

Critical Realism And The Biographical Film Project

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Abstract: *This paper explores aspects of a critical realist approach that have practical application to biographical documentary filmmaking as an ontological and methodological guide in the planning, production, and editing processes. An interdisciplinary approach from social science philosophy, critical realism is a tool with the potential for gaining a greater understanding of the mechanisms underlying events because of its focused ontology, view of society as multi-layered with emergent properties, and the use of abduction and methodological pluralism. This approach results in a circular historical perception that connects backward and forward in a continually recursive fashion to reveal contemporary events not as predestined points along a 'linear' continuum, but as interrelated elements of a contextualized whole that brackets any temporal point of investigation. The biographical subject is shown connected outside as well as inside their time, and in relation to different levels of agency in the context of their culture.*

Keywords: *multilayered society, emergent properties, methodological pluralism, underlying mechanisms.*

Introduction

The rationale in making a documentary¹ biography of Juvénal Habyarimana, the assassinated president of Rwanda, is to illuminate through the axis of one man the agential philosophies that emerged from the complex sets of interrelationships constituting and impinging upon the Rwandan social milieu, and which directed the 1994 genocide. Because of the complexity of the project a research tool called critical realism is used, a theoretical approach that was

¹ The debate over what defines a non-fiction film is endless and defeats theory building when starting a film project. As noted by Alexander Kluge: "A documentary film is shot with three cameras: 1) the camera in the technical sense; 2) the filmmaker's mind; and 3) the generic patterns of the documentary film, which are founded on the expectations of the audience that patronizes it." (Kluge, 1988: 4). A CR approach indicates that the choices of film form will come about through the pluralistic methodological process guided by the filmmaker's theory framework, in which case fiction *and* non-fiction techniques—in effect, all techniques or a combination of techniques—may be found useful. For a general definitional concept operating alongside this critical realist one, one could do no worse than to keep in mind Dirk Eitzen's: "a documentary is any motion picture that is susceptible to the question 'might it be lying?'" (Eitzen, 1995: 810).

developed to examine the sets of relationships that operate among and comprise social behavior. The usefulness of this approach to biographical filmmaking will be explored in this paper, using the example of Habyarimana as a subject.

Necessary in the course of researching Habyarimana's life and Rwandan society, is a culture-specific sense of what constitutes the world, time, and various pasts.

The following models will elucidate the notion of ontological grounding and critical realist practice vis-à-vis the film project.

Approach, Rationale and Considerations

In Ardebili's¹ conception of critical realist (CR) practice (*Fig. 1*), 'actual practice' is derived from a theoretical framework and should not be initiated

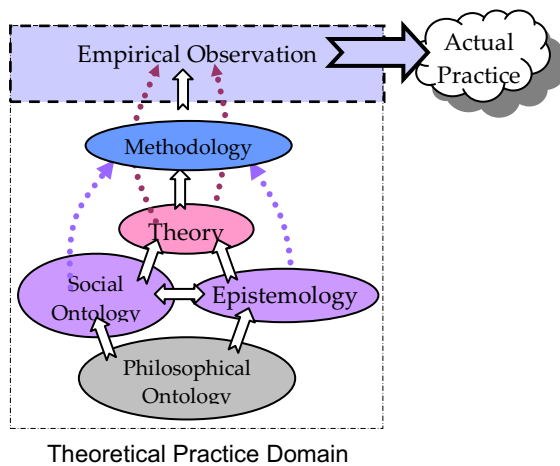


Fig. 1: Critical Realist Scientific Practice
(after Ardebili)

until the requisite preparation is accomplished among the six inter-related elements of the 'theoretical practice domain'.

In the CR sense, ontology means a positioning toward the world that acknowledges a multi-level society, in which the layers contain sets of relationships that

cannot be conflated upward or downward. This forces the filmmaker to posit an ontology and not shift her world view throughout the film project, thus avoiding ontological confusion when, in the course of actual practice, different world views are encountered.²

² There has been some debate whether stating an ontology at the beginning forces us to subscribe to a particular point of view that funnels data into a fixed framework rather than allowing us to examine undetermined and dynamic sets of relationships *as they are* and allow theory to congeal according to what we find. That is, the CR ontological statement has been accused of forcing social observations into a pre-determined mold. But the CR ontological positioning only assumes society is multi-layered and that

From CR's philosophical ontology springs the social ontology (for example, is society considered real or a construct, do humans have autonomous agency or are they dependent on social conditioning and social powers, etc.). By deriving the social ontology from the philosophical ontological grounding the filmmaker makes certain that the two ontologies match. This positioning is necessary in order to avoid unexamined premises the filmmaker may have about her subject.

Epistemology is a co-determinant of theoretical practice at this second level of CR practice because the way knowledge is derived bears directly on one's theory and methodology. It is critical that the filmmaker at this stage examines her concept of how knowledge about the world is generated, so as to be aware of possible gender, cultural, or political biases surrounding her subject and in her own agential role in the film project. This has been a commonly overlooked part of research and film production, especially among male filmmakers filming male subjects, whereby a culturally-predominant male view has gone naïvely unchallenged, and the significance of women's roles largely ignored or misunderstood. A critical realist approach to a biography about a country's president, especially in an underdeveloped country, would insist on the researcher/filmmaker being aware of the literature on gender, post-colonialism, politics and the state in relation to the dynamics of internationalization.

Theory is a guiding principle and helps determine what object(s) to study. Methodology is then fitted to the specific object(s) and empirical observation is employed in a feedback cycle coupled with actual practice. Methodologies are utilized which are deemed most appropriate to the object(s) under study. The

relationships cannot be conflated without creating false theory — this in no way pre-determines how objects act.

