

DOCTORAL THESIS

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

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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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