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## ON THE TURN OF VALUES IN THE PRACTICE OF “HUNTING IMAGES”

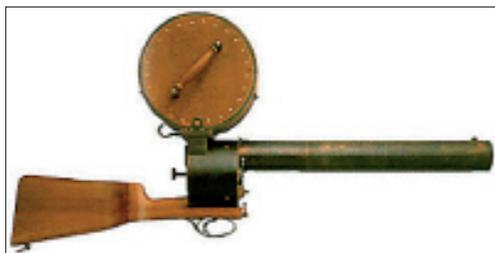
**Abstract.** This paper begins by focusing on demonstrating/ convince that between the creator of a documentary movie (called here “the hunter of reality”), and the ancestral hunter (who survived by hunting animals) we can draw several analogies. Starting with these analogies, I will try to understand and describe the deontological aspects of mass media, through the perspective of the deontology of hunting and implicitly trying to identify connotations in the practice of “hunting” images.

**Key words:** Media ethics and deontology, documentary, observational cinema, cinema-direct

### 1. Analogies

One of the apparatus belonging to the long series of inventions that led to the apparition of cinema (in the beginning as a form of reproducing movement and later as a form of art) was imagined by J. Marey in 1882, and was called “photographic gun”. This instrument had a technical capacity to store 12 fixed images per second (a real machine gun!) and was built based upon the classical concept of all hunting rifle. In fact, it had the same functions, to “i-mortalize”, obviously, another kind of “prey”.

Marey’s gun is the prototype of the first camera (actually its ancestor) and his instructional concept is found today in most of the new cameras performing. The same structures, the same component elements, the same philosophy... the only difference is that now they are optimizing it from the standpoint of technical parameters. We have thus the first element of analogy: **the hunting rifle.**



1. Marey's rifle



2. Lumière's apparatus

The French documentary moviemaker Andre S. Labarthe, analyzing the first seconds of Lumière Brothers' movie (*The arrival of a train in the train station*) compared the new wonderful “box” that is able to capture reality to the trap of a hunter. Using his technique and driven by his instincts, the Hunter is charting first the place where he could start the hunt, and only later he continues by placing his trap, and he does so in the place where his prey has no more chances to escape, while quietly, without giving out his position, he waits for the victim. It is the same with a moviemaker (the cinematographer) who places the camera, out of experience, instinct and personal

ability, as a “capturing device” in the specific place where the subject is best seen (having “the best angle”) and, like the hunter before him, sits and waits until the subject enters the “net” of the camera objective. It is only then that he takes the decision by saying “action”, then he squeezes the button/ the trigger and the image is stolen/ captured/ registered irreversibly on the celluloid support. We can extract thus a second element of analogy: the **hunting instinct**.

## 2. The documentary movie

One of the pioneers of the documentary filmmaking, J. Grierson has defined documentary filmmaking as a form of “creative approach to reality”. Thus, in the documentary moviemaking, the author brings his own sensitivity and subjectivity in reproducing facts that have taken place in reality. As a continuation of this concept, starting with the affirmation of Zola, according to whom “art is a corner of nature seen through a human prism”, the documentary is called “a fragment of reality filtered through a human prism”.

Another definition states that **every movie that is not fiction is a documentary**. But what are fictional movies? They are a creative audiovisual form of expression using imagination, fiction film being a transposition of a vision that was created exclusively in our imagination. The imagined facts, obviously, did not happened in reality (although sometimes they are inspired by real facts). In the case of fiction, a story, the facts, the characters are not real, they are simply imagined.

So we can say that we are in front of a documentary film only when we have as a support, the source and content of information, any element of the real universe, only when the story is sustained by a real character, by facts and situations that are captured and reproduced from the space of reality. Thus, the documentary movie is based exclusively on that which is tied to Humanity or a manifestation of the Human.

The forms of expression of a documentary film have evolved in the same time as the innovations and the optimizations of the technical abilities of the filming technologies. From the heavy cameras filming on celluloid, who could not capture synchronous sound, today we have cameras that are miniaturized, having better and better technical capabilities, with the possibility to get the sound in good conditions, with the ability of registering and with an autonomy ever-increasing, one with a small weight with and noiseless functions, with high sensibilities to light and so on.

All these technical optimizations have created in fact new possibilities of access to the subjects (or otherwise said, the new techniques allowed new forms of approaching the prey), and finally created new relationships between the team (the filming crew) and the subject. In this technical context, in America during the 60's, appeared a new wave, called **cinema-direct** (or **observational** cinema), around the directors F. Wiseman, the Maysley brothers and Allan King.

