi with his family, ending with a silent evening shot of a road. However, the next familial scene is different, a confrontation with his own uncle. Starting with a medium close-up of Adi walking down a road while he smiles and says hello to his cousins, he greets his uncle and tells him that he is there to check his eyes. Cut to his uncle's close-up face, with optometry glasses on his eyes, Adi first small talks and tests some lenses, but soon after starts asking him all the difficult questions that he really wants answered. In shot reverse shot of close-up faces, Adi first asks what he was doing in 1965 and his uncle says he worked as a prison guard but did not know what happened to the prisoners after they were taken away. Then he starts pressing his uncle on Ramli's murder and the encounter turns more uncomfortable. We here look upon the faces of both during long moments of silence, Adi with his determined expressions of skepticism and his uncle clutching his pearls and covering his mouth, turning more and more defensive, while still anxiously smiling with blank wet eyes. The uncle continues to plead his innocence, claims he did not kill people and was only following orders, concluding: "The past is past".

As the ones before it, the conversation becomes more confrontational, as Adi accuses his uncle of helping kill innocent people, upon which another close-up of his face lets us see his uncle turn more animated and aggressively turning down responsibility. As the back and forth goes on, he rants about how the "communists" were bad people who never prayed and only pretended to be religious, subsequently indignantly saying: "And you blame me? How dare you!". After he does, his close-up face tells another story altogether, as he awkwardly giggles before swallowing his smile in face of Adi's still relentless stare. The scene then ends with a lingering and painful silence, cutting between Adi's and his uncle's close-up face with none of them saying a word. In this last face-to-face exchange, the camera pans from Adi, blowing air into his cheeks in exasperation and looking down into the ground, to his uncle averting his red-eyed gaze and then seemingly ashamed looking back over to his nephew, and closes on Adi stroking his chin, softly nodding and staying with his teary-eyed look of silence – in what is an incredible moment of stillness and sadness.

Following some more intermediate scenes, the film then soon moves on to yet another confrontation. After shots of a blue door on a brick house, we first hear a woman's voice and then see her and her father in a close-up two-shot as she talks about feeling proud of how her father killed many "communists". Cutting from the two-shot, with his face in the foreground and hers in the background, we see Adi carefully listening. Unprompted, the father then says he once brought a head to a shop to scare them and make them scream before throwing the head away, laughing and slapping his thigh after finishing the grotesque anecdote. Set up similarly yet somewhat differently to previous interview scenes, this one switches between Adi's facial close-up and medium or close two-shots of the faces of both father and daughter. In the next two-shots, the father continues describing his deeds of killing people, slitting their throats, and dumping their bodies into the river, and then about how they would also collect and drink their victims' blood not to go crazy. As he does, we see the daughter by his side in the shots, looking at Adi and him, and see her face change from slightly concerned but caring looks to looks of repulsion and regret. After, we also see a lingering facial close-up of Adi, silently looking straight at them with blank eyes, pushing his lips together and softly nodding, and then a two-shot of father and daughter sitting in silence where she looks down and away and he looks up and into the camera. Now, Adi asks her how she feels and she answers, with teary eyes, shaky voice and nervy laugh, that it all is sadistic and surprising – as the film cuts closer to her face framed alone against the dark green wall.

In what follows, the confrontation takes a quite unexpected turn. Unlike the others, when Adi tells them that his brother was also killed, instead of defensiveness and pleading innocence there is a plea for forgiveness. While the father looks apprehensive and ashamed, interjecting that "it's getting late", the daughter asks Adi to forgive her father and her – and Adi answers: "It's not your fault that your father is a murderer". In an emotive shot reverse shot and in-between affectively poignant silences, we as spectators look at both their faces tearing up and we listen to both their voices breaking up. At its close, in another two-shot of father and daughter, Adi suddenly comes into frame, surprisingly leaning down to shake the daughter's hand and give her a long hug and then doing the same for the father, while she continues to beg for his forgiveness and bids him to think of them as family now, before Adi says he must go and greets them goodbye, and walks out the door into the blinding sunlight outside. In the end, the scene is simultaneously affecting and absurd, with Adi embracing a former murderer come senile old man in what seems almost an act of reconciliation without recompense, but there is a certain awe to witnessing his grace, compassion and forgiveness, as well as clear feeling of hope in this coming together of the generation after the genocide.

These three traumatic confrontations in different ways speak to several dimensions of the difficult but crucial process of the film. More than a decade in the making, the context of Oppenheimer's overall project is material, as the two films together make for a momentous work of both documentation and dissemination. Here, the intent and impact of the film and its work of cinematic witnessing is therefore best worded by Oppenheimer and Adi themselves:

My task in this film is to show what the frightened silence of the survivors, and indeed of the society, looks like. It divides neighbours from neighbours and even relatives from relatives in an abyss of trauma. It is a fear that will never go away until it is addressed [...] I believe that by looking or speaking out, we are compelled to maybe act. Otherwise we retreat into fantasies that divide us from each other and ourselves [...] (Oppenheimer 2015).

We're no longer living around the people who have been threatening us for 50 years. [*The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence*] opened a space that never existed before, and led to an enormous acknowledgement of the suffering and prison of silence and fear we'd been living in. We feel our stories are on the lips of everyone. I no longer feel afraid [...] I don't feel afraid at all (Rukun 2016).<sup>17</sup>

For me, critical are the consequences of facing the films. When *The Act of Killing* premiered in Indonesia its attempted public screenings were either shut down or met with protests, so it was shown by way of secret and guerilla-style screenings as well as made freely available to download online. Yet media attention nationally and internationally made it a phenomenon, bringing the film into global conversation and creating pressure that prompted response from the government. What a difference a film makes then, as this contributed both to opening a discussion and to official wide release for *The Look of Silence*, which had double, sold-out premieres in the biggest Indonesian theater, with standing ovations for Adi. What a difference another film makes too, as the success only continued with thousands of screenings around the country after, with Adi also celebrated by many as a national hero. Together the two films had an extraordinary impact, changing the conversation about these mass killings in media, education, the general public and even the government, but there was backlash and bullying from dangerous reactionaries still. Bearing witness to the traumatic past and breaking through the terrorizing silence of the present thus turned to becoming change and hope for the future. This challenge of change as acting and facing trauma continues in the final parts of the film.

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<sup>17</sup> Quotes from an interview with Oppenheimer by Sean O'Hagan for *The Guardian*, June 7, 2015, and one with Adi by Cara Buckley in *The New York Times*, February 12, 2016, while other parts of paraphrased information here come from an interview with Oppenheimer and Adi by Melis Behlil for *Cineaste*, original version dated Summer 2015, as well as from extra materials on the mentioned box-set edition of the films themselves.

Before the film's last confrontation, we see another family scene, which finishes with a striking, silent close-up two-shot of Rohani and Rukun, and then a stunning, sudden match cut between his mother and him returns to Adi, once again staring off-screen at the soon to be seen footage on the screen in front of him. "We killed 32 people here", we hear and then see Amir Hasan and Inong, as well as the former's wife, stand around and speak about the book he wrote and illustrated himself about his misdeeds. We here watch Ramli's killers joyfully reminisce and make jokes of their murders and then dumping bodies in the river, only broken up by Adi's close-up face and disgusted expression. "Your husband killed 32 people here", we now hear Adi say and see the close-up older face of the wife, and thus we have come right to the film's next and last confrontation. Over her skeptical-looking face, we listen to Adi explain that since Amir Hasan is dead, he wanted to at least meet his wife and sons, before we see a series of shots where Adi shows them sketches from his book. Cutting to a close-up of Adi's face and then going into a shot reverse shot including the mother and her two sons, we look at them looking and listening and at Adi himself telling the traumatic story or giving his testimony about his brother's murder uninterrupted for the first time:

Of the 32 people killed here, the worst story is about my brother Ramli... He was chopped in the shoulder. He was stabbed in the stomach. His intestines spilled out. He was stabbed in the back. But he managed to run home. From the front yard he called for mom. She brought him inside, but in the morning they took him away. Your husband took him away. Because your husband was commander in Komando Aksi. Your husband told mom that he would take Ramli to the hospital. But in the truck, they chopped him up... They cut off his penis, and then finally he died.

All the while Adi keeps speaking here, with a still determined and dignified expression on his face, we also see different close-ups of the family members and watch their worried faces and wary gazes following his words in complete silence. In the moment, through looking at their seemingly affected faces, perhaps we as spectators feel some hope that the confrontation may become an open conversation like the one before it, but when he then begins showing them sketches of the killing in the book, like most of the other confrontations, that is when the lies, denial and defensiveness begins too. First the mother claims she never saw the book and that her husband never told her anything, even saying that he did not kill anyone. Then the two sons both profess they knew nothing about it and were never told what their father was doing. During it all, we are left to look upon Adi with a painful smile of pure frustration on his face.

Now the confrontation becomes chaotic. First, Oppenheimer starts involving himself directly from behind the camera, reminding them Adi is here to speak openly and requesting that they tell the truth, but apparently to no avail. Instead, one of the sons goes on a tangent about that everything is fine and everyone is friends, and that what they are doing is opening a wound that otherwise would not be a problem. “Otherwise, you wouldn’t know me, right?”, he says and looks over to Adi, to which he immediately responds: “Of course I knew, I knew all about this family. All the victims’ families know who the killers are, but that doesn’t mean that we want revenge”. As if not even listening, the other son then antagonistically questions: “Do you want revenge?”, but like so many times before, Adi once more keeps his cool and composed look as he simply replies to him: “If I wanted revenge, I wouldn’t come like this”. The two sons now go on with their conspiratorial nonsense, while their mother suddenly gets up and goes, to which one son yells: “Enough! My mother is ill, and this will traumatize her”, and then goes on: “Forget the past. Let’s all get along like the military dictatorship taught us”. There is almost too much to unpack in these statements, but the film cuts back to Adi as this happens to let us see the close-up look on his face, and his both exasperated and demoralized expression says it all. Then, Oppenheimer gets even more involved, handing over a computer for Adi to show them footage of the father talking about the killing of Ramli. In the face of this undeniable documentation and visible evidence, the sons do not want to look but rather so refuse to really see while shouting at them to turn it off, before things quiet down again when the mother comes back – all of them sitting in silence as the film stays on their faces.

After saying no to Oppenheimer’s question if there is anything else he wants to say, Adi says no more for the rest of the scene, as we only see his closely framed look of silence and still listening as the confrontation soon turns chaotic again. Beginning with a close-up of the mother as she apologizes, first saying that she feels the same way he does with shame on her face, and then seeing her peeking up in view of the camera itself, seemingly with another guilt-stricken gaze, both shots are followed by reverse shots of Adi looking back at her with his calm and warm facial expression. However, when Oppenheimer starts to suggest they watch just one more clip from the footage, the sons start shouting again while the mother starts crying, and when he keeps pushing and starts playing the footage, they all yell at him. Throughout it all, the film continues to cut back to Adi’s close-up face, and soon the scene ends with a lingering facial close-up of him first looking away, then looking over at them, and finally looking right into the camera – and thus straight at us, as if facing and asking a question as well as waiting for us to answer.

While his face closes the final confrontation, this cinematic face does not finish the film. From Adi's face, we first see his mother in striking long shot outside the house looking sad, and we also see his father in some devastating shots of him looking scared and lost while dragging himself around the concrete floor of the house, shouting and screaming for help.<sup>18</sup> Cut to a sort of medium three-shot that frames Adi, his mother and his son, as they open the door to let Kemat come inside, that is the survivor we met previously in the film. Seeing him and touching his hand as he reaches out to her, she now breaks down crying and lays her head on his hands. The camera moves in closer on them both, tilting up from her face to his, while he pleads "Let it go. Leave it to God", and she responds "My son is gone, but you survived", moving up and down from his upset face to her unseen weeping face pressed into his chest, before cutting to a cobwebbed roof shot as she keeps wailing about her son's killing.

Along with the following cut, we first hear and then see Amir Hasan and Inong on the screen once again, like before looking at them standing there at their so-called killing spot by Snake River – where in the end they even pose for a photograph – as they in turn say:

That's the true story of Ramli... And the others have similar stories, but not the same. But that's what we experienced. That's what happened... Well, that's just how it is... Life on Earth.

Between the lines, we come back to Adi's close-up face and traumatized or traumatic gaze. Sitting on the same wooden chair and wearing the same black shirt, while framed the same as so many times before it, watching him in the foreground ahead of an unfocused background with shadowy golden walls and bright green curtains. Once more we look at him looking – witness his witnessing – and see the sorrowful or even suffering expression on his face in a stillness that is only interrupted by the miniscule but visible micromovements of his teary eyes as he gravely stares and his lumpy throat as he gently swallows. The scene then ends with a gorgeous long shot of Adi looking at the screen, for the first time seeing his figure in the dimly lit and dark gold surroundings of the space around him, watching him perched up on the chair on the right side while hunched over staring out at the small television set on the left side of this almost painting-like frame. Here we are: looking at his final look of silence.

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<sup>18</sup> This scene with his father was shot by Adi himself. While the co-director that is anonymously credited for the film is someone else, Oppenheimer also left a camera for Adi to film different scenes from his family's life and included this particular scene in the final version of the film.

*The Look of Silence* ends with the traumatic testimony and personal story of this one family, but symbolizes the history of victims and survivors from the Indonesian genocide and terror. Following the fantastic long shot of Adi's witnessing position and his final look of silence, a sound bridge of his mother's voice-over transports us to close-ups of her hand holding jumping beans, her face looking at and speaking to them, and the beans "dancing" around on her palm – in a returning but oblique visual metaphor. The film then returns to the night-time road shot from the start, coupled with the sound of the recurring chorus of crickets, before fading to black alongside his father singing another song, which begins the end credits.<sup>19</sup>

Like the terrorizing trauma of living in silence and suppression, there is really no finality here other than facing the reality of the crying wound of the past and its continued haunting of the present, yet in the film's close-up and eye-opening confrontation with this past and present, there perhaps also remains a certain sense of hope for the future. That is to say that, in some ways, Adi's mission within the film itself was a failed one. In the end, he found little joy and justice in his noble but naive goal of facing the killers or meeting these murderers and speaking openly with them as people, as they showed no remorse or regret, they had no revelation nor took any responsibility, and there was therefore no road towards reconciliation or redemption. Nonetheless, both his mission as well as the missions of the film itself were arguably still accomplished in several ways. For one, the film as witnessing expression incessantly works as an act of facing the terror and opening the wound of trauma, by way of audiovisual testimony giving a face to survivors and sound to the silence, one that also becomes a profound testament to their resistance and resilience in face of living in fear and precarity in a society where the perpetrators and their propaganda still hold the power. For another, the film as witnessing experience inescapably works as an appeal to look and listen to its uncomfortable and near unbearable terrible traumatic testimonies, cinematically facing the faces and witnessing the witnessing in a way that realizes ethical relations and our responsibility to see and speak for the sake of survivors – to be there and to act for others. For one final another too, the film is a witnessing work whose described consequences also really speak on their own, with Adi and Oppenheimer's daring making a world of difference.

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<sup>19</sup> As mentioned in the beginning, the end credits list nearly as many credited as anonymous as those credited by name, and this includes the film's co-director, assistant cinematographers, assistant directors, camera assistants, co-producers, production managers, production assistants, and line producers, as well as other crew. On another quite interesting note, the film had both Danish and Indonesian crews, as well as a Norwegian production office, and three major documentarians as its executive producers: Werner Herzog, Errol Morris, and André Singer.

As this analysis has elevated, cinematic witnessing is implemented in simultaneously distinct and difficult ways in *The Look of Silence*. Through the film's "face-first" aesthetics, it facilitates a traumatic ethics in the form of spectatorial optics or otherwise way of seeing whose relationality is demanding, haunting and wounding for us. The film's witnessing of witnessing, its facing audiovisual testimonial expressions, thus encounters and encourages us to bear witness, but our witnessing this witnessing is both conditional and contingent on our openness to face the other and our willingness to witness and not retreat into the confines and follies of fantasies – remaining only our own responsibility. In this sense, Adi's face and act of trauma and the film's mediation of his "double-faced" testimony opens an ethical and affective witnessing process that is as precarious as productive every step of the way. In that sense as well, the film implores our awakening, our looking and speaking out both by being and therefore bearing witness for the other, which becomes a cinematic interaction that may find lasting impact and endure through ethical understanding.

Thus, as a documentary film about facing fear, challenging false truth and claiming the real, by telling the traumatic story of past acts of killing still traumatizing in the present and testifying with a hope of change for the future, *The Look of Silence* breaks terrorizing silence and bears cinematic witness to work through a broader meaning of what has been and is still being done to victims and survivors. In the end, the way it faces us with a traumatic ethics to make us face and take on responsibility for the other powerfully resonates with the film's objective of opening a productive act of looking or potential otherwise witnessing.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Such a focus on being and bearing witness for the survivors is particularly noteworthy in *The Look of Silence* due to the unresolved trauma and unrelieved terror characteristic for the Indonesian genocide and its aftermath. For obvious reasons, there are not many other documentary or different kinds of films that deal with this dark history and contemporary reality, and the handful that do have therefore been made by so-called "outsiders" to Indonesian society. Alongside Oppenheimer's pair of films, another interesting one is anthropologist Robert Lemelson's *40 Years of Silence: An Indonesian Tragedy* (2009). This is a film that focuses on four different survivors and their families, and thus on different generational relationships to the events themselves and the memories of them, combining testimony with commentary from three historians as well as Lemelson himself. In similar but different ways, both films become testaments to terror and trauma from the past through speaking about its haunting and lasting impact on the present, and thereby both act on breaking the silence.



