

Making the fiction visible: Even the Rain and cinematic and historiographical discourses about history

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***Abstract:** While historians, literary theorists and philosophers now have been engaged in debates about the narrativity of historiography during the past few decades, there is limited awareness among the broader public of those discussions. In contrast, in those historical films that have a popular appeal the viewers regularly encounter a closed narrative combined with the immersive power of audio-visual imagery, which does not encourage a critical perspective. The 2010 Mexican-Spanish-French co-production *Even the Rain*, directed by Icíar Bollain from a screenplay by Paul Laverty, makes an exception by popularizing these debates. The film follows a fictional crew making a historical production critical of Columbus and the Spanish conquest of the Americas, this fictional production being set during the backdrop of the 2000 Water War in Cochabamba, Bolivia. *Even The Rain* juxtaposes epic scenes from the film within the film with the stages of its production. Thus, *Even the Rain* has an unusual plot structure that unites features of the conventional historical drama with those of the experimental film. It achieves a self-critical stance on the audio-visual representation of the past while at the same time being easily accessible and attracting many viewers.*

*This article analyses how in *Even the Rain* the construction of the historical film's narrative is made transparent for the viewer. It discusses the additional discursive layer that engages with the employment of source material and the ideological implications of the film project, and concludes with the ability of *Even the Rain* to communicate discussions on narrativity and historiophoty of the academic field to a broader audience and, thus, raise critical awareness among the viewers.*

Keywords: *Even the Rain, historical film, historiophoty, authenticity*

A glade opens to the gaze of the film viewer. Luscious green vegetation surrounds the armed Spanish conquistadors who hold captured people from the Taíno tribe, and others who stand on the sidelines. The indignant monk Bartolomé de Las Casas sees the selection of thirteen captives, one of them the tribal leader, the cacique Hatuey, to be burnt at the stake. Cut: the tribespeople stand on the firewood, tied to crosses. The priest Antonio de Montesinos baptises them and pronounces that their chance to enter paradise still exists. He moves to stand in front of Hatuey and performs the ritual. The face of the cacique with his feathered headdress is viewed close-up while the priest's words are translated

for him. The sizzling noises and the glow of the fire are already noticeable. ‘Do Christians enter heaven?’, he asks the priest. Hearing the confirmation he replies with a vigorous and distorted facial expression: ‘Then I want to go to hell.’ At the same time he kicks the cross out of Montesinos’ hand; all this witnessed with pain by Las Casas.

The Spanish commander orders the stakes to be ignited. While the smoke intensifies Hatuey and the other prisoners chant their contempt for the Spaniards. The surrounding Taíno begin to shout Hatuey’s name, whereupon Las Casas tells the commander that he has created a martyr. Views of the burning stakes, the shocked crowd and the nervous conquistadors alternate. The face of Hatuey is distorted with pain and rage. Behind the smoke his expressions of suffering, crying out in pain for the last time, can be seen. In a long shot the smoke covers the glade. Cut: suddenly an overwhelmed man announces through a megaphone: “Okay, cut! Cut!” The crew applauds. A further cut shows that the tribespeople aren’t standing on the stakes, but that this is an illusion created by the use of perspective. (*Even the Rain* 2012, 1:04:30-1:09:00)

This scene of around five minutes shows the quality that characterizes the 2010 Mexican-Spanish-French coproduction *Even the Rain*, directed by Icíar Bollain. Scenes that raise the mood of epic historical films alternate with those that reveal the cinematic construction of history. A film about Christopher Columbus and the Spanish conquest of the Americas is set within a contemporary plot about the fight against water privatisation in Bolivia. *Even the Rain* is a self-reflexive, in certain moments even parodic, film about cinematic representation, in this case of history, a common trait of post-modern cinema (Degli-Esposti 1998, 9-10). Furthermore it combines two of the three categories of historical films outlined by the historian Robert A. Rosenstone: *history as drama* and *history as experiment* (Rosenstone 2001, 52-54). This combination of categories results in *Even the Rain* being an interesting case for studying how the status of historical narrative can be communicated to a broader film audience.