This current had a particular strand, the presentation of events through neutral observation, uninvolved and detached. The presence of the camera must affect and intervene as little as possible during the event. Thus the possibility is created of surprising as naturally and spontaneously the reactions, the emotions and the leading actions of the subject.

In this type of documentary, the technique is reduced to a minimum, the filming is done with the existing lights (there is no adding of artificial lights, there is no intervention in the ambience of the lighting), there are no preparations before and there is no directing of the sequencing. This wave in the filming of documentary (who has a predecessor, in fact, the Lumière brothers) is perfectly applicable to the model and the technique of the hunter (*piégeur*), who waits stalking, hidden in the bushes, or camouflaged in order not to be seen (for example in the hunting of a bear and other wild animals).

Another current in the documentary moviemaking, developed in Europe (actually this trend appears in fact before direct-cinema) is called **cinéma vérité** (*Real Cinema*, the translation of the expression used by the Russian director Dziga Vertov, **kino-pravda**). Unlike the observational cinema that tries not to intervene, but to remain a neutral observer of an event, cinema-verity positions itself in the opposite direction, from the point of view of the relationship between camera and subject.

In the cinema-verity, the camera:

- becomes a character presence in the actions of the subjects;
- participates and produces events and situations ( even if only by its sheer presence in the middle of the event);
- it becomes a catalyst in the development of the events.

This is why cinema-verity is also called **participatory cinema**.

Eric Barnouw describes it this way: "in cinema-direct the director points the camera towards a situation that is tensional and waits hoping to get the moment of the crisis, while a *cinéma vérité* approach enters the crisis in order to precipitate it. Cinema-direct tries to be invisible, *cinéma vérité* bringing a new character into the event, the camera". In his type of expressing the strategy of capturing images there is another similarity with the metaphor of a hunter, where, in opposition with the hidden and patient hunter, the hunt for images is done by running in the fields and looking for the prey. The hunted does not present itself, quite the contrary he is the one who'll be hiding, so, in order to be seen and brought to light he needs to be challenged, followed or driven out of its den.

Although using different methods (technologically) the purpose of both modes of expression (observational, *cinéma vérité*) address and look for (in the same way as it happens with hunting) the same thing, surprising spontaneously the "target", in a way that the reactions, the emotional behavior and the facts are veridical, authentic and true.

We can identify thus, together with the **weapons** and the **instincts**, a third element of analogy between the instruments of hunting "images" and does of the human hunter: **the method (the hunting technique)**.

Observation:

The same techniques I use by the poacher (that Hunter who does not respect the laws, the rules and the codes of the hunt). In the same way, and in the same logic of analogy described above, we can identify the media poacher (paparazzo).

As a first conclusion, we can say that the documentary movie brings to live events that couldn't have been seen if the movie camera would not have been there, it reveals a world (a trophy) – that we as spectators would have had access to.

The key to enter this inaccessible universe (the success of the hunt) are the **weapon**, the **instinct** and the ability of the documentary moviemaker as hunter, as well as his **method** (is hunting technique) by which he approaches the subject.

Once identified/ accepted the analogies described above I will try to extrapolate, using a very brief code of hunting ethics, several rules that apply in the case of "hunting images".

### 3. The code of the Hunter

#### **Respect for the hunted.**

This rule imposes a relationship and behavior (of respect) between the hunter and its prey. The prey, even if it is not your equal, you should consider it at least your partner in this struggle/ game of survival. In the documentary movie this relationship between author and subject

is the starting point in any creative approach. A detached relationship, uninvolved, will not open “the doors” of communication and implicitly the gates of “the hunting field” of human emotions will remain closed. Much more, for each author every movie is a chapter not only in his professional portfolio, but also in his of her existence. A driver of a filming crew (working in a cultural department in a television station) was saying: “I am a true intellectual because I live only among intellectuals. I’ve been saying that it’s like graduating at least a faculty, since every day, and every meeting and interviewing all these people having lot of knowledge were like courses to me, and while assisting all these years so many courses, adding them up one can gather a full time faculty.” So, for this person, describing all the lives of so many people became a part of the life. The characters in the movie are, each in its way, chapters from the personal life of the author.

Documentary movie is a profoundly humanistic discipline and can form the most elaborate manifestations of humanism today because he has as its exclusive “primary matter” the human being and everything that defines him (words, facts, emotions, thoughts, feelings etc.). The documentary movie brings to light the most hidden “pieces” of humanity in human beings. These people (from all countries and extremes) that society condemns, despises, avoids, judges, or pre-judges, the documentary movie brings them to light and tells their story. So, by definition, the documentary

movie is oriented towards the human, towards the good. Errors can occur when “the hunters of images” do not respect the primordial rule of “respecting the hunted”, and even go in the opposite direction (against humanity or Goodness).

