DOCUMENTARY CINEMA AND THE FICTIONS OF REALITY

_____

A Project

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School

At the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

WILLIAM ANTHONY LINHARES

Stacey Woelfel, Project Supervisor

DECEMBER 2017

DEDICATION

To my parents, Jim and Mary Linhares.

Thank you for the unwavering commitment, support and friendship.

ACKOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank:

Stacey Woelfel for his support, commitment and calm in leading me through the practical and creative development of my film. Yours is a calm voice of reason in the otherwise nearly pathological world of documentary filmmaking.

Robert Greene for the willingness to offer his perspective (one of the most attuned working in cinema today) and mentorship through the many rough cuts of my film. It has been an honor to work the process with you.

Roger Cook for blindly accepting to hop aboard this committee. Your patient, thoughtful advice concerning the first cut of my film was essential to the various evolutions it later embodied. After we met, I completely reworked the entire design of the film. It would not be what it is today without that first meeting.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction

I chose this project for a variety of reasons, into which both artistic and career-oriented elements factored. First, there was a project. Then there was Docktown. My older brother David lived in Docktown for a short time in a room inside one of the large floating homes. He emphatically relayed the quirkiest details to me, even insisting how great of a documentary setting the place would make. When the whole story came into focus – their effective removal, the condo projects across the creek, the proximity of Docktown and Silicon Valley and the whole economic landscape of the Bay Area in general—I officially declared Docktown as the subject of my project. In other words, there was an advantageous and practical reason for choosing Docktown as the focus of my project – the "in" I had with my brother – and a larger, more important and creatively compelling reason as well: believing in Docktown as a compelling story.

Before I ever visited Docktown, I looked for potential entryways into the story, finding that there were essentially two approaches I could take. The political side of the story, the side filled with historic codes, land and property disputes, a diversity of legal interpretations, etc., from which it would take an investigative journalist to appreciate and construct something from. Once I visited Docktown and began speaking with residents about these issues, I soon understood that engaging in battles of this sort, of the specifically political, the nitty gritty, indeed, the journalism of the story, would be futile. It was a shape with many sides, each claiming to be the defining variable in the equation. But there was a second narrative throughway that interested me much more. It was the more contemplative and personal perspective: the story of a specifically unique approach

to life (living on the water) coming to an end as a result of macro-economic constraints. This approach dealt with the politics but from the perspective of a function of human culture. To me, it was richer, more abstract, more important. It also has a more approachable and applicable resonance to it. Following this narrative has allowed me to represent the emotional burden of the Docktown evictees, while also alluding to a broader critique as to why this removal is happening there and now. This approach to documentary I believe is conducive to the mysterious power that cinema wields.

I believe that defining the open concepts of my film was the most valuable lesson I learned from the project. Defining the design, concept and ethical orientation of the project will, in effect, help me to shape my own perspective on what documentary filmmaking should be, and thus, is invaluable in reaching my career goals.

As a student, I was given space with which to fill the perspective. I was allowed the use of camera equipment, editing software, and finally, a chunk of time to shoot and edit the film that was registered as school credit. Therefore, the experience of making this film was literally undergone as a student; someone expecting to learn, not master.

Much of the process of the project was painful. I have been a ruthless critic of my own shortcomings. The number of mistakes and regrets makes an impressive list (as will be presented in a later section of this paper), but understanding these castigations as constructive self-criticisms can only aid me in the pursuit of a filmmaking career. Rebranding my apparent filmmaking flaws as lessons gained will allow me to both produce better films and be a more competitive force in gaining funding, audience appreciation and critical reception. In other words, the most important reason I completed a film as my project is for the construction of a more realized filmmaking future.

Chapter 2: Activity Log

First Trip to Docktown: 12.30.2016 – 1.7. 2016

Day 1

Arrived in Docktown at 8:00PM, New Year's Eve 2016. That was the night before. Day 0. This is Day 1.

Light is impeccable. Reflections, light, everywhere. We accomplished a 360-degree pan shot that included the four dimensions of this space. From a bridge over the creek (which is really more of a river) we captured in one fluid camera movement: the row of floating homes, Highway 101 and the Redwood City skyline behind it, a massive hotel development, and the condominiums. It took at least 2 hours to get a satisfactory take. Aaron went at full steam. The important thing to remember about this shot is sound. As in, despite it being a 360-degree rotational pan, it will still be pure montage because its use of sound. Each of the dimensions of the shot should have a constructed sound design.

One interview today. James Janus (?), resident intellectual of Docktown. Knows voluminously on tide law, the architecture of water-based living. Speaks a lot about "innovation" and "Design-Think." I think he was a techie in a former life. He also kayaks a lot. He seems to be at a higher socioeconomic level than the rest of the people living in boats on "this side of town". I have noticed there are two (or more) sides to Docktown that are determined by economic status: the homes and the boats. The homes range from modest to garishly large, while most of the boats are standard fishing boats or sailboats that double as liveaboards.

My interview techniques are pretty weak. Mostly what I got from James was expository, as if I was making an advocacy documentary (which most of them think I am. Am I? I don't know). But there were great behavioral moments as well, the best being his philosophical explanations on living on water. It is his belief that the state of California is not adequately prepared to face the impending challenges of sea level rise. He knows the physical mechanics of water-living but he doesn't think the state does. He's a man interested in technology, innovation, change, modernity, etc. Not unlike the techies who bike past his house on their morning commutes, but he is more like a visionary at leisure, or so he postures.

Great, ecstatic shots of him on his roof pointing out various landmarks: condos where floating home communities used to be, the proposed new Google facility, Facebook HQ, a concrete factory, other tech startups, etc. A great "nodal" moment perhaps.

The rest of the day was spent capturing fragments of this strange place. Questions: are James and other people like him, in denial about the removal? They don't seem to acknowledge it. Need more interviews, more meat…

Day 2

Encountered a kind of ethical conundrum today. Was expecting it but did not know when or how it would take place. The crisis is simple and one that I imagine is symptomatic to most in-depth documentaries: *my* film versus *their* film. They see me as someone representing a way to get out their cause: Save Docktown. I have tremendous sympathy for this: I love Docktown and I basically loathe the development. But I am not a political activist, I am a filmmaker. I am not making a commercial for them. If I was, I

would not be making *my* film. What I need to be careful about is betraying my identity—saying I'm doing one thing and doing another. Saying I am making an advocacy film while I'm really constructing my own piece of art. If I was, would I be betraying them? Would I be exploiting them? Would it be ethical? Am I violating their trust? Does it matter? Have I been calling myself a journalist when I am not one? Because I go to journalism school, does it make me one? What is journalism? What am I doing here?

Mary Bernier was the subject today. She is an older woman, bred in 1960's Cali politics. A former hippie, an organizer for Docktown, a charming, motherly, extremely charismatic woman. Also, somewhat of a nuisance to everyone it seems. I imagine she's annoying, and that's probably how she gets things done. She knocks on doors. She confronts people for signatures and other projects with a grandmotherly smile (she's always smiling). Most view her as a freeloader. Who knows what's really in her head. She compliments everyone with honesty. She has room for everyone and also recognizes when people dislike her. But she is relentless. She is probably very depressed. She lives in a small boat ("legally this time!!" she kept saying). She walked us back and forth through Docktown. Aaron got amazing handheld shots the whole time. She would knock on doors and say a little something about them, and move on. Pictorially, its legendary. The ethics of it all. I understand this conversation now. I always knew documentary was about performance, but I never understood the filmmaker to be a performer as well. Its maddening. Documentary is an insane act. I performed all day. And I am exhausted.
Day 3

Woke up with a queer kind of dread in my stomach. Nightmares of mutiny from the Docktowners. What is their motive? Where is this undercurrent of tension that exists

in between my performance as filmmaker (journalist) and their performance as subject/victim/activists? Where is the truth?

I tried to call Lee Callister for interview but got no response. Texted Alison, Paula and Dave the Creekmaster. Got replies from Alison and Paula. Interviews are set up for tomorrow for Alison and Lee.

Discovered great shots on the back porch today. Slow, long takes of the houseboats moving in the water. If you sit patiently enough, you can actually feel the houses moving away and towards each other. I tried to get the camera to see this. The shapes and structures of the homes—triangles, squares, boxes, points, angles, moving in and against each other, away from and toward reflections in the water. It is the rhythm of Docktown here. In and out with the pacing of a duck on water. The eye must pick an object on screen and watch patiently as it moves in relation to other objects. What is its purpose? What is its symbolic meaning? What kind of symbol is it not? Could be anything or nothing. Ultimately, it does not matter—it is truth in a shot.

So, there were no interviews today, but fragments, moments, the passing of time. Moving, but slowly.

Day 4

Interviewed Lee today at the Peninsula Yacht Club for an hour and a half about the history and politics of Docktown. The major takeaway is what a clustered and complex narrative it is. It is a game of players and competing interests and that's it. Lee is a smart man who has done more digging on these issues than any other Docktown resident, even having to pause occasionally to exclaim "what was I talking about again?" Such are the complexities of the story. Too much to get into right now - will have to go

over footage for nuances. Behavior-wise, he is a sturdy, hard-of-hearing old man: Berkeley Master's degree in journalism, now fighting and writing in his retirement for the livelihood of a floating home community. Pretty amazing. The tangents and the layers, also the sad remaining fact that Docktown does not stand a chance. We got some footage of him walking the docks in the rain that was emphatically, but subtly, cool.

Also, Mary called me today. She wanted to discuss her position in regards to the RCA (Redwood Creek Association) meeting tomorrow at the PYC (Peninsula Yacht Club). It is becoming clear that she is "using" me as a means to promote her own local political agenda, though I say that in a very harmless way. She is not power hungry per se, but she has a way about her, a kind of tentacle system that latches to you with goodwill in order to participate in one of her "programs." It's very clear that most of the Docktown residents understand this. It is also very clear that Mary is trying to use my film as a means to promote her own causes. You see the complications. I want neither. Her causes include low-income, affordable housing, disabilities, veteran care, etc. All extremely important, valid perspectives with which I want to explore in the film. But she seems to be wrangling me in to her cause. Part of me likes this—she makes an excellent subject. Part of me loathes it. She discomforts the rest of the Docktowners, even the houseboat folks (though they may be poor, disabled, or both, they seem to lack the 60's Berkley optimism that Mary still exudes, and they may be all the better off for it). Realism is an elusive mist here in Docktown.

I heard strange stories of the micro-political maneuvers of the RCA. Supposedly Mary was accused of "voter fraud" when she wrote in herself (and campaigned for other people to write in herself) in the election for RCA president and council board recently.

The fact that all of these sects exist in a floating home community is amazing. The image of a lady going door to door campaigning for herself as a write-in candidate for a floating home community council member is beautiful and seems to indicate everything beautiful and sad about the American political dream of local democracy. A question also occurs to me: does Mary have dreams of manifesting unlived dreams of Berkley campus political activist leadership here in Docktown? That's also fascinating to me from the angle of California historical identity. Must interview her.

It furthermore occurs to me that the only way to tell a story is to acknowledge the storyteller. Plain and simple. There are too many narratives being constructed and promulgated to afford not to. The creator must be acknowledged. Everything is a fabrication. At least we should admit it. It will be sloppy. But it is necessary.

Days 5 & 6

Interview with Alison represented something big, I felt, in a journalistic way, which is a conflicting feeling for me at this point. With my notepad and pen in hand, and my thinking cap awkwardly on my head, I asked questions like, "and so the county commissioner felt that…". Am I giving in to the Docktowners? Am I now just creating an investigative piece? Is this advocacy journalism? Interviews hardly feel like behavior anymore. With Alison, it was pure data with the intention to vindicate Docktown. There was a nice moment when she received a text mid-interview from a colleague informing her about a possible leak from inside city council. She called him on speaker phone and we captured it all. That felt legitimately journalistic. Again, I don't know how I feel about that. I have a conflict in feeling both that we have loads of images and ideas to work with, yet not nearly enough. Some key moment is missing. I am too detached. There are hardly

any observational images of the Docktowners. Because they don't want to be observed. They want to live.

I emailed Ted Hannig, the attorney who filed the lawsuit against Docktown. We will set up an audio interview with him. He is not available for a video interview, so it will be audio only. I rather like that contrast when it comes down to it. We have great footage of the Marina 1 condo complex across the creek. Planes over condos in between communication towers, sleepy little condo streets, construction cranes in action, etc.

