

Histories of Arab Documentary (München, 27-29 Oct 17)

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München Institut für Kunstgeschichte &
Filmmuseum/Münchner Stadtmuseum, Oct 27-29, 2017

Niklas Wolf

LMU Art History Dept. presents

Conference and Film Screenings Histories of Arab Documentary

Friday, Oct. 27, 2017 panels and film screening (9:00-18:0) Saturday Oct. 28, 2017 panels and film screening (9:00-18:00) Sunday Oct. 29, 2017 film screening only (18.00)

The conference Histories of Arab Documentary wants to examine the diverse histories of film documentary in the MENA region since the 1920s and to serve as a platform for investigating different theoretical approaches with regards to a number of queries, that is: structural development and state intervention, formats and aesthetics, new media, politics of representation, auteurs and subjectivity, „Artivism" and Revolution. It will allow film professionals from the region and international academic researchers to meet and exchange on their respective topics. Herewith it will unearth and propel some of the hitherto unrecognized scholarly work in the field and to shed light on a neglected part of general film history.

Venue 1

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
Institut für Kunstgeschichte
Zentnerstr. 31 80798 München room 007

How to reach:

Subway: Line U2 stop Josephsplatz or Hohenzollernplatz Bus: 154 stop Winzererstraße

Venue 2

Filmmuseum/Münchner Stadtmuseum St.-Jakobs-Platz 1
80331 München

How to reach:

S/U-Bahn stop Marienplatz U-Bahn stop Sendlinger Tor Bus 62 stop St.-Jakobs-Platz Bus 52 stop Blumenstraße

Programme

DAY ONE: Friday Oct. 27, 17

9:00 - 9:15

Introduction Viola Shafik & Kerstin Pinther

9:15 - 10:30

Panel 1

Histories and Structures

via SKYPE

Laura Marks (researcher/Simon-Fraser University, Canada)

Political economies of experimental documentary

How do makers manage the balance between reaching audiences and protecting their civil and intellectual-property rights? I will draw on case studies of exhibition venues, distribution and artists' rights.

Kay Dickinson (Concordia University, Canada)

Funding the "Creative Documentary": An Art Cinema of Refugees

While Arab documentaries are usually categorized in national terms, their funding is often complexly transnational. The selection processes the Dubai International Film Festival enacts to distribute production support to non-UAE filmmakers reveals how the pressing subject of refugee representation is marshaled according to often conflicting economic imperatives that aim to expand the creative economies of the UAE.

10:45 - 12:30

Panel 2

Artivism and Revolution

Jamal Bahmad (postdoctoral fellow, UK/Morocco):

From Mount Albban to the World: Activism and the Environmental Documentary in Morocco
Morocco's longest sit-in is still on-going on Mount Albban (Tinghir province), which overlooks Africa's largest silver mine in the village of Imider. The sit-in started in 2011 hand in hand with the so-called Arab Spring. The protesters on Mount Albban since 2011 have been filming their everyday life and protests against the repression of the authorities, which have arrested and imprisoned many activists over the last six years. The Mount Albban sit-in has also attracted a brave Moroccan documentary filmmaker, Nadir Bouhmouch. This paper will explore Bouhmouch's films, which are indeed two powerful illustrations of activism and will likely define this new genre in Morocco. The paper will conclude with the implications of this formative moment for the future of environmental politics in Morocco and perhaps beyond.

Nouri Gana (researcher/UCLA, USA)

The Will to Expose: Documentary Filmmaking in Postrevolutionary Tunisia

Sami Tlili's *Yal'in bu il-Phosphate* (Cursed be the Phosphate) is just one example about how the will to document for revolutionary purposes has gradually gone quite quotidian--transforming in the process into an everyday will-to-expose. I argue throughout this article that the will-to-expose has become indeed the driving force of documentary filmmaking in Postrevolutionary Tunisia. In other words, documentary filmmaking has matured enormously in a very compressed period of time and become not only a tool of criticism (i.e., criticism with definite and specific targets like the former dictator and his regime), but also a tool of critique (i.e., the kind of critical work that is more profoundly aware of the complicated web of power-interrelations of which the current condition of Tunisia as an economically-dependent country is an effect).

Donatella della Ratta (Assistant Professor of Media Studies, John Cabot University, Rome):

"The Unbearable Lightness of Images": The Aesthetics, Economics, and Politics of Post-2011 Film-

making in Syria

The talk will frame the analysis on contemporary image making in Syria – from user-generated videos by activists and citizen journalists to fully fledged auteur films – within a broader reflection on the web 2.0 as the technological and social infrastructure dramatically influencing the aesthetics and politics of Syrian visual media. Questions related to the political economy of networked communication technologies will be explored, such as Syrian image-makers' loss of ownership and control over their own visual production; and the corporate and private nature of web platforms controlling the flow of data on Internet and establishing what ought to be remembered and archived as a meaningful "past", and what to be removed, redacted, and therefore forgotten among the events currently unfolding in Syria.

12:30-13:15 lunch break 13:15 - 14:30

Panel 3

The Filmmaker and the State

Ali Essafi (filmmaker/author, Casa Blanca):

Short History of Moroccan Non-Fiction Film

The non-fiction Moroccan cinema was born, by default, with the first generation of filmmakers emerging just after the country's independence by the end of the 1950s. However in the following decade the lack of cultural freedom and distribution networks condemns the young cinematographic movement to a slow death. And then, since the early 1970s total inertia until twenty years later a new generation comes to life. Exclusively active in the western countries and disconnected from the first generation's legacy, this one painfully tries to build a unique cinematographic identity.

Yasmin Desouki: (researcher/ Cinematheque Cairo)

Egyptian Newsreels and Beyond

I am thinking of writing primarily about newsreels and the general tendency to "document" in different forms of Egyptian media--there is often a direct link between newsreels, some commercials made for different state institutions (especially those written and directed by Ahmed Kamel Awad, which borrow elements of docu-fiction), and some of the documentaries Hossam Ali made, produced by the Ministry of Culture. And while newsreels are primarily a form of documentation, there is also a slightly "staged" quality to them that might be interesting to explore further, particularly how they also influenced the commercials of Ahmed Kamel Awad and other filmmakers. The loose timeframe for the pieces I'm discussing is 1962-1982.

14:45 - 16:00

Panel 4

Directors and Formats

Shohini Chaudhuri (Senior Lecturer, University of Essex, UK)

Iraq War Home Movies: Abbas Fahdel's Homeland (Iraq War Zero)

Filmmaker Abbas Fahdel filmed his family and acquaintances before, during and after the US-led invasion of Iraq. The result is Homeland (Iraq Year Zero) (2015), a five-and-a-half hour documentary in two parts that presents the Iraq War as a home movie from an Iraqi perspective. This chapter will explore how the film uses its home-movie aesthetic to address the lacunae of mainstream (Western) coverage of the war as well as to articulate specificities of Iraqi life under Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. Homeland raises a number of comparisons with other long-format

documentaries, such as Shoah and Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel, while Fahdel has himself likened its portrayal of a war-devastated landscape to the Zone in Tarkovsky's Stalker. The chapter will focus on sensations of space and time created by the film as it strives to unearth another reality of Iraq that was lost upon the country's American invaders.

Peter Limbrick (Associate Professor of Film and Digital Media, University of California, Santa Cruz, USA)

Spaces of dispossession: experiments with the real in contemporary Algerian cinema

This paper will address the rhetorics of dispossession and space in contemporary Algerian films. While paying particular attention to two recent documentaries, *Un rond point dans ma tête* (Hassan Ferhani, 2015) and *Samir dans la poussière* (Mohamed Ouzine, 2015), my paper situates them in relation to other documentary and fiction films, both Algerian and non-Algerian, that also experiment with how to articulate the social and political realities of the present.

18:00

Screening Filmmuseum

Decolonization:

Presented by Ali Essafi/Viola Shafik/Kerstin Pinther

- Let the World Witness/fai-yashhad al-'alam by Saad Nadim (1956, Egypt, 20 min) - Memoire 14 von Ahmed Bouanani (1971, Morocco, 24 min) by Ahmed Bouanani

- Zerda and the Songs of Oblivion/La Zerda et les chants des l'oubli by Assia Djebar (1982, Algeria, 26min)

20:30

Dinner optional

DAY TWO: Saturday Oct. 28, 17

9:00 - 10:45

Panel 5

Politics of Representation I

Ella Shohat (Professor/ New York University & Affiliated with NYU-Abu Dhabi)

On Palestine and the Arab-Jew: The Cinema of Displacement

Shohat discusses the representation of the links between the question of Palestine and that of the Arab-Jew in revisionist documentaries. She examines the critique of Zionist discourses, on the one hand, and of Arab nationalism, on the other, in relation to the history of partition and the dispossession of Palestinians and the dislocation of Arab-Jews — all within diasporic and transnational perspectives.

Nisreen Mansour (researcher/Westminster University)

The Aesthetics of Othering in Lebanese War Documentaries

I am thinking of a piece that explores the aesthetics of othering in Lebanese war documentaries in the context of the Sabra and Chatila massacres or the unresolved fate of thousands of disappeared civilians. It will engage in a close reading of key works produced during and after the official end of the civil war. The narrative shifts of victimhood and perpetration will be traced across time in an effort to understand the discursive appeal of the genre.

Nadia Yaqub (professor/University of North Carolina)

Opaque Encounters in Films About Palestine

A paper on the use of the experimental essay film as a means of addressing the problem of the violent image in Palestinian (and Palestinian solidarity) film. I would focus on the use of opacity—the intentional withholding of information, uses of silences and enigmatic images as a means of establishing relationships of equality between viewer and viewed. These works are a direct challenge to the notion of the documentary as a purveyor of information, but still rely on its privileged relationship to the “truth” or the real world. Relatedly, I will focus on the films of Kamal Aljafari.

11:00 - 12:15

Panel 5

Voice and Narration

Alisa Lebow: (researcher/University of Sussex, z.Zt. Berlin)

One for All: First Person Films from the Egyptian Revolution

This essay attempts to understand and account for the distinct emergence of first person documentaries after the 2011 uprising in Egypt. Looking back at the history of revolutionary film one does not see the emergence of the personal camera as a site of revolutionary expression until this current wave, given especially that revolutions have always been conceived of as collective movements. Why and how the first person has come to be articulated in this present case will be of primary concern for this chapter. Analysis of recent key first person documentaries from Egypt, including but not limited to Moug (Ahmed Nour, 2012), Arij: Scent of Revolution (Viola Shafik, 2014), Little Eagles (Mohamed Rashad, in-progress) and Happily Ever After (Nada Riyadh, in-progress) will form the basis of the discussion which will benefit from interviews of each of these filmmakers reflecting on the topic as part of the interactive data base documentary Filming Revolution (Lebow, 2015).

Viola Shafik (filmmaker/researcher/Ludwig Maximilian University):

Defying the Voice of Authority: Egyptian Documentarists between 1956 and 1982

State-sponsored Egyptian documentary of the 1950s and 60s relied heavily on the rhetorical mode and the voice-over commentary following the Griersonian model. It was only in the 1970s, in the wake of the student revolt that a new generation of filmmakers adopted a new film form inspired by the Third Cinema and direct cinema movements refusing or deconstructing the voice over as a structuring device, a development that evolved into a generational conflict within the National Film Center involving people, resources and doctrines. My paper will focus on exemplary films by old-school directors Saad Nadim and Salah al-Tuhami as opposed to Khairy Beshara and Hashim al-Nahas as representatives of the then new generation.

Lunch break 12:15-13:00

13:00 - 14:45

Panel 6

Film(-ed) History

Mohamad Soueid (commissioning editor and producer al-Arabiyya/filmmaker/author, Dubai): Documenting Lebanon

When I chose this title I intended to depict the history of documentary filmmaking in Lebanon. However, when I started to write my essay I found the title intriguing: Is “Documenting” necessarily linked to documentary practices? Or is it really a task related to the film historians? In a broader sense it is related to history as a whole, more properly to the history of Lebanon. But are documen-

tary films the mere tools/references to accomplish such a task, i.e. to reconstruct the history of Lebanon through documentary films? I, eventually, have assumed that fiction films could be/and would become in the course of time documentary references in telling the history of a country and its communities. In fact, actually any written document or any visual material, a film frame or a piece of paper used in a film should be considered a contribution to the mentioned task.

Ahmed Bedjaoui (director of Algerian Film Fund/researcher/professor, University of Algiers, Algeria)

Documentaries Questioning History

France, the former colonizer and the Algerian insurgents waged a veritable war of images that began in 1832 and continued beyond July 1962.

The representation of contemporary history (in particular when related to the Algerian national liberation war) is a central question that raises controversial debate in Algerian cinema. A large amount of documentary films (among which we can associate *La Bataille d'Alger*) demonstrate admirably that the secret of the cinematic narrative applied to contemporary history resides in a magical mixture somewhere between documentary and fiction, while using an analytical approach rather than a purely descriptive one.

Olivier Hadouchi (film curator, Paris, independent researcher associated to IRCAV/Paris 3/ Sorbonne Nouvelle)

Cinema and the Struggle of Women in Algeria

In this paper I want to remind of the way how cinema has tackled the women's question in Algeria through documentaries shot in different periods, like in *Elles* as well as *Algériennes, 30 ans après* by Ahmed Lalle, *Lettre à ma sœur* by Habiba Djahnine. My discussion will include a passage that is dedicated to the memory of female struggle during the war of independence and the way how women were dealt with after 1962 by Assia Djebbar or in *Barberousse mes sœurs* by Hassen Bouabdellah.

14:45 - 15:30

Round Table with Film Professionals, Cinattheque (Cairo) and Dox-Box (Damascus/Berlin)

Closing Session

Filmmakers Ali Essai and Mohamad Soueid as well as film initiative representatives Yasmin Desouki (Cinattheque) and Marion Schmidt (Dox-Box) will lead an open discussion on historical lessons and prospects of development.

18:00

Screening Filmmuseum Modernisms:

presented by Ali Essafi/Viola Shafik

- Village Doctor/tabib fi-l-aryaf von Khairy Beshara (1975, Ägypten, 20 min)

- Machines Revolution/thawrat al-makkan von Madkur Thabet (1967, Ägypten, 7 min)

- Return to Agadir/Retour à Agadir von Mohamed Afify (1967, Marokko, 10 min) - Horizons/afaq von Shadi Abdessalam (1972, Ägypten, 39 min)

20:30

Closing dinner

DAY THREE

18:00

Screening Filmmuseum

Documentary Film in Lebanon before and after the Electronic Turn:

presented by Mohamad Soueid

- The Story of a Village and a War /hikayat qarya wa harb by Maroun Baghdadi (1978, Lebanon, 24 min)

- Cinema Fouad (1993, Lebanon, 60 min) by Mohamed Soueid

Reference:

CONF: Histories of Arab Documentary (München, 27-29 Oct 17). In: Arthist.net, Oct 17, 2017 (accessed Jul 8, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/16503>>.