

Showing Vs Telling In Revolutionary Cinema

Unfortunately, horrible things are caught on film all of the time, leaving them in an everlasting digital memory. However, it is up to the audience to decide how to react to that memory. Or is it? Filmmakers, especially revolutionary filmmakers, use different strategies to push viewers into different modes of understanding and acceptance of what they are seeing on-screen. These two examples of revolutionary cinema depict dark times in human history; however, both have different goals in mind for their audience. In *The Spook Who Sat By The Door*, filmmakers are arming their audience with knowledge and tactics to overcome an oppressive regime or system. In *Five Broken Cameras*, the filmmakers are opting to spread awareness of what is happening as well as show the reality of the events taking place. However, both films are pleading with the audience to recognize the oppressive force the subject(s) of the film has to face.

In *The Spook Who Sat By The Door*, the oppressor is white people, and the oppressed are black people. The film has several instances of how revolutionary forces can arm themselves, tactics for fighting, and effective forms of protest. In one scene, the black people of the city of Chicago boycott spending their money and/or working, and they effectively cripple the city for a few days. However, the most clear-cut scenes for learning are the scenes in which Dan Freeman and the other members of the resistance are starting their takeover. With the help of Dan's former CIA training, he effectively coaches the group into an extreme level of skill in guerilla warfare. In fact, in Huey P. Newton's "The Correct Handling of a Revolution: July 20, 1967" he stresses the importance of activist groups remaining prominent figures among their communities and teaching those who are in the group the ways and methods of guerilla fighting. The aspect of secrecy is stressed, but as is the notion that the party must stay above ground. "The main purpose

of the vanguard group should be to raise the consciousness of the masses through educational programs and other activities” (Newton 16). For liberation of the people, there must be those who are willing to teach them the proper methods of resistance.

Other forms of resistance are documented but not necessarily taught. In *Five Broken Cameras*, the audience sees example of this onscreen, as the filmmakers aim is to show the horrors the people are forced to live through and trying to show that change must happen. The filmmakers behind *Five Broken Cameras*, document countless interactions with Israeli citizens and soldiers and show how they are consistently antagonistic and hostile. The audience is also shown first-hand accounts of the destruction of land, homes and property, and people and families. The footage is used as a marker in time that says, “This happened, and you won’t forget.” This footage also shows immense strength and community. Samuel Brodsky’s article, “Interview: Patricio Guzman on *The Battle of Chile*, he comments to Guzman about the endearing sense of solidarity between the people in Guzman’s film. Guzman acknowledges this, and also says, “But to *participate* in this case meant *working*—and that was quite a lot” (Brodsky 2023). Here Guzman is recognizing the absolute feat these people go through on a daily basis fighting those who are oppressing them but then trying to document it on top of it all. In this mode of filmmaking, documenting the collaboration of people takes precedence.

Similarly, both of these films want to call attention to injustice that is happening on screen. It wants the viewer to be aware of what the people are facing, they just have different methods of getting people there. In both of these films, community is central. The group is needed for change to become possible. In “Problems of Form and Content in Revolutionary Cinema,” Jorge Sanjines points out on page sixty-three, “... revolutionary cinema cannot be anything but collective in its most complete phase, since the revolution is collective.” Although

the films differ in their desired outcomes from their audiences, the focus and need for collective strength is always present. Without them, revolutionary parties would crumble, and oppressive regimes and people would prevail.

Revolutionary cinema often has multiple different sub-goals with a larger over-arching main goal. In this instance, *The Spook Who Sat By The Door* wanted to teach its viewers. The filmmakers wanted their viewers to leave the theater with a new sense of motivation and a few new fighting techniques that they learned. In *Five Broken Cameras*, the filmmakers still want you to leave with a sense of motivation to help, but they want you to see the reality of their everyday lives. They want you to recognize the injustice on screen and act on it without having to be taught what to do. There are strengths and weaknesses to both forms of filmmaking, but both provide effective ways of spurring action.

Work Cited

Brodsky, Samuel. "Interview: Patricio Guzman on *The Battle of Chile*.", *Film Comment*, 11 Sept. 2023, www.filmcomment.com/blog/interview-patricio-guzman-on-the-battle-of-chile/.

Five Broken Cameras. Directed by Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi, *Kino Lorber*, 23 November 2011.

Newton, Huey, P. "The Correct Handling of a Revolution: July 20, 1967.," *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton*, 1972, 14-19,
uiowa.instructure.com/courses/246353/assignments/2387299?module_item_id=8049089.

Sanjines, Jorge. "Problems of Form and Content in Revolutionary Cinema." *New Latin American Cinema, Volume One: Theory, Practices, and Transcontinental Articulations*, 1997, page 62-70,
uiowa.instructure.com/courses/246353/files/29329624?module_item_id=8048400.

The Spook Who Sat By The Door. Directed by Ivan Dixon based on the novel by Sam Greenlee, performances by Lawrence Cook, David Lemieux, J.A. Preston, and Paula Kelly, United Artists, 1973.