Day 7

It's raining like crazy in California. Right before we were set to leave, I get a call from James telling me a house is sinking down the dock. Aaron and I, excited but grumpy, unpack the equipment, slip on our rain gear and head out for some last-minute footage. Turned out to be pretty great stuff. Literally, one of the homes was actively sinking, and the "whole town came together" type of thing happened. The back porch of the home at one point slipped off into the current and James had to literally lasso it back with a rope. This may factor in well with the film. Everything was so wet though, I have no idea how it looks.

Second Trip to Docktown: 05.27.2017 – 06.6.2017

Day 1

From the airport, I drove straight to the ocean and shot scenes at an amazing place called Pacifica Beach. First images from this trip are rocky shores, crashing waves, strange anemone slug things, misty beach, water, water, water. Do not know how this will fit in, but what is a movie without pictures of nature? Still no idea really what this movie is. Just gathering stuff.

Arrived in Docktown around 2:00PM. Checked into the Whale House. James Jonas is my host. Amicable, smart, heady, very interactive, also a bit domineering. Consistently has ideas on the edit, form and themes of everything. This is fine; I will just discard most of it. It's very helpful to have this local contact, because in some ways he's leading the political charge against the city. One of the only residents who knows the complexities of the issue: the boundaries, the lines, the threads, the jargon, the history. His big idea which I find fascinating is about the future, and how in the face of sea level rise, Docktown could serve as a kind of "living laboratory" for water-based architectural innovation. This is a through-line I want to explore.

Also shot some nice exteriors: more water, reflections, slow movement. I am getting more familiar with this camera but it is quite heavy and is exhausting to carry around for than an hour or two. Met Francesca on her bike who had a sign-up sheet asking for donations for he Save Docktown campaign. Other bikers zoomed by on their way to Silicon Valley.

Day 2

Woke up in Whale House. Shot the guys who come in on a little boat and suck the sewage out of all the floating homes' septic tanks. Decent shots but not interactive enough. I was too bashful. Could work.

Talked with James until mid-morning. He talks and talks and talks. Didn't get any on camera. But that will happen soon enough. The issue is complex. Want to really explore the water-based living architectural innovation side of things. A Dutch (?) water-based architectural firm worth speaking to. Skype? This will give this thing a stake in modernity, which I feel is lacking.

Went to downtown RWC. Got coffee at Peet's coffee. Read about Godard. Went out and shot scenes in downtown RWC. Skeletal construction sites. A bot on wheels that delivers food to businesses. Also met with Erin Ashford downtown, a local photographer doing a portrait series of Docktown. Very earnest, very ethical, wants to use her project for express purpose to "save Docktown."

Night time: Went to Yacht Club, hung with a small crowd: Aimee, Ed, Skeet, some others. We drank beer and talked for a while. Then Skeet gave us a ride to downtown RWC where an 80's band was playing to a large crowd of drunk Californians. There is a beat here. People are totally lost in space but in a frank manner. California is pure artifice in the most authentic way. Me and Aimee hung out and walked around a lot together. We bought a six-pack of beer and met Lane, the scriptwriter of the Fuse Theatre production of the Docktown play that is in the works. To be honest, there is almost too much to talk about in regards to our meeting. Who is Lane? He is a gazelle of the performing arts. He wears denim jackets and carries his motorcycle helmet into bourgeois bars. He raises his eyebrows at each articulation and then smiles as a reaction to his own conclusions. He is a smug, energetic, impressive man. He is made for the camera. Yet he's also an agreeable, thoughtful and kind man. But despite what he (consistently) claims, he seems to lack perception on how to perceive the terrain of documentary work. Ok, so he writes plays, not documentaries. But why not? The world is a stage; it is not the documentary work to create the stage per se, but to explore the many stages that contextualize any important moment. Godard: "Certainty is imagination; Uncertainty is reality."

My purpose is to document the multitudes of stories that are appropriating this place into a new kind of place. This includes the economic environment that is ultimately the enemy. It also includes the photographer, the play and my own documentary, not to mention all the perspectives of the people who live here. This has to be the strangest line of work in the world. I loathe it one second and am riveted by it the next. It is literally pathological.

Day 3

Succumbing to malaise. Walked around the rummage fair at the PYC but didn't set up anything with anyone. Put up some posters in the PYC but I don't think it will do much. Tried to set up a session with Alison and Aimee. We will see where it goes.

Why do I choose not to do? Why is it so difficult to go there - to approach the thing I want at high speed? Why choose the interior? I submit I need help. A guide. Someone, a middle man to show me a hand to shake. Otherwise, I will remain, even behind the camera, on the sidelines like a spectator in my own damn film.

I need to get out and get the good stuff. I'm going to Facebook HQ. Thumbs up. The stretch of Silicon Valley along Bayshore highway. Barren land as far as you can see until a prop of mountains. Fragmented pools and waterways in the middle of a desert. Hills look like the African Sahara. And then, there's Facebook. Physical evidence that it is not just some virtual deity. Across the freeway is the new HQ, half built, already twice as big.

I took images of families walking up to the big thumbs up sign and mimicking it for the camera. Mimesis. Affirming the Affirmative.

Days 4 & 5

Feelings of self-judgement. In and out of pain and relief. Exhausting. Do I have what I need? What do I need? Not enough tripod shots. But the thing is heavy. So usually I go mobile. Thing is still heavy! Beginning to regret using the FS-7. Too big. Want small, mobile, digital capabilities. Besides, this image is too mature for my own abilities. Exteriors and landscapes are awful. Will have to be color corrected extensively.

Bad interview with Alison. Or, I don't know, perhaps it's okay. Her home is very interesting, shaped like a fortune cookie and was once used as a transport vessel in WWII. Amazing. There is lots of movement within the home (which, interestingly is hard to capture without an external reference point.) Couldn't quite capture what I wanted. Hesitated. Poor angle choice. Had no command.

Depression. Self-loathing.

More walking around, capturing moments. Again, hauling the camera around is exhausting. Cannot be mobile with it. Terrible idea to bring it.

I'm counting the days until I'm out of here. Not a good thought to have while making cinema. I'm convinced it is the conditions. Such pressure in a community of strangers.

Caught a lovely break with an elderly Catholic man. Sweet and smoky-voiced and a bit on the side of pomp. Perfect for the camera and a boat with a colorful interior to boot. Warm light, very lovely, full of interesting artifacts and anecdotes. Basically, the ideal material I've been looking for and I think my decisions behind the camera were worthy. I was on task. Probably, I moved too much. It was too cramped to do much else. His boat was named AGAPE. The Jesuits.

An idea for opening (or closing). Long shot / long take of kid practicing skateboard at dusk. On the audio track, insert the conversation between Lee, Phil and myself regarding 60's SF. "Tune in, drop out…?", etc.

Day 6

Wonderful play with light on water for the camera this morning around 8:00am. The reflection of little light orbs travelling downstream past the glow of the sun ball on the waves. Need to find great color for it. Natural circles wiggling and shapeshifting from focus moving in and out of frame.

Caught a break with the lovely Francesca who showed me around the Yacht club and up into the tank, which, through the miraculous wear of time has developed eroded little rust holes in its roof which as light shines through, resembles constellations of stars in the night sky. Dear God, I hope I recorded this moment with justice - could be a pinnacle.

The evening with the kind, dorky Phil Bigelow. A man who can't help but talk about anything. Perfect for the camera. Movies, TV shows, high school track records, past experiences, whatever crosses his mind. I may have asked one question the entire time. Could be very interesting. Felt good about this one. Could make for some laughs.

Day 7

Day with James on camera. Exhausting. The man is relentless. And I aim to show this. What kind of subject claps and calls "action" and "cut" throughout a shoot in which he is being recorded? A guy who took a community college level course in video production. A man who thinks he has the intellectual capacity to solve California's sea-level rise problem. A man who wants to save his community. Both egotistically empty

and admirable. Ambiguity. I let him do his thing. Passivity. My game. And this will take some thought to develop in edit. To stay true to my experience as documentarian and filmmaker, this segment will have to translate the feeling I had. Therefore, I am forced to include these hammer taps on the "fourth wall." My idea: at first, these moments will be comic, rather absurd in their portrayal of a man who is attempting to control the production. Including this is my retaliation. However, I am also grateful for his behavior. It eased my anxiety and gave me something to follow and record rather than invent. This is admittedly a relief. And so, as it continues, I must find a way to express this relief, the nearly beautiful way the film is being fostered by this. Besides, the film remains not a characterization of Docktowners but of the nature of the system they live within. It is neither an advocacy film nor a clown show. It is analytical, of politics, of non/fiction, of beauty, of nature, of human beings. It is everything at once. That is the hope.

Third and final visit to Docktown: 10.18.2017 – 10.21.2017

Day 1

Back at "Whale House." First thing I do is get some rest. Tonight was the last night of rehearsals before tomorrow's opening of "The Unfinished Story of Docktown." As far as the play is concerned, I am worried most about sound. Stacey had assured me it wouldn't be a problem, that the voices of the actors would be amplified. I knew I wouldn't be able to "lav" everyone on stage. So, I gambled on this promise. Turns out there is no microphone or amplification set up at all. And the wind was relentless during rehearsals. So, my humble shotgun mic got whipped around all night and the results show. Looking over footage was rough. I am realizing the FS5 has trouble in low light situations so I need to figure out ways to address this.

The play itself honestly exceeded my expectations. It is overly dramatic just like you hope local theatre would be, full of grand statements ("Upon these wooden planks…") and even had some musical numbers. It also occurs to me that shooting theatre for a film is a kind of sinful appropriation to the dedicated thespian. Especially with only one camera / one angle set up. When you experience theatre as a spectator you count on your eyes to roam the stage and construct your own kind of shot / reverse shot dynamic. With only one camera angle, the play becomes very lifeless. This may prove to be something interesting for my own film. Something so obviously staged may provide good contrast with a movie that is dedicatedly documentary. I prefer theatrics to documentary anyway, and lacking that stage, that intentionality has been a struggle of mine with this project.

After the rehearsals, I hung out at the PYC bar and then recorded some night scenes around Docktown.

Day 2

Had to buy some time today before the play started so I basically just walked around handheld and recorded some things and looked around at this peculiar and absurd slice of California. Got some coffee in town. Bought food. Taking my time.

Shooting the play was extremely difficult. My arms were completely worn out from operating the camera propped high up on tripod, zooming and panning on instinct. Windy again. Audio is awful. Tomorrow Stacy is going to bring a mic and place it on stage and run it through the PA, so perhaps that will help.

There were a handful of Docktowners in the audience tonight. Some enjoyed it. Others had this skeptical expression on their faces, as if to say, "oh yeah that's supposed

to be me on stage, what of it?" It began to rain near the end and really came down during the final number, "Who Gives a Damn About Docktown?" so it was cut a little short and everyone ran inside to the club to start drinking.

Judi, a local Docktowner, teacher and a bit of a hippie-type, had this little point-and-shoot digital camera circa 2003 that she graciously let me borrow until I leave. I'm not sure if she thought it would actually be helpful for me to use, considering I brought like a $4000 camera myself, but she was very nice about it, and I'm very glad she did because I love the little thing. Most importantly, it is a way for me to capture some candid moments in the club. If I was to pull out the FS5, people would (and have) naturally tensed up and become skeptical. This is well known. But with this new little thing, I can bust it out and everyone treats it as if I am recording home movies. People love it. I shot some random scenes around PYC and outside then went back to Whale House and fell asleep on a couch floating on the water.

Day 3

The malaise of making a movie as a stranger. I loathe these moments. Any way to escape so I walked around again and shot some clouds, more water, more construction cranes and bulldozers, etc.

The rest of the day is a blur. Night two of play. I finally found a better color profile for shooting the play in lowlight. Exhausted my arms again. Don't really remember anything else about the process to be honest.

At the club bar again after the play. With my trusty point and shoot. Everyone gets drunk and slowly leaves the club. Only me and Emilio left. Emilio is a local

Docktowner, an older man born in Mexico who came here on his boat 20 or so years ago. He is also one of two Docktowners starring in the play.