Since 1990 the number of historians who engage with historical film – in relation to their representation of the past or as expressions of the times in which they were produced – has grown strongly. Nevertheless, most historians still treat historical film sceptically. They regard writing history as the more desirable way to engage with the historical record, ultimately leading to a more authentic representation of the past. From this perspective, a film – especially in its conventional, dramatic form – creates a representation of historical events whose ultimate goal is to trigger the emotional engagement of the audience and thus results in popular appeal. In order to achieve this, historical facts may be omitted or altered to turn history into an easily consumable commodity (Weiser 2015, 272-273; Rosenstone 2001, 50, 53). This opposition between historiography and historical film ignores a shared basic trait: they rely on a created narrative. History never unfolds itself, it always depends on someone telling it.

Criticism of the historical film seems to rely on a persistent belief in the authentic quality of historiography, while most historians – even if they don't necessarily agree with it – nowadays are aware of the critical perspective on the narrativity of history. Thinkers like White and Foucault have unsettled beliefs in historical referentiality and the historian's ability to assess the historical fact in their works (Goertz 2001, 8-9). From this perspective historiography is a poetic act, depending on the historian to forge a narrative to explain the course of history from their perspective (White 1973, x, 4), or the formation of discourses. Outside the scientific community awareness of these discussions is low and a strong belief in and desire for authenticity prevail (Pirker & Rüdiger 2010, 19-21; Munslow 2007, 12).

In this article I aim to explore the question of how the state of critique on narrativity in historiography can be communicated to a broader public in order to raise awareness of the problems of authentic representation of the past. I will use *Even the Rain* as example of a successful way to make the processes of the creation of cinematic and historiographical discourses of history visible to the audience. The academic reception of this film has been focused on the role of its fictional director. Frans Weiser and Stephanie Dennison analyse his failure as cinematic historian and the film crew's missing awareness of the reproduction of neo-colonial patterns while aiming for a critical film about colonialism (Weiser 2015, 272; Dennison 2013, 191-192). The conceptualisation of the director as cinematic historian who adds to the historical debate – for example, Oliver Stone with his historical films – limits the perspective on a central figure with professional and ethical choices. However, *Even the Rain* shows the director as more than a historian, and does more than open up a (self)-critical perspective on the making of a historical film. It puts the construction of the historical narrative and the forces which shape it into focus. Thus I argue that *Even the Rain* is valuable for its quality to expose to a certain extent the discursive practices of those representations of the past to a broad audience, and therefore bridges the gap in understanding between the academic field and the broader public. Therefore, the popular appeal of this film offers the possibility for a wider audience to develop a cautious and critical perspective on the narratives of the past.

Exposing the construction of the historical film's narrative

Even the Rain displays two aims. On the one hand it functions as a conventional drama in order to attract a large audience, while on the other it exposes the construction of cinematic representations of history. It combines three storylines. First, there is a Spanish film crew working for Costa, the producer, and Sebastian, the Mexican director, shooting a critical film about Columbus and the Spanish conquest of America in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Second, sequences from this historical film appear in *Even The Rain*. And third, the shooting takes place

against the background of the Cochabamba Water War between December 1999 and April 2000. Sequences from the three storylines alternate, with in the beginning the first dominating while over the course of the film the third becomes the focus. Accordingly the tone of *Even the Rain* changes: scenes that show the cast and crew at different stages of the production employ at times parody and humour, while showing a critical perspective on the production process. In these Sebastian and Costa are established as opposing characters, the former being the idealistic director while the latter is a cynical producer who cares most about the financial side of filmmaking. Between those positions the indigenous actor Daniel operates. He is cast to play Hatuey, and is an active agent in the political fight while working on the film. He connects the historical narrative with the contemporary since he leads the protests against the water privatization in Cochabamba. This conflict turns violent and, thus, makes the completion of the fictional film impossible. While Sebastian's only priority seems to lie with film, Costa develops a moral consciousness and rescues Daniel's daughter who had been injured in a clash between protestors and the armed forces. In the end, the protestors succeed in their fight against the privatisation.

While the contemporary background story provides the incentive for changes among the main characters, the frame for critical evaluation of their motivation and the climax of the plot, the other two storylines engage with the making of a historical film. Thus *Even the Rain* makes the production of a visual historical narrative visible to the audience: the casting, the script rehearsal, the creation of the set, communication with the financiers, and the shooting process itself are presented to the viewer. Instead of being confronted with the immersive quality of the conventional historical film, the audience is enabled to assess the agendas, decisions and negotiations that shape a film narrative.