One of the most famous examples, of extreme breaching of this rule happened in America, when a young director launched a series of television programs about and with the homeless. These people, living at the fringes of society, were followed (in an observational style) step by step in their tragic existence and were surprised in a un-staged manner, in some of the most extreme forms of de-humanization. The scenes of extreme violence and the deviant behavior were shocking, but were also attracting an audience that soon gave the series an impressive notoriety. The problem was that these people were in fact paid to drink (and even to take drugs), provoking in an immoral way the reactions of these people lacking any form of discerning. Besides the explicit case of a lack of deontology, the series provoked a phenomenon that was even more dangerous. It instigated other producers and even created a fashion of provoking immoral facts (at some point even crime) of people lacking the ability of the discerning, or of people lacking defense (like children, beggars, mentally sick etc.) and then filming them in order to distribute the images in various ways. If, at the moment when this series first aired, the Internet was not developed as a channel of communication, the reactions of the public were able to impose the

change of some norms in audiovisual, and a phenomenon was kept under control until the apparition of the Internet.

At the conclusion of this point we can say that the rule to respect the hunted should be transposed in the media and re-written in the following way:

**To promote the values and the human dignity.**

**Don't be greedy and don't shoot more than you need.**

For a hunter, more than you need means more that it's necessary to ease your hunger (which is not the case for the hobby hunters of today). What can it mean for the image Hunter "more than you need or as much as it's necessary to ease your hunger"?

On one hand, this could mean to know when to stop, not to overdo, who has your own measure that you don't cross. In the history of television in Romania the apparition of commercial stations was a significantly important moment. Associated to that moment, in which one of the most important commercial television in Romania (ProTV) was beginning to broadcast, in the most important news bulletin there was the information that an airplane crashed. Excited by the possibility to take lead, the crew sent on location did not stop to presenting the facts, they went to see the family of the pilot. The family finds out for the first time about the tragedy from the television crew... and everything happened under the magnifying glass of the camera.

So, the hunting teaches us that we must find the **measure**, no matter how tempting the prey is.

**Do not shoot the prey that goes towards someone else and do not claim the hunted that does not belong to you.**

Is not a special and particular rule of hunting, as a matter of fact this is a transposition of the rule of not taking that which is not your own, or simply put not to steal. In the practice of mass media the hunt which is not yours refers to intellectual property. Since we are talking about a more volatile and less palpable property, its appropriation without consent can be perceived as being less severe. It is not really "penal" (although it really is), so this type of taking without asking for permission is not lead to a firm combination, it might bring some recognition set back, some image or honor problems (if those actually exist). One important example (and these are not simple misdemeanors by "borrowing" ideas, formats or programs) is the copying of the successes in style (or even program structures) used by some networks. I need to make an example of ProTV again, since it is a success story in the Romanian context, whose recipe was copied (in a generally blunder way) by the competing stations (including the public television). So we came to a point where copying the speech patterns of the anchors, the structure of the news programs, the subjects and even the haircuts became a practice. What makes

this intellectual and institutionalized stealing even more despicable is the fact that the copying did not cover only the good parts, but they extended to the moral decline of the model (for example the “tabloidization” (Becalization) of the sports news). The consequence is that we witnessed a generalized and perpetual series of deontological and the values misconducts.

In the language of mass media this rule can be simply put:

**Be honest.**

**Do not shoot the Prey when the conditions make the hit uncertain and presents the risk to only hurt the hunted.**

Even if from my standpoint this seems like a cruel and bloody rule, the sense of this rule seems more profound. The rule is forcing us in the first place to make things the proper way (professionally), we are not supposed to miss because the error can have tragical consequences (both to the hunted, dying in pain, and to us and two other innocents whom can enter by chance in the way of the animal who is hurt). This rule also tells us not to expose ourselves or others to useless risks and, last but not least, makes us conscious that the things must be taken to their final consequences. Transposed into a media rule it means first to be a **professional**: to write correctly, to have a logic and a coherence in the message, and maybe most important, the message needs to be “fatal” in reaching the purpose for which it was created.