That night he told me his whole life story. Its moments like these that I curse the situation I'm in. I simply didn't have the time or presence to capture and transmit moments like these into the films. These invisible moments that are so rarely coded into art. His life is wild. Served in Vietnam, came back to California, got himself involved in the anti-war movement for the simple reason that he thought he could get laid, became president of SDS chapter of UC-Davis (!) until it fizzled out, bought a boat, fixed it up, began smuggling pot from Mexico into California, made a whole lot of money, lost it all, somehow found his way to Docktown, tied up his boat and has been living here ever since. Suddenly, his role in the play seemed so insignificant as does all the activism surrounding Docktown. They have no chance. Things are changing. Emilio knows it. He doesn't care about the play. (And it shows, too: he is by far the least prepared actor, so much so that a characteristic was invented for his role: he always has some sort of reading material with him as a prop – a newspaper, a book, etc.—where he can check his lines.)

This is when I realized the fundamental sin of my film and why, no matter what kind of formal design I implement, will necessarily be somewhat of a failure. I was not able to truly reach the essence of the place, nor could I invent one. I was simply too distant, peeking in every once in a while to find something interesting to record.

Day 4

Final moments in Docktown ever? Had to catch my flight early afternoon. I filmed my exit through the window of the Uber, driving past the factory, then the houseboats and finally past the hotel and condos swallowing up the whole scene.

Chapter 3: Evaluation

In documentary filmmaking, process is everything. To evaluate my film as simply a text would be pointless without first discussing the experiences I had in making it. There were two parts to the process: shooting and editing. In my opinion, most of what I did wrong happened during the shooting, and was thus attempted to be absolved in the editing room. Thus, any misdirection I acknowledge during the shooting necessarily condition the finished product as a text, and I therefore will evaluate my film in that manner: by first discussing what happened in the shooting and how that affected the final product.

There are three main criticisms I have of myself that occurred while shooting. The first—and most glaring of the three—has to do my apprehension in being a director (or collaborator)with people. Aside from a few sacred moments, rarely during my three or four weeks living in Docktown did I truly enter into a realm of consistent trust or collaboration with any of the people about whom I was making a film about. When it did happen, it was clear the presence of a camera or any other recording device would be schismatic to the vibe.

Instead, I was much more interested in casing the joint for landscape shots. The problem with this is that rarely were there any people in these frames. It is hard to make a film about the conflict between people and space without any figures to contrast with a background image. And when there is no reference point for a spectator to understand the relationship between people and space then the film ceases to be about people, which *Time Off* very much purports to be.

For a number of reasons, I was unable to lose the sense of self that could have freed me into risks of associating with people. To do this could have allowed for staged scenes or other forms of collaboration, instead of my always remaining a voyeur. I should have *directed* rather than merely waited and watched. When I compiled all my footage and began editing, then I was not confronted with cohesively planned or thematically organized material, but a massive collection of image-files, each attempting to do something separate from the other. The plan was to simply "manufacture" a narrative from all these. And basically, this is what I have done, though it has not been easy. In searching for the proper language, I have introduced a dramatically transformed narrative structure with each rough cut, of which there have been several.

The main reason behind this problem of on-site direction and organization, if I'm allowed to self-analyze, is probably my personality, which tends to avoid human contact in general, and especially in approaching strangers and making demands of them. This sentiment is magnified when I have the voyeur's tool in hand, beckoning me to stay at a distance, to watch and not interact. But more importantly (and practical to the evaluation of this project) is that I chose a site-specific topic that happens to be about 2,000 miles away. The worst result of this choice is that I had to coordinate my trips in relation to school, work and other responsibilities at home, not to mention the financial cost. I went in January for 9 days or so and could not return until May, when I stayed for another week and a half. The third trip did not come until October. Each of these trips was bound by time. They were expensive and not conducive to building dedicated, quality relationships. It would have been much better to spend a month or two with one announced trip, rather than "starting over" each successive visit.

All this to say that I should have chosen a project closer to home in which I could truly dedicate my time and presence to. I believe no matter what the topic would have been, the film would be at the very least, stronger, more consistent and ultimately, closer to the cinematic vision I believe in. Although there are aspects to the film I truly love and take pride in, it remains, at its worst, a desperate attempt to piece together something cohesive from a pile of disassociated scraps. At its best, it is a good-looking pile of scraps.

The last critique I am levelling against myself is from a technical standpoint. On the first trip to Docktown in January of 2017, I brought a friend and cinematographer out with me. His expertise did wonders not only for the images—which were crisp, colorful and smooth—but also for my own brain space, which was freed to be a director instead of technician. I could distance myself from the equipment and simply tell Aaron what I wanted and he would do his best to get it, adding his own internalized aesthetic into the show. (Many of the beautiful shots in the film were captured by Aaron. And likewise, a lot of the rougher, rawer moments came from my hands.)

After that first visit, I handled all camerawork on subsequent visits. I regret to a certain degree not practicing a bit more before I returned for the subsequent visits. Hardly was I familiar with not only the specific camera's settings but simply the nature of cinematography itself. I knew what kind of frames I wanted, but it is a whole different mentality when faced with capturing those decisive moments on spot. Too often I was handheld when I should have used a tripod. Consistency in color profiles should have been recorded and implemented more strictly. If all of this isn't embarrassing enough, there was even a moment when I had recorded a couple days' worth of good landscape

shots until I realized that I had been recording in 60 fps. I am not a cinematographer but I still should have done the proper technical preparation to ensure that I was able to provide visually what I desired conceptually. Many shots that could have been composed more successfully on location were simply found unusable during the edit and thus discarded. Suffice to say the great lesson I have learned from this experience is to always prepare (thematically, conceptually, and pictorially) for what is to be represented in the film. I had never even set foot in Docktown before I went in and tried to make a movie about it.

Chapter 4: Physical Evidence

My physical evidence is a documentary film called temporarily called Moving

Houses. It can be found in the Missouri School of Journalism Master's Projects archives.

Chapter 5: Analysis

Surface, Work and the Production of Space:

A Textual Analysis of Three Documentaries by Jia Zhangke

"…Suddenly the question are the words I've just said,
so awkwardly and blindly… part of a greater play
continuing through me… a worker in the world theatre."
– *La Chinoise*

Introduction to concepts and theories. In Jia Zhangke's debut feature film *Xiao Wu (Pickpocket),* the titular protagonist returns to his hometown to find both the physical and emotional terrain impenetrably altered. One of the only ways of reconnecting with an old friend, who, once a pickpocket like Xiao Wu, and now reinventing himself as a businessman, is to acknowledge a wall outside of their childhood homes used to mark their aging process. By touching the wall (both in isolation from each other) the characters of the film are literally encountering a surface of their memory. As the town's crumbling infrastructure hints at impending redevelopment and transformation, the surface of this wall represents the last evidence of a shared space between two friends unable to find connection in modernity. It is a space of memory—proof of the constancy of a changing China and, more gloomily, the further inevitability that it someday will be torn down. Throughout his filmography, Jia represents the physical surfaces of a transforming national project as a way of addressing individual perspectives on reality.

To approach the cinema of Jia Zhangke is to encounter these surfaces that physically provide evidence of the complex transience of modern life. To interpret each

shot, frame or gesture within a film is to interpret specific moments in space, time and the emotional identification that conflates them (Qi, 2014). Graced with the emotional power of realism and societal critique, these "creations of space and time" represent a certain significance rarely seen in contemporary cinema. Jia accomplishes this by granting the spectator access (albeit, a distant, minimalist access) to individual characters who transmit perspective on the world.

I argue that the common denominator between each of the characters in Jia's films can be understood as each person's relative classification as *workers*. Most of these workers are literal workers in the sense that they are employed by the state or, say, a factory or construction company. Such a strict definition is not always applicable, however. Rather, *worker* here I am referring to someone who operates within spaces of modernity, and is therefore, in a country with a strong nationalist program like China, subject to the machinations of the macro-economic and political system. In this way, all of China can be seen as a production stage, and all of its economic subjects as workers in the national theatre.

The worlds represented in Jia's films are specific Chinese moments of reality, fragments of space and time with contemporary significance that, like the walls constantly being destroyed and rebuilt, are created with the intention for use. To "use" Jia's films is to assume new perspectives on China's shifting collective project and how that in turn effects the perspective of the individual spectator. Transfixed with China's physical and civic transformation, Jia represents his country as a giant production of economy - a stage constantly getting destroyed and reset for global market interaction, rendering its subjects often displaced from work, community or their entire home-space.

By engaging directly with human subjects to provide perspective for the spectator, Jia's films can be seen as texts that track the dislocation between the individual and the collective in a post-Maoist Chinese culture that is beginning to accept and contribute to the global economy (Yingjin, 2010). Like most of the characters (or subjects) in his films who tell of their personal histories as "constructors" (often literal laborers or sometimes performers or artistic, and therefore, "constructors" of worlds) of some kind, Jia acknowledges his own contribution in constructing Chinese realities. His vision is from one of the many workers in the national production—another surface in the modern development plan.

As a spectator of Jia's films, one *experiences* before knowing what exactly is happening. Such as it is for a director who privileges the provisional frame and mood evocation prior to offering clear contents or coercing narrative clarity (Qi, 2014). In other words, the spectator is shown a series of frames within a film with the intent of presenting various ideas on Chinese realities as opposed to transferring pure knowledge from artist to spectator. This method of distancing the spectator from identification has the tendency to create rather oblique experiences when watching Jia's films. His characters are alienated from their immediate environments and portrayed with a distance, making it difficult for spectators to create identification with them. Time moves like a great beast, slowly, but powerfully; and often, the films depict the erasure of history. Surfaces crumble, new ideologies arise, ready to rebuild.

So vast, complex and unfamiliar are these "creations of space and time" that Jia's films should defy any reductive readings. This research is being limited to a textual analysis, therefore, of three of his documentaries that represent the themes of individual

workers and their contributions and perspectives of the production of space within China's post-Maoist global market emergence in significantly distinct ways. The three films are *Dong* (2006), *24 City* (2008) *and I Wish I Knew* (2010). Within these films, the research will be isolating various thematic and technical elements that pertain to the claim that Jia's films are studies of individuals acting as workers in spaces produced by macro-economic controls. The "surfaces" represent fragments of change: old walls come down, new walls are constructed, etc. All of China is a production set preparing for the event of global capitalism. Even in documentary, Jia recognizes the contrivances of reality. Thus, documentary subjects become actors and actors become documentary subjects. All workers, whether laborer or artist, become stagehands.

Through a variety of complex and subtle self-reflexive techniques, the "surfaces" of these films reflect the changing physicality of the Chinese economic and social landscapes perceived through the people local to the films' settings. In *Dong*, a painter attempts to configure a Yangtze River landscape near the prospective site of the Three Gorges Dam project by painting a tableau of local male workers in its foreground. In *I Wish I Knew*, the histories of Shanghai are explored using the city's famed cinematic past as a way to represent the city as a readymade for the 21th Century global market sphere. And in *24 City*, Jia hones in on a development replacement project converting a state-run factory into luxury condominiums by mixing in elements of fiction into the documentary.

In summary, this research will be examining the following elements in three Jia Zhangke documentaries:

(1) *workers as individual actors of their socioeconomic condition*
(2) *the production of space*
(3) *surfaces within these spaces*

For further clarity, it will offer definitions for the key terms of the analysis.

Worker. Any individual agent contributing to the constructed collective notion of what China looks like from a local perspective. This could be a factory worker in *24 City*, the painter in *Dong* who reappropriates the shifting Chinese landscape into his own vision, or even Jia himself, as a constructor of worlds shown through his films.

Space. The local, physical setting specific to each film, scenario or frame. For example, the space of *24 City* is the entire factory campus, but for each character's interview, a new local space arises with its own conditions and essence. In other words, space can become as local as the frame allows, but is never of its own singular "justitselfness"; rather, all characteristics of "local" space are conditioned by the machinations of the macro. When one says the "production of space," this is precisely the process that is meant.

Surface. This can be understood here in two ways: as a literal surface of, say, a wall or concrete walkway, i.e. something physically constructed for an intended use; and, also, as something constructed but more invisible, something artificial and representative, something that locks into the imagination of the user and changes its perspective on things. For Jia, cinema is a surface.

In order to fully analyze the texts for the elements mentioned above, this research will also draw from three areas of research to frame its analysis: semiotics, montage, and a cultural analysis of China's historical relationship to polylocality and spaces of transformation.

