



# My Octopus Teacher: Learning to overcome the pandemic with an octopus

*My Octopus Teacher: Aprendiendo de un pulpo para superar una pandemia*

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the documentary *My Octopus Teacher (MOT)* from the point of view of viewer engagement with the protagonist in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. It uses a comprehensive definition of the concept of engagement, including variables related to the plot and the story's receiver. The documentary's content is analyzed by applying the theoretical categories proper to the concept of character engagement. *MOT* functions as a story of empowerment for viewers

suffering from loneliness and a lack of socialization due to the pandemic and its effects.

**Keywords:** Octopus, engagement, plot, documentary, Covid-19.

# RESUMEN

*Este artículo pretende analizar el documental *My Octopus Teacher* (MOT) desde el punto de vista del engagement del espectador con el protagonista en el contexto de la pandemia de la Covid-19. Se recurre a una definición integral del concepto de engagement incluyendo variables relacionadas con la trama y el receptor del relato. Se analiza el contenido del documental aplicando las categorías teóricas*

*del concepto de character engagement. MOT puede funcionar como un relato de empoderamiento para el espectador que ha sufrido la soledad y falta de sociabilidad que ha producido la pandemia y sus efectos.*

**Keywords:** Pulpo, engagement, relato, documentary, Covid-19.

## INTRODUCTION

For approximately two years and beginning in March 2020, something extraordinary impacted society's daily life. The coronavirus pandemic forced millions of people to stay in their homes and to more or less renounce something as human as sociability. Simultaneously, and perhaps for the first time in history, many people felt consciously united with the rest of the planet due to a narrative that was constructed as the virus spread and doubts were raised about its potential harm and the hope for vaccines. Like the 9/11 attacks or the 2008 global economic crisis, this pandemic confirmed that history did not end with the twentieth century (Fukuyama, 1993) and that, once again, the modern metaphor of the ark applies, i.e., the ship on which we are all traveling and to which we all entrust our fate (Sloterdijk, 1994). Although all of humanity may be in the same boat, it would be naïve to think that the voyage is similar for all in terms of social class, ethnicity, gender, nationality, etc. Kimberlé Crenshaw (2017) referred to these social constructs as intersectionalities (2017) and associated them with privilege and discrimination. We are all in the same boat, but if it is shipwrecked, there will not be lifeboats for everyone, there will be boats of different quality, and there will even be social classes within those boats.

During the height of Covid-19 confinement, videos appeared on the web showing how life barely changed for some confined to their lifeboats, while others had to learn to live in modest conditions and unwelcome loneliness; all they could do was rely on stories of experience and resilience. We had few historical references to pandemics relating experiences and stories to help people cope with this new phase. Stories about the 1918 pandemic, which happened more than a century ago, were invoked in the media. In Spain, a news program opened with photos from a Twitter user's feed comparing the two eras.<sup>1</sup> With no living subjects to give an account of the last great pandemic, references were only available in audiovisual accounts. And although a few pieces of fiction on the subject existed (such as *Contagion*, 2011), people needed to turn to narratives that, metaphorically, served to trigger attitudes and beliefs that could help "navigate" this event's unprecedented waves. This article focuses on one such narrative, namely *My Octopus Teacher* (Ehrlich and Reed, 2020).

None of those involved in the production of the documentary *My Octopus Teacher* (hereafter *MOT*),

<sup>1</sup> Online resource: <https://twitter.com/latinapaterson/status/1241559073797128192>. Visited on March 23, 2022.

winner of the 2021 PGA (Producers Guild Awards), BAFTA, and an Academy Award, seemed to expect the success that they achieved. *MOT* explores the unlikely relationship between Craig Foster, an audiovisual creator in the midst of a personal crisis, and a female octopus, telling a story of love and redemption. This tale clearly reveals an encounter with an unknown “other” that has another mind and lives in an environment that is at some turns idyllic and at others hostile and complicated; this mind lives mostly in solitude but is capable of intelligent behavior and can even express sociability with other species. The protagonists inspire connection, engagement, and projection in viewers.

