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.
Acknowledgements

Looking back on the four years of Ph.D studies, it indeed has been a bittersweet journey, a mixture of all kinds of tastes. It took me quite an effort to achieve the present stage; and in this final piece of writing for this dissertation, I cannot avoid but being so proud that I have come so far and truly grateful that my supportive families, scholarly mentors and beneficial friends have been inspiring and encouraging me so much and so enduringly. I finally complete a research that blended in the important years of my youth. I own this to my supervisor, Ian Aitken, who always allows me to make changes; I would not find an area that I am truly committed to study for my Ph.D research, without his patience of being the first reader of my drafts, his responsive guidance and support.

I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to Prof. Cheuk Pak Tong, Prof. Zhang Zhen, Prof. Li Siming, Prof. Steve Guo, Dr. Tan Jia, Prof. Yeh Yueh-yu, Dr. Sobel Chan, Prof. Xiao Xiaosui, Ms. Eve Cheung, whose many advices and suggestions, warm supports and encouragements helped me to work out the hesitations and problems of studies. I would also like to remember my indebtedness to Wu Wenguang, Wen Hui, Zou Xueping, Zhang Mengqi, Luo Bing, Jia Nannan, Li Xinmin, Shu Qiao, Wang Hai’an, Guo Rui of Caochangdi Workstation, Shi Zhe, Wang Yi, Zhang Kunhua of Shanghai Television Station (Shanghai Media Group), Zhang Hongli, Xiong Jingming of the University Service Center in the Chinese University of Hong Kong, for their generosity of sharing with me their understandings of specific concerns, and sometimes even friendships.

My gratitude also goes to my fellow students who shared with me their great insights about life and research that inspired me a lot, and also to my close
friends who witnessed the lonely journey of my pursuance for the Ph.D with their supports to me: Feng Jing, Natalie Wong, Grace Mark, Sun Li, Wu Wen, Song Zheng, Helen Du, Hilary He, Zheng Wen, Lu Chen, Zhao Xinyan, Zheng Yue, Yang Guang, Han Jia, Wang Zhe, Renata Wojtczak, Jayleen Huang… I feel so lucky to have you with me along the way. Last but not least, thank you my parents and my brother, for everything you have done for me.
# 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 Benjamin119

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’ (jishi) ......................................................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

Appendix 2: Sources of the ‘Folk Memory Documentary Project: Famine’ (2009-2012) at Caochangdi Workstation

Appendix 3: Sources of the Documentary Archive of University Service Center at the Chinese University of Hong Kong