Semiotics is a method for understanding how to see and gauge meaning within texts. It is, in other words, an interpretative strategy for finding symbolic meaning in objects. It is the key towards recognizing Jia as a self-reflexive filmmaker: one who acknowledges his own filmmaking as complicit in the critique he formulates within them. In the meaning-making process of semiotics, there is the interpreter of the object, the object under interpretation, and the concluding interpretation of that spectator-object relationship (Tsang, 2013). Semiotics, above all, is about making meaning. Cinema, then, as it is in the business of images, can be understand as a laboratory for semiotic

interpretation. Tsang (2013) develops a cinematic triad of semiotics, consisting of *representamen*, *object*, and *interpretant*, that together become "unifying terms" with which we can interpret a film with (p. 11). In the context of Jia's films, this research refers to these *objects* of semiotic interpretation as "surfaces." As superficial entities endowed with interpretative qualities, *object* and *surface* are interchangeable concepts with only a nominal difference. The wall Xiao Wu and his friend both encounter in *Xiao Wu (Pickpocket)* as a space of memory is a good example of how a surface becomes representative when interpretation is applied to it. In this case, the wall is not just a piece of civic infrastructure but a symbol of loss and change.

In interviews, Jia has claimed a desire to treat his films as surfaces themselves (Qi, 2014). Rather than dive into the subjectivity of things, and thus, risk enforcing identification, he prefers his films to dwell on the objective surface of things, becoming a surface itself in the process. Therefore, we can further view the screen with which we view his films on as a surface-object (Qi, 2014). It is the domain of the *interpretant*, i.e. a spectator, to recognize this surface and create meaning from it.

Montage is a theory of cinema introduced by pioneering Soviet filmmakers in the 1920's that views cinema as a material means of using art as a political act (Bordwell, 2005). It is admittedly difficult to associate Jia with a strict Eisensteinian classification of montage. Nonetheless, at the heart of Jia's films remain a cinematic design derived from the nature of conflict and contradiction essential to montage theory. While it is true there is an inherent link between montage and Marxist ways of thought, it is simultaneously true that elements of both can be used against each other. If the Soviet Union emphatically valued the collective over the individual, and montage instituted this creed

into its own value system of art in general, then Zhangke, it can be said, pits China's institutional collectivism against an emerging individual consciousness. The films as a result are concerned equally with both ideas and people, the collective and the individual. The depth to which Jia explores the individual and collective realms is what defines his conception of montage. In other words, there is a localized approach to montage in each of the films under analysis.

Finally, a brief but crucial cultural analysis of modernized China's relationship to space, scale and its representation in cinema is necessary in order that we gain a perspective on a place with a complex social and historical identity. Jia's films unconsciously but specifically exist within this space and, without a general analysis, many of the cultural references in the films would go undetected and thus, much of the films interpretative possibilities lost. Yingjin (2010) defines the historical Chinese condition by focusing on a single conflict: (1) the production of space and scale by an authoritarian position and (2) the polylocality of China's cultural landscape. This is an important notion towards understanding the complexities of China's post-Maoist spatial and cultural orientations and how they have affected one another through China's global, capitalist and population booms in the late 20th Century. The cinema of Jia Zhangke engages in this very battle by becoming itself a space where this conflict is dramatized. By framing the technical design of three of his documentaries with montage and semiotic interpretation theory, this paper concludes that the critical foci of Jia's films—local individuals acting within macro-produced spaces—is also the very story of modern China itself.

***Dong* (2006) and the artist as a worker of perspective**

Dong (2006), a documentary made as a thematic companion to the feature film *Still Life* (2006), is centered on Fengjie, a small industrial town off the Yangtze River close to the proposed site of the Three Gorges Dam. Much of the town, due to its proximity to the construction site will be flooded, and thus, its inhabitants forcibly removed. What remains of the town is an eerie mix of construction laborers, hangers on and businessmen. Fengjie is a ghost town in the works. Though *Still Life* has become acclaimed in the international critical consciousness, *Dong* remains the relatively obscure shadow to its feature-length, more "produced" and costlier counterpart. Nonetheless, due to its minimal, lo-fi digital aesthetic, its ambitious humanism and mix of vérité and staged elements, *Dong* is a crucial work in understanding the many critical angles Jia's aesthetics can embody.

The film is concerned with a painter who is constructing a massive tableau of male laborers from Fengjie posing in the foreground of Three Gorges Dam landscape. If all of China is a production, then the town of Fengjie is a set actively being torn down for the construction of a new one. Surfaces reflect everywhere in this production. The whole town is in rubble. Walls have crumbled. The dam, as much a symbol of high hubris and progress as displacement and ruin, is waiting backstage to be pulled out for the next scene. Self-consciously, Jia constructs his own perspective on the situation by making the focus of *Dong* about a painter who is a clear stand in for himself. Amidst this stage in rubble and ruin, this artist arrives in the space with the intent of using the surface of a canvas to project his own interpretation of the scenario. In other words, this local space of Fengjie, utterly altered by a massive state development plan, is reconstituted into the dynamic vision of an artist.

This perspective can be understood in the very first frame of the film. Before any production credits or titles, we see the painter Liu Xuedong (from here on out, the titular "Dong") from behind and the waist up gazing out onto the huge vista of the Yangtze River valley (Fig. 1.1). Mountains stretch upward on either side of the raging river. The landscape is massive, wild and overwhelming. Yet, the artist, jutting through the lower left-hand side of the frame's foreground, throws all potential scale out of proportion. He towers over the whole valley, gathering perspective. This is the prospective site of The Three Gorges Dam and Dong is above it all hovering high in space like a god. Here we can identify the main conflict in Jia's films illustrated in a single frame: the complicated interplay between the individual's perspective and the macro-collective design. Yet the key distinction in *Dong* is this godliness of the artist. For Jia, the artist represents a unique characteristic of the Chinese worker-subject. Empowered with the ability to construct worlds (and thus, perspective and space), the artist is a worker represented as a worthy foe to the state's macro-production of reality.

Soon, however, the perspective returns to the human scale as the great expanse of nature shifts to the interior of a boat entering Fengjie (Fig. 1.2). The space is crowded with passengers and conversation as an automated authorial voice on the intercom makes announcements. Dong, on his cell phone, gazes once more into the approaching space. In the next shot, we find him on land, wandering through piles of rubble, the camera carefully panning with him horizontally (Fig. 1.3). He inspects the territory, gazes off into space and, crouching down, balances a few pieces of rubble in his hands. This is the artist in preparation. Freed from the temporal and physical constraints of wage labor, the work of the artist is primarily one of exploring a space and developing individual

perspective on it. Dong wanders coolly through the scene he eventually aims to appropriate onto the canvas, hands in pockets, engaged in the realms of his mind.

Emerging from these three opening scenarios, we can locate Jia's corresponding ideas of space in contemporary China: natural space (the river valley soon to be replaced by the dam); controlled space of economy (the boat entering Fengjie); and, the discarded spaces built and left behind by human construction (the ruinous piles of rubble). For Jia, the artist has the leisure to traverse all three, wide-eyed and interested in everything.

His work is not purely of intellectual leisure, however. Soon Dong is shown hard at work on his painting, collaborating with both people and tools to construct a physical representation of space. By observing him paint, the spectator begins to understand space from the perspective of Dong. He engages us in interview, confiding that he needs "to see [his] subjects at a distance" in order to "paint each stroke rationally" (Fig. 1.4). Here again, Dong can be seen as a stand-in for evangelizing Jia's own conception of cinema, in which he employs a similar discipline of distance and objectivity. In Jia's films, alienation is omnipresent. By often placing great distance between his subjects, the background, and the camera, it becomes difficult to foster identification between the spectator and the characters in the film (Qi, 2014). Like the figures in the film, a spectator can feel alienated watching a Jia film due to this lack of identifiable entryways. But through a process of waiting, watching and dwelling on the interpretive qualities of the film's surfaces, it becomes possible to engage with the perspective of the film as a totality (Qi, 2014). The screen is this *object of signification* that allows us to interpret meaning into the work.

For Jia, this is the urgent work of the artist—to use the medium as a physical surface with which the spectator can interact with. Rather than providing clear contents of narration or information which would allow us as spectators to identify with the charters of the political facts of the situation, Jia instead provides us with a frame of perspective, a surface, to interact with. His films then, can be seen on an equal plane as any of the other surfaces depicted within them - the crumbling wall, the piece of stone in a pile of rubble - all evidence of a constantly shifting production of space. As workers in this world, all of us – character, subject, artist, spectator—are left with a sense of alienation from our labor, and must create new perspectives if we are to survive.

Such are the underlying thematic intents to *Dong*. But what of the technical labor of Jia himself? How does he communicate these ideas? What is he physically doing in the editing room to evoke such perplexing ideas? Jia's tendency to blend documentary and fiction can be traced back to original ideas in montage theory as a confrontation between reality and narrative (Veg, 2007). This notion further complements (and complicates) Jia's vision of China as a giant production of space as the distinction between what is "real" becomes harder to discern, and ultimately, something negotiable.

Made in companion with his feature film *Still Life,* Jia interestingly incorporates elements of both fiction and reality into *Dong*. For example, we may recognize an actor from *Still Life,* Han Sanming, mixed into the group of male laborers modeling for Dong's painting. By calling into question the borders between fiction and documentary, Jia is forcing us to think twice on the exclusivity of both, not just in films, but in everyday life. Semblances of reality are often incorporated into the realms of fiction. But can fictional elements be incorporated into reality? By using Han Sangmin as the vessel with which to

pose this type of question, Jia has appropriated him from fictional subject in *Still Life* to documentary object in the artist's spatial representation of Fengjie in *Dong* (Fig. 1.5). In Jia's China, where the fate of a space like Fengjie is dictated by the machinations of the state, the individual's reality is constructed outside the realm of nature.

Could this play between fiction and reality be a variation of Eisenstein's (1949) ideal cinematic synthesis of "Art and Industry" (p. 46). That by blurring the lines between what is "staged" and what is "real," Jia is ultimately affirming a material analysis of history and advocating for a kind of working class consciousness? I would argue yes, albeit in a slightly deterred manner. In some senses, Jia exemplifies a variation of montage that exists within the frame based on the emotional resonance and tone of the piece, as well as exploring notions of conflict between individual and state, reality and fiction, etc. (Eisenstein, 1949). In other words, there is a kind of thematic montage that is critical of the material organization of modernity while it simultaneously acknowledges its contribution to it. But the organization of the film, the cutting and movement of the camera, remain based on emotional instinct rather than "mathematical units of measure" (p. 75). Thus, as we watch his films and attempt to discern the various questions that arise – what's real? what's fiction? why does this matter? what could it mean?—we are allowed to construct our own synthesized conclusions.

Dong (2006) dir. Jia Zhangke

Fig. 1.1. The opening shot of *Dong*. The artist gathering perspective in natural space.

I am now at the Three Gorges

Dong (2006) dir. Jia Zhangke.

Fig.1.2 The second sequence in *Dong*. The artist in a controlled space of economy.

Dong (2006) dir. Jia Zhangke.

Fig. 1.3. The third sequence of *Dong*. The artist strolling through mountains of society's discarded space.

Dong (2006) dir. Jia Zhangke.

Fig. 1. 4. The artist Dong explaining his philosophy on perspective and representation can be understood as a stand-in for Jia's beliefs of the cinema.

Dong (2006) dir. Jia Zhangke.

Fig. 1.5. Three planes of surface: the camera-surface; the canvas-surface; and the documentary object-surface.

24 City **and the space of history.** This specific variation of montage which relies on a conflict between fact and fiction, the individual-collective disjunction, and the objective interpretation of the spectator, reaches new heights in Jia's mammoth hybrid documentary *24 City (2008)*. It is a film that asks one question: as the macro-production of space shifts its historical mise en scène from communism to capitalism, how do individual subjects examine their own agency and futility as workers in the world theatre? Jia attempts to answer this not by being a journalist but by being an inventor, architect and constructor of realities. By implicating his film into the lived conflict of deciphering the limits of reality within produced spaces, Jia creates a massively complex film that repurposes the official historical perspective of the state to that of the worker-individual.

With more urgency and objectivity than *Dong*, *24 City* investigates the conflict

between the individual and the state collective will by focusing on the workers of a state-

run factory that is redeveloping into a luxury condominium complex. Factory 420 was a

state-run manufacturing campus of military aircraft vessels that employed and housed

hundreds of thousands of workers and their families. As the state's global role as a

communist power weakened, so did the manufacturing output of the factory. In the

1970's it was downsized to a producer of cheap goods, and finally, in 2006 as the state

definitively ceded to the fate of globalized capitalism, sold to a private company

specializing in luxury housing (Shu-chin, 2011).

