

Transnational Genre: Documentary Film

Fall 2013

Wednesdays 2:10-4:00pm (522C, Kent Hall);

Thursdays 4:00-6:00pm (Kress Room, Starr East Asian Library)

Instructor: Shi-Yan Chao

sc3690@columbia.edu; shiyao_chao@yahoo.com

Office Hours: Thursdays 11:30am - 1:30pm (Inter'l Affairs Building, Room 906)

Course Description

This course examines the ideas and practices of documentary film in a transnational framework. It locates documentary traditions in the work by Robert Flaherty and John Grierson, alongside the influence of the Soviet and European avant-gardes. The class zooms in on different modes of documentary filmmaking, particularly the observational and participatory modes (as exemplified by direct cinema and cinema verite, respectively), as well as the reflexive and performative modes. It also addresses the important genres of ethnographic film, drama documentary, and essayist film in the larger documentary category. Special attention will be given to the ways in which particular ethics and politics are imbricated in these varied documentary modes and genres, and how social issues and histories are represented and evoked. The final section of the class will be devoted to Sinophone documentary film, particularly the sociopolitical implications of China's "new documentary film movement" since the 1990s and the commercial success of Taiwan's documentary films in the last decade. Among the films to be discussed are *Nanook of the North* (R. Flaherty, US), *The Man with a Movie Camera* (D. Vertov, USSR), *A Song of Ceylon* (B. Wright, UK/Ceylon), *Chronicle of a Summer* (J. Rouch and E. Morin, France), *Titicut Follies* (F. Wiseman, US), *Two Laws* (C. Strachan and A. Cavadini, Australia), *Sans Soleil* (C. Marker, France), *The Emperor's Army Marches On* (K. Hara, Japan), *Close-up* (A. Kiarostami, Iran), *24 City* (Jia Z., China), and *Gift of Life* (Wu Y., Taiwan).

Course Requirements

- Attendance and participation (25%): Your attendance and participation is expected in each class and you are supposed to come to finish all the readings assigned for the week before you come to class. Active participation is required. Two unexcused absences will automatically cost the students one grade point.
- One short essay (4-5 pages; 25%) Essay question regarding films or assigned readings will be announced two weeks before essay due date.
- Final project presentation and research paper (10-12 pages; 50%): The students will each give a ten minutes presentation related to their research papers during the last four weeks. Research papers are due a week after the last session.

Required Texts:

- Louise Spence and Vinicius Navarro, Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011.
- ALL readings (including further readings) will be posted on Courseworks

Week 1 (9/4) Documentary Traditions (I): Robert Flaherty and John Grierson

Screening: *Nanook of the North* (Robert Flaherty, 1922, US)

Drifters (John Grierson, 1929, UK)

A Song of Ceylon (Basil Wright, 1934, UK/Ceylon)

Night Mail (Harry Watt and Basil Wright, 1936, UK)

Week 2 (9/11) Documentary Traditions (II): The Soviet and European Avant-Garde Influence

Screening: *The Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929, USSR)

Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis (Walter Ruttmann, 1927, Germany)

Land without Bread (Luis Bunuel, 1933, Spain)

Rain (Joris Ivens, 1929, Netherlands)

Readings: Bill Nichols, "How Can We Define Documentary Film?" Introduction to Documentary. Second Edition. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010. 1-41, esp. 6-20.

Keith Beattie, "Men with Movie Cameras: Flaherty and Grierson." Documentary Screens: Nonfiction Film and Television. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 26-43.

Seth Feldman, "Peace between Man and Machine: Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera*." In Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski (Eds.), Documenting the Documentary. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998. 40-54.

Vivian Sobchack, "Synthetic Vision: The Dialectical Imperative of Luis Bunuel's *Las Hurdes*." In Barry Keith Grant *et al*, Documenting the Documentary. 70-82.

Further readings:

Richard M. Barsam, "The Beginnings of the Documentary Film." Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History. Revised and expanded edition. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992. 65-86.

John Grierson, "First Principles." In Forsyth Hardy (Ed.), Grierson on Documentary. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1966.

Fatimah Tobing Rony, "Taxidermy and Romantic Ethnography." The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996. 99-126.

Week 3 (9/18) Cinema Verite and Direct Cinema (I)

Screening: *Chronicle of a Summer* (Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, 1961, France)

Readings: Keith Beattie, "The Truth of the Matter: Cinema Verite and Direct Cinema." Documentary Screens: Nonfiction Film and Television. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 83-104.