**Never shoot the rabbit sitting in his shelter, the duck sitting on the water and pheasant that walks.**

This rule is a continuation of the rule talking about the respect for the hunted. The hunted must be respected and even more than this, one must accept the fact that the fight must take place in the context (even if at a theoretical level) where the adversary had a chance to defend itself, he can escape by its own qualities, he can save himself if he is faster, more agile or intelligent. If in the previous rules there was no discussion about poaching (since poachers have their own “honor”, they do not shoot more than they can take, and they don’t cross each other) in the case of this rule poaching must be addressed directly, if the rule is not respected. The “poachers” in the media are generally associated with the term paparazzi (but they are only the visible ones). More destructive is the industrial poaching, or the institutionalized press poaching, where the structures, the politics and the philosophies of media institutions are focused on shooting “the rabbit sitting in his shelter, the duck sitting on the water and fezant that walks”. Even if the “sheltered rabbit” is Adrian Năstase in his penthouse from Zambaccian street, “the duck sitting on the water” is Andreea Marin in the privacy of her home, and the “pheasant that walks” is Dani Oțil with Mihaela Rădulescu riding their bike. Each and everyone of them has the right to personal life and image. As a counterpoint to the over cautious expressing of the right to private image,

I must describe a real situation. On top of a mountain, far away from the adversity of the city, the cameraman is following a tractor moving further away. At some point the motor stops and the crew sees the driver approaching. "What gives you the right to film my tractor? We have the right to defend our image!"

**Never leave your comrade in a difficult situation**

The rule is quite rudimentary and defines in fact the solidarity of the trade. Be it hunters, doctors, magistrates or journalists, the group solidarity activates instantaneously and is manifested instinctively. The problem of solidarity can be questioned when we are talking about what are the "difficult situations" that affect journalists, and the manner they were exposed with these situations. And I want to mention here only the polemic around the famous case called "Kidnapping in Harem" or the "Gazeta Dossier". Personally I went through contradictory situations when it comes to group solidarity.

*"Three steps backward..."*

During the commotion and the hysteria provoked by a high-level visit, all the ambitious journalists fighting for a place in front of the group, have decided in a difficult moment (and because of the struggle) if they don't take, together, three steps backward, they will all compromise their chances. And, to my surprise, everybody stopped their blitzes and started counting "2, 3 and go!" as a choir, then moved three steps backward.

After that, they started their stream of questions, as frantic as before, flashes and pushing and everything.

In another situation, also a high-level visit, the German Chancellor was visiting a small village near Turda, a presumptive burial place for his deceased father, during World War II. The German protocol discipline requested: "this is the line, nobody crosses it...". Much more, there was the request that during the private moment in front of the tomb, the cameras must face down. The majority of the journalists respected the moment, yet others didn't. As a consequence, the line was moved three steps backwards... and nobody was able to see anything. Another case of trade hypocrisy can be identified in the case of the comedy program "Cronica Cârcotașilor", an entertainment oriented show, with a format acquired from the Western markets, where the errors, mistakes and ineptness of the television colleagues are mocked. The majority of the mistakes and speech errors are made by those journalists who speak directly (go live), without the possibility of repeating or repairing their error. The hypocrisy comes from the fact that the program itself is recorded, and their own errors are edited and eliminated.

**Do not exaggerate while describing the hunting events.**

Otherwise said, do not tell mere "hunting stories". Maybe this rule seems the least important because I'm not talking about the hunt itself, but the stories told "after and about". In the media the roles are reversed because

one of the meanings and functions of mass media is to carry messages, and these messages are in fact only “stories after and about”. A simple problem, like exaggeration (specific to any hunt story), becomes an essential one since the audiovisual product (the message) is a subjective reconstruction, by its own structure subject to manipulation. The selection of images captured on a field is subjective, then the selected order of editing is also subjective. This selection and ordering of the frames (the very essence of audiovisual expressing) is a process deeply subjected to the suspicion of manipulation, since it is structurally a form of manipulation. As long as they can create time (since in moviemaking we can dilate or compress the real time of action) and to create virtual space, the journalists will manipulate every moment, because they show what “it is”, when in reality “it isn’t”. As an example, from various fragments that are associated in editing, we can create the perception of spaces, facts, real actions, all but in-existent. For example, when a subject is depicted falling from the top of a building, we can show him at the window and then another frame landing. The real action

does not exist, but we perceive as being real.

Structurally in the movies every cut between the frames (fragmenting the reality) is a form of selective truth or a white lie, but the act is justified by the purpose of telling the story. The problem here is the limit of where we can “exaggerate”, since the “exaggeration” can easily be transferred into deceit or blunt lie.

As a final conclusion we can say that, although in the mass media we have only “hunting stories”, the hunter/storyteller can say anything, as long as it is **correct**.

Without intending to provide a comprehensive selection of ethical rules of hunting, and implicitly the deduction of their transposition into mass media (with the following consequences) the analogy allows us to particularly and succinctly re-write the deontological code of mass media in the following sentence.

**If we Promote the Human values, by telling the Truth, with Measure, Correctly and Honestly, doing our work in a Professional manner, respecting the same time the fellow Human near us in a Solidarity with our colleagues, then we are a Real journalists.**

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