The film is capable of generating a polysemy of varied readings. It could belong to the sub-genre of buddy films, while it is also an excellent documentary about the environment and its preservation. Furthermore, it appears to appeal to both adult and child audiences, as well as is a confessional story about resilience during personal crisis. It depicts a stage of anagnorisis in the course of Craig Foster’s life; he can go no further and needs to take stock of and search out his origins. His state can be said to be similar to what the pandemic produced in millions of individuals. In fact, the extraordinary slowdown of daily life pushed many to leave their jobs (the Great Resignation) or their relationships and rethink their lives. This documentary uses both reflexive and performative cinematic modes (Nichols, 2010).

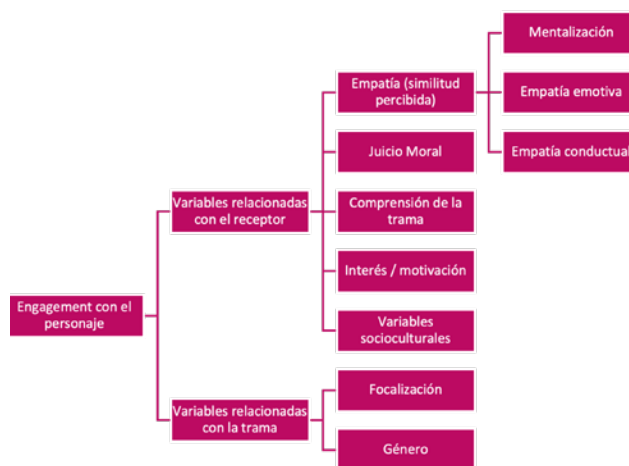
The performative mode is obvious in the way the documentary offers an experience, knowledge, emotional intensity, and subjectivity embodied in a real protagonist (Craig Foster) (Ross, 2021). Thus, the documentary stimulates reflection and action in the viewer in a critical period.

## VIEWER ENGAGEMENT WITH THE VIEWER

Engagement has been described in different ways, such as identification, involvement, commitment, or captivation. Balint and Kovács’ (2010) review of character engagement points out that there are two main factors that explain this phenomenon, namely, narra-

tive procedures and sociocultural variables. In other words, one variable is associated with the text and the other with the receiving subject. Within the textual variable, these researchers consider internal and external focalization to be one of the many variables that can account for narrative procedures (Genette, 1972; Jost and Gaudreault, 1995). In fact, they conduct their experiment by telling the same story with focalization as the independent variable and engagement as the dependent variable. Balint and Kovács consider narrative procedures generally. Of course, focalization is an essential element for understanding engagement, but there are others, such as genre.

Figure 1. Engaging with a character



Source: Author’s elaboration based on Bálint and Kovács (2010).

Establishing causal relationships and connecting independent and dependent variables in the study of engagement is undeniably difficult. Thus, this analysis points out variables related to the plot and to the receiver where there is a clear correlation, but deciding on which is the cause and which is the effect in the engagement process is still difficult (Figure 1).

Regarding the receiver, empathy (in its cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions), moral judgment, understanding of the plot, the receiver's interest or motivation, and the socio-cultural variables associated with the context of reception are important. Among plot-related variables, focalization (internal or external) and the film or television genre have been considered.

## EVOLUTION AND CONTINUITY OF THE NARRATIVE PLOT

In recent times, researchers and philosophers have taken a special interest in several species whose capacities were previously considered far removed from those of humans but are now understood differently, especially from the point of view of possessing subjectivity and consciousness (Godfried-Smith, 2016). Octopuses stand out in this category. This turn can be traced back to psychologist and philosopher William James' evolutionary perspective. At the end of the nineteenth century, he was one of the first thinkers to ask how consciousness emerges in our universe. According to James, the answer must respect the principle of continuity to explain the transitions between species and the appearance of new phylogenetic traits. Affirming that body-mind-environment are realities that have emerged dialectically requires sustaining the axiom that there is biological continuity between body and mind, and between both of these and the environment in which they appear. As William James pointed out in *The Principles of Psychology* (1950):

The demand for continuity has, over large tracts of science, proved itself to possess true prophetic power. We ought therefore ourselves sincerely to try every possible mode of conceiving the dawn of consciousness so that it may not appear equivalent to the irruption into the universe of a new nature, non-existent until then.