Michael Chanan, "Truth Games: Cinema Verite and Direct Cinema." The Politics of Documentary. London: BFI, 2007. 166-183.

William Rothman, "*Chronicle of a Summer*." Documentary Film Classics. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 69-108.

Louise Spence and Vinicius Navarro, "Camerawork." Crafting Truth:

Documentary Form and Meaning. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011. 187-212.

Week 4 (9/25) Cinema Verite and Direct Cinema (II)

Screening: *Titicut Follies* (Frederick Wiseman, 1967, US)

Salesman (Albert Maysles and David Maysles, 1968, US)

To Be and To Have (Nicolas Philibert, 2002, France)

Readings: Dave Saunders, "The New Frontier and Beyond: Direct Cinema's Search for a Subject." Direct Cinema: Observational Documentary and the Politics of the Sixties. New York: Wallflower Press, 2007. 57-83.

Dave Saunders, "Wiseman and the Civil Reform: Four Institutions." Direct Cinema: Observational Documentary and the Politics of the Sixties. 145-168.

Barry Keith Grant, "Ethnography in the First Person: Frederick Wiseman's *Titicut Follies*." In Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski (Eds.), Documenting the Documentary. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998. 238-253.

Louise Spence and Vinicius Navarro, "Editing." Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011. 161-186.

Further reading:

Jonathan B. Vogels, "Direct Cinema and the Maysles Brothers." The Direct Cinema of David and Albert Maysles. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005. 1-19.

Week 5 (10/2) Ethnographic Film and Indigenous Media

Screening: *Two Laws* (Carolyn Strachan & Alessandro Cavadini, 1981, Australia)

The Ax Fight (Timothy Asch & Napoleon Chagnon, 1975, Venezuela)

The Wedding Camels (David and Judith MacDougall, 1980, Kenya)

Cannibal Tours (Dennis O'Rourke, 1988, Australia)

Readings: Faye Ginsburg, "The Parallax Effect: The Impact of Indigenous Media on Ethnographic Film." In Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov (Eds.), Collecting Visible Evidence. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. 156-175.

James Roy MacBean, "*Two Laws* from Australia, One White, One Black." In Alan Rosenthal (Ed.), New Challenges for Documentary. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. 210-226.

Timothy Asch, "The Ethics of Ethnographic Film-making." In Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton (Eds.), Film as Ethnography. New York: Manchester University Press, 1992. 196-204.

David MacDougall, "New Principles of Visual Anthropology." The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. 264-274.

Further reading:

Jean Rouch, "The Camera and Man." Cine-Ethnography. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. 29-46.

Week 6 (10/9) Ethics of Documentary Film

Screening: *Grey Gardens* (David and Albert Maysles, 1975, US)
No Lies (Mitchell Block, 1973, US)
The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On (Kazuo Hara, 1987, Japan)
Secrets of the Tribe (Jose Padilha, 2009, UK/Brazil)

Readings: Brian Winston, "Ethics." Lies, Damn Lies and Documentaries. London: BFI Publishing, 2000. 132-156, esp. 132-143.

Jay Ruby, "The Ethics of Image Making; or, 'They're Going to Put Me in the Movies. They're Going to Make a Big Star Out of Me'." Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film & Anthropology. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000. 137-150.

Louise Spence and Vinicius Navarro, "Responsibility." Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011. 83-109.

Calvin Pryluck, "Seeking to Take the Longest Journey: A Conversation with Albert Maysles." In Keith Beattie (Ed.), Albert & David Maysles Interviews. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010. 65-73.

Week 7 (10/16) Reflexivity and Performativity in Documentary Film

Screening: *The Thin Blue Line* (Errol Morris, 1988, US)
Night and Fog (Alain Resnais, 1955, France)
Paris Is Burning (Jennie Livingston, 1990, US)
Tongues Untied (Marlon Riggs, 1990, US)
Sari Red (Pratibha Parmar, 1988, UK)

Readings: Jay Ruby, "The Image Mirrored: Reflexivity and the Documentary Film." In Alan Rosenthal (Ed.), New Challenges for Documentary. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. 64-77.

Linda Williams, "Mirror Without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary." Film Quarterly 46.3 (Spring 1993): 9-21.

Bill Nichols, "Performing Documentary." Blurred Boundaries. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994. 92-105.

Louise Spence and Vinicius Navarro, "Evidence." Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011. 36-58.

Further readings:

Trinh T. Minh-ha, "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning." October 52 (Summer 1990): 76-98.

Stella Bruzzi, "The Performative Documentary." New Documentary. Second Edition. New York: Routledge, 2006. 185-218.