One of the most striking scenes in this respect is the script rehearsal in a hotel garden. Instead of simply reading the text, Antón, the actor playing Columbus, stands up and uses the hotel's sun umbrella to play out taking possession of the land by ramming it into the soil as the royal standard on Columbus' arrival (*Even the Rain* 2012, 8:44-12:13). On a very abstract level this scene relates to familiar images of the arrival of Columbus in the Americas that shape the collective memory of this event. The act of setting the Spanish flag into the soil features prominently in Columbus' own account, in prints and paintings depicting this event and in the 1949 and 1992 films directed by David MacDonald and Ridley Scott respectively. It was prominent enough to be employed in advertisements (Menninger 2010, 88; Sale 1990, 347). To present this event in the rehearsal situation rather than in a sequence of the epic historical film, strips it of qualities that normally guarantee the feeling of historical authenticity by employing the *mise-en-scène*. This way of presentation stresses the abstract narrative framework which lies at the heart of the historical representation. However, this scene does more than contrast with sequences of the historical film that follow the conventions of historical drama. Its function to underline that the

mode which the audience perceives as authentic cinematic representation of the past is a construction based on a text, supported by other scenes that highlight the transition from this early production stage to the final product. Most notably this occurs when Sebastian rehearses with Juan, who plays the friar Antonio de Montesinos (*Even the Rain* 2012, 15:43-16:51). Juan preaches a sermon critical of the conquistadores' attitude towards the indigenous population, in a half-finished church set while the set construction workers listen. The set is incomplete and the actor is not wearing his costume, but this scene is already a lot closer to its final version in the historical film. Thus, this scene makes the viewer conscious of the influence of the *mise-en-scène*.

The same effect is used with regard to the actors as well. In the opening sequence the audience is introduced to Daniel, the main indigenous actor who plays Hatuey, when he protests against the early end of the casting for extras. Later the viewer follows him through the casting and filming process: first we watch Daniel's screen test together with Sebastian, Costa, María who shoots a making-of documentary and a casting agent, then in make-up in front of a mirror (*Even the Rain* 2012, 12:14-13:33) and finally during the shooting and in scenes from the historical film. Thus, the viewer is clearly presented with the two modes of gaze in relation to the actor in a historical film. At the same time two bodies are visible on the screen: the actor and the character he plays. While this is an implicit observation for the mode of 'embodied impersonation' which means that the actor is mostly absorbed in his character and is the dominant mode in historical films, in *Even the Rain* the transformation of the former into the latter is highlighted (Bingham 2013, 240).

Furthermore, the negotiation process behind the film is visible. There isn't an evolving plot that the camera records, and even the selections made in the script are not definite. When the indigenous women are supposed to walk with their children into a river, then exchange the child actors for puppets and pretend to drown them, they refuse to do so. Even after Sebastian's encouragement and Daniel's attempt to explain the situation, the women refuse to comply with the script, ultimately leading to this scene not being shot (*Even the Rain* 2012, 42:37-45:38). This scene underlines that the shooting of a film is a dynamic process, pointing to the variability of the plot (Garrett et al 1989, pp. 34-35).

Consequently, the two main methods for creating authenticity for the cinematic historical narrative – *mise-en-scène* and actor – are exposed and contrasted with their full potential of enabling immersion within the historical film. This perhaps is the most powerful tool used in *Even The Rain*. When the viewer is absorbed into the historical epic and out of nowhere hears someone yell 'cut!', the camera angle changes and the stakes that seem to burn are seen to be some distance from the actors, this is a most potent contradiction of the qualities of the historical drama with its attached visual discourses of authenticity (*Even the Rain* 2012, 1:04:30-1:10:48).