By weaving together this history though a spread of stories, Jia gives precedence

to the toll that China's macro-economic shifts have inflicted on the individual worker.

The spectator, however, lacks nearly any reference to distinguish whether these histories

are "fact" or "fiction" amid this meandering narrative. Without the enigmatic perspective

of the artist-worker of *Dong*, Jia's thesis *in 24 City* retreats into the oft-dispirited sense of

futility of the worker, a subject displaced at the whim of state machinations. Thus, this

delirium experienced in deciphering between "reality" and "the stage" is given evidence

though the individual consciousness of workers. Whether or not these stories are borne

from reality or a script is intentionally left unclear. After all, if the whole world is a stage,

Jia seems to be asking, what's the difference?

From the first shot of *24 City*, the audience is confronted with a huge disconnect

in scale between space and the human subjects who navigate it. The frame consists of a

mass of workers trudging through a factory's entrance gate so massive it dwarfs the

anonymous bodies funneling through it (Fig. 2.1). Watching this action, we are reminded

of the Lumière film *La sortie des usines Lumière* (1895) (*Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*) and the beginning of cinema itself. Through this reference, Jia is expressing solidarity with documentary cinema's singular ability to depict the conditions of humanity. He is also accomplishing something more subliminal. By showing the inverse of the Lumière film – workers not exiting their factory but entering it—he reveals the purpose of his film: to depict the lives of workers not as free agents of public spaces but as subjects to the state labor system. This is not the liberating gestures of workers trotting into the public sphere as the Lumières depicted. It is a representation of humanity as an entity shaped by the system it is coerced to act within. By organizing space as both historic and cinematic, Jia is introducing a film with the intention to subvert and, at times reverse, the expectation of what that word documentary, and its history, is supposed to mean.

From the godly perspective of the factory gates, the film then enters the workspace as the credits roll over sentimental music. As we watch workers weld, scrape and bang fiery metal instruments, the practical components of the film's production are listed plainly in text. Jia is acknowledging the film as a product of labor. It is a kind of initiation into the space of the film, a way of announcing both the solidarity and complicity with the contemporary production of spatialized labor.

This economy of labor is not only a matter of documentary reality, however. It is also a production of theatre. In the following sequence, the workers are again corralled into a space, a massive auditorium where the redevelopment program is announced from a stage under a large banner reading "CEREMONY FOR TRANSER OF LAND." Here workers can be seen not only as a collective force subjected to the situation of

41

socioeconomic policy, but also, as they are willed into a rehearsed, commemorative song and cheer, participants in it. The film then cuts harshly to an isolated corridor where a lone figure trots up a staircase. The entire dislocation between the individual and the collective, the theatrics of economy and the isolation of reality, is portrayed here in a matter of seconds. In *24 City*, Jia is revealing his purpose within documentary cinema: to first track the working masses into their spaces of employment, and then, to chase the lone figure on the staircase and tell its story. Only by exploring the individual's subjectivity in relation to the enforced collective will can the production of space be acutely critiqued. That this subjectivity necessarily includes fictional elements is the entire point in portraying the experiences of individual lives that are structured by forces beyond their control. A thesis of *24 City* could be summed up with the following mantra: sometimes only fiction can represent reality.

There are three individual narratives in *24 City* that illustrate the ambiguities of Jia's cinematic space. They can be understood as dialectical games between reality and fiction and are used to critique the socioeconomic space produced by the state but experienced by workers. We can interpret these themes utilizing methodologies of montage theory and semiotics.

One of these narratives is an interview with Secretary Guan, former head of security of Factory 420 and a secretary in the Communist Party. He is situated in the seats of the auditorium (now, largely empty), his back to the stage where, alarmingly, two men are playing badminton under a large military propaganda poster. As Guan recounts his days of leadership in the party, the scenario grows in absurdity and we begin to recognize that more than just a game of badminton is being waged. Both the physical competition

of the players and the empty rhetorical volleys of Guan are the back-and-forth gestures of sport. Politics and the spectacle conflate into a single display of mass-produced ideology.

This dynamic between political theatre performed on and off the stag illustrate the two planes of power examined in Jia's cinema. One is of the obvious and recognizable variety wherein fiction is clearly distinguished from reality through the signifier of the stage. This is the space of paid performance and entertainment where an audience is expected to understand the indestructability of the "fourth wall." The badminton players exemplify this realm. But there is an invisible kind of theatre being waged off-stage as well, performed by the likes of Guan and other high-ranking officials. It is characterized by echoing state-enforced ideology in an attempt to monopolize history. By including Guan's oral history, Jia is both recognizing official government narratives of the past and simultaneously exposing it through the constructed cinematic spatial orientation. As Shu-chin (2011) points out, one of Jia's firm beliefs concerning Chinese history is the urgency to de-monopolize the official historical narrative set in place by the government. By slyly constructing a mise en scène that depicts a theatricalism performed on and off the stage, Jia is subliminally addressing this concern and effectively subverting a space to which ordinary people have been denied historical access to.

After literally constructing and deconstructing the historical stage in one scene, *24 City* transfers entirely to the perspectives of the factory workers past and present, giving precedence to their oral histories through interviews. It is difficult (and especially, I would wager for foreign viewers unfamiliar with Chinese film industry) to discern which segments use actors and which use the real workers of Factory 420. As was mentioned

43

earlier, this oblique, ambiguous distinction must be understood as part of the point in addressing the lived spaces of production in China. Jia purposely arranges the interviews so both actor and worker are situated in similar arrangements: shot in medium frame and sitting down at an equal distance from the camera. Therefore, an equal emphasis is placed on fiction and reality. In other words, whether we are watching a professional actor or a documentary subject is a question that precedes the ability of the cinematic image to truthfully communicate reality (Shu-Chin, 2010).

One of these interviews is of a woman named Hou Lijun who, sitting alone in a bus marauding through the streets at night, recounts her tales of misfortune as a repairperson in Factory 420. Forced to leave her family for work, she experiences isolation, and eventually, in an ironic twist, after the diminishing production of Factory 420, loses the job she relocated to get. As tears fall from Hou Lijun's face, Jia occasionally cuts to seconds of a black screen before returning to the bus again. Her final words, "If you have something to do, you age more slowly," are presented in quotes as the frame fades into a black screen, her name boldly attributed in text. Hou Lijun's lonesome journey is reflected through the constructed mise en scène of the cinematic space: a bus with no other passengers, visible driver or apparent destination accentuates the isolating experience of the Chinese worker-subject. Jia is attempting to reconstruct a space which gives definition and, though somber in tone, a reclamation of spatial orientation to the ordinary worker. And by displaying Hou Lijun's final words as a kind of proverbial mantra, Jia elevates the ordinary to the extraordinary, restructuring the intentions of "official" historical narratives.

Though it is dangerous to equate Marxism with its various 20th century ideological experiments, there is nonetheless a clear disdain and ironic perspective in Jia's films for the Maoist programs implemented under the communist banner. Certainly, he refuses to engage in the idealism of early Soviet films that expressed a harmony between worker and machine through experiments with montage. An entire century of countless wars, famines and shifting global paradigms offers Jia the means to distance his political and cinematic beliefs away from the strict accordance of materialism. Where Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* (1920) views man as one independent fragment connected by machine to the larger organic web of social, economic and political relations, Jia prefers to provide distance between the acceleration of this mindset and the individuals at the behest of it (Shu-chin, 2011). In other words, if Jia is ultimately constructing political critiques in his films, he is consistently examining the system from the perspective of individuals like Hou Lijun, thus relocating the political programs from a collective emphasis to an individual one. Through concerns with power, politics and history, Jia is ultimately expressing his care for the people made anonymous through a coercion of collective participation.

Despite this resilience against pure cinematic materialism, the goals of dialectical montage as a cinematic tool—to express conflict and synthesis between "Art and Industry"—remain coded into the themes of Jia's films (Eisenstein, 1949). Can there, be, therefore, a form of montage that is in conflict with itself? *A montage of montage and anti-montage*? It may sound verbose, but there is a logic at work here applicable to Jia's process, most pertinently in his exploration of the "fictive" and "real" spaces of contemporary experience. The development of this theme is what constitutes Jia as a

filmmaker interested in both the material and human elements of society, experimenting thematically in both montage and (neo)realism.

This technique of using montage-within-the-frame can be illustrated with one stunning shot from *24 City*. The camera begins low, showing a long exterior wall decorated with advertisements for a luxury living condominium, promising a green paradise in the middle of the industrial city. The camera then fluidly cranes up and over the wall and into the massive construction pit obscured by the façade, thus providing direct evidence of the government's great lie. Tweedie (2013) correctly points out that in this shot, Jia depicts China's entire historical transition in one camera movement. Part of the effectiveness of this shot is its highly orchestrated but dedicatedly documentary (i.e. real) connotation. By placing the façade and the obscured within one continuous shot, Jia is showing the spectator two narratives of modern Chinese reality. One is the thing of billboards, of false promises; the other is the pit of reality and loss, but also of unknown futures—a set in waiting.

Jia's incorporation of fictional elements in *24 City* reaches its apex of layered allusion and critique during the interview with the woman known in the film known as Little Flower. For domestic Chinese viewers the fictional elements of this segment are distributed in two ways. First, Chinese audiences will doubtlessly recognize the famous actress Joan Chen (Western audiences may too—Chen played the sultry sawmill heiress Josie Packard in *Twin Peaks*) in the role of Little Flower, and that secondly, Chen is playing a character given the nickname Little Flower for her resemblance to the titular character (who was played by the real Chen) in the classic Chinese melodrama of the same name from 1979 (Shu-chin, 2011). It is a sly, multi-layered mechanism for

reminding spectators of the fluidity between the real and the representational in spaces constructed through ideology.

Even without being privy to these local in-jokes, the interview with Little Flower (Fig. 2.2) demonstrates with remarkable subtlety Jia's methods of critique. Little Flower's (hi)story is a virtual lost and found, at first prized for her resemblance to a beauty of the screen only to find the magic fade away. Little Flower's virtual connection to a film character of collective admiration, national pride and ideal female beauty has an inverse effect on the Little Flower who went to work in Factory 420 as a twenty-year old young woman. She experiences many admirers and boyfriends but true love is destined to escape her. When Jia records her history, she is middle-aged and single, navigating alone the labyrinth of modern "produced" space.

Within this scene, we find a human subject caught between her authentic self and a virtual representation of it that eventually takes controls of her life. The fact that the film *Little Flower* is commonly known as one of many state-produced propaganda films is testament to understanding *24 City* as Jia's attempt to reclaim the representational back to the real. That he chooses to accomplish this by entirely fabricating a narrative using actress Joan Chen to portray a factory woman who resembles herself in a film starring herself, only adds to the complexities Jia is willing to wade through in order to reach the desired level of formal realism. Only through a dialectic between reality and staged reality can the truth be found. Only by experimenting with a "montage of montage and anti-montage" can an authentic cinematic representation of reality be discovered.