Judith Butler, "Gender Is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion." Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'. New York: Routledge, 1993. 121-140.

Thomas Waugh, "Walking on Tippy Toes: Lesbian and Gay Liberation Documentary of the Post-Stonewall Period 1969-1984." The Fruit Machine: Twenty Years of Writings on Queer Cinema. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000. 246-271.

Week 8 (10/23) Politics, History and Memory through Documentary Film

Screening: *In the Year of the Pig* (Emile de Antonio, 1968, US)
The Battle of Chile (Patricio Guzman, 1975-79, Chile)
Who Killed Vincent Chin? (Christine Choy, 1987, US)
History and Memory (Rea Tajiri, 1991, US)
Habitual Sadness (Young-joo Byun, 1997, South Korea)
Coming Out Under Fire (Arthur Dong, 1994, US)
Nitrate Kisses (Barbara Hammer, 1992, US)
Fahrenheit 911 (Michael Moore, 2004, US)
Control Room (Jehane Noujaim, 2004, US)
Waltz with Bashir (Ari Folman, 2008, Israel/France/Germany/USA/
Finland/Switzerland/Belgium/Australia)
5 Broken Cameras (Emad Burnat & Guy Davidi, 2011, Palestine/
Israel/France/Netherlands)

Readings: Jane Gaines, "Political Mimesis." In Jane Gaines and Michael Renov (Eds.), Collecting Visible Evidence. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. 84-102.

Bill Nichols, "How Have Documentarists Addressed Social and Political Issues?" Introduction to Documentary. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. 139-167.

Paula Rabinowitz, "Wreckage upon Wreckage: History, Documentary, and the Ruins of Memory." They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary. New York: Verso, 1994. 16-32.

Barbara Zheutlin, "The Art and Politics of Documentary: A Symposium." Cineaste 11.3 (Summer 1981): 12-21.

Emile de Antonio, "History Is the Theme of All My Films: An Interview with Emile de Antonio." Cineaste 12.2 (Spring 1982): 20-28.

Further reading:

Bill Nichols, "Please, All You Good and Honest People: Film Form and Historical Consciousness." Blurred Boundaries. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994. 117-147.

Week 9 (10/30) Drama Documentary, Docudrama, Docu-soap, and Reality Television

Screening: *Close-up* (Abbas Kiarostami, 1990, Iran)
An American Family (Craig Gilbert, 1971, US)
The Brandon Teena Story (Susan Muska, Greta Olafsdottir, 1998, US)
The Times of Harvey Milk (Rob Epstein, 1984, US)

Readings: Bill Nichols, "Telling Stories with Evidence and Arguments." Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 107-133.

Steve Lipkin, "Defining Docudrama: *In the Name of the Father*, *Schindler's List*, and *JFK*." In Alan Rosenthal (Ed.), Why Docudrama: Fact-Fiction on Film and TV. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999. 370-383.

Richard Kilborn, "The Docu-soap: A Critical Assessment." In John Izod and Richard Kilborn (Eds.), From Grierson to the Docu-Soap: Breaking the Boundaries. Luton, UK: University of Luton Press, 2000. 111-119.

Stella Bruzzi, "New Observational Documentary: From 'Docusoaps' to Reality Television." New Documentary. Second Edition. New York: Routledge, 2006. 120-151, 256.

Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight, "Building a Mock-Documentary Schema." Faking It: Mock-Documentary and the Subversion of Factuality. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001. 64-75.

Further readings:

Judith Halberstam, "The Brandon Archive." In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives. New York: New York University Press, 2005. 22-46.

Week 10 (11/6) Essay Documentary

Screening: *Sans Soleil* (Chris Marker, 1983, France)

Reassemblage (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1982, US)

The Beaches of Agnes (Agnes Varda, 2008, France)

Readings: Laura Rascaroli, "The Essay Film: Problems, Definitions, Textual Commitments." The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film. New York: Wallflower Press, 2009. 21-43.

Louise Spence and Vinicius Navarro, "Dramatic Stories, Poetic and Essay Documentaries." Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011. 135-158.

Catherine Russell, "Autoethnography: Journeys of the Self." Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999. 275-314.

Timothy Corrigan, "'On Thoughts Occasioned by...': Montaigne to Marker." The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 13-49.

Week 11 (11/13) The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement

Screening: *Bumming in Beijing* (Wu Wenguang, 1990)

Readings: Zhang Yingjin, "Styles, Subjects, and Special Points of View: A Study of Contemporary Chinese Independent Documentary." New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film [England] 2.2 (2004): 119-135.