This is especially important since cinematic images have the power to shape the historical memory of their viewers. Film and television are the most important media through which individuals engage with the past, though the research of their reception remains fragmented, not comprehensive, and it is not possible to measure the impact of historical films on the historical consciousness (Meers & Biltreyst 2012, 131-132; Bisson 2014, 136, 144). Current research generally accepts the viewer as an active agent who produces meaning and is not merely a passive consumer of the film text (Meers & Biltreyst 2012, 126-128), though Marnie Hughes-Warrington concludes that so far no studies can establish the dominance of either the viewer's agency or their subordination to the text (2009, 236-237; cited in Bisson 2014, 137). Even if we accept the existence of an active viewer as given, the power of audio-visual representations shouldn't be underestimated. For example, it has been shown that study participants, who watched a historical film, began to refer to its images and cite them as references in later interviews and group discussions about the topic. That is also the case for popular understanding of historical figures, based on actors' portrayals even if contemporary images were known, as well as for the historical narrative itself (Sommer 2013, 434-440). While an audience certainly exists with a high critical awareness for such issues through their engagement in discourses about cinema or consumption of experimental films, other audiences watch films predominantly for entertainment and show less caution (Bisson 2014, 142, 147). The immersive quality of the historical drama film and the function of its images in our memory make audio-visual narratives an important force in shaping historical consciousness. The juxtaposition of the production of such images and their effect in *Even the Rain* offers the possibility to assess this consequence from a certain reflexive distance, even for a part of the audience unfamiliar with critical discourses and watching the film simply as a consumer. Thus, more viewers are enabled to evaluate the cinematic representation of history.

The historical narrative under discussion

Though, *Even the Rain* with its juxtaposition of the making of the historical film with some sequences of its footage does not just make the production of a historical visual narrative visible, it also shows related discussions between the crew members and opens a further discursive layer to the viewer. This takes place on two levels: Sebastian is working with historical sources as a historian would and interprets them in a new way through his approach to directing his film. Second, the historiographical discourse itself becomes visible.

All through the filming process Sebastian acts as a cinematic historian, actively engaged in the construction of history. He bases his narration on the sources that he incorporates in the script of his film and strives to achieve an authentic representation of the past (Weiser 2015, 280). As has been shown,

Paul Laverty, the screenwriter of *Even the Rain*, altered the original sources for the film. When Antón rehearses the text of Columbus' letter to the Spanish crown, it is not clear to the viewer that this is not a coherent quote but is from different parts of the letter and even from Columbus' log book, amalgamated to stress the intended message critical of profit seeking (*Even the Rain* 2012, 28:49-32:21). The same is true of the sermon by Montesinos which is rehearsed in the church set while still under construction. In this the friar criticizes the conquistadores for exploiting the indigenous population, though the text of the sermon recorded by Las Casas was adapted by Laverty who added some information and omitted a comparison of the colonists to Turks and Moors who would not qualify for salvation (Graf, 2010, 448-450).

Those alterations won't be noticed by most audiences, and thus they enforce the message that the screenwriter and director wanted to communicate to their audience. Nevertheless the use of source material in *Even the Rain* helps the audiences reach a critical perspective: the viewer can observe that the source texts don't stand for themselves, but are invoked and incorporated into a historical narrative. The sources are employed to back the narrative that Sebastian wants to tell in the historical film, and he makes clear that he wants to distance himself from the traditional, more positive image of Columbus as discoverer of the New World. He does so by using familiar material, now rearranged to fit his purposes.

Furthermore, the source texts are used as testifying arguments by the actors for certain perceptions about their roles. In a scene from the fictive making-of documentary María interviews Juan and Alberto, who play the friars Las Casas and Montesinos. Juan describes the historical figure he impersonates empathically and praises him as a father of international law. To back up his argument he refers to a statement that, according to him, the friar made on his deathbed (*Even the Rain* 2012, 15:43-16:51). By presenting this statement as a quotation, the actor gives credibility to his description of Las Casas. Juan's use of source material as the basis for his argument is similar to the historian's practice, with the difference that his assessment of the source material will not be presented in a written account but generates together with the film script the basis of his audio-visual representation of the historical figure.

While the use of source material is not challenged in this scene, it is shortly afterwards. In a dinner scene members of the cast engage in a heated debate about the historical facts and how to interpret them. The trigger for this discussion are Alberto and María who express interest in the Quechua waiters by asking them for translations of words like 'water'. Antón criticises this as hypocritical and follows up with a critique of omissions in the historical film.

Antón: 'Nothing like getting into character. God bless you, Father. Why don't you fill a plastic bag with the leftovers from this meal, which costs more than what they earn in a month, and give it to them, so their

scrawny children can gobble it up like starving rodents! Then you'll feel like a real missionary.'

María: 'Antón, relax. It's Saturday night.'

Antón: 'How long will you remember that "water" is yaku?'

Alberto gives him the finger.

