

**Journal Title: Wide Screen**  
**Vol. 4, No.1, December 2012**  
**ISSN: 1757-3920**  
**URL: <http://widescreenjournal.org>**  
**Published by Subaltern Media, 153 Sandringham Drive, Leeds LS17 8DQ, UK**

## INTRODUCTION

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If documentary and non-fiction cinema now feature as part of special exhibitions at contemporary art and performance venues, it's because the relationship between art, documentary, and non-fiction practice is assumed rather than examined. We wanted to make apparent the aspects of this relationship, from the vantage point of documentary studies, and were particularly interested in essays that addressed the discursive challenges involved in the representation and interpretation of one medium by another. Thus the original call for papers invited essays on topics related to the arts, theatre, and music in the global documentary. To our delight the response was unexpectedly diverse as well as numerous and reached us from various parts of the world, making the selection process truly difficult. We decided therefore to have two special issues instead of one, the current issue focuses on Art, Performance, and Documentary and the forthcoming one, under preparation, is on the theme of Documentary and Music.

Historically, there has been a concerted effort to anchor documentary in scientific objectivity, which, as Brian Winston<sup>i</sup> argues, was believed would lend documentary its legitimacy and unique relationship to truth claims. Thus the indexicality of the documented image derived from the photochemical “event” of its origins has always been the source of documentary objectivity. Even as “Documentary as Science” has been the paradigm for the legitimating discourses that surround documentary, Winston makes a case for “Documentary as

Art.” In *Claiming the Real* (1999)<sup>ii</sup>, he traces the origins of documentary to the engagé artists of the French realist school, and names the father of the documentary, John Grierson a “latter day Courbet.”<sup>iii</sup>

In fact to Grierson goes the credit of the first and enduring definition of the documentary as the “creative treatment of actuality”<sup>iv</sup>, a felicitous description that points both ways to the art and artifice of documentary. A significant body of work devoted to studying the “art of the documentary” focuses on how the documentary differs yet overlaps with the creative principles of fiction, thus blurring the boundary between the two. If Michael Renov identifies the difference between documentary and fiction as the “differing historical status of the referent”<sup>v</sup>, more recently Jacques Rancière points to the differing status of the “real” in both. For Rancière, the real in fiction is an “effect” to be produced while in the documentary the real is a “fact” to be understood.<sup>vi</sup> It is assumed then that both fiction and non-fiction require the mediation of creative strategies in order to be complete. The creative strategies deployed in the representation of “*a* world” of fiction, or “*the* world” of documentary are the same be they narrative structures, reconstructions, character development, the use of music, close-ups, varying lenses, camera angles, lighting (even if its often the manipulation of available light in the documentary), subjective edits, or spatial strategies and shot compositions.

Recent scholarship has also given to us an expanded notion of the documentary - Bill Nichols’ typologies of the expository, observational, poetic, reflexive, and performative<sup>vii</sup> and Renov’s work<sup>viii</sup> on the subjective documentary that introduces the vector of “desire” into the hitherto sober discourse of documentary filmmaking allow us to include the subjective, the experimental, the diaristic, and the performative as part of documentary. Catherine Russell’s work on experimental ethnographies<sup>ix</sup> deconstructs the humanist realist framework of the documentary to include intercultural difference and films produced at multiple sites of marginal identities. Thus a vast array of creative work can now be included under the rubric of the documentary - not only the modernist avant-garde but also newer postmodern artists whose works cannot be easily classified into art or documentary. The avant-garde art roots of

documentary film – both artists who dabbled in documentary and documentarians who overlapped with the world of art – Walter Ruttman, Jean Vigo, Fernand Leger, Maya Deren, Joris Ivens, Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, Andy Warhol, Peter Hutton, Mani Kaul, Satyajit Ray et al have been discussed both in studies of the avant-garde<sup>x</sup> as well as in studies on the documentary.<sup>xi</sup> Documentary has also moved into the gallery spaces of art where they are now often viewed as part of multi media installations, and venues like the MOMA have special screenings of documentaries during the annual Documentary Fortnight. Gallery spaces have themselves become sites of convergence for art and documentary in a fulfillment of Geeta Kapur's formulation of “art x documentary,” where she refers to the documentary as the “critical art” of our times – “an inquiry into the potential of praxis premised at once on refusal, risk and utopia.”<sup>xii</sup>