In *24 City*, it is in the (hi)stories of the workers, some told from lived memory while other scripted and rehearsed, that Jia forms critical perspective from. By exposing

the official government histories as mere sport, he reclaims them for the individual, using both fact and fiction to reflect the ambiguities of modern Chinese spaces of labor and social interaction.
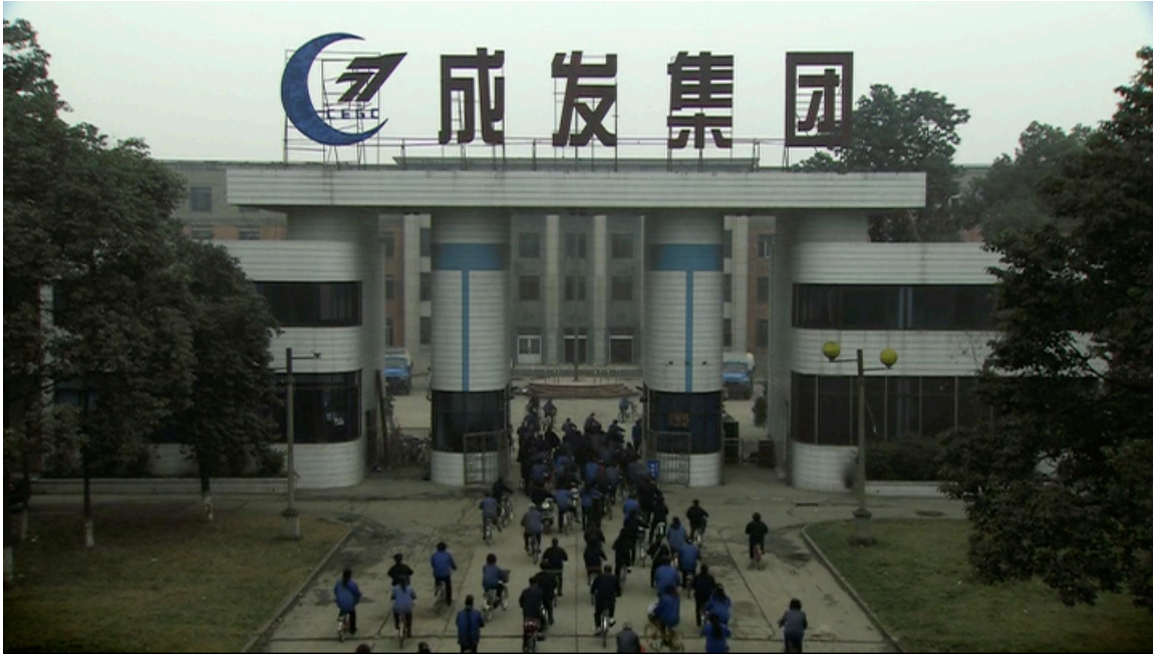
24 City (2008) dir. Jia Zhangke.

Fig. 2.1. The opening shot of *24 City*. Workers entering the factory.

24 City (2008) dir. Jia Zhangke.

Fig. 2.2. Little Flower in ironic detachment from her reflection.

I Wish I Knew and the montage of (hi)story. In his 2010 documentary *I Wish I Knew*, Jia uses this representation of media spectacle found in the Little Flower interview as a point of departure in order to portray Shanghai as a modern city-space actively conditioning its reality through the production of stories. The film explores the histories of the city by examining in equal measure narratives told on and off the motion picture screen, interested in the intersections between the city's famed film history and the citizen's real lived experiences. At times the distinction between the two become indiscernible. In the same way that *24 City* reclaimed official historical labor history into the domain of the individual, so does Jia reterritorialize Shanghai's collective identity of storytelling into his own cinematic space, representing "fact" and "fiction" equally. By mixing archival footage, clips from older Shanghai films, and his own primary recorded material (including a recurrent fictional narrative thread), *I Wish I Knew* formally

represents Shanghai as a space of historical production where the dialectical collision between narratives on and off screen reach a critical synthesis. As the distinctions between narrative falls out of focus, this collage of histories eventually blends into a singular representation of Shanghai as a globalized space manifesting its reality through the production of stories.

From the opening credit sequence of the film, *I Wish I Knew* acknowledges its contribution to this production, becoming a self-reflexive space for the spectator to examine the very nature of (hi)story. The first images we see are gargoyle/dragon-like statues on the exterior of a large building. A worker cleans the face of one as credits appear. Finally, we see the business of the building revealed on a sign: The Shanghai Bank of Communications. Before any narrative elements of the film are revealed, Jia is acknowledging that, even in a film with a vision as independent as his own, there are always financial controls in place. Jia's own directorial credits are revealed from the perspective of the bank, looking out at an anonymous space of Shanghai: construction, traffic, the active sphere of a globalized city. Then the title is revealed on a black screen as if to bemoan the endless, mysterious natures of modern spaces: *I Wish I Knew*.

Only now, with a contradictory admission of utilizing private production for an investigation of public spaces, can the film begin. But as Yingjin (2010) points out, to claim that Zhangke is complicit in the financial sphere of Chinese economy and thus, suspect in promoting it, is too shallow a criticism. Through the use of slow motion and sentimental music, this opening scene come across as anything but celebratory. Instead, it presents a kind of ironic detachment, a set of contradictory elements necessarily put in place to represent the ambiguities (and sadness) of the spaces where globalization is

negotiated. In a film that is largely about a local space's relationship to its cinematic representation, Jia is admitting his own film as yet another one of these representative surfaces, produced and admitted by the powers that be.

Throughout *I Wish I Knew*, Jia blends oral histories with fictional texts (films) to construct a space of collective imagination that privileges neither. Many of the interviews consist of stories told from the perspective of elderly people recounting their childhoods. Often, these stories are filled with espionage, organized crime and the violence of the earliest Communist Party days. In other words, the stuff of movies. At times, these stories are about times before the storytellers were even born. One woman named Wang Peimin, for example, speaks of her father, an early Communist executed by Nationalists, and her pregnant mother who flirts with madness as a result. The fact that a story of this nature is dependent on its passage through time moves us just as much as it alarms us for the simple reason that it was told by someone who may or may not be induced with mental trauma. How much of this story can we honestly believe if the storyteller was not alive at the moment of occurrence? Does this skepticism even matter?

Furthermore, the fact that Wang is introduced without reference to her occupation, current situation or any other expository data, convinces us that her relative anonymity signifies her as more of a passive spectator than a storyteller. And yet, she is undoubtedly a participant in the storytelling process. She receives stories and transmits them for audiences. In effect, she is no different from Jia himself, or even the spectators watching *I Wish I Knew*. All are interpreters of a world of surfaces, built and deconstructed through the development of their political, social and cultural environment.

To clarify this conceptual intent, Jia precedes Wang's story with two crucial sequences, both of which we can recognize as fictional in their own ways. We may recognize Zhao Tao, Jia's frequent collaborator (and wife), who in this first scene walks aimlessly through anonymous industrial spaces, observing construction sites and passing traffic with a sense of curious detachment (Fig. 3.1). The segment's focused, contrived cinematography as well as our recognition of a well-known actress making use of its space, offers us formal evidence to conclude this is cinema pre-meditated and rehearsed. From Zhao's dramatic gaze, the frame fades into a static shot of an empty thoroughfare captioned "Nanjing Road set, Chedun Film Studio (Fig. 3.2), then followed by a composed shot of Wang Peimin gazing off into the street as a squadron of foot soldiers amble by, visible through a storefront reflection (Fig. 3.3).

With these three images, Jia is exposing the contradictions of history to the light. In Jia's space, the accepted roles of workers are reversed: it is the actors who exist in public places (Zhao Tao), and the non-actors (Wang Peimin) who dwell on movie sets recalling traumatic past events. The disorientation of this role reversal is contextualized as bookends to the shot of the film set. If it were not for the caption denoting the name of the particular set, we would be unable to distinguish between it and any other Shanghai street. We recognize the ambiguities between the sets of Shanghai films and the "sets" of Shanghai's "real" public experience. By the time we are with Wang, listening to the story of her father and mother, we recognize it as something hardly different than the multitude of stories constructed on film sets. All stories, whether films or memories, belong to the collective imagination. They all become, in their own way, surfaces of fictional interpretation.

As a result, average, "anonymous" individuals like Wang Peimin assume the roles of *historical actors* by participating in the collective, organic dimensions of their city's historical narrative. The differences between the Chedun Film Studio set and the room Wang Peimin tells her story in become difficult to map. Both the Chedun Film Studio and Wang Peimin's story are spaces whose cultural identity is negotiated through the emerging global market of Shanghai (which, Jia informs us earlier in the film, officially opened its ports for foreign trade in the mid 19th century under British colonial rule). The world is a stage; its space produced and organized through collective storytelling.

In the latter half of the film, Jia advances this critique of narrative/historical assimilation by directly engaging in the aesthetic dialectics between mediums, forming the film into a critique of how specific cinematic representations infiltrates reality. For example, after Wang's story, Jia inserts clips from a state propaganda film called *To Liberate Shanghai* from 1959 as a way of addressing how the space's historical memory is synonymous with its historical representation. Even if a film like *To Liberate Shanghai* intentionally foregoes "fact" for propaganda, the effects of the film have been embedded into the city's consciousness and therefore, part of reality itself. Jia is depicting the history of a place just as he is critiquing it by engaging directly with the space's industrial production—in this case, the medium of film and its representation of Shanghai. This is a form of direct montage previously unseen in Jia's films, representing one of the most significant critical perspectives on Chinese identity within his larger filmography.

Figure 3.1. The actress Zhao Tao wandering through the public spaces of Shanghai.

Nanjing Road set, Chedun Film Studio.

Fig. 3.2. Historical film production set in Shanghai.

Fig. 3.3. Non-actress Wang Peimin and the reflection of her history through a film set window.

Concluding remarks on aesthetics. This engagement with aesthetic dialectics is critical to understanding Jia's cinema because so often he is concerned with the paradoxes of contemporary life. As De Luca and Jorge (2016) argue, films like *Dong*, *24 City* and *I Wish I Knew* can be understood as waging a dialectics between slowness and fastness. In other words, because the films are dealing with transformation via the destruction and construction of space, Jia's preference for *slowness* through long takes gives an eerie definition to the *fastness* in which China is transforming for the local people effected by development. There is a sense that as spectators we are watching the collapse of a local space in real time, and therefore, the weight of the past and the impending future are in co-existence with each other. To witness the destruction of a place is to also engage with the loss of memory. In a sense, Jia is combatting the *fastness*

of China's transition with the *slowness* of the eternal, experienced present. This is often why Jia is often associated with neorealism. He intends to make the modern condition something deeply felt by the spectator, and accomplishes it by raising the curtain of his country's staged production of reality. That, in order to understand all the elements at play on stage, you must sit still and from a great distance when you watch.

"The trend of globalization will make this world become tedious," Jia writes in *The Age of Amateur Cinema Will Return*, a kind of manifesto where he admits his steadfast belief that the future of cinema will favors earnestness, diversity and unique emotional attachment to the world in navigates (as cited in Mackenzie, 2014). For Jia, filmmakers of the future will "free themselves from conventional customs and restraints to an infinite space for creation; at the same time, they are earnest and responsible because they persist with the conscience and conduct of intellectuals" (p. 623). In order to create cinema that truly reflects the conditions of the world, filmmakers must first not only recognize the surfaces of the world, but become one themselves.

References

Bordwell, David (2005). *The Cinema of Eisenstein*. New York, NY: Routledge.

De Luca, Tiago and Nuno Barradas Jorge. (Eds.) (2016). *Slow Cinema*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Eisenstein, Sergei. (1949). *Film form: Essays in film theory*. (Jay Leyda, Trans. and Ed.). New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.

Ji Zhangke, Shozo Ichiyama and Wang Hong (Producers), & Jia Zhangke (Director). (2008). *24 City* [Motion Picture]. China: MK2 Diffusion.

Leiwei Li, David. (2016). *Economy, Emotion and Ethics in Chinese Cinema: Globalization on Speed.* New York: Routledge.

MacKenzie, Scott. (Ed.). 2014. *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures*. University of California Press.

McGrath, Jason. (2007). The independent cinema of Jia Zhangke: From postsocial realism to a transnational aesthetic. In Z. Zhan (Ed.) *The urban generation: Chinese cinema and society at the turn of the Twenty-first century*. (80-114). Duke University Press.

Tsang, Hing. (2013). *Semiotics and documentary film: The living sign of the cinema*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Tweedie, James. (2013). *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wang, Qi. (2014). *Memory, Subjectivity, and Independent Chinese Cinema*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Wu, Shu-chin. (2011) Time, history, and memory in Jia Zhangke's 24 City. (3-23). *Film Criticism*. Vol. 36 (1).

Veg, Sebastian. (2007). From documentary to fiction and back: Reality and contingency in Wang Bing and Jia Zhangke's films. *China Perspectives*. Vol. 3 (130-137).

Zhang, Yingjin. (2010). *Cinema, space, and polylocality in a globalizing china*. University of Hawaii Press.

Yu Lik-wai, Tianyun Wang, Xiong Yong, Meg Jin, Lin Ye (Producers), & Jia Zhangke (Director). (2010). *I Wish I Knew* [Motion Picture]. China: Midas Filmes.

Yu Lik-wai, Zhu Jiong, Chow Keung, Dan Bo (Producers), & Jia Zhangke (Director). (2006). *Dong* [Motion Picture]. China: Xstream Pictures.