Antón: 'That's not very pious, Father, but the director will cut it out, along with other important details. For example, the fact that Las Casas wanted black slaves from Africa to replace the Indians. Why not put that in the film?'

Costa: 'Don't let him needle you.'

Sebastian: 'No, no, no, but – but, no, it's true, it's true. He did think that when he was young, but for a very short time. He always regretted it.'

Antón: 'And his deal with the slave traders?'

Juan: 'A mistake, a disaster that ashamed him.'

Antón: 'Don't lose your marbles, Father.'

Juan: 'I'm not, I'm just informing you. Until his dying breath, Las Casas condemned corrupt bishops, merchants, royal officials ... The whole State hated him.'

Antón: 'They hated him?'

Juan: 'Yes. Listen to me. He said the Indians had been sacrificed, and I quote, "for private appetites and profits". 500 years ago. Then cynics like you try to reduce his life to one mistake.'

Antón: 'Like in football, history is always cruel to the losers.'

Alberto: 'Just cut them out and make the film about me [Montesinos]! [Pointing to Antón] I'm better-looking, right? More handsome than him.'

Antón: 'He never – Beto. He never questioned Spanish authority over the New World or royal authority. In other words, he was a conservative.'

Juan: 'He was a radical! A radical! He demanded that Indians be treated equally as Spaniards!'

Antón: 'Under the Crown!'

Juan: 'But with the Indians' consent. He was ahead of his time.'

[...]

Antón: 'You have an agenda. You sanctify this pair of bastards and string me [Columbus] up! This isn't art. It's pure propaganda.'

[The argument ends with some casual remarks] (*Even the Rain* 2012, 18:39-21:56)

In this scene the audience can observe that the ideological judgement of whether the historical figure Las Casas was conservative or progressive is a matter of perspective, a historical perspective rooted in the contemporary that shapes any historical text (White 1973, 22), no matter if written or visual. In the end, Antón exposes Sebastian's attempt to counteract the dominant heroic narrative by emphasising Las Casas and Montesinos as positive historical figures in opposition to Columbus as villain. This sort of discussion underlines that history isn't fixed. There is no authentic representation of the past, but a narrative about it that is ultimately the result of various discourses in play. In this scene, *Even the Rain* most notably refers to the historiographical context in which the film about Columbus and the colonisation of the Americas is located, and to its own production context. It also exposes a flaw of the historical film that would omit the ambivalence of the figure highlighted in this discussion. In the context of *Even the Rain* it is the effect of the collaboration between screenwriter and historian that enables the plot composition which allows the additional discursive layer to become visible in this scene. The idea for the film originated in the contact between Paul Laverty and Howard Zinn who asked the screenwriter to transform the first chapter of his book *A People's History of the United States* into a script. In this chapter Zinn aimed to write the conquest of the 'New World' from the perspective of the conquered people. He outlines his position as follows:

My point is not that we must, in telling history, accuse, judge, condemn Columbus *in absentia*. It is too late for that; it would be a useless scholarly exercise in morality. [...] The treatment of heroes (Columbus) and their victims (the Arawak) – the quite acceptance of conquest and murder in the name of progress – is only one aspect of a certain approach to history, in which the past is told from the point of view of governments, conquerors, diplomats, leaders. [...] Thus, in that inevitable taking of sides which comes from selection and emphasis in history, I prefer to try to tell the story of the discovery of America from the viewpoint of the Arawaks, of the Constitution from the standpoint of the slaves, of Andrew Jackson as seen by the Cherokees, of the Civil War as seen by the New York Irish, of the Mexican war as seen by the deserting soldiers of Scott's army, of the rise of industrialism as seen by the young women in the Lowell textile mills, of the Spanish-American war as seen by the Cubans, the conquest of the Philippines as seen by the black soldiers on Luzon, the Gilded Age as seen by southern farmers, the First World War as seen by socialists, the Second World War as seen by pacifists, the New Deal as seen by the blacks in Harlem, the postwar American empire as seen by peons in Latin America. (Zinn 1999, 9-10)

While this film project never left the stage of the script, the ultimate idea of a film critical of Columbus and the Spanish conquest survived the many reworks of the script until finally arriving as the historical film that *Even the Rain* presents to its audience (Laverty 2011, 9-11; Graf 2013; 446). Sebastian's statements about the aim of his film project definitely echo Zinn's motivation behind

his historiographical monograph. And in reverse, his failure to live up to the high moral aims of his film project cautions against the extent to which such a moral and ideological standpoint can be met. Since Sebastian acts as cinematic historian he opens both roles – the director and the historian – up for critical evaluation by the viewer. It becomes transparent to the audience to which extent the ideological position shapes the pursued narrative, while sources are repeatedly employed to lend credibility to it. Thus, the connection between the level of historical fact or referent and the level of interpretation becomes visible (Goertz 2001, 39-40).

Beside this general relationship between the perspectives of Zinn and Sebastian and the implications that follow from this, there is a connection on the level of the assessment of single historical facts. The characterisation of Las Casas also follows the emphasis set in *A People's History of the United States* (Zinn 1999, 6). This assessment of the Dominican friar is shared by other monographs as well. Even if the film is the result of many alterations to the initial project, the connection of *Even the Rain* to Zinn, who died before it was finished, is underscored by the dedication to him in the opening credits.

To be clear, this discussion of the historical narrative of the film within the film that takes place in the scene described above remains at a modest level. *Even the Rain* addresses the matter of narrative on a lower level: the evaluation of Las Casas and Montesinos is under discussion at the film crew's table. The 'facts' are clear, the documents exist and aren't disputed by anyone. Though there still seems to remain much to discuss, which relates to the question of which story to tell about Las Casas. Condemnation of his position on slavery from a modern ethical perspective is as possible a narrative as it is to stress his later change of position. Thus, in the context of the first storyline of the film the ideological background of the narrative decisions becomes visible to the audience. The decision to present Las Casas as moral champion in contrast to Columbus who represents all the atrocities of colonialism is a direct effect of Sebastian's criticism of colonialism and neo-colonialism. The strength of *Even the Rain* is that it doesn't stick to a dramatization of the well-known proverb 'History is written by the victors' with post-colonial agents ultimately winning in the struggle over the narrative of the European colonisation of America. The discussion about Las Casas contains more complexity, in a film clearly conceptualised as entertainment. *Even the Rain*, therefore, makes it possible for the viewer to assess the decisions and positions that shape a narrative and can use this knowledge to evaluate further narratives, no matter if presented in conventional historical films or in a history book. This is especially important since a critical position to historical films already exists in large parts of the audience, but relates more to the financial context of production and fosters an awareness that historical 'facts' could be altered in favour of the entertainment purposes of the film (Bisson 2014, 145-146). Thus, *Even the Rain* can enhance the viewer's perspective on historical representation.

Communicating narrativity and historiophoty to a broader audience

This modest approach to present the underlying discourses that shape every historical narrative is central to achieving the goal of introducing a broader audience to this discussion and raising a critical awareness about historical narratives.

This quality becomes even clearer in comparison to experimental films. A good example is the 2013 Mexican-Danish co-production *Killing Strangers*. This film about the representation of the Mexican revolution blurs the border between fictional and documentary. It contrasts a casting situation with sequences of three Mexican revolutionaries passing through the countryside. In the casting process the amateur actors receive directions through an earpiece and have to act them out. For example, one is ordered to play a dying revolutionary and throws his upper body backwards, imitating the character of Neo in *The Matrix* in 'bullet time' (*Killing Strangers* 2013, 39:48-40:04; *The Matrix* 2005, 1:42:06-1:42:38). This stance also resembles the famous photograph 'The falling soldier' (also entitled 'Loyalist militiaman at the moment of death, Cerro Muriano, September 5, 1936') by Robert Capa, taken during the Spanish Civil War. These shared visual images illustrate convincingly that if there is no authentic image of the death of a fighter in the Mexican revolution, an iconic scene from *The Matrix* with no connection to any historic situation and an iconic photograph from an entirely different context can determine the imaginary construction of one. Additionally, the sequences of the three revolutionaries passing through the countryside break with popular expectations of historical representation: No battles or revolutionary turmoil are depicted but a time in which not much is happening, especially nothing that would be emblematic for this revolution. In the Question & Answer session after the screening at the Berlinale 2013 the directors Nicolás Pereda and Jacob Secher Schulsinger stated that this breaking with conventional ideas about the Mexican revolution was intended to pose a counter-narrative to the official celebratory narratives by the Mexican government during the celebration of its 100th anniversary in 2010. The many questions by the audience indicated that there was a need for further engagement and clarification caused by the experimental character of the film that complicated its consumption and understanding. While *Killing Strangers* makes the reshaping of historical events by popular motives and ideas visible and counteracts the idealization of the revolutionary events, it lacks popular appeal. Outside film festivals not many people will have seen it, thus it will not have much impact on raising awareness of those matters of historical narrative.