This principle of continuity also explains the genesis of the documentary analyzed here. The evolutionary perspective applied to understanding the intricate phylogenetic path of mind and consciousness is

mirrored briefly in the creation of its plot. There is continuity in this complex work's production layers.

Figure 2. Foster discovers the octopus in the kelp forest



Source: Frames from the documentary *My Octopus Teacher* (2020).

According to the documentary's producer, Swati Thiyagarajan (2021), Craig Foster was filming on his own for years in a kelp forest on the West Coast of South Africa. On one such occasion, he came across an octopus and became curious about its way of life (Figure 2). Roger Horrocks, another cameraman and one of Craig's friends, recognized that Craig's encounters with the octopus had potential as a story. Together, they spent hours filming a sequence for BBC's *Blue Planet II*, joined at the end by Pippa Ehrlich, journalist and marine ecology specialist. Craig suggested that Pippa turn the footage into a documentary, and she accompanied him on his kelp forest dives almost daily for six months.

Thiyagarajan notes that, by the time the documentary was edited, the octopus, whose life expectancy is no more than a year and a half, had already died. They had hundreds of hours of underwater footage

with the octopus, but it had to be structured into a story that could be told. With the help of marine biologists and octopus ethologists, Craig Foster enthusiastically set about documenting his observations. Foster's power of observation and perseverance were essential for identifying species and documenting animal behavior. In the end, his work aligns with posthumanist ethnography (Ross, 2021; Braidotti, 2016).

The documentary required Craig Foster to create a working methodology to track and film the octopus's behavior in a shallow aquatic environment where one must avoid scaring the animals in order to film them. Craig went without complex diving and filming equipment, using neither a wetsuit nor an oxygen tank. He had to adapt to cold water for several months. In a sense, he had to encounter the octopus by accepting its conditions. However, many of the scenes did require filming with powerful equipment, a RED Dragon operated by Roger Horrocks. Besides this footage, months were dedicated to shooting additional footage, master shots of the kelp forest or scenes focused on Craig, shot by Pippa and Tom Foster (Craig's son), who captured the scenes with a drone.

Deciding how to combine the different story threads, the plots that were to come together in the final story, was difficult. Pippa Ehrlich, Craig Foster, and Swati Thiyagarajan debated the discourse and, above all, the starting point. There were several options to start with, including Craig's childhood in the natural environment of the kelp forest and his experience in the Kalahari with the native San people. The team had to decide which characters to include in the storyline and which point of view to adopt.

The first version took a year to edit and proved to be too complex and inaccessible for a wider audience. There were many details and an excessively complex frame of reference for viewers unfamiliar with the natural environment. The producers instead sought to engage viewers with impressions of a deep connection to nature, spiritual awakening, and redemption through nature. However, the message could not be too overt. A more militant and conservationist perspective was therefore discarded by eliminating possible episodes about octopus fishing and whaling, which also occurred

while filming. Pippa Ehrlich insisted on maintaining the ecological theme as a backdrop, as Syd Field (1994) recommended when talking about Chinatown. In short, the theme had to emerge naturally for the viewer through the narrative.

Another problem arose when it came to choosing the characters that would appear in the final discourse. An initial test, which included other characters, diluted the story and arguable clouded the focus. It was decided that the only human character who would appear alongside Craig would be his son Tom, because of Tom's connection with the protagonist's concerns, i.e., being a good father while also suffering from depression. Tom grew up during the project, and his involvement increased toward the story's end.