Appendix

I believe I investigated my research questions thoroughly and, for the most part, answered them in depth. However, the scope of the analysis changed greatly, which necessarily did affect the research. I decided to scale back discussions on montage and semiotics because they are simply too large of concepts to include as a tangential complement to an analysis of a filmmaker. It would have to take book to really dive into those worlds. However, they were both still necessary as framing for the concepts I focused more energy on, namely that of work, space and the borders of fiction and nonfiction. Jia's films only grew in depth and complexity the more I watched them. I was never for a moment short on material to write about. Indeed, the hard part was reducing the analysis. I feel I have a new and more nuanced perspective on both the possibilities of documentary cinema and the way the world works as a result of this analysis.

The Documentary Cinema of Jia Zhangke: A Textual Analysis of Five Films

Will Linhares

University of Missouri, School of Journalism

Introduction

The world comes to us in images. We appropriate them from past experiences in the process of remembering. Images stand for their representations in reality. They offer justification, and sometimes, proof. Above all, they are inherent to the process of making sense: of relating things to other things. In other words, images have tremendous power over humanity. They are dangerous and beautiful things.

In the realm of art and entertainment, it is cinema that, like a memory, creates and organizes images that remind us most of our lived experiences. Both fiction and non-fiction cinema have claims towards representing these lived experiences (and the theoretical border between the two is one hotly contested, to say the least), but for the purposes of this proposal, it will be the interpretation of only those films conventionally labeled "documentaries" considered for research. For it is here, in the realm of non-fiction, where audiences can recognize most viscerally the common plagues of humanity. Therefore, it is important to understand how filmmakers treat this common experience through editing technique and theory. Do they invite the audience to participate in the meaning-making process or do they manipulate them into identifying with a set of prescribed emotional cues?

Interpreting this relationship between text and spectator as a process of semiotics is one method in which a researcher can codify and take account for this (dis)functional relationship between producer and spectator of images. Semiotics is the phenomena of interpreting the larger, hidden meanings behind signs and their objects. Because I wish to explore the semiotics of technique and interpretation involved in non-fiction cinema, it is

necessary then to make companions of both documentary cinema and semiotics. From a foundation of semiotics, this researcher hopes to understand the making and interpretation of documentary films.

The purpose of this research proposal is to understand how Jia Zhangke's approach to documentary filmmaking can help us address real world concerns through the medium of cinema. Using an evolved theory of montage, I will analyze five of Jia's films from a theoretical and cultural perspective ultimately as a means to practically understand my own process in making my own film. In this proposal, I will first discuss the literature and theory that forms the basis for my research. This will include the evolution of montage theory from its conception in the Soviet Union and into its various disparate forms through modern times followed by brief discussion on semiotics and how the relationship between audience and filmmaker can affect the interpretation of film and the world at large. It would be unwise to attempt analyses of Jia's films without a cultural analysis of China itself, given the hyper polylocality of China's modern social and political landscapes. Therefore, as a contextual complement to the textual analysis, I will explore a rather brief cultural analysis of China's post-Maoist period and how it has been represented on screen.

In essence, I argue that addressing the medium of film itself as a way to invite critical engagement with the audience, thus synthesizing new forms of meaning-making in the process, is crucial to the power of non-fiction cinema. This theory of montage, introduced by pioneering Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein (1949), takes Marxist dialectics into the editing room as a way to critically engage with the world in and outside the frame. The audience, invited into the sphere of interpretation, is involved in the

process. In this way, the sign-object relationship of semiotics (which will be discussed further below) is not merely a process happening within the screen, but treated self-reflexively: the cinema itself is a sign to be interpreted by the spectator. Furthermore, I will explore briefly a cultural analysis of contemporary China in order to provide some context to Jia's often perplexing cinematic commentaries. These theoretical lenses (semiotics, cultural analysis and montage theory) will then be applied to an analysis of the documentary films of Chinese filmmaker Jia Zhangke. To put it simply, the purpose of the cultural analysis and semiotic components are to allow for the codification of montage into the textual analysis. The montage analysis is primary, but without the other components I would at a loss on how exactly to code my language.

Theoretical Framework

Theory is the design of practice. It conceptually defines the purpose and use of the tools that craft technique. The main branch of theory of this proposed research is montage, a cinema-specific term that revolutionized the way films are made and conceived. But first, in order to offer context to applying montage to the textual analysis, I will entertain a discussion on semiotics, as well as a brief but crucial cultural analysis of modernized China's relationship to space, scale and its representation in cinema.

Semiotics

Semiotics is a broad field of social and philosophical thought with a multitude of interpretative concepts regarding language, sociology and media studies. At its core is a methodology for interpreting the larger, veiled meanings that exist beyond physical objects. In the meaning-making process of semiotics, there is the interpreter of the object,

the object under interpretation, and the concluding interpretation of that spectator-object relationship (Tsang, 2013). In order to investigate how the semiotics of both documentary technique and interpretation can yield meaning, ideas borrowed from an array of literature related (in)directly to the fields of semiotics and cinema will have to be examined.

Semiotics, above all, is about making meaning. Cinema, then, as it is in the business of images, can be understand as a laboratory for semiotic interpretation. In *Cinema & Semiotic*, Ehrat (2005) identifies the "trimodal reality" (p. 6) developed by Peirce as a codified way to gauge how human beings interpret the world. The three points of this reality are designated by the sign, the object and the signified interpretation. Tsang (2013) develops Peirce's theory deeper, with more nuanced and authentic terminology. For Tsang, Peirce's triad consists of *representamen*, *object*, and *interpretant,* and together become "unifying terms" with which we take account of the world (p. 11). In Peircian semiotics, according to Tsang, the *representamen* is the sign which stands for an *object*. For example, somebody's mental image of a leaf may stand as a representative for the actual leaf-object. That image of the leaf represents its objective counterpart and is therefore a sign. Furthermore, to interpret why this particular sign-image represents the object is the domain of the *interpretant*.

If this semiotic classification is applied to cinema, a theory can be developed on how we may interpret the meaning of films. Tsang's (2013) attempts to do this prove useful. According to the author of *Semiotics and Documentary Film*, the camera is the sign because it stands for the objects it is recording. In other words, the camera "stands" for the object by representing it, while the object also stands for the interpretation through

its representation. This is a kind of mechanical decoding of meaning that infuses the cinema with an ability to explore levels of truth in what it records. In Tsang's book, he analyzes three documentary filmmakers and how semiotics can be applied as an interpretive technique for their films. This allies handsomely with the research this paper proposes, with the only difference being the particular films under analysis. Using Tsang as a starting point, the degree to which semiotics can be applied to documentary research and its implications for interpretation and meaning-making must now be explored.

Meaning-making can only be processed from the perspective of the spectator through the interpretation of the previously discussed object-sign relationship. How do objects, then, gain meaning? For Tsang (2013), "viewing a film involves both an artefact in the form of a projected image (representamen), something which the film is about or indicates (the object), and a sense of what this might mean for the viewer both individually and collectively (interpretant)" (p. 11).

It is necessary then again to discuss the differences between the identification and representation of objects (or subjects) on screen. One way to create *identification* in a film is to do what Ehat (2005) refers to as narration. Narration, he claims, theorizes time as its main function for self-definition. It appropriates existential time in order to represent it cinematically. This causes a spectator to identify with the flow of the film. This is not a bad thing per se, it should be said. However, to exercise the full potential of the medium, there must be another variable that can critically engage the complexities of the world. Erhat (2005) calls this variable *representation*. To represent the world in a documentary film is to allude to meaning through its cinematic grammar. This process of meaning-making should sound familiar. "Semiotics," says Erhat, "is merely a particularly

way of thinking theoretically, in various ways, the tri-relational process of becoming meaning" (p. 114). In this way, again referencing the trimodal relationship of semiotics, an ordinary object, when *represented* cinematically, grows into its transcendent and symbolic "more-than-just-itselfness" (p. 114).

Chanan (2010) claims true representation happens through three levels of inscription: "the ostensive content of the images on screen, the implied relationships produced by montage and the implicit but hidden categories of the ideological" (p. 148). Without uttering the term "semiotics," Chanan has effectively defined it. The very process of documentary is one that exposes the signified via the signifier through the use of montage technique (which will be discussed later).

By employing a semiotic lens to several Chinese documentaries, the spectator is allowed the privilege of interpretation. To understand the sign-object relationship in cinema is to grant oneself the authority to make symbolic (even universal) interpretations of the objects within a film. Therefore, the enigmatic nature of Jia's films (that they are films that employ the use of distinctly localized objects of criticism, and therefore, difficult to decipher from a foreign perspective) can become at once more familiar and universal to the spectator/interpreter. An understanding of modern trends in Chinese culture, however, is also a crucial key to this process. For without it, the meaning-making process is sentenced to the realm of total abstraction, and lacks the ability to make real-world referential interpretations.

Cultural Analysis

Like the discussion of semiotics, this section on cultural analysis will be rather brief and used as a necessary complement to the textual analysis component. I deemed it

necessary to research China's modern cultural history in relationship to its 20th century

global emergence because without it, an outsider's analysis of Jia's films—which are, to

say the least, peculiar in their nuanced perspective on local themes—would be

untrustworthy in its lack of context. Because his films focus so heavily on issues of

China's local/global contradiction, one must be versed in these historical and

contemporary references before analyzing them within a film. Though I claim no

expertise in the realm of Chinese culture, it is important to have at the very least a general

perspective on its spatio-social terrain. My perspective in this regard is the greatest

limitation facing this analysis, though I only admit this armed with the steadfast belief

that it will be overcome. This confidence is not based on pure hope and conjecture,

however. Rather, I have strategically chosen to incorporate various elements of theory

(cultural analysis, semiotics and montage) with the conviction that it will provide an all-

encompassing method for analysis. The idea is that these methods will allow for the

hyper-localized objects in Jia's films to take on universal significance, therefore

providing for both a Chinese and global perspective.

In *Cinema, Space and Polylocality in a Globalizing China*, Yingjin (2010) takes

as a starting point in his wide-ranging critique of contemporary China the intersections of

several social ideas. Generally, however, the sum of the critique can be condensed to a

single conflict: the production of space and scale by an authoritarian position, and the

polylocality of China's cultural landscape. Together, Yingjin, discusses how both these

characteristics have been represented in Chinese cinema. These are important notions

towards understanding the complexities of how China's post-Maoist spatial and cultural

orientations have affected one another as China became more global, more capitalist and more populous in the second half of the 20th Century.

In simpler terms, What Yingjin is arguing is that the social, economic, and political climate of China has historically been organized at the behest of macro-authoritarian governing forces. This was especially true in the Maoist and post-Maoist years as the country became more modern and global. Furthermore, because these shifts in space, scale, and the cultures produced within, have been represented in the movies one way or another, that there has emerged a new distinct space shaped by modern conditions: the space of the cinema. Using this critical perspective will allow for me to analyze the conditions of modern China via the cinematic lens of Jia, which I now understand as a space itself to be analyzed—produced both by and against the governing forces surrounding it.

Thankfully, there are helpful precedents to take into account as I explore the mysterious and nuanced cinematic world of this Chinese director. Shu-Chin (2011) claims that Jia's films are distinct in how they depict a new sense of experiential time in China that contradicts both Mao's vision of utopia and the post-Maoist ideology of modern reform and the emergence of global capitalism. In other words, by inventing new conceptions of lived time and space in his films, Jia succeeds in both representing and critiquing Chinese culture. The idea is that by using some of the points of analyses for my own critiques of Jia's films, I can emerge with newly formed and original theories that can contribute to conversations on trends in both Chinese cinema and globalization.

Montage

The following discussion on montage theory, though it is the most important theoretical aspect in analyzing the films, will be relatively brief compared to the space given to semiotics for two reasons: one, because the semiotics of cinema is conceptually a murkier topic, and therefore, requires more dedication to explain clearly; and two, to be frank, montage as a theory disembodied from a film is something necessarily abstract. In other words, montage can only be truly explored when a particular film is guiding the conversation. To enter a conversation on Jia Zhangke's use of a specific interpretation of montage would be ridiculous because I have not done the work yet to pursue that end. This paper, after all, remains only a proposal. This is the reason I have developed discussions on the two other theories before montage—to offer concrete context to the ambiguous task at hand.