In contrast, *Even the Rain* aims for popularity by fulfilling the conventional expectations of a historical drama film. The contemporary history storyline offers a moment of catharsis for the characters. The climax of the plot culminates around the Cochabamba Water War in which the indigenous main actor is involved as a leader of the protest. The civil unrest exposes the true characters of

the two main members of the film team. While Sebastian gives up his social engagement for the indigenous cause and puts his film first, the producer Costa who, up to that point, had appeared as a cynical, profit-orientated person decides to rescue Daniel's daughter from the conflict zone. In the final scene Daniel meets Costa in the storage hall of the film production and he gives him a bottle of water.

This ending follows more conventional ideas of the drama film and was criticized for its 'Hollywood' likeness (Hornaday 2011). However, this shouldn't obscure the fact that the film does not fit the category of the conventional historical drama despite playing very well with viewers. If judged on the basis of Rosenstone's three categories for historical films – 'history as drama, history as document, and history as experiment' (Rosenstone 2001, 52) – *Even the Rain* unites the first and third category. Bollaín and Laverty try to balance the popular appeal of the historical drama, the most common cinematic assessment of history, with the critical evaluation of cinematic representational strategies and opposition to mainstream Hollywood films that experimental cinematic approaches encompass. In doing so the message of the film can be more easily decoded than those of postmodern classics frequently referenced in academic publications on historical film, for example the 1987 production *Walker* (Rosenstone 2001, 53). This tells the story of William Walker who intervened with a troop of US mercenaries in the Nicaraguan civil war of 1856 and 1857 and became one of the presidents of the country. In the film Walker flees with his troops into a church. When they leave it, a modern American military helicopter is landing on the square in front of the church and US marines come to rescue American citizens (*Walker* 2003, 1:21:37-1:23:46). This move thus clearly establishes a parallel between Walker's illegitimate intervention in the mid of the nineteenth century and the politics of Ronald Reagan who supported the war against the Contras in Nicaragua in the 1980s. While at the time of its production the interwoven historical layers were relatively accessible because they referred to contemporary politics, it now might be much harder for a viewer to understand the intended meaning of the anachronistic helicopter landing in a historical film about the nineteenth century. Since no empirical research exists on this film, we should assume that a viewer without specific knowledge of the film's historical context could consider *Walker* as a very broad critique on interventionism or be completely puzzled by its final anachronism in a conventional historical narrative. In contrast, *Even the Rain* is more obvious about its intended meaning and spells it out to the viewer, therefore it is more likely that its message will be received. It does this without making the film a shallow propagation tool.

The combination of modes in *Even the Rain* leads to the juxtaposition of sequences from the historical film that convey an epic quality with sequences that show their production. This ambivalence makes it possible for the viewer

to reflect on the media representation of history: while historiography – no matter how colourfully the historian describes the past – relies entirely on the writing, film possesses an additional layer that encompasses objects, spaces, and people. In this sense *Even the Rain* is a fictional film that resembles the reflexive mode of documentary (Ward 2005, 19), because its subject is less the past but the representation of the past. In this respect, the film addresses the critique that historiophoty – ‘the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse’ (White 1988, 1193) – lacks the ability to represent the debates of the historical discipline. The different plot lines allow such debate to take place, as the dinner discussion illustrates, leading to an internal layer of analyses. *Even the Rain* has the capacity to show how to raise awareness about those historiographical and audio-visual discourses that shape historical narratives among viewers who normally don’t engage on a deeper level with the films they consume. This knowledge can then be applied to other films. The use of the script and film for teaching, even if other topics addressed in *Even the Rain* might be the main focus, ensure that this film can shape a critical understanding of those representations (Mai 2015).

