

DOCTORAL THESIS

The oral testimony and the embodied witness: orality, intersubjectivity, and Chinese oral history documentary film

Xu, Yaping

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Abstract

In order to explore the embodiment of oral history in documentary film this study sets out its analysis in two sections. The first section concentrates on understanding the issue of intersubjectivity in Walter Ong's idea of 'orality', namely, orality as characterized by an interactive relation between speaker and listener, based on the sensual-perceptual experience of sound phenomenon and the expressive act of the spoken word. Additionally, in this first section, intersubjectivity in cinematic experience is also investigated in relation to early German film theorists' romantic conceptions of filmic 'gesture'. Employing a 'performance-centered' approach, the second section of the dissertation analyzes how the oral testimony and the embodied witness collaboratively produce historical knowledge on the scene of interviewing and beyond. This section will also consist of three case studies covering three broad areas of historical identity: 1. Women induced into sexual slavery by Japanese troops (the so-called 'comfort women'); 2. Villagers affected by the Great Leap Forward Famine, and 3. Intellectuals affected by political persecutions during the era of Mao.

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Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of appendices	viii
Introduction	1
Section 1. Intersubjectivity in Ongian orality and romantic film theories: the embodied human experience	20
Chapter 1. Essential issues of Ongian orality	20
1. Ong’s writings on orality, and the limits of ‘secondary orality’	20
1.1. The social implication of physical sound-experience.....	22
1.2. Open system, the textually embodied encounter	28
1.3. The limits of secondary orality	33
2. The intersubjective component underlying Ongian orality	37
2.1. Speaking–hearing encounter in life-world.....	37
2.2. The interlocutor in-between the textual and the real	39
2.3. The ‘the genuine spoken word’, and models of intersubjectivity.....	41
Summary.....	48
Chapter 2. Surveying film orality: What do we talk about when we talk about orality in film?	49
1. The psychodynamics of orality-literacy in cinemas: the oral episteme.....	50
2. The politics of orality.....	56
3. Secondary orality in/of film.....	68
4. Orality as a perspective on the vernacular moving-image cultures	73
5. Orality in the photographic making and perception of history	76
Summary.....	78
Chapter 3. The problematic of ‘language’, and the redemptive ‘gesture’: filmic imaginary and spectatorship	81
Introduction.....	81

1. The discovery on the gestural quality of film.....	85
1.1. Overview: German early cinema (1895–1918) and Weimar cinema (1919–1933).....	85
1.2. The problematic of abstract language within the literary debates on cinema (1907–1931).....	89
1.3. Béla Balázs’s early writings on film: gestural expression.....	93
2. Mutual openness in and through ‘physiognomical expressions’	102
3. The polyphonic physiognomy in facial close-ups	109
3.1. Simultaneity in the fairytale close-up: the castle of Bluebeard	109
3.2. The interpenetrating experience in Bergsonian close-up.....	112
3.3. The address of the face: Lilian Gish and Asta Nielsen.....	113
4. Beyond the filmic apparatus: the embodiment in and out of film	115
5. The intersubjective embodiment in Geog Lukács and Walter Benjamin	119
5.1. The mimetic representation in Lukács’s early film thought.....	120
5.2. Inter-corporal film spectatorship in Benjamin.....	129
Summary and implication.....	138
Section 2. The embodied encounter between testimony and documentarian: case studies on Chinese oral history-based documentary films (1990-2012)	147
Chapter 4. A performance-centered approach to the embodied testimony in oral history interview-based documentary film.....	147
Introduction.....	147
1. From evidentiary knowledge to performative relation: the oral history (interview).....	151
1.1. Growing into a culture	152
1.2. Striving for objectivity and conforming to social-science law	154
1.3. Narrative turn, performative turn, and the performance-centered approach.....	155
1.4. Intersubjectivity of oral history	160
2. Oral history in the moving-images	161
2.1. Oral testimony and technological impacts.....	161
2.2. The appropriation of video in oral history: videotaped testimony....	162
2.3. Moving-image histories and oral history as narrative device	166
2.4. Documentary filmmaking and oral testimony in ‘talking heads’	167
2.5. Performativity in oral history interview-based documentary: ‘talking heads’ and beyond?.....	171
2.6. Oral history documentary, bearing testimony in interview and filmmaking.....	176

Prelude. Oral history practices in China: An overview	179
Chapter 6. Televised documentary testimonies	189
Introduction: ‘Documentary Editing Room’ (DER) of Shanghai Television (STV) and ‘Documentary realism’ (<i>jishi</i>).....	189
1. Television culture in Shanghai and the ‘(re)cosmopolitanism’	195
2. Institutional and aesthetic changes in DER	201
3. DER in the Audiovisual Archives of SMG: the embodied testimonies ..	204
4. Bearing testimonies for the victim’s history.....	208
4.1. Plot, narrative, rhetoric	209
4.2. Intentional and contingent testaments conveyed in actuality	211
4.3. The difficulty of articulating traumatic memories.....	217
4.4. Trans-border identity and cosmopolitan motherhood.....	220
4.5. Contingent testimonies as found footage in docudrama	222
Conclusion	226
Chapter 7. Re-presenting alternative traditions of socialist history	231
Introduction.....	231
1. Filmmaking as body writing, the inscribed selfhood of the post–1980s generation	232
1.1. The Great Leap Forward Famine (1959–1961) and the literary representations	237
1.2. ‘Folk Memory Documentary Project: Famine’ (2009–2012): the embodied knowledge	242
2. Embodied filmmaking as critical historiography on political movements, and the autonomous self of the intellectuals	254
2.1. Romantic individualism, the textual formation of selfhood	259
2.2. Ethical spectatorship through creative treatments of testimonies.....	266
Conclusion	270
Conclusions.....	275
Appendices	286
List of references.....	289
Curriculum vitae.....	309

List of appendices

Appendix 1: Sources of Documentary Editing Room at Shanghai Audio-Visual Archives	281
Appendix 2: Sources of the ‘Folk Memory Documentary Project: Famine’ (2009-2012) at Caochangdi Workstation	282
Appendix 3: Sources of the Documentary Archive of University Service Center at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.....	284