Developed in the nascency of the Soviet Union, montage as Eisenstein developed it is essentially hinged on exercises in Marxist dialectics, that is to say, of creating new meaning (synthesis) through the conflict of two opposing ideas. For Eisenstein (1949), montage is the dialects of art. It is a process of thinking (philosophy) and creating (art) by which the creator critically engages with world. Influenced by the revolutionary violence of his age, Eisenstein believed that all art is conflict "according to it social mission, according to its nature, according to its methodology" (p. 46). Through montage, a film should be edited not as to portray continuity that the viewer can identify with, but in order to depict the conflict of the world by layering together disparate elements that fuse together with new critical meaning. "At the Intersection of Nature and Industry stands Art," Eisenstein postulates (p. 46). This inherent contradiction in cinema—that it wants to be pure but is in fact an industrial process—is why the art form is a dynamic one.

68

Through the power of montage, cinema becomes a critical and dynamic plane in which the spectator is infused with the power of interpretation.

Montage therefore should be understood not as technique with a specific set of means and ends, but instead, as a cinematic theory opened out into the infinite array of technique, method and critical thought happening around the world. This interpretation of montage allows for a heterogeneous application of its use through the variations of world cinema. In other words, not only is the distinction between, say, a Chinese filmmaker's application of montage theory and a Canadian filmmaker inevitable, it is also *necessary* for the continued innovation of cinema as a critical tool in confronting a dynamic world. But what, after all these years, remains of montage in the original, Eisensteinian sense? How can we apply these tenants to films that have internalized the bloody and busy 20th century world? What does a 21st century globalized montage look like? Does one have to be a strict Eisensteinian to deal with montage?

If Eisenstein's entire creed could be boiled down to one line, it would be that montage, above all, is about conflict. This key idea can serve as both the starting and ending point in film analysis, for Jia has certainly always incorporated Chinese conflict into his films. Whereas Eisenstein externalized all conflict, however, reducing the human condition to material instances of human political drama—worker revolts, raised fists, imperial crimes—Zhangke chooses to internalize the external as a way to explore the modern condition. And here is where montage can be seen as an organic, evolving condition of cinema that adapts to global fluidity rather than constricts it. When it was developed in the Soviet Union, the advocates of montage felt obligated to its materialist

conception of history. Zhangke, on the other hand, takes this blend of culturally-ingrained Marxism as an exit point for developing the themes of his films.

While it is true there is an inherent link between montage and Marxist ways of thought, it is simultaneously true that elements of both can be used against each other. If the Soviet Union emphatically valued the collective over the individual, and montage instituted this creed into its own value system of art in general, then Zhangke, it can be said, pits China's institutional collectivism against an emerging culture of individualism. In other words, the Soviet conception of montage existed within a Marxist dialectic theory of the world, which became institutionalized into a communist society, spreading eventually into China as a beast in different clothes. In the second half of the century, the emergence of a post-Maoist culture of individualism became the opposing force in the social conflict. What Zhangke does comes in reflecting this conflict. The films as a result are concerned equally with ideas and people, the collective and the individual. This conflict is what defines Jia's conception of montage.

Research Questions

Drawing on the previously discussed literature and theory led me to pose the following questions, which I will attempt to answer in the research process: (i) How do documentary films convey meaning through the editing process? (ii) How can semiotics be interpreted into the meaning-making process of documentary films? (iii) How is montage theory applied in the documentaries of Jia Zhangke in a manner that directly confronts the economic and social landscapes of modern China? (iv) How does montage theory allow the spectator to interpret the signs into signifying deeper and more meaningful concepts about the nature and ideology of people living in particular places?

Methods

      This paper proposes a textual analysis of five documentary film for their use of cinematic techniques that succeed in giving the objects of the film symbolic meaning. I want to see how the films engage with the editing process of montage, and how an interpretation of that process succeeds (or fails) in giving a semiotic potential to the various social critiques the films engage with. The hope is that this multi-pronged strategy for film analysis, in which various lenses are employed as a means to understand the complex strains of localism represented in the film, will activate the audience to engage in the meaning-making process and therefore, offer a more serious and engaged relationship between the real world and the medium representing it.

      I am proposing a textual analysis of Jia Zhangke's non-fiction films *Dong* (2006), *Useless* (2007), *I Wish I Knew* (2010) and *24 City* (2008). I am curious to analyze these particular films both because ostensibly its objective content incorporates similar themes to the documentary project I am proposing. For example, both *24 City* and my project are concerned with the displacement of an endangered cultural generation rendered economic subjects by a supreme, abstract, macro-organized, economically-determined project of residential development. In a sense, they are both classic "out with the old, in with the new" type of stories, but the distinctions come in the organization and specificity of the films themselves. I look to Jia, a master in representing thematic dualities in his films, as a theoretical model for my own. Often, his taste can be both sentimental and ironic, romantic and analytical, and static but deeply energetic at the core.

      A textual analysis of technique and theory is the only method appropriate for this kind of research because I am interested in discovering the political meaning that is

created through a film's distinct technical structure. Because the very nature of meaning-making and interpretation is as much of the audience as it is the creator, analyses of texts using a theoretical framework that uncovers the techniques for allowing viewer interpretation is necessary and justified. This is why I could not settle for merely interviews with filmmakers or viewers alone. To analyze a film using the theories of montage, semiotics and cultural analysis allows for a maximal interpretation of the film: who made the film, under what conditions the film was made, what the film is about, and what kind of interpretations are being made. Larsen (1991) describes textual analysis in the following passage: "The text, then should not be regarded as a closed, segmented object with determinate, composite meanings, but rather as an indeterminate field of meaning in which intentions and possible effects intersect" (p. 122). In my proposed research, I am not analyzing only what happens in the film but rather how and why the films cultivate particular meaning as such.

Though I found Ying and Narayanau's study *Movie Content Analysis, Indexing and Skimming Via Multimodal information* difficult to comprehend, its importance is nonetheless apparent because its similar methodologies justifies my own. The study uses content analysis as a method for picking out particular filmic techniques as a way to understand their broader implications. The authors even mention briefly the concept of montage which I use as a central phenomenon for proposed study. Though our specific framing analyses differ, the methodologies remain similar.

Procedure

The data analysis will involve tracking the particular moments in the film in which I can detect the theoretical application of montage theory. The researcher will be

looking for specific instances in which dialectics is used among the film's many elements: use of music, the movements and length of shots, application or withholding of voice-over narration, function of interviews, the framing, presentation and juxtaposition of objects in a sequence, use of text and audio, etc.

Using literature regarding the semiotic processes that rejects emotional identification between the audience and the objects or subjects in favor of a more theoretical representation of the film's content, I will judge the "merits" of these instances when I recognize them. For example, a documentary that follows a local political activist and uses non-diegetic, soaring music to garner emotional identification with the subject, would be an example of using technique for *identification* not *representation*. However, if the filmmaker arranges for the music to work in a dialectical way, if the song's content contains meaning that contradicts or augments a character's ideological situation, this could be an example of *representation*. In *24 City*, for example, a scene of women workers singing "The Internationale" as the society indicative of that song's spirit literally crumbles around them represents a certain dialectics of interpretation for the viewers. We recognize a certain irony in the present situation and create a new meaning as a result of the opposing elements.

Sample

According to McGrath (2007) the cinema of Jia Zhangke offers "a penetrating view into Chinese society in the postsocialist or reform era and make implicit claims regarding the nature of Chinese urban reality today and the ethics and aesthetics of its documentation and memory" (p. 82). The tumultuous 20th Century was especially formational in China, a country that took a political tour through feudalism, communism

and global capitalism in only a half a century. Questions of development, representation and ideology abound in Jia's work because of this, as McGrath mentions. Although, as Veg (2007) clarifies, documentary elements have pervaded his work since his beginnings in film, there are only a handful of Zhangke's films that can be conventionally taxonomized as documentary (p. 130).

It is for these predetermined reasons—the unique development of late 20th Century China and Jia's own appropriation of this culture into film—that I chose his documentary filmography for analysis. This type of sampling strategy is exemplary of the criterion method for choosing texts. I knew I needed to study films that took as its main subjects the cultural and political development of transitioning social landscapes. Using McGrath and Veg as guides into China's post-socialist cinema, I arrived at the documentaries of Jia Zhangke. Of his films, there are four I will analyze: *Dong* (2006), a documentary that follows an artist as he paints a landscape near the Three Gorges Dam (also location also the subject of Zhangke's fiction film *Still Life)*; *Useless* (2007), a documentary on China's textile production industry; *I Wish I Knew* (2010) an historical look into the cultural forms of Shanghai; and finally, *24 City* (2008), an infinitely perplexing documentary/fiction hybrid piece about the post-Maoist industrial work culture in contemporary China.

Description of Project

My professional project will consist of the construction of a documentary film in two recorded parts: shooting and editing. As I am engaged in this process, I will take in tandem my research component on the documentaries of Jia Zhangke and montage theory

as a guide and influence for my own cinematic technique. I will discuss the process only briefly here in terms of their potential significance because I have not yet embarked on either task. For obvious reasons, I will discuss the aspects of shooting on location first, but before I do that, it is necessary to discuss the project's background and prospective themes must occur.

Docktown

Docktown Marina is a floating home community in Redwood City, only a few miles south of San Francisco down the 101. The community has formative roots dating back to 1961 when it was in operation as a harbor for boaters, consisting mostly of docks, a yacht club and a few live aboard houseboats. Over the years, the ownership of Docktown changed numerous times through a tangled mess of lies, deceits and legal disputes. This complicated history is one of the reasons that Docktown is under threat of removal by the local city council, and why establishing a consensus between the two parties has been so difficult.

Being so close to San Francisco, it should come as no surprise that the housing landscape of Redwood City has transformed exponentially in the past five years. Tech start-up culture and its young, wealthy working base now dominates the demographic landscape of a city with historically Hispanic and working-class origins. It cannot be denied that this neo-bourgeois class of tech employees has brought both an economic and cultural infusion into the area. However, that infusion of capital has also created a widening disparity between classes and culture. As housing prices become more and more ludicrous all over the Bay Area, those residents who survive with minimal incomes are suddenly faced with soaring housing demands. With Google 10 miles away,

Facebook only 5 and Oracle down the road, the current economic situation in Redwood City is one of rapid, hyper gentrification in which the demands of living are high, but the expectation of anyone but the well-to-do to meet them are only getting lower.

The other side of the tech-boom/Silicon Valley effect is the continual construction and development of luxury residential housing complexes. Cranes litter the skyline in Redwood city, lifting and setting the pieces together for new office complexes or condominiums. About three years ago, a huge condominium project began construction right across the river from the houseboats, liveaboard barges, and floating homes that make up Docktown. The residents there (typical to their old-school, quasi-libertarian attitude) responded at first with little more than a shrug of the shoulder. The monolithic development might have spoiled their view, but as long as they are allowed to live in privacy, life goes on.

Until it doesn't. About a year ago, the real estate developers of the condominium project and their lawyer (a man named Ted Hannig who literally lives in one of the condos visible from the houseboats) sued the city for allowing Docktown to maintain private residences on what they argued is public land. They demanded the city adopt measures to remove or relocate every last resident and residence existing on the property. Fearing the demands of the housing boom and the infusion of new money and demographic power into their city, the City Council agreed to the demands of the lawsuit and in December of 2016, officially declared a plan to effectively remove Docktown Marina from the map. There could be an entire book on the legal nuances to this case but suffice to say that lawsuit against the city was not entirely truthful in its assessment, and

so, in the face of this threat, the residents of Docktown began to organize a legal defense of their own, eventually filing a counter-suit of their own against the city in February.

According to many, the legal arguments of the real estate company are nothing but a pretense for the eventual acquisition of the property on the water for the eventual construction of more condos. The ramifications for the residents of Docktown are, it should go without saying, disastrous. Most of the people who have made a home and community out of this place (including many who suffer from disabilities and PTSD and rely on the affordable housing prices in Docktown) will be punted into the unknown with inadequate relocation compensation from the city.

The many elements of Docktown's story is one of the reasons I prefer to look at this project as a study of not the specific but the microcosmic symbol for the larger forces at work all over the world. Thematically, some of these ideas include reflections on the local versus the macro, the spread of tech-capitalism, and the attitudes of communities who reject the social landscapes constructed around them.

Shooting

I plan to spend a minimum of three weeks shooting full time in Docktown this summer. My schedule will include both setting up interviews with Docktown residents and establishing more observational-based narrative sequences. To fully utilize time while shooting, pre-arranged "appointments" will be made for the interviews, but not so strictly so as to prevent fluidity and improvisation. One of the most important lessons I learned from class is the notion that if nothing else, documentary is "chaos plus structure." I take this to mean that filming is chaos and editing is structure. Therefore, it would be wrong to strