
Media Crises in Political Process: Peter Watkins' "La commune - Paris 1871"

Amandine Turri Hoelken*†¹

¹Dynamiques Européennes (DYNAME) – université de Strasbourg, CNRS : UMR7367 – 4 rue Blaise Pascal CS 90032 67081 Strasbourg cedex, France

Abstract

In my paper, I would like to draw a parallel between the book "Media Crises" of Peter Watkins (2015) and his documentary "La Commune - Paris 1871"*. My goal is to show in that is dialogical approach has political implications both socially (democratic) and aesthetically (in a protest against monoform).

In his documentaries Peter Watkins develops processes which are characterized by continuous involvement of actors (who are both social actors and cinematographic actors) before (research), during (realization) and after (debates) the documentary. At the same time, he's looking for aesthetic forms which create meanings together with the content. All this process is achieved with the aim of building a thick description - to use the terminology of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz - about the subject of his documentaries and also about the construction of images by the media.

For Peter Watkins, only a creative and democratic relationship with the public can create news forms and processes in documentaries (and the media). It means developing non-hierarchical forms with the public.

In his approach He also develops a critical approach of mass media and aesthetic forms (monoform) in which he wishes to free the public of its "entertainment syndrome".

His involvement has led to censorship, both on a political level (his fiction documentary "The War Game" has been censored by the British parliament for 20 years) and on the level of the media (his documentaries are not broadcast on mass media because they do not follow the aesthetic codes of entertainment - length, data processing...) although he's a very famous film-maker

I'll illustrate these ideas through his reconstitution documentary "La Commune - Paris 1871"*, made in 1999, with 200 actors (who are both social actors and cinematographic actors), documentary which tells the forgotten history of the Commune during 345 minutes, and which had the great honor of being showed in 2006 (after being reduced to 210 minutes) once a month at 9h15 in a suburban Parisian cinema.

* Link to watch "La commune - Paris, 1871" (I cannot upload the files in "File(s)"): Part one & two : <https://archive.org/details/COMMUNE.Paris1871.PeterWATKINS>

*Speaker

†Corresponding author: amandine.hoelken@gmail.com

Keywords: dialogy, collaboration, Peter Watkins, documentary, aesthetic, thick description, democracy, censorship