CR theoretical practice configuration is hierarchical in the sense that the upper layers presuppose the underlying layers. One cannot have empirical study without methodology, nor methodology without theory, *but* one can develop a theory without yet having a methodology.

For the biographical film project, theory will be a guide for utilizing 'methodological pluralism', whereby methodology emerges from the theoretical practice model, then the tools needed for concrete research are chosen, followed by various 'intensive' and 'extensive' empirical observation procedures that satisfy demands in the actual practice. Intensive design "seeks out substantial relations of connections and situates practice within wider contexts, thereby illuminating part-whole relationships."² It would consist of studying causal group agents in context. In Habyarimana's case this would mean looking at specific structures and mechanisms having significant connections to and influence on his life. Extensive design is "informed by a successionist theory of causation, and therefore aims at finding regularities among atomistic events or variables, seeking out mainly formal similarities and differences rather than substantial connections."³ It would consist of studying a larger population in order to find patterns and regularities. In Habyarimana's case this would mean examining a large number of dictators in third-world countries, especially in Africa, to see if there are discernable patterns or similarities among them that correlate with Habyarimana's dictatorship.

Methodological pluralism also means an interdisciplinary utilization of various, even competing, research methods employed to penetrate the cultural world view of Rwandans and bring to light elements that a Eurocentric view would not uncover. A researcher's culture-boundedness not only falsifies other, different realities, but causes confusion in the research process, obscuring behavioral mechanisms. That is, having some understanding of why a

Cambodian military leader utilizes genocide does not necessarily or neatly translate to an understanding of why a Rwandan politician, for instance, commits genocidal acts. There is considerable danger in assuming meta-corollaries across time, cultures, and agents. Not only can the same causal powers produce different outcomes according to conditions, but there is also the risk of ascribing to one structure and its mechanisms the effects that are owing to another.⁴

Critical realists rely heavily on *abduction* and *retroduction*. *Abduction* is “a mode of inference—of logic in the largest sense—by which one moves from one set of ideas to their conclusions in another set of ideas.”⁵ It is also talked about

<i>Observable events</i>	<i>General structures</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government or military agents. • The manifest context of a text. • Peasants laboring, communicating (Rwanda's case). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norms and rules that make the government or military structures what they are. • Implicit ideological meanings of the text. • Clan structures/kin relationships, ethnic/race perceptions, internal gendered relationships.

Table 1: *Events and Structures* (After Danermark, 1997)

as ‘redescription’ or ‘recontextualization’⁶, and with metatheory is a way of “acquiring knowledge of how various phenomena can be part of and explained in relation to structures (see Table 1), internal relations, and contexts which are not

directly observable. Such structures cannot be derived either inductively or deductively.”⁷ “The foundation of abduction is chiefly creativity and the ability to form associations, and is particularly apt for trying to illuminate the psychological and ideological undercurrents leading up to an event. This makes it especially effective for biography.

The biographical documentary's aim, therefore, is to create an arc across structures, mechanisms and their outcomes, and to realize that the importance is not in discovering new events, but in finding relations and not-directly-

observable associations through which we can comprehend and explain familiar events in a new manner. As Danermark stresses, "Several different theoretical interpretations and explanations can and should be presented, compared and possibly integrated with one another."⁸

Retroduction is an informal mode of inference, an argumentation that seeks to clarify the basic prerequisites or conditions for social relationships, people's actions, reasoning and knowledge. That is, what are the circumstances without which something can't exist?⁹ For the President Habyarimana film project, for example, it would be asked, 'How is his hold on power for 20 years possible?' What properties must exist for his hold on power to exist?

The concentric circles in *Figure 2* are a representation of how Habyarimana's life will be approached in an abductive and retroductive manner.

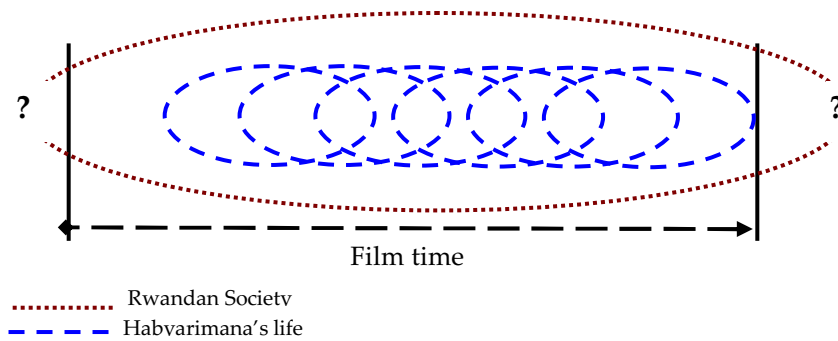


Fig. 2: *Rolling Circularity Schema for Habyarimana's Life*

This will include split screen, flashbacks and flash-forwards, as well as the juxtaposition of imagery with narrative spoken text and informant testimony, in an attempt to assemble a 'rolling' circularity of recontextualization. This schema avoids a temporal successionist model because events are not pre-determined but depend on contingent conditions. A great temptation of biographical documentaries has been to suppress recognition of the fact that at any particular moment the future is open. This comes from uncritically accepting the normative view that once something happens it is closed.¹⁰

As can be seen in *Figure 2*, Rwandan society is recognized as existing before and after Habyarimana's life and should be recognizable in the film as extending beyond the film's boundaries so as not be 'encapsulated' by the film, thus avoiding making the film a static, authoritative time capsule. Whether the past has a truth that can be uncovered, or whether such a 'recovery' is always an invention, critical realism answers that society is real and can be described. Such descriptions are not 'truths', but when collected and built up over time they constitute a body of knowledge that is useful for approaching certain understandings of complex phenomena. History is vital in this attempt to understand social reality, but history has different modes of accessibility that must be understood and applied to the subject of study. The breadth and depth of historical enquiry also determines views of reality. A study of Rwandan society embracing only the twenty years of Habyarimana's dictatorship, for example, would not be adequate.