## VII:

### CONCLUSION

#### Facing film and otherwise conclusions

Even though called a conclusion, this short final section is rather a summary and commentary of sorts with the intention of providing responses and hopes to all those questions and desires opened in the introduction. Thus, we again return to the fundamental question the project has explored: *What is the ethical potential of facing terror through film?*

To sum up in short, now coming to its end, my argument remains the findings of this dissertation has demonstrated the dissemination at the beginning to be valid and vital. All the while there is no single nor simple answer to such a non-finite question, one as important as imperative concluding point certainly seems clear: there *is* an ethical potential to film, and therefore film also *does* have a role in relation to facing terror. Here this specifically means that the specific mediated relations that manifest themselves between spectators and survivors through audiovisual testimony in documentary film certainly do hold a power for recognition, responsibility, and even resilience, and that such possibilities clearly have much or even most to do with interfaces of those three mentioned interlinked dimensions of this specific sense of facing film: the face, reality, and trauma. Since this happening thus suggested is arguably no longer hypothetical, through theorizing and analyzing it in different ways, to further highlight these findings, the following will now return to all those follow-up questions as posed before in the beginning: What happens? Why does it happen? How does it happen? Where and when does it happen? Who does it happen to? Before doing so, as the one makes better sense with the other research-wise, first I want to come back to what this study wanted to do and so too assess if these aims were accomplished.

One goal was to expand on contemporary media-related terrorism research, and this dissertation has done so in two main ways. For one, through focusing not on terrorist events and the terrorists themselves, but instead so on the human consequences of terrorist attacks – studying the memories or testimonies of survivors, victims and witnesses, and the sense of terror as well as traumatic aftermath of those affected – the project has indeed contributed to further opening up the other side of terror and finding new avenues to approach the crucial stories of survivors. While a claim that such a closed lens might lose some interesting context around the subject matter in a more general sense would be understandable, my counterpoint

here would be that such a closer look at specific people is a more important concern for the ethics developed in the dissertation. For another, by focusing not on news media but rather aesthetic media and even more specifically documentary film, this is a project that dually explores a field of study that really deserves more focused attention, namely the key part that documentary film, both as archival documentation and audiovisual testimonial form, may play in how we deal with and learn from terror afterwards. While a contention that many different media and mediations have parts to play is fair, my case study is these specifics in the cinematic encounters of real people in the relations between survivors and spectators.<sup>1</sup>

Another goal was to extend the boundaries or reach of film-related ethical research, and this dissertation has done just that in double form. For one, by turning ethically, if you will, in a different way than most other studies do through specifically exploring the ethical relationship that exists in-between a film and its spectators as simultaneously a specific yet general and essential potential, and then further elucidating the ethics of these encounters in the domain of documentary film, the project can thus indeed claim to have provided a new perspective as well as nascent perception on the ethicality that may be discovered in aesthetic and affective dimensions of cinematic expression and experience itself. While the argument that my way of doing makes these analyses somewhat closed-in and complicated is certainly valid, an analytical allegiance to these films' facings of us as spectators is simultaneously the foundational theoretical idea. For another, through engaging the ethical tenets and terms of Emmanuel Levinas at face value, while also delving into dialogue with them through taking into consideration a host of other theories and thoughts within different fields of study, and in particular film and media studies, this is a project that has been able to build a philosophical but at its basis also practical framework that has developed somewhat otherwise connections between ideas of cinematic faces, audiovisual testimony and cinematic witnessing. While the assertion that these terms and theses nevertheless remain too open-ended, oblique or obscure, is clearly a reasonable one, this is once more done by design, where the fundamental reason for doing so is to develop onwards frames that are deliberate but flexible and versatile enough to do film analysis that expresses spectatorial experiences in specific yet different ways.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the dichotomy between the particular and universal has been a continuous thought and concern in this work, but the aim and attempt has been to maintain a mutually beneficial balance between the specificity of film expression and experience and the extrapolated generality of theoretical and film-analytical frameworks.

<sup>2</sup> Even if that is the intentional case, this conclusion will come back to both some general and more specific meanings when it comes to these three terms themselves since they are simultaneously frames meant to be applicable and adaptable not only for my own approach but potentially also for others.

All these goals of course go hand in hand or meet face to face in the overarching objective of exploring the complex nexus between terror, film, ethics, and the face. What is more, they adjoin with doing so in a specific and systematic manner by taking different paths towards a joint point and thus always making headway onwards onto interconnected openings of dimensions of the ethical potential of facing terror through film – or facing film.

Forgive the slight digression here, but it is interesting to segue a short bit to what was written in the project description for the dissertation. Already with the same name as now, the first and foremost research question was formulated there as to ask and answer how cinema may partake in resiliency after terror attacks, while the central objective was elaborated to be exploring and elucidating the ways cinema can contribute to our understanding of the human consequences of terror, and the possible manner in which the mediated faces of survivors in documentary film may help us deal with and heal from trauma and tragedy. Fast-forward to here and now, although the process has come to face obvious changes with its main question as well as key objective becoming otherwise, both the idea and the intention are still the same: exploring this eventuality – the possibility or potential for ethical understanding.

On another note, when it comes to what this project has not done, some points are here worth a mention. Because this dissertation is neither a general treatise on mediated nor cinematic faces of terror, but rather a deliberately exclusive discourse that revolves around three different films with characteristic yet complementary ways of facing terror, that by design means that many other relevant works<sup>3</sup> and films<sup>4</sup> have not been included. Likewise, since this project develops one specific perspective or perception on a thematic matrix that pertains to so many aspects, dimensions and elements, there are multiple possible avenues of interest that have not been explored. These notes and segues notwithstanding, better now to come back again to what the work has done and how it has done so, thus it seems best to sum up its different parts and thereupon answer the questions asked beforehand.

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<sup>3</sup> There are lots more aesthetic and artistic works that also “face terror” in cinematic and other mediated forms. Exemplified, I here want to mention two photography works that have played their parts in the background for my project. One is Andrea Gjestvang’s striking *One Day in History* (2012), which provides poignant portraits of both physically and psychologically wounded young survivors from July 22. The other is *The New York Times’ Portraits 9/11/01* (2003), which precisely consists of pictures and profiles of people who lost their lives on 9/11.

<sup>4</sup> This is also true for its cinematic sources of inspiration. While Lanzmann’s *Shoah* is of course the paramount film work about the Holocaust, especially so for a project that sets out to explore films that portray the faces of survivors, and has therefore been prominent in parts of my work, two others that do things differently should also be mentioned. One is Alain Resnais’ *Night and Fog* (1955), which to me is the quintessential “faceless” documentary film that still makes a face – an idea that I hope to explore more at some later point. Another is André Singer’s *Night Will Fall* (2014), whose combination of the most extensive compilation of archival eye-witness material of its aftermath with a more traditional format of talking head testimony is of special interest.

Firstly, chapter one and two explored *facing face* through film. Beginning with ideas on ethics and the face in Levinas, ideas that would follow this dissertation from start to finish, these interlinked terms were understood and used here to denote our encounter with otherness and our responsibility for the other in the face-to-face relationship itself, an epiphany of the face and the ethics of encounter. All the while turning from the philosophical concepts of his project onto something more practical was somewhat ambitious and convoluted, this was elaborated as the ethical potential of a certain process of teaching and learning that may enhance our understanding of both others and ourselves.

Moving into the mediated context, the next task was to work out the ways in which this relation without relation may simultaneously happen in the setting of the relationship between the face and the image, a film and its spectator, and the site of the facial close-up or cinematic face. Dialoguing with some work from Sam Girgus, Sarah Cooper, Libby Saxton, and Hagi Kenaan, and working towards developing some other ideas about the possible ethics of the mediated face, here Levinasian ethics or his ethical optics was in the end seen as an otherwise way of seeing that opens at the site, situation, or space in-between the face of the image and the gaze of the spectator. Specifying this space as the space of the cinematic face, and simultaneously consulting and looking closer at the ideas of Bela Balázs, Jean Epstein, and Gilles Deleuze on the close-up, this part therefore closed in on a general yet specific concept of the cinematic face, theorizing an idea about the power of as to build the basis for an otherwise approach to the ethical potential of facing the cinematic face.

This theoretical exploration of facing face was further followed by analysis of ethics and the cinematic faces in Carl Javér's *Reconstructing Utøya* (2018). Closely looking at the way in which the four survivors and their faces are portrayed and presented in the film, both as they recount their stories and reconstruct their memories by way of role-playing processes to tell their therapeutic testimonies, it evoked how the film's composition of cinematic faces also facilitates an ethical space of experience for us as spectators. Chronologically figuring our close-up come face-to-face encounters with these survivors, it further explored how the expressive and affective relationship between film and spectator mediates a manner of facing their faces, one that encourages an ethical optics and teaches a mode of responsibility for the other. In the end, this is why the analysis concluded that by our encountering and embracing the cinematic face, the film turns into a constructive reconstruction of terror with the ethical potential to enhance our understanding of both survivors and ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For reference, see ch. I: "Facing Face" (pp. 17-46) & ch. II: "Reconstructing Utøya" (pp. 47-76).

Secondly, chapter three and four explored *facing reality* through film. Beginning with inspecting foundational ideas concerning documentary film and consulting some of the most prominent scholars in documentary film studies – Bill Nichols, Carl Plantinga, Dirk Eitzen, Brian Winston, Michael Renov, Stella Bruzzi, and Vivian Sobchack – this opening dialogue thus questioned what documentary is and does, or can be and do. Going from the general to the specific, gradually developing the discussion onwards from ontology and epistemology towards the affects and the ethics of documenting reality, the key interest here was the way the doing of documentary is in-between its relationship to reality and with spectators.

The next and necessary step for exploring facing any form of film reality was thus further examining the very relationship between the real and the image, the real of the reel and its realization for spectators. This brought us back to certain ideas of image referentiality or indexicality, first through the lens of Mary Ann Doane’s critical revisitation of the concept and then in tandem with the writings of Roland Barthes, André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer, here deliberating cinematic reality and referentiality beyond any basic terms of representation but as possible becoming existential relations that emerge in reciprocal encounters between film images and spectators, and developing an idea of mediation as the potential realization of ethics. Thus, advancing this approach onto the specific case of audiovisual testimony, now also involving some notions from Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker, Nichols and Renov, and once again the face, this part thereby engaged another way of seeing the ethical dimensions of documentary, theorizing an idea about the power and the potential of audiovisual testimony.

This exploratory theorizing around facing reality was after that accompanied by analyzing the documentary reality and audiovisual testimony in Jim Whitaker’s *Rebirth* (2011). Examining its documentation of five survivors coping with terror, grief and loss, through nine sections of testimonial and transitional material recorded and edited together from a nine-year period, it elaborated the specific way the film deals with, relates to or mediates the real, and simultaneously engages spectators in a relationship that potentially realizes an ethics. Thematically following its recurrent survivor encounters and repeated cinematic facings, with speaking faces interacting and interfacing with us as spectators, it further explored how the film’s expressive making real mediates an experience of ethical time and manifests existential relations with the infinite otherness of reality. In this way, that was the reason the analysis concluded that its reality as recorded and recovered, or even reborn, beckons ethical realization that potentially becomes a resource for resilience.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For reference, see ch. III: “Facing Reality” (pp. 77-106) & ch. IV: “Rebirth” (pp. 107-136).

Finally, chapter five and six explored *facing trauma* through film. Beginning with a view on central thoughts and theses about mediating trauma, and reviewing seminal theories and terms in trauma studies from Judith Lewis Herman, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, as well as Cathy Caruth, this survey traversed an opening framework around how trauma can be communicated, could be understood, and even if this may thus do us any good. While finding a foundation to focus on core elements of the mediated traumatic in close relation to concepts of testimony and witnessing, this also forwarded the why of further studying trauma in terms of audiovisual mediation and the relationship between images and spectators as witnesses.

The next call here was therefore to explore the relationship between trauma and the image, and the traumatic in the encounter between images and spectators. First considering and connecting mediated trauma to theories of memory, through different modes of thought from Marianne Hirsch, Alison Landsberg, and Roxana Waterson, this discussion unfolded an understanding of the experience of mediated traumatic memories not as the transmission of trauma from image to spectator but rather as based in an encounter with traumatic expression. Developing the perspective, in dialogue with Janet Walker, Joshua Hirsch, Susan Sontag, and E. Ann Kaplan, the salient point was that the traumatic ethics of these encounters are situated in feeling, haunting, or wounding “seeing”. Then concretely exploring cinematic witnessing, while debating the term for itself with John Durham Peters, Paul Frosh, and Thomas Trezise, this part thus evoked an ethical understanding of facing the traumatic through film, theorizing an idea as well as way of looking at the power and potential of cinematic witnessing.

This theoretical exploration of facing trauma was subsequently taken further through analysis of mediated trauma and cinematic witnessing in Joshua Oppenheimer’s *The Look of Silence* (2014). Approaching the particular way the film gives a voice and face to survivors, through both its protagonist’s and with the project’s own witnessing in oscillating parts of meta-cinematic observation and confrontation of the perpetrators’ testimonies, it elucidated how the film sets up a series of testimonial situations and traumatic encounters that puts us as spectators into an insistent witnessing position. Structurally, it further explored how the film in this manner generates and mediates a witness relation that gradually moves us to face its traumatic ethics with an otherwise gaze that welcomes haunting or wounding understanding. In the end, this is why the analysis concluded that the film’s speaking and breaking through the terror of silence powerfully makes possible a productive look and act of trauma, wherein cinematic witnessing becomes a process of potential ethical learning.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For reference, see ch. V: “Facing Trauma” (pp. 137-166) & ch. VI: “The Look of Silence” (pp. 167-196).

Even though these three parts explored different yet interlinked dimensions, by way of respectively headlining the face, reality, and trauma, it should hopefully be evident here that they together all still explore the ethical potential of facing terror through film, and that they therefore along one another develop the same otherwise frameworks as well as overall approach for doing so. Of course, key here are the three ideated terms themselves, ones that have intentionally been made to remain both open and becoming frames of exploration while they have further developed through these theorizations and analyses, yet ones that still come with specific meanings that may be better articulated after all is now said and done.

Firstly, the *cinematic face* is here a double-faced concept that denotes both the facial close-up in film on its own but simultaneously also the overall facing expression of the film. In one sense, the idea is intimately linked to Levinas and his philosophical idea of the face in the elaboration of the manifestation and manner of this face and our encounter or engagement with the ethical meaning of that face. In another sense, the idea means something yet nothing more than our facing the face of the other through film and being faced by the facingness of the film itself – precisely the possible ways that films present or portray faces, the powerful ways they may face us as spectators and the potential ways that we face these faces and films. In these senses, thus the term is a theoretically specific yet analytically dynamic concept that both may be understood and used in diverse ways according to different wants and works.

Secondly, *audiovisual testimony* here indeed specifically means the forms and frames or the formats of testimonial footage in documentary film. To be sure, the term thus builds upon the already established terminology around testimony in documentary film theory, but does not enclose itself with the story that is told by way of voices and words and instead also encompasses and emphasizes the importance of the other side of this story. That is to say that it especially valorizes the visual, the image and the face, and in this way also relatively seen “re-forms” or “re-frames” the foundation of the format as spaces of speaking faces and gazes, facing micromovements of mien and sounds of silence, and thus essentially the audiovisual facilitation of “face-to-face” encounters between a witness and its witnesses. In the end, the term thereby relates the cinematic reality and specificity of telling testimonies through film.

Finally, *cinematic witnessing* is here a conceptualization of a particular spectatorial position and potential witness experience while facing a film. This otherwise way of seeing involves an optics and ethics of encounter, or ethical optics, which includes simultaneously the simplicity of not staying as only an onlooker but also the difficulty of making a turn away from a self-oriented point of view and taking upon ourselves an open, vulnerable and even

traumatic posture of witnessing – one which in effect most often means our welcoming the facingness of a film and learning to face, recognizing our responsibility and witnessing the witnessing. In short yet sharp words, cinematic witnessing thus terms the relative spectatorial realization of the ethical potential that emanates from the mediated relationship engaged by our facing the cinematic face of the other in the audiovisual testimony of documentary film.

Following up on these summarizations, it seems the right time as well as point of worthwhile order to once more return to the project-specific processes of these conceptual frameworks and thus try to answer the follow-up questions asked in the introduction in as simplified and straightforward a way as possible – furthermore coming to conclusions on the happenings of this potential.<sup>8</sup>

*What* happens is fundamentally that audiovisual testimony in documentary films, such as these case studies, embody an ethics of encounter, one conditioned by the cinematic face but likewise contingent on an optics or otherwise way of facing – our cinematic witnessing. *Why* it happens is the fact there exists an ethical relationship between us as people, which emerges in our encounter with the face of the other and remains in effect in the mediated relationship between survivors and us as spectators. *How* it happens, although still the most complex and abstract aspect to concretize even after the exploration has now come to its end, may at its core be conceptualized best as some or other becoming process of teaching and learning, a happening and realization taking place on the level of sensation and affect and making sense in the space in-between the face of the image and gaze of the spectator.

*Where* and *when* it happens, in this way, is precisely in the relationship between a film and us as spectators, opening from our subjective encounter with a film's specific expression of cinematic time and space, mediation of an enhanced cinematic gaze and presentation of the cinematic face, and therefore essentially situated in the here and now of the film experience. *Who* it happens to is thus you, me, and us; for one, it happens in the singular, to a self, to a spectator, and for another, it also happens in face of the singular, for a survivor, for an other. Whichever and whomever the case, while these interactions stay unique in this way, there is still a more universal “we” at play in these relations, since those ubiquitous encounters may happen to anyone, yet they may also not happen at all as they turn on the turn of face of every potential someone themselves – or on ourselves – ethically facing film.

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<sup>8</sup> Here it seems opportune to mention once more that my work purposefully opens more questions than it comes to conclusions, something that of course partly so comes with the conceptuality and complexity of the territory, but that has mostly been the desired result of deliberately making the choice of going, to re-use my final line from the introduction, “whichever way works to explore the nexus between terror, film, ethics, and the face – the ethical potential of facing terror through film”.



Now, this work will come to its close with some otherwise conclusions or concluding remarks. Here one theme comes to mind once more, that now deserves a more direct mention. This is a study of three specific documentary film works that come from a specific period of film history and concern three specific terror attacks and aftermaths of those affected. They are similar in some ways like facilitation of facing encounters and focus on recovery and resiliency after the fact, yet different in other ways such as types of terror, countries and cultures, distance to memory and deliverance of testimony, and of course the unique doing or the expression and the experience of each film. For sure, there is therefore still so much more to explore in this field or form of film, from other films about these events themselves or the larger body of testimonial documentary about terror, genocide or war, as well as connections to cinematic works that face us with stories from survivors of many other terrors and traumas. This is just to say the scope and scale of the subject for sure calls for other and further study.

For me, especially so due to working in film dissemination, another important and interesting discussion are the possible implications and practical applications of the project. All the while this theoretical and analytical work can both develop and deliver a perspective, perception or point of view, these processes of teaching and learning and the ethical potential they facilitate will always lie in the interactions between films and spectators, the cinematic encounter and the film experience itself. Even though my project delineates ideas and ideals about what documentaries like these can do, this doing is dependent on the films being able to find or face their audiences. As therefore follows, like partly discussed in the last analysis, looking at and also learning from the impact and influence of such films on an individual or personal and collective or societal level is subsequently another complex but crucial subject.<sup>9</sup> On that particular and more practical note, without delving into the dealings and details of film distribution, there seems a necessity as well as responsibility to ensure films like these stay available publicly and to help them reach new and broader audiences, so that spectators can actually see, witness and face them, at release and years or even decades after – if we hope to have filmmakers keep taking on those subjects and making these projects.<sup>10</sup> This call is thus also for us to be open and willing to see and seek out such otherwise films.

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<sup>9</sup> While the case of *The Look of Silence* is unique in many ways, considering both the unprecedented story and situation of the project and its profound consequences upon Indonesian society, my belief is still that such potential in some or other form could be found in most films like these. Luckily, *Rebirth* and *Reconstructing Utøya* have been used for educational and therapeutic purposes as well, being part of memorial and museal settings or becoming part of school courses and curriculums.

<sup>10</sup> On a more unfortunate note, all these films are surprisingly unavailable for a universal audience, both so when considering either physical editions or digital formats, and especially so when it comes to these three films crossing different international distribution borders. However, there is positive work being done here.

In the introduction, my beginning statement there was that terrorism is primarily a mediated phenomenon, and that media or mediations, in particular images and video, strongly inform, illustrate and illuminate the way that most of us see, learn about and understand terror and its consequences. Soon coming to its conclusion, my conviction that this thesis is true is still as strong as it ever was; therefore also that explorations of forms of visibility and modes of visuality in terror imagery, and the potentially constructive and perhaps even counteractive role film can play in facing terror, continues to be a fundamental and fruitful subject of study.

At the very end and to paraphrase my previous words, both my belief and hope is that what this work has shown is that sensorial and singular ethical cinematic encounters with the witnessing of survivors embody the powerful capacity to empower us to see, feel and learn, realize and understand, something otherwise so about the traumatic reality of facing terror. My concluding remark is thus that this dissertation has followed and fulfilled the imperative and intention of its exigent call to explore another foundational dimension of the value and vitality of cinematic expression and experience – the aesthetic and affective dimension that is the ethical potential of facing terror through film.

## POSTFACE

After the end, the face that started it all remains: a traumatic facing of reality.

More than fifteen years later, the expression and experience of a face, the mediated face of a barber, the cinematic face of a survivor, the face of Abraham Bomba in Lanzmann's *Shoah*, still calls me. It persists as vividly and vibrantly present, although I cannot remember specific details about it, no matter how many times I return to re-face it; not the color of his eyes, not the contours of his mouth, not how his face really looked at all. No less, I see his face appear, I hear his face speak, I feel his face gaze – a face of another that still haunts me, a face otherwise that I believe will always haunt me.

Now, others do the same: the faces of Rakel, Mohammed, Jenny, and Torje; the faces of Ling, Brian, Tim, Tanya, and Nick; and the faces of Adi, Rohani and Rukun. These faces speak to me, each one through our face-to-face encounter address and affect me in the very ordinary yet extraordinary way of the other, where something is felt and understood beyond the borders of sense-making while still making a sense and meaning of terror and trauma real to me. That meaningful and resounding echo of sorts, a deep feeling of desire or compelling demand, and some kind of sense of obligation or even obsession, this is the infinite haunting of my own ethical responsibility.

If this sensibility of responsibility, or these ethics of encounter, is both something more specific but also something more general has really been the most central background of this dissertation; but if truth be told, I am yet not fully sure how to answer such a question. My project began with the unresolved idea and unexplored potential of facing terror through film, and while such a potential has been given much in ways of exploration and the idea has found some resolution, so many things still remain oblique, opaque, or even other. That is to say that even with the necessary time and space, the will and the word may never be enough to precisely analyze and articulate such an ethical potential, and therefore its multifaceted dimensions will always partly stay an open question for never-ending study.

Nonetheless, I am sure about some things. Namely, that audiovisual testimonial material in documentary film, with its cinematically facilitated memory and facial testimony of terror survivors and the sensorial expression and the spectatorial experience of the face, does something to us all. Furthermore, that what it does or its very doing may enable and encourage a process of both teaching and learning, one which simultaneously also may be a way for those who were not there to be there for or stand together with those who were, and thereby become a source of communication, commemoration and compassion. Finally, that

such face-to-face encounters, through which these ethical relationships or interactions come to be, thus have the potential to not only enhance our understanding but even increase our capacity for understanding, making us all the more ready and able as to understand and help those affected by terror, trauma and tragedy, and therefore also ultimately the potential to change us and do us good.

As should be evident from the beginning all the way to the end, and so to sum it up again in short words: I believe *film* can make us *face* – really facing the reality of traumatic events, facing survivors and facing terror – and I believe this facing film both is and beckons our ethical responsibility. By way of this work, this belief has been strengthened even more and even if the starting point itself has a personal basis the end possibility or potential goes beyond my own sense and self, so I hope my project has served as a reminder about the role film can play as part of our response and resilience to terror. By generalized extension, I also hope it has managed to simultaneously say something about the way that film is a medium and an artform for meaningful humanist education and understanding, one that may help open and empower both our hearts and minds to better face the world, others and ourselves.

Looking at what is going on in the world today and what has been happening during the years spent writing this dissertation – violence, war, terror and the all too numerous other indignities, injustices and inhumanities – it somehow brings me a sliver of solace to see the way that many documentary films have once more come to the fore as key vehicles that make us face. These cinematic works that impress and impel, engage and enrage, show resistance and resilience and therefore awaken our sense of responsibility, solidarity and even humanity. In my opinion, there is no doubt about both their productive nature and practical necessity, as well as their pedagogical and spectatorial power and value, but this otherwise also shows the ongoing need for more theoretical and analytical study too – as there is still so much more to explore about and around the ethical potential of facing terror through film.

Here, there also seems more left to say yet feels like enough has been said. Because I have now explored what I wanted to explore, expressed what I had to express as best I can, and experienced what I had to experience as I did, I am at an end but also a new beginning. One specific project is over, done by finishing this dissertation, only for its process itself to open onto other ones. So, my plans going forward is nothing if not onwards, along the roads not taken, making headway into areas not yet mapped, towards facing that which still calls to me. Who or what, where or when, and how so, that may be, is another story.

When I wrote the preface of this dissertation almost two years ago today, as is also written there, more than a decade had gone since the July 22 terrorist attacks, over two since the attacks on 9/11, and close to six decades since the Indonesian state terror of the sixties, and my plan was to finish writing sometime after that. Little did I know at the time that life itself would once again find a way to get in the way and that it would take almost two more years before I would finally be able to complete the work. However, the reason I have chosen to keep the preface as it was then and to write this postscript or postface now, is that while everything and everyone always changes, still the lesson mentioned there somehow remains the same and is something that bears repeating. Namely that no matter how far into the past, for the present and the future, nevertheless it matters that we all try to truly understand what happened and who it happened to – to face it is our duty to do. In the end, to realize this responsibility that reverberates both is and has always been what this project is about: the importance of being haunted.



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*9/11: One Day in America* (2021). Directed by Daniel Bogado. Produced by Caroline Marsden. USA: 72 Films & 9/11 Memorial Museum.

*22.07* (2012). Directed by Svein Bæren. Produced by Kim Henriksen & Anne Berit Østerholt. Norway: NRK.

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*22 July* (2018). Directed by Paul Greengrass. Produced by Scott Rudin et al. Norway/USA: Scott Rudin Productions & Netflix.

*40 Years of Silence: An Indonesian Tragedy* (2009). Directed by Robert Lemelson. Produced by Robert Lemelson & Alessandra Pasquino. USA: Elemental Productions.

*Bravehearts [Til ungdommen]* (2012). Directed by Kari Anne Moe. Produced by Tone Grøttjord & Anita Rehoff Larsen. Norway: Sant & Usant.

*Generation 9/11* (2021). Directed by Liz Mermin. Produced by John Smithson. USA: Arrow Pictures & PBS.

*Generation Utøya [Generasjon Utøya]* (2021). Directed by Aslaug Holm & Sigve Endresen. Produced by Tore Buvarp & Sigve Endresen. Norway: Fenris Film.

*Night and Fog [Nuit et Brouillard]* (1955). Directed by Alain Resnais. Produced by Anatole Dauman, Samy Halfon & Philippe Lifchitz. France: Argos Films.

*Night Will Fall* (2014). Directed by André Singer. Produced by Sally Angel & Brett Ratner. UK: Angel TV & Spring Films.

*NYC Epicenters 9/11-2021 ½* (2021). Produced by Spike Lee et al. USA: 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks & HBO.

*Rebirth* (2011). Directed by Jim Whitaker. Produced by David Solomon & Jim Whitaker. USA: Oscilloscope Laboratories.

*Reconstructing Utøya [Rekonstruksjon Utøya]* (2018). Directed by Carl Javér. Produced by Fredrik Lange. Sweden/Norway/Denmark: Vilda Bomben Film.

*Shoah* (1985). Directed/produced by Claude Lanzmann. France: Les Films Aleph & Historia.

*Terror Island [En liten øy i verden]* (2011). Directed by Tommy Gulliksen. Produced by Tommy Gulliksen & Kjell Øvre Helland. Norway: TV2.

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*U: July 22 [Utøya 22. juli]* (2018). Directed by Erik Poppe. Produced by Finn Gjerdrum & Stein B. Kvae. Norway: Paradox Film 7.

*United 93* (2006). Directed by Paul Greengrass. Produced by Tim Bevan et al. USA: Universal Pictures.

*World Trade Center* (2006). Directed by Oliver Stone. Produced by Moritz Borman et al. USA: Paramount Pictures.

*For all others*





ISBN 978-82-326-7930-0 (printed ver.)  
ISBN 978-82-326-7929-4 (electronic ver.)  
ISSN 1503-8181 (printed ver.)  
ISSN 2703-8084 (online ver.)



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Norwegian University of  
Science and Technology