Other essential issues included the voice and point of view to be used. From the beginning, the team was aware that nature documentaries conventionally add a voice-over to interpret the image. They chose to use Craig's voice, but debated whether Craig should appear in on-screen interviews or only in the underwater footage. His previous documentaries explored the human connection with wild nature, but at no point had he become the central subject of the discourse, which was told "objectively" through the camera's lens. Yet, being accessible to the general public meant having a natural on-screen protagonist with whom to identify or project onto. Although they eventually went in this direction, it was a difficult decision because Craig was not used to being the focus of the story and, just as he had to get used to cold water, he also had to adapt to thinking of himself as the embodied agent of the discourse.

Pippa Ehrlich took it upon herself to interview him, but the interview did not work out as planned. Perhaps Pippa knew the story too well and had become so involved that the staging of someone recounting his extraordinary experience could not be reflected opposite her. They thought of an alternative approach involving voice-over and shots of Craig underwater, with no shots of him talking directly to the camera. That option was discarded because it failed to convey the emotion and authenticity required. The narrative needed an interview, but with an uninformed "objective eye" to vicariously play the role of what is understood in narratolo-

gy as the narrator or, in other words, to be the receiver within the discourse.

During the filming process, an Amsterdam-based production company that had previously worked with Craig (Off the Fence Productions) joined the project. Ellen Windemuth, its founder, became executive producer and contacted James Reed, a well-known director, who took charge of the in-depth interview with Craig, which lasted three days.

In early 2019, Netflix executive Sara Edelson became involved in the project to provide a worldwide platform. The two executive producers, Sara and Ellen, hired an editor, Jinx Godfrey, to refine the rhythm of the story and add the necessary cadence to the plot. Editing was completed with the involvement of a music composer and the work of a digital color grading expert so that footage from twenty different cameras provided the same color gradient.

## METHODOLOGY

This article analyzes *My Octopus Teacher* because it presents an opportunity to examine the viewer's character engagement with the documentary's protagonists and the relationship established between them in the historical and social context of a pandemic. This relationship also reveals the phenomenon of human resilience at a time when life's aims disappear and everything has to be rethought.

This case study also seemed ideal because the confessional interview style resembles a diary and points to a dual function related to the concept of engagement. On the one hand, it serves to anchor Foster to his surrounding reality and his own self. The protagonist narrates his experience through voice-over and an interview. On the other hand, it also functions as a rhetorical resource to involve the viewer and produce the previously mentioned character engagement.

A segmentation was carried out and an analysis of possible viewer engagement with the protagonists was conducted, applying a reception model from Balint and Kovács (2010), but modified (as noted above in Figure 1). Balint and Kovács's same experimental design was not used, rather, the approach was limited to

exploring possible viewer engagement with *MOT*. We also reviewed the pertinent genres (interview, testimony, action film, nature documentary, buddy film). Interestingly, the interview allows for the construction of the protagonist's identity in a crisis situation. Another part addresses diaries as a means of identity construction. Here, the same is done with the interview.

## SPECTATOR-HUMAN-OCTOPUS ENGAGEMENT

The results are discussed following the above engagement mapping (Figure 1).

### Mentalization

One way of increasing empathy involves mentalization, or the viewer's ability to read the character's thoughts. Craig Foster's voice in the interview and his voice-over narration provide an empathetic resource because they offer direct access to Foster's thoughts.

In his book *Other Minds*, Godfrey-Smith (2016) described Hume's attempt to observe consciousness like someone trying to connect with an octopus from the deep. Hume's experience leads him to confess that, upon observing its consciousness, it only beholds objects that appear and disappear. Godfrey-Smith attributes this to Hume's having a Newtonian view of consciousness; he wanted to describe a kind of mechanical consciousness in which objects resemble those in external reality, full of forces and attractions. But Godfrey-Smith points out that Hume surely overlooked, or refused to see, that consciousness is also an inner dialogue (Kross, 2021). Reading the minds of others involves imagining their inner dialogue. There are many examples in this documentary in which the protagonist imagines the octopus's inner dialogue, with phrases like "By far the most powerful is when it comes out the den because that's when you know there's full trust. There's no holding the arms back just in case I have to pull back. It's like, 'I totally trust this human and I'm coming out of the den, and I'm gonna go about my business' ". Generally, the protagonist goes through the adventure of metaphorically immersing himself in the mind of the octopus: "What goes through her mind? What's

she thinking? Does she dream? If she dreams, what does she dream about? She just ignited my curiosity in a way that I had not experience before?" (Ehrlich and Reed, 2020).

Surrounded by starfish that want to steal its food, Foster notes that "not that long in the future, she's thought, "Okay, brittle stars are stealing my food", and has this amazing method of just picking them up with her suckers and gently just throwing them out of the den. Now she's completely the boss." (Ehrlich and Reed, 2020). Again, Foster discerns a consciousness in the animal by imagining its inner dialogue.

### Empathy: The octopus as a mirror

Viewers are quite likely to feel empathy for the human protagonist, seeing him as helpless and exposed to the metaphorical swell of existence and to the cold of the sea in which he dives and learns to acclimate his body to low temperatures.

Empathy with the octopus also takes place, which the protagonist himself encourages from the beginning when he points out that he will not approach the octopus as an alien, but rather seeks to understand its human-like qualities, while also pointing out what humans share with amphibians. From the outset, Craig Foster states that his choice not to use diving equipment or large cameras has to do with a respectful approach and methodology. As an ethnographer who adopts an insider or emic perspective in the community, Foster attempts to adapt to the octopus's environment. It is obvious that, to tell the story he wants to tell, he must be a subject with whom the viewer can engage. Doing without scuba gear serves that purpose, both symbolically and realistically.

The audience perceives some similarity between the protagonist and his target, just as Hoffner and Buchannan (2005) describe the essential aspect of engagement. The protagonist is presented as naked and defenseless, in the same way that he describes the octopus as a fragile animal that, in its evolution, lost its shell.

We empathize with the octopus when it falls victim to catfish attacks. However, when it devours crabs

and lobsters, it is presented as an intelligent being that manages to cope in a complicated environment (therefore, its victims do not inspire sympathy). The same intelligence is highlighted when it climbs on a catfish's back, thus avoiding it. This maneuvering is tied into human capabilities.

Thinking like the octopus and carrying out an ethological study of its habits allows viewers to understand some of the enigmas that arise, for example, the fact that it creates a shield by covering itself in shells (Figure 3). This appears at the beginning of the documentary and is shown again an hour later to actually explain the enigma.

Figure 3. The octopus protects itself and plays



Source: Frames from the documentary *My Octopus Teacher* (2020).

There are other types of behaviors that encourage the viewer to identify with feelings that we sometimes understand as exclusively human. For example, the octopus plays with fish (Figure 3), a type of social behavior that has no strategic purpose beyond communicating and testing its capabilities.

The climax of emotional empathy comes during mating season. Craig notes that “so while I was very excited that this mating was beginning, there was a sort of... this dread in the bottom of my stomach. She wasn’t coming out of that den. There was no more feeding, no more hunting. A huge part of her body is actually given to those eggs. So she drops in weight, and she loses an enormous amount of strength. She’s just slowly dying and timing her death exactly for the hatching of those eggs” (Ehrlich and Reed, 2020). Craig confesses his feelings in the face of this new twist in the tale: “I mean, it struck home so hard for me. Here’s an invertebrate, essentially a mollusc, sacrificing her own life for her young”. (Ehrlich and Reed, 2020).

Later, they say farewell, and the protagonist again reaches an emotional climax when describing that final moment. “And the next thing I saw, she’s washed out the den, barely alive”. (Figure 4). The emotional journey is not complete until the octopus’s possible offspring appear (Figure 4). “A few months later, after she’d died, he actually found this tiny little octopus. It’s very rare to see an animal that small. They have up to half a million young. A handful survive. So it’s a pretty tough road they have to walk. But that’s their strategy, live fast and die young. We kind of imagined that it might be one of her young. It was a kind of the right size, the right time. And it was joyous. It was like, “Well, there she is”. (Ehrlich and Reed, 2020).

Figure 4. The octopus dies but its young are born



Source: Frames from the documentary *My Octopus Teacher* (2020).

Each moment is underlined by the idea that the protagonist expresses to promote connection between the viewer, nature, and the octopus: “You go into that water... and it’s extremely liberating. You slowly start to care about all the animals. You realize that everyone is very important. To sense how vulnerable these wild animals’ lives are, and actually, then how vulnerable all our lives on this planet are. You are in touch with this wild place, and it’s speaking to you”. (Ehrlich and Reed, 2020).

## VISCERALITY

As Craig Foster unfolds his story, many of his gestures stimulate viewer engagement with him and also, indirectly, with the octopus. Throughout the interview, his gestures are emotionally restrained but, at the same time, very passionate. His expressions produce mimetic reactions in the viewer that are reinforced through contact with the octopus, for example, when he recalls how it played with the fish.

Sometimes this expression of the octopus’ viscerality reaches poetic heights, for example, in the scene in which a catfish chases the octopus for a second time and she escapes. When it manages to get ashore, a gasp is heard, as if it is tired (Figure 5). It is obviously an overlaid human sound, but the octopus is anthropomorphized to connect with the viewer.



Figure 5. The octopus seems human



Source: Frames from the documentary *My Octopus Teacher* (2020).

In the interview's final moments, Craig expresses the heights of his identification with the animal:

Often, I go to the place of her main den. And I just float above it and feel her there. Of course I miss her. But, I mean, in some crazy way, it was a relief because the intensity of going every day and tracking her, and trying to capture, it was... It was tough in a way. I mean, I sort of slept, dreamt... this animal. I was in my mind thinking like an octopus... and it was all so taxing, in a way. But underneath that, this incredible pride for this animal that's been through impossible odds to get to this place. I mean, an unimaginable life. (Ehrlich and Reed, 2020).

Certain highly emotional gestures also influence viewer engagement, for example, when he refers to "the last time we had physical contact". (Figure 5). The viewer observes that Craig has a lump in his throat and bleary eyes.

Throughout the story, several shots of the octopus depict her eyes in such a way that she appears to be looking at the viewer (Figure 6), a visual detail that incites empathy.

Figure 6. Humanization of the octopus



Source: Frames from the documentary *My Octopus Teacher* (2020).

### Moral Judgment: A story of redemption

Despite dealing with the animal world and the fact that the protagonist decides not to interfere in the octopus's life and to respect nature's balance, the documentary itself moralizes about respect for that which is different, strange, and unknown, all that seeks to avoid creating monstrosities (Wright, 2013). The very decision to enter the water without a wetsuit reveals the great respect that the author feels for his object of study. The entire pedagogy he develops is based on reconnecting with himself and his family through his forgotten childhood. As Nicole Ross (2021) points out, this is a kind of

posthuman education by which we understand that we are part of a system and not its owners.

Self-redemption comes with the reward of Craig reconnecting with his son once the octopus dies (Figure 7). “One of the most exciting things ever in my life, taking my son, walking along the shore and just showing him the... the wonders of nature and the details and the intricacies. I had so much energy to give back. And as he gets older, he seems to want to do it more and more. To see that develop, a strong sense of himself... an incredible confidence, but the most important thing, a gentleness. And I think that’s the thing that thousand of hours in nature can teach a child”. (Ehrlich and Reed, 2020). Craig appreciates the meaning of his journey through the underwater world and his relationship with the octopus: “You are in touch with this wild place, and it’s speaking to you. Its language is visible. I fell in love with her, but also with that amazing wildness that she represented and... how that changed me. What she taught me was to feel... that you’re part of this place, not a visitor”. (Ehrlich and Reed, 2020).

Reconnection with society as a form of personal redemption is confirmed by an epilogue showing text juxtaposed over a hawk-eye image, which reads “Craig still dives every day but he no longer swims alone. He co-founded the Sea Change Project, a growing community of divers that is dedicated to the lifelong protection of the kelp forest”. (Ehrlich and Reed, 2020) (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Sea Change Project



Source: Frames from the documentary *My Octopus Teacher* (2020).

### Appealing to genres

*MOT* is an exercise in the complex hybridization of genres that challenge the viewer through the invocation and innovation of those genres’ features. Viewers are likely to feel familiar with some characteristics of this documentary and, at the same time, appreciate the innovations that result from its hybridization. Some of the genres represented in this film include the following:

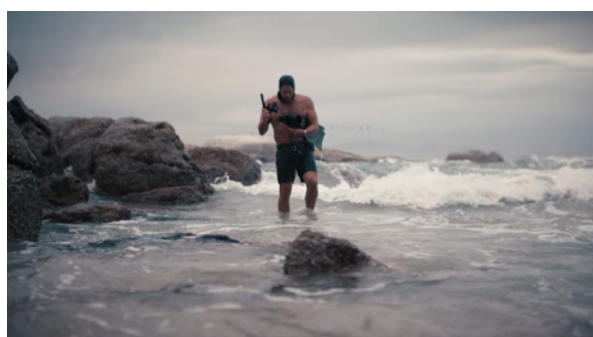
- » Classic nature documentary, along the same lines as Jacques Cousteau’s famous works
- » Romantic drama between two subjects of different species
- » Buddy film
- » Action movie
- » Self-help documentary (despite this term’s poor reputation)

### Internal focalization

To maintain the narrative’s rhythm, many of the out-of-water scenes are presented in slow motion. The interview is the only thing that is not slowed down. Underwater, everything moves slowly; out of the water,

everything slows down. Outside and inside, the continuous visual rhythm is maintained, as if time passes differently, just as Craig subjectively perceives time (Deleuze, 1986). All this is reinforced by the use of music and voice-over.

Figure 8. Time passes differently



Source: Still frames from the documentary *My Octopus Teacher* (2020).

Craig moves slowly, but the octopus can move very fast, especially in the action scenes. These stylistic maneuvers are the result of an internal focalization strategy in the documentary's narrative, a resource far removed from the objectivity of traditional documentaries.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

*MOT* follows a classic restorative structure of order-disorder-reorder (Dancyger and Rush, 2013). The protagonist's regular life is coming to a point of breakdown after two years of depression and disconnection from his social environment. In his testimony, he sets out to regain the connection with nature that he felt as a child and observed in Kalahari's natives when he

himself produced a documentary about them. This is the trigger for the story, which functions as a call to return to the serenity of childhood and to the kelp forest, the privileged setting of his childhood experience.

This documentary is narrated like the journey home of a modern Ulysses. A two-way return, ontogenetic and phylogenetic. Craig Foster embarks on a journey to his childhood origins in search of an authentic connection to his identity. In that journey, his identity is inextricably linked to the kelp forest. Phylogenetically, it can also be seen as a return to life's ancestors to recognize a relative who separated from the human species millions of years ago. That recognition is part of the process in which Foster strives to return to the world that gave birth to life, namely, the sea and the kelp forest. That process starts with an octopus, representing the closest thing to an alien on Earth, which goes through a process of anthropomorphization to the point that the octopus serves as a mirror for Craig and helps him reflect on his place in the world.

As pointed out, this documentary has an impressive ability to construct a world unknown to general audiences and to do so by creating a personal redemption drama. The receiver's interest-motivation as well as sociocultural variables favor engagement and appear in the model presented. In the case of this documentary, sociocultural variables should include the relationship of real or symbolic continuity between content and reality, that is, the power of the story to connect individuals with their community. In this regard, this article closes with the same reflection with which it opened.

Symbolically, *MOT* offers viewers an emancipatory story that may inspire them to share the loneliness and lack of socialization produced by the pandemic and its aftermath. Obviously, in these conclusions, it is important to note that this inspiration is closely related to the possibilities of engagement analyzed above, but, at the same time, these possibilities acquire greater significance in the context of reception, namely, the recent public health crisis. Logically, audiences are more sensitive to the representation of this contact between humans and octopuses and, in general, between humans and their environment. The conditions in which the documentary was presented are a good allegory of the crisis experienced by millions of individuals.

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