Critical attention about historiophoty is also raised in relation to the images themselves. While it certainly is true that film has the capacity to represent certain phenomena like emotions, scene, landscape or complex events like battles better than a written account, especially in regard to historical phenomena, it easily can be misleading (White 1988, 1193). In *Even the Rain* this issue is exposed in the context of the making-of documentary shot by María. While Costa drives her and Sebastian to a location in the Bolivian mountains, she points her camera at the director and asks why they shot the Columbus film there and not in the Caribbean. The following discussion reveals that financial interests and not the most authentic location determined where the film would be shot. It is pointed out that the indigenous actors cast for Sebastian’s film speak Quechua and not the language of the Taíno, whom Columbus actually encountered. Thus, it becomes obvious that the authentic feeling in the sequences of the historical film is misleading. Their landscape isn’t that of the island on which Columbus arrived, and the viewer can’t assess how close the Bolivian mountains relate to it. With regard to the indigenous cast, while on the Greater Antilles distant descendants of the Taíno whom Columbus encountered still exist, the Quechua of Bolivia have no actual relation to the place and events depicted in the historical film. It could be argued that they were as affected by the Spanish conquest and European colonisation of the Americas as were all indigenous populations, but with regard to Sebastian’s ambition to shoot an authentic film and the potential of historiophoty to enable a representation superior to historiography this transposal of peoples appear as an avoidable flaw caused by the economic logic of film production. All this is presented to the viewer in an easily consumable way. Pirker and Rüdiger argue that authenticity itself is a fiction which is necessary for the historical consciousness and the authentic experience can be created in

forms of re-enactments which encompass films as well (Pirker & Rüdiger 2010, 13-17). I believe that *Even the Rain* can help to establish a critical awareness of the problems that arise in this context for people whom the historiographical and philosophical discourses on this issue do not reach. Ideally such viewings would lead to a critical engagement with authenticity discourses.

Conclusion

As has been shown, *Even the Rain* operates on two levels that problematise historical narrative for the film audience. First, the film addresses the production of a visual historical narrative and the problems of historiophoty. From the script to scenes that invoke the epic quality of the film in film, the different stages of the creation of a (historical) film become visible. Since *Even the Rain* as a whole is about the making of a historical film that additionally encompasses a making-of documentary that follows the work of the actors playing cast and crew, the production process is revealed to viewers who are normally not confronted with this in such a direct manner. In *Even the Rain* the audience is presented with a juxtaposition of film sequences that normally would satisfy expectations of an authentic historical film, and their critical evaluation is invited, thus aiding a critical reception.

This already points to the critical assessment of historiophoty. While this term does not belong to common knowledge, the viewers of historical films certainly know about its effects. *Mise-en-scène* and actors create a historical representation that gives the impression of authenticity. The sequences of the historical film definitely fulfil the expectation in this respect. However, how authentic can be the depiction be of the arrival of Columbus and the conquest of the Caribbean in the Bolivian mountains? And how authentic is it really to let the indigenous actors speak in their own language of Quechua, and not Taíno, the language of the people whom Columbus actually met? Those points become flaws in the film project, the subject of *Even the Rain*, because Sebastian the director often refers to authenticity as the goal of his work. On a more general level the confrontation of the viewers with the problematic nature of the authentic representation of historical events in film offers the possibility that they will respond to other (visual) narratives with more caution. The use of *Even the Rain* in educational contexts can strengthen this effect.

Second, the plot structure of *Even the Rain* exposes a further discursive layer that functions as an internal commentary on the narrative. In the discussed dinner scene the argument points to a broader issue of historiography. While historians work with the same body of historical facts and sources, increased by new findings, those referents can be employed in very different narratives, and depend on the moral and ideological position of the historian which guides the focus of their account. Since Sebastian acts as cinematic historian he communicates issues from the historical field to the audience that normally would remain

more or less exclusive to the scientific community. At the same time these scenes function in the unusual plot structure as a self-critical device.

In closing, *Even the Rain* addresses in a conventional film drama the production of historical narrative and the problematic quest for the authentic, central points of discussion in the fields of history, literary sciences, and philosophy. To do so, it reduces the complexity of discussion while it employs a complex plot structure in relation to the experimental film. Thus, it adds a discursive layer to the film that allows for a critical assessment of its subject: the production of historical fiction. By doing so, the fiction is made visible to viewers who normally are subject to the absorbing quality of historical films and don't experience analytical distance. For this reason *Even the Rain* is an outstanding example of how to communicate the central role of narration for discourses about history – both historiographical and cinematic – to a broader audience.

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