Finally, one more vital link between documentary and art remains relatively and surprisingly underexplored - documentaries on art and artists. Although the recently successful award winning documentary/ mockumentary on street art and artists by the renowned graffiti artist Banksy, *Exit through the Gift Shop* (2010) drew attention to this genre, many previously important films such as Marion Cajori and art critic Amy Wallach's film on artist provocateur *Louise Bourgeois: The Spider, the Mistress, the Tangerine* (2008); Wim Wenders' *Pina* (2011), a tribute to deceased contemporary dancer Pina Bausch; RV Ramani's large body of work on Indian art and artists; Shanti Chowdhury's film on MF Husain, *A Painter of Our Time* (1976); Alison Klayman's documentary on maverick Chinese artist *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry* (2012); Henri Clouzot's *The Mystery of Picasso* (1956), to name a few, have gone largely unexamined. Perhaps owing to the circuits of distribution in educational, informational networks, museums and art studies programs, contributed to their lack of visibility in documentary studies.

This issue features four very different essays that represent the international scope of the journal as well as the theoretical and analytical concerns outlined above. Anindya Sengupta's essay on Satyajit Ray's documentary *The Inner Eye* (1972) on his blind teacher and “aesthetic mentor,” the pioneering Indian artist Benodebehari Mukhopadhyay, is an exploration of

Benodebehari's work as well as the lineage of Ray's own realism in the eclectic visual traditions of early twentieth century art in India. Several works of twentieth century art – all linked to artists whose tombs are located in the famous Père-La Chaise cemetery in Paris such as Proust, and Ingres, Chopin and Jim Morrison, are invoked in Heddy Honigmann's unusual documentary on mortality, *Forever* (2006). Annelies Nootwijk reads the film in the light of twentieth century literary and aesthetic thought, especially Marcel Proust's celebrated classic, *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Swarnavel Eswaran Pillai's essay is a commentary on the contemporary and controversial Tamil poet-documentarian Leena Manimekalai, reading her films as embodied practices that offer powerful critiques of national patriarchy. Carine Hoogland offers a theoretical approach to Dutch filmmaker Van Der Keuken's film *Face Value* (1991), describing the film as a "cartography of faces," the essay explores the art of the human face via Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Rancière's work on the face and the close-up and its significance for the documentary form.

We hope that this volume will make a small but effective contribution to documentary studies on art. I want to thank the contributors for being patient with the delays that issues like these inevitably run into, the reviewers who gave their time generously to improving the essays in this volume, and the journal editors, especially Kuhu Tanvir for inviting me to be the editor on these special issues and for being a thorough professional and a great sounding board for ideas.

-Veena Hariharan

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### **About the Author:**

Veena Hariharan is currently Assistant Professor of Cinema Studies at the School of Arts & Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She recently completed her PhD from the Critical Studies Division of the School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles. Her dissertation entitled *Private Modernities: The "I" in Contemporary Indian Documentary and Visual Culture*, focuses on the first-person documentary in contemporary India. Her interests include transnationalism, documentary and avant-garde cinemas. Veena's

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## **Notes**

<sup>i</sup> Winston, Brian. *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited*. London: BFI, 1999.

<sup>ii</sup> See p. 17 to 96 for an interesting exposition of Documentary as Art and particularly his reading of the "Griersonian artist" in Winston, Brian. *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited*. London: BFI, 1999

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>iv</sup> Attributed to Grierson in Rotha, Paul. *Documentary Film*. London: Faber, 1952, p. 70.

<sup>v</sup> Renov, Michael ed. *Theorizing the Documentary*. London: Routledge, 1993, p. 2.

<sup>vi</sup> See Rancière's discussion of the "documentary fictions" of Chris Marker in Rancière, Jacques. "Documentary Fiction: Marker and the Fiction of Memory" in *Film Fables*, trans. by E. Battista, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006, p. 158

<sup>vii</sup> Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.

<sup>viii</sup> See Michael Renov's book length study of the subject in the documentary, Renov, Michael. *The Subject of the Documentary*. Minneapolis: University of Minesotta Press, 2006.

<sup>ix</sup> Russell, Catherine. *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.

<sup>x</sup> P Adams Sitney, David James, Ashis Rajadhyaksha, Geeta Kapur et al.

<sup>xi</sup> Especially Scott MacDonald's *A Critical Cinema Series* brought out by University of California Press. See also Michael Renov, Catherine Russell, Laura Marks et al.

<sup>xii</sup> See Kapur, Geeta. "A Cultural Conjecture in India: Art into Documentary", 2005. Accessed online from *Another Life: The Digitized Personal Archives of Geeta Kapur and Vivan Sundaram*, <http://www.aaa.org.hk>.