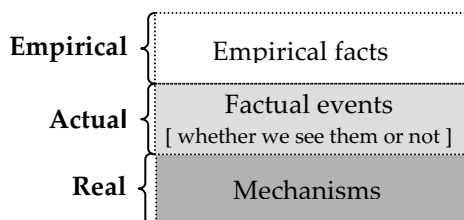


Fig. 3: Three Domains of Reality

Following this brief overview of critical realist philosophy it is important to look a little more closely at the critical realist conception of reality, which is composed of three domains: 'the real', the 'actual', and the 'empirical' (*Fig. 3*).

The 'empirical' domain is where we experience daily events on an observable level. In the biographical film these would be images of places and people—all concrete, real (not imagined) imagery and sounds.

The 'actual' domain is comprised of the intransient events which have emerged from mechanisms in the 'real' domain, and which occur and exist regardless of our awareness of them. They are largely unobservable—social mores, cultural ideas, and institutions, such as banking, democracy, concepts of

right and wrong, religious beliefs, and so forth. In the biographical film they are represented largely through narration, spoken and written texts, but also through various visual referents (the image of an army, for instance, comprises both the actual and the real).

The 'real' domain is stratified and consists of whatever exists, natural or

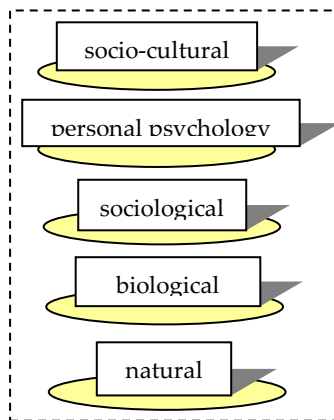


Fig. 4: Stratified Nature of Reality

social (Fig. 4), and is the realm of objects, their structures, and their causal powers. The ontological structuring is temporally hierarchical, the first or 'elemental' objects of reality comprising the first of the strata, going upwards with each succeeding level presupposing and built on the preceding one. However, each strata

is a complex entity composed of its own many stratum, and has its own unique mechanisms, so that it is not possible to reduce one strata to a lower one (conflation downward). Using a lower strata as a model to represent and extrapolate meaning for all succeeding strata is known as the 'Smithville = U.S.A. fallacy', and results in conflation upward. In other words, CR avoids, through its layered-domain model, the confusing dichotomies that conflation creates. The CR model is heterogeneous and allows for examination of the interplay between the different layers.

The relation between two objects in the real domain of the social strata is

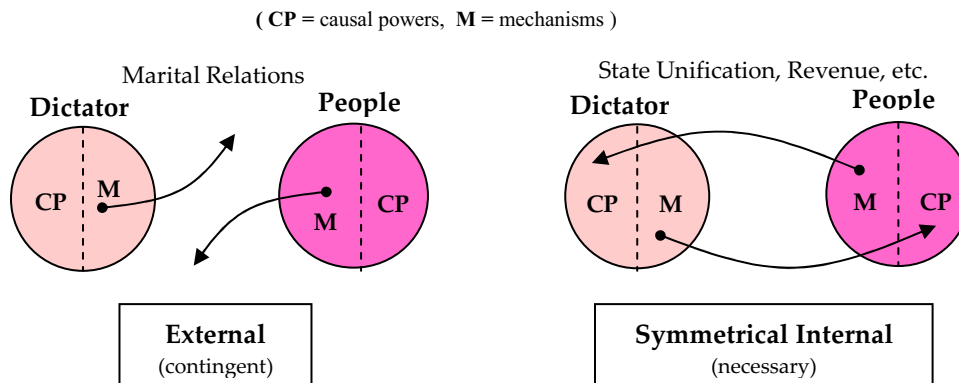


Fig. 5a: External Relations Between Objects

Fig. 5b: Internal Relations Between Objects

defined as being ‘external’ or ‘internal’ (Figures 5a & 5b). In an external relation the objects remain independent, and no emergent powers ensue. Using the example of a “Dictator/People” relationship, individual marital relations between different ‘agents’ (or actors) has no bearing on the ‘necessary relationship’ which governs the Dictator/People structure (fulfilling specific duties, etc.), and so is an ‘external’ relation (Fig. 5a). But an ‘internally-necessary’ relation means the two ‘objects’ under study (in this case Dictator and People) are so connected that A cannot exist without B, that is, the Dictator cannot exist without the People. The two objects’ relation is *symmetrically* internally necessary if both A’s and B’s existence are reciprocally tied together (Fig. 5b). If one needs the other but not vice versa, then it is *asymmetrically* internally necessary.

Yet, the creation of ‘reality’ is fraught with difficulties. Reflexivity, Trinh Minh-Ha observes, “proves critically insignificant when it merely serves to refine and to further the accumulation of knowledge.” The filmmaker “must create a space in which meaning remains fascinated by what escapes and exceeds it”¹¹ In the documentary interview process, conflicting or new information often occurs in repeated questioning, or in open-ended questions where the respondent may lead the interviewer into unforeseen areas. An informant changes aspects of his/her story through multiple interviews—by elaboration or negation, especially if each interview is significantly distanced by time. And triangulating interview questions is essential. It must always be kept in mind that the portrait of the biographical subject is also a portrait of the interviewees, and the interview process is a primary tool for excavating agency and its underlying rationale.