Wu Wenguang, "Just on the Road: A Description of the Individual Way of Recording Images in the 1990s." In Wu Hung (Ed.), Reinterpretation: A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art (1990-

2000). Guangzhou: Guangzhou Museum of Art/Chicago: Art Media Resources, 2002. 132-138.

Berenice Reynaud, "Translating the Unspeakable: On-Screen and Off-Screen Voices in Wu Wenguang's Documentary Work." In Chris Berry, Lu Xinyu, and Lisa Rofel (Eds.), The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement: For the Public Record. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010. 157-176.

Chris Berry, "Chinese Documentary, Chinese Postsocialism." In Zhang Zhen (Ed.), The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. 115-134.

Further readings:

Wang Yiman, "The Amateur's Lighting Rod: DV Documentary in Postsocialist China." Film Quarterly 58.4 (Summer 2005): 16-38.

Arjun Appadurai, "Global Ethnography: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology." Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present. SAR Press, 1991. 191-210.

Week 12 (11/20) History and Memory

Screening: *24 City* (Jia Zhangke, 2008)

West of the Tracks (Wang Bing, 2003)

Though I Am Gone (Hu Jie, 2006)

Readings: Chris Berry and Lisa Rofel, "Alternative Archive: China's Independent Documentary Culture." In Chris Berry, Lu Xinyu, and Lisa Rofel (Eds.), The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement: For the Public Record. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010. 135-154.

Lu Xinyu, "Ruins of the Future: Class and History in Wang Bing's *Tiexi District*." New Left Review 31 (Jan-Feb, 2005)

Wang Qi, "Navigating on the Ruins: Space, Power, and History in Contemporary Chinese Independent Documentaries." Asian Cinema 17.1 (Spring/Summer 2006): 246-255.

Shen Rui, "To Remember History: Hu Jie Talks About His Documentaries." Senses of Cinema 35 (2005).

Bill Nichols, "Embodied Knowledge and the Politics of Location: An Evocation." Blurred Boundaries. Bloomington Indiana University Press, 1994. 1-16.

Week 13 (11/27) The Queer Lens: Documenting the *Tongzhi* Community

Screening: *Mei Mei* (Gao Tian, 2005)

The Box (Ying Weiwei, 2001)

Night Scene (Cui Zi'en, 2003)

Our Story (Yang Yang, 2012)

Readings: Lisa Rofel, "Qualities of Desire: Imaging Gay Identities." Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. 85-110.

- Shi-Yan Chao, "Performing Gender, Performing Documentary in Postsocialist China." In Yau Ching (Ed.), As Normal As Possible: Negotiating Sexuality and Gender in Mainland China and Hong Kong. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010. 151-175.
- Luke Robinson, "From 'Public' to 'Private': Chinese Documentary and the Logic of *Xianchang*." In Chris Berry, Lu Xinyu, and Lisa Rofel (Eds.), The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement: For the Public Record. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010. 177-194.
- Chen Mo and Xiao Zhiwei, "Chinese Underground Films: Critical Views from China." In Paul Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang (Eds.), From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006. 143-159.

Week 14 (12/4) Contemporary Taiwan Documentary

Screening: *Gift of Life* (Wu Yi-feng, 2003)

Corner's (Zero Chou Mei-ling, 2001)

Voices of Orchid Island (Tai-li Hu, 1993)

Viva Tonal (Jian Weisi/Guo Zhendi, 2004)

Go Grandriders (Hua Tien-hau, 2012)

Readings: Kuei-fen Chiu, "The Vision of Taiwan New Documentary." In Darrell Davis *et al*, Cinema Taiwan. New York: Routledge, 2007. 17-32.

Hsien-Hao Sebastian Liao, "Almost Propaganda But Not Quite: Identity, Modernity and the Construction of 'The Native' in *Gift of Life* and *Viva Tonal*." In Felicia Chan, Angelina Karpovich and Xin Zhang (Eds.), Genre in Asian Film and Television: New Approaches. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 61-76.

Li-hsin Kuo, "Sentimentalism and the Phenomenon of Collective 'Looking Inward': A Critical Analysis of Mainstream Taiwanese Documentary." In Sylvia Li-chun Lin and Tze-lan D. San (Eds.), Documenting Taiwan on Film: Issues and Methods in New Documentaries. New York: Routledge, 2012. 183-203.

Daw-Ming Lee, "A Preliminary Study of the Market for Documentaries in Taiwan" Asian Cinema 20.2 (Fall/Winter 2009): 68-82.