

Documentaries & Ethical Practices: Sexual Violence, and The Business of its Representation

The placement of documentary films as presenters of non-fiction tales brings to the forefront the question of truth-telling and story building. Inherent in documentaries that cover topics of violence is the question of ethical practices when representing that violence and in the case of testimony, respecting the people that have had to suffer at the hands of that violence. The debate of ethical practice has been in conversation within the International Documentary Association, having produced multiple featured articles regarding those practices. Considering Susan Sontag's work *Regarding the Pain of Others* in which she states that "All images that display the violation of an attractive body are, to a certain degree, pornographic" (95) the documentary as a montage of violent images is called into question. This paper intends to document the ways in which the presentation of sexual violence in documentaries serves the role of commodifying violence as opposed to encouraging a reflection on the systems that promote it.

A colleague of mine has sent me a number of documentaries from the archive "Instituto de Derechos Humanos" (Institute of Human Rights) located in Buenos Aires, Argentina that currently function as the base for my research: *Hotel Gondolin* (2005), *Infancia Clandestina* (Clandestine Childhood, 2011), *La guayaba* (2013), and *Sexo, dignidad y muerte* (2011). The documentary that sparked this line of questioning is *Los internados del miedo* (The borders of fear, 2015) and looks at pedophilia in boarding schools during the Francoist regime in Spain. In this film, violence is represented indirectly through cartoon drawings. I've had the privilege of hearing the director, Montse Armengou speak about some key choices she made while filming and I have taken the liberty of contacting the artist behind the drawings to get his take on how his work was used. I think their testimonies poignant in the debate of ethics in documentary films.

The approach to this project will be bifurcated in that I hope to juxtapose academic analysis of the films rooted in the content and stylistic film choices with a commentary of the creators of the films themselves.

I'm interested in looking at the way these documentaries construct the stories of sexual violence and how they maneuver the politics and ethics behind marginalized peoples. The project will concretely explore the physical presentation of the subject, who speaks and who is the narrative voice, what is the staging of the interview space (if there is one), what material is presented to the viewer to substantiate the claims of the people the film is documenting, and the visual representation of violence. It is my intention to dissect the ways in which documentary films use affect and work with eliciting audience emotions to substantiate their argument and whether this use of affect respects the very subject they are using for their films or puts their trauma on display and reobjectifies an already objectified subject.