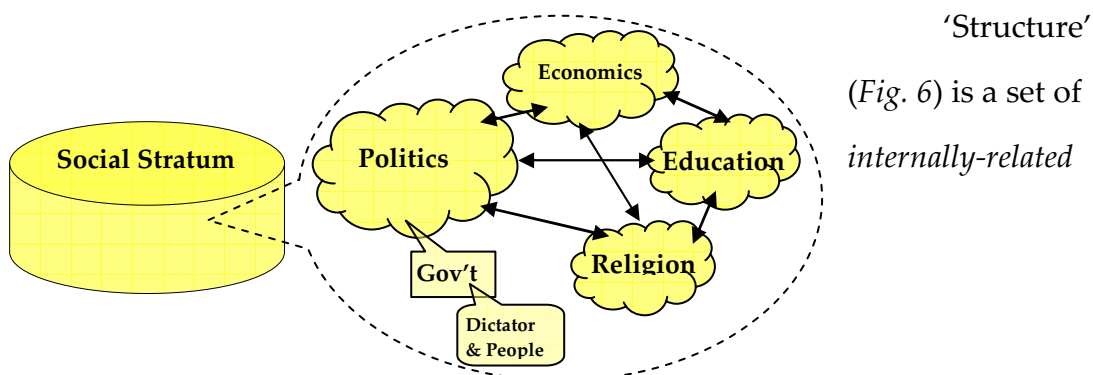


Fig. 6: Structures in the Social Stratum

objects. Structure does not refer only to social structures, but to the *inner composition* making each object what it is; for example, the physical structures that describe environmental features and impact human cultures, such as the ubiquitous hilly terrain and occasional severe draughts that make up Rwanda's geography. These features significantly influence housing types and spacing, agricultural efforts, kin relations, and the requirements for protection from external threat, among other things. In every concrete situation there is a complex combination of formal and substantial, external and internal relations. That is the reason one must make an abstract study, an analysis of the structures involved in the social phenomenon under study; to abstract—that is, isolate—a set of internally defined social relations. Social structures always have a material dimension, such as an army having soldiers, weapons and uniforms. They also constitute the 'deep' component of social reality, where mechanisms are located which generate the events in reality, in society.¹²

An example of the way mechanisms are enacted or suppressed by agents in structures can be seen in *Fig. 7*. The People's power (monetary situation) is

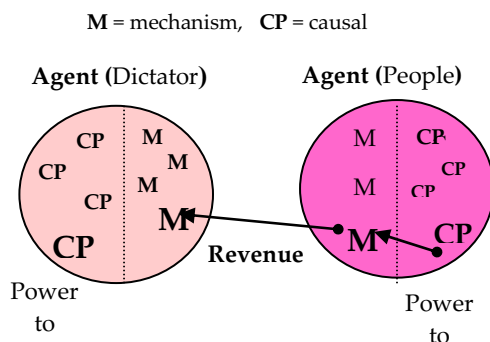


Fig. 7: Causal Powers and Mechanisms

released through the mechanism of paying tax money. The Dictator, by collecting the revenue, allows the mechanism to be enacted (that is, he does not suppress the mechanism by demanding an unpayable amount), and by so doing does not enact his causal power to punish, thereby

suppressing the punishment mechanism, and the ensuing event emerges (the People live without punishment until the next tax collection). This is a simplified example from a very complex web of agent-to-agent interactions within one of

many social structures, all of which are connected but only come into play for the agent when s/he acts; all social action is human action.

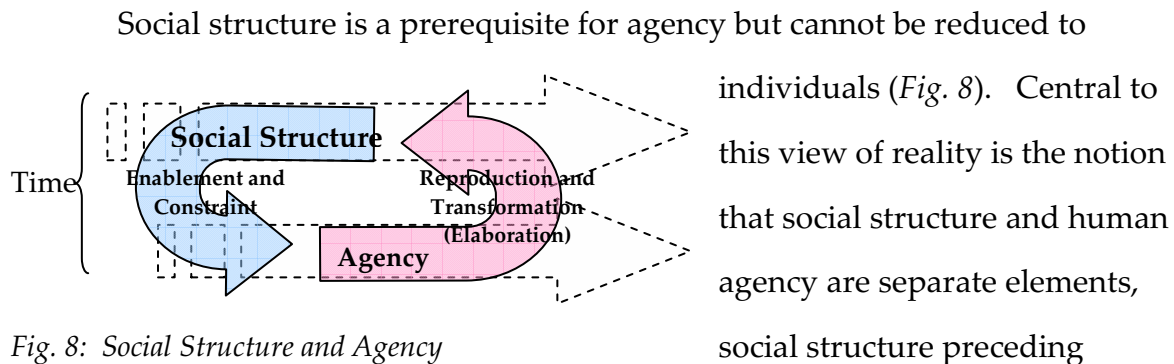


Fig. 8: Social Structure and Agency

agents in time (we are born into an already existing social conflux). This is one reason conflation is a false concept; because social structure and agent are separate they cannot be reduced or subsumed one to the other. We cannot say, even in a one-party dictatorship like Habyarimana's, that he *was* the government. Rather, the government structure of which he was the helmsperson had powers and liabilities of complex agency that existed in the larger social entity. Figure 8 shows the transformational interplay between the two over time; social structures are considered as 'already existing' and actions can only modify them. That is, society is not static, and as Habyarimana's biography unfolds it must do so within a changing society.

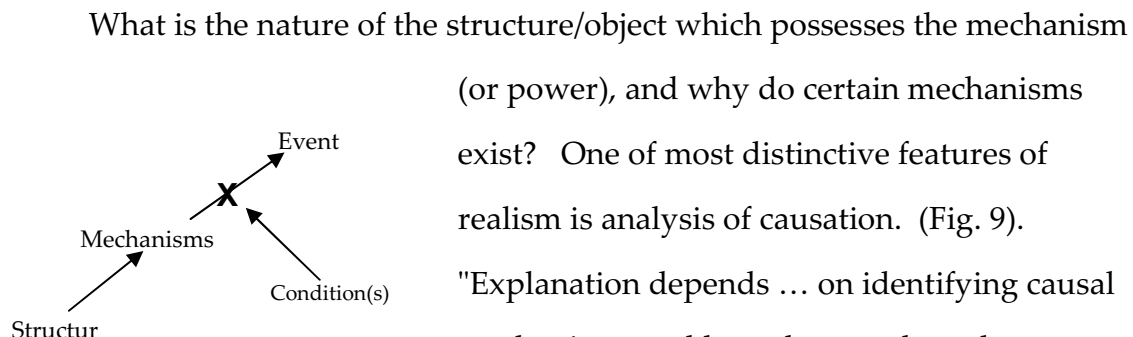


Fig. 9: Realist View of Causation

A elaborated representation of a structured society and its causal mechanism is shown in *Figure 10*: a stratified model of social structure. The three circles represent Archer's three 'morphogenetic cycles' (referring to processes which elaborate/change a system's form), which consist of People's Emergent Properties (PEPs), Society's Emergent Properties (SEPs), and Culture's Emergent Properties (CEPs).

Concerning People's Emergent Properties, Archer explains,

"Any form of socio-cultural conditioning only exerts its effects on people, and is only efficacious through people ... and is subject to reflective evaluation by agents who weigh it against their other concerns, due to their own emergent properties of self-consciousness and self-monitoring.

" Society's Emergent Properties are *irreducible to people*, are relatively enduring, and ... are ... those internal and necessary relationships which entail material resources, ... physical or human, ...which generate causal powers proper to the relation itself.

"Culture is *approached analytically in exactly the same way as structure* ... Equally it is the pre-existence, autonomy and durability of the constituents ... of the Cultural System which enables their identification as entities distinct from the meanings held by agents Causal relations are contingent, ... and when internally and necessarily related they constitute cultural emergent properties."¹⁴.

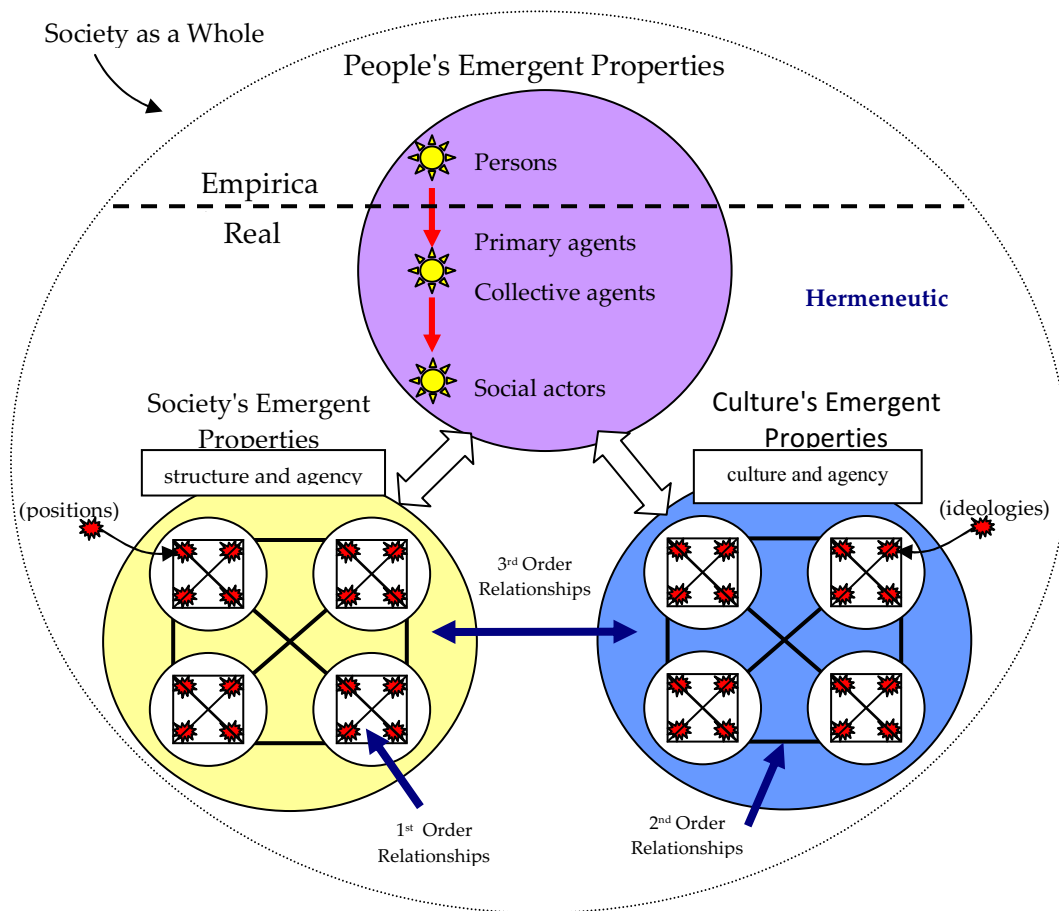


Figure 10: Depiction of Necessary Relationships (after Ardebili)

The Cultural System in *Figure 10* refers to relations between the components of culture whilst Socio-Cultural interaction concerns relationships between cultural agents. The Cultural System/Social-Cultural distinction therefore “maps on to that between culture without a knowing subject and culture with a knowing subject ... but the Cultural System and Social-Cultural interaction do not exist or operate independently; they are mutually influential and their interplay can be explored. Social Agency is embedded in interaction and therefore a relational property of people”¹⁵. From birth, being a social agent is part of being in the world, and part of living in society is to learn how to become one kind of actor rather than another; ... and “roles themselves have

emergent properties which *cannot be reduced to characteristics of their occupants*”¹⁶ (my italics).

Because critical realism deals with emergent properties in the analysis of structure, culture and agency—each with relative autonomy but interacting—what is involved with the morphogenetic cycle model is how the three domains of emergent properties converge; theorizing how their generative powers interweave in order to inform our expectations of certain outcomes. The results are what Archer calls ‘analytical histories of emergence’, and it is these analytical histories of president Habyarimana that will make up the biographical

documentary.

The causes and conditions of any social change are inclined to spread out geographically and back in time from the point at which change happened.

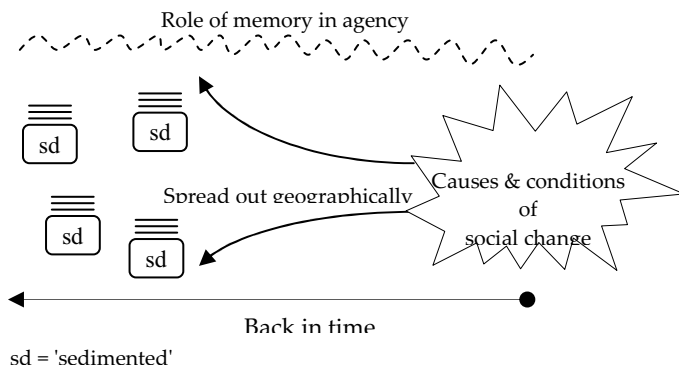


Fig. 11 Example of spatio-temporal

This is particularly marked in social change because of memory (Fig. 11). What actors do at a given time is affected by dispositions which were 'sedimented' at an earlier stage, often in different places.¹⁷ In the case of President Habyarimana it means recognizing from the onset that he is part of multiple geo-histories. A CR approach would ask not only how Habyarimana would construct history (as an old Chinese saying goes, *To understand a man you must know his memories*), but how other Rwandans, other cultures--and especially how the filmmaker—all construct history. Multiple histories and the subject's location amidst these histories challenges the viewers linear, single history concept fed by and feeding predominant cultural representations of the past that substantiate local and

national identity; multiple versions of the past are not normally tolerated because they undermine legitimacy of power.

A CR documentary has the obligation to unearth the various mechanisms operating across time in society that produce various outcomes. The Belgian colonial period (1919-1962) in Rwanda, for example, is viewed differently by the three principal actors—the Belgians, the Tutsis, and the Hutus—and by outside observers. Moreover, among the Hutus themselves are competing points of view, different memory paths or history frames that have interacted to shape events in the post-colonial period. Ashcroft, for instance, has suggested there are four ways that the colonized can respond to the 'imperial' function of history. They may: "acquiesce with its historical narrative; ... reject history outright; ... interject a different perspective into the discipline of history; or ... interpolate history in a way which reveals its assumptions and limitations."¹⁸

In Habyarimana's instance, our investigation would include how he interpreted (as well as created) history and how that coincided and conflicted with others' histories. Taking Ashcroft's concept into mind, we would be aware of the various ways that the Rwandans, having been colonized, respond to the 'imperial function of history'. In the case of the Hutu Power extremists who perpetrated the genocide, they acquiesced to the colonial racist distinction of Hutu/Tutsi. Simply showing the events that unfolded does not give any insight into the 'whys' and 'hows' of those events. As Bhaskar points out, there are two kinds of criteria necessary for a qualitative description—demonstrative and recognitive, and they are distinct. He illustrates this with the example of looking at a chromosome structure via an electron microscope. His inability to recognize the structure does not mean it is an impossible object to reference, but that such a recognition requires an independent effort: "The production of the object and the production of its concept are ... independent tasks."¹⁹ Thus, when the

documentary filmmaker simply renders an object or event visible, as the chromosome is rendered visible via the microscope, the production of a concept is missing and a qualitative description of the object (the biographical subject and its interrelatedness to structures) is incomplete.

For example, Hutu-Tutsi relationships in the south of pre-genocide Rwanda did not necessarily pertain to relationships in other regions. Habyarimana's treatment of and relationship to people in his hometown region was significantly different from the way he related to people in other regions—his regional nepotism was extreme and caused considerable resentment. Thus, it would be false to conflate upward by saying, as has been the case, that Hutus and Tutsis were unvarying monolithic national entities.

However, the question remains of how far back in time a biographical researcher has to go to make an 'inclusive' study of a subject's life. A critical realist would say "As far back as theory dictates." The filmmaker must then decide from among theory-dictated choices what to incorporate in the film project. In people's lives there appear to be sedimentary 'markers' that can serve as historical time referents within the film. In Habyarimana's case these would include: his birth; influences during his formative years (Rwandan Independence, teachers, classmates, ideologies related to colonialism, and so on); then military training and service; marriage and fatherhood; command of the army; a successful *coup d'état* to gain the presidency; agency and agents required to secure his presidency over twenty years; the genocide in neighboring Burundi; the Tutsi rebel invasion forcing his signing of the Arusha Accords; and his assassination. However, we must keep in mind that, as Sayer points out, "it is not enough to cite the will and actions of key individuals and institutions as sufficient for producing change, because their effectiveness depends on how they relate to wider discourses and to the shifting and uneven possibilities of the

context We need to know not only what the main strategies were of actors, but what it was about the context which enabled them to be successful or otherwise, that is, what the necessary and sufficient conditions were. Often the success or failure of agents' strategies may have little or nothing to do with their own reasons or intentions."²⁰ In the biographical film project this, particularly, must be addressed.

As can be seen, a CR biography is not a process whereby photos and film

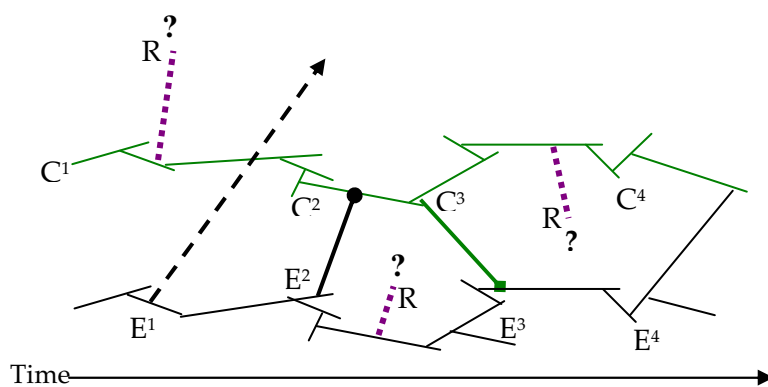


Fig. 12: Path Choices

footage and talking heads are simply strung together in a linear story-telling format. Sayer's words are especially apt here: "There is more to the world than patterns of events; it has ontological depth."²¹ There

are several ways the film subject's life choices affect filmic representations of Time. In *Figure 12*, Habyarimana's significant path choices are labeled 'C' (representing nodes of *choice*), and 'E' (representing nodes of *experience*), and constitute continuous entities throughout his existence. It may be that an experience has no significant effect (E¹), or has an indirect effect (E²), or that choice has a delayed causal effect (C³ on E⁴). These nodes of choice and experience are further treated in their causal interrelationships with the subject as in *Fig. 13*, deepening our understanding of the rational and irrational powers and liabilities constituting Habyarimana's world. "We can be affected by things whose existence and position is only contingently or externally related to our own existence, by chance encounters. Individual biographies are crucially influenced by such accidents."²²

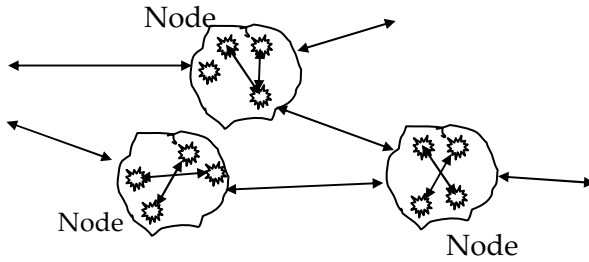


Fig. 13: Nodes of Choice and Experience

Unspoken as well as spoken supra-realities emerge from these nodular explorations. Film form could handle these effects linearly, in parallel, switching back and forth, or as indicated earlier, in a concentric

circular fashion, showing first a result then flashing back in time to examine the cause. Figures 12 & 13 also represent the time problem compounded by the critical realist notion of retrodution, or 'counterfactual' thinking. In Habyarimana's case this would mean asking whether Habyarimana *might* have been assassinated if the rebel Tutsi forces from Uganda had not attacked, or ask, for example, "Could one imagine the genocide happening without Habyarimana being in office twenty years?" The paths of choice and experience can be extended to retroductive lines of enquiry (**R**) as in Figure 12.

Combining rolling circularity with path choices and nodes of choice and experience we can graphically approximate how a critical realist film might be

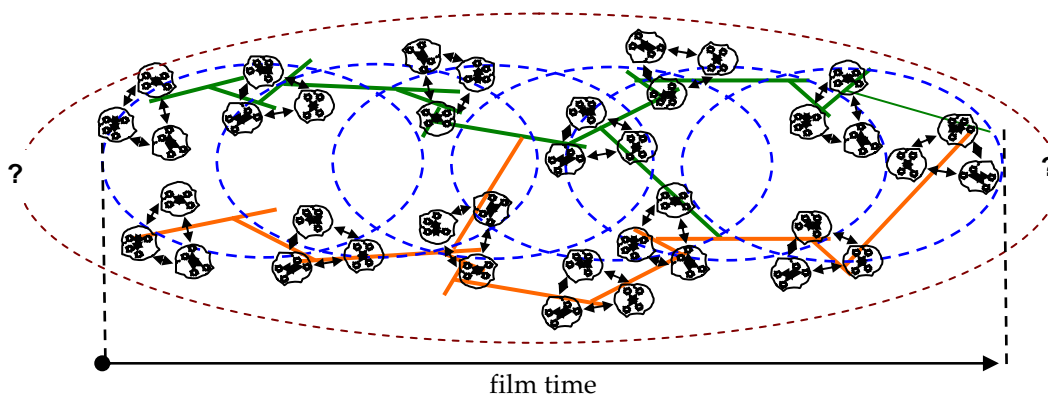


Fig. 14: Redescriptive Schema Of Habyarimana's Life With Choice Paths And Nodes

constructed (Fig. 14) with path choices studding Habyarimana's life cycle. The path choices constitute various responses by Habyarimana to a wealth of

interrelations, and show not only what the interrelations were but which ones he chose or couldn't avoid, how he managed them (and mismanaged them), as well as alternative choices that were available but not followed. Paths not taken reveal as much about a person as those taken, and a critical realist approach is particularly useful for revealing these alternatives.

An example of a partial conceptualization of the research process which might be used in examining Habyarimana's complex movement through life is given in *Table 2*, in this particular case focusing on Habyarimana's coup d'état and formation of a dictatorship.

A critical realist structured film has the possibility of setting up a discourse between the viewer and the film text, necessarily engaging the viewer in thought by posing questions to the viewer through the process of abduction,

STRUCTURES	MECHANISMS (emergent powers)	CAUSAL COMPONENTS	EMPIRICAL PHENOMENON
	<i>→ Gives rise to</i>	<i>→ Under certain conditions resulting in</i>	<i>→ Outcomes</i>
Structure of Rwandan kingship and its historic patterns of violent succession	Vertical hierarchy with King at top Circumstances requiring military: to protect and control population, space, assets, cultural beliefs, and to expand state Military as autonomous and overriding power	Validated atmosphere of one-man rule Philosophy oriented away from democratic rules / processes, responsible judicial system (extra-judicial slipperiness)	Coup d'état And formation of dictatorship
Structure of military in Rwandan society	Conditions of a ruling elite, patronage system, rent collection, and paternalism Absence of concept of individual or 'human' rights	Authentication of military's sense of being arbiters of state structure	
Structure of colonialism	Role of religion in validating authoritative, vertical, racist social structure Concept of individual power and bureaucracy over social equity, fair trade, freedom of movement, and markets	A socio-political orientation bereft of ethical or moral restraint on murder, torture, and 'disappearances' as political tools	
Kinship and clan structure	Regionalism, poverty, non-development of entrepreneurial class Reinforcement through example of neighboring states of violent and		
Socio-economic structure			

State structure of surrounding countries	military agency in ruling the state and in state takeover Lack of constraints normally enforced by powerful int'l players or regional organizational entities	Corruption, cronyism, nepotism and gov't stakeholders' sense of being 'favored' compared to peasant masses
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Table 2: Example of Conceptualizations in the Research Process (Adapted from Danermark, 1997)

retroduction, and counterfactuals. Recursivity and postulation of the film's ontological positioning also confront the viewers concerning their own relation to the film's world view, making viewing a dynamic exercise. Sub-titles and original language are necessary to dispel the stereotyped and false historical perception that non-westerners do not have an intellectual life, and to engage the viewer in alternative cultural 'colors' and 'textures'. The result will dispel and correct various mono-conceptual and ideological points of view about Africans, the African state, and the Rwandan genocide. This insight will surely benefit the viewer by resulting in a film that is, in the Brechtian sense, entertaining by dint of "the wisdom that comes from the [viewer's] solution of problems"²³ — and will work against "the impression which illusionist film seems to convey of a world which one can understand simply by viewing it."²⁴ As Geertz says, "We must measure the cogency of our explications ... against the power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers."²⁵ Above all, the CR-driven examination of Habyarimana will *decolonize* film. Trinh Minh-Ha's thoughts are particularly apt here: "If life's paradoxes and complexities are not to be suppressed, the question of degree and nuance is incessantly crucial. Meaning can therefore be political only when it does not let itself be easily stabilized, and when it does not rely on any single source of authority, but, rather, empties or decentralizes it." ²⁶

This paper is meant to be a real working document for its author, utilizing critical realist philosophical determinants as they can be applied to the construction of a biographical film, in this case about the assassinated president

of Rwanda, Juvénal Habyarimana. In practice it means collecting data from the broad spectrum of Rwandan history and society and related areas of African government, as well as examining the nature of dictatorial regimes, the relation of international actors to Habyarimana and his governance, and the literature on genocide. From this wealth of voices, images, and texts the filmmaker will be faced with constructing a multi-dimensional portrait in context.

CR is explicitly non-deterministic and essentially non-predictive. It is a tool to help describe sets of relationships, being constantly cautious of conflation, and aware of the several layers within which agency occurs. For the film project examining a country's president in a socio-political milieu including persons capable of adopting a genocidal philosophy, this means that a resulting genocide cannot be presented as a *fait accompli*. In a particular set of circumstances, such as the 1994 Rwandan genocide, it also means that past or future occurrences of genocides in other countries do not automatically share the dynamics of the Rwandan model.

Notes

1. Personal communication with Dr. Morteza Ardebili, Spring 2004.
2. Andrew Sayer, *Realism and Social Science* (Sage Publications Ltd; 1 edition, 2000), 22.
3. Ibid., p. 22
4. Ibid., p.16
5. Randall Collins, *Three Sociological Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 188.
6. Klaus B. Jensen, *The Social Semiotics of Mass Communication* (London: Sage, 1995), 148.
7. Berth Danermark, Mats Ekström, Liselotte Jakobsen and Jan Ch. Karlsson, *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 92.
8. Ibid., 109-110

9. Ibid., 96
10. Sayer, *Realism*, 16
11. Minh-ha, Trinh. "Documentary Is/Not A Name." *October* 52 (Summer 1990): 76-98.
12. See, for example, Danermark, *Explaining Society*, 47.
13. Sayer, *Realism*, 14
14. Margaret S. Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
15. Archer Ibid., 177-180.
16. Archer Ibid., 276.
17. Sayer, *Realism*, 15-16.
18. Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 100.
19. Bhaskar, Roy, "The logic of scientific discovery", in *CR: Essential readings*, p.73)
20. Sayer, *Realism*, 25-26
21. Ibid., 15
22. Ibid., 13
23. Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre, Note 2," in Toby Cole, *Playwrights on Playwriting: The Meaning and Making of Modern Drama from Ibsen to Ionesco* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960).
24. Dana Polan, "A Brechtian Cinema? Towards a Politics of Self-Reflexive Film," in B. Nicholls, ed., *Movies and Methods*, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 672.
25. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p.16.
26. Minh-ha, "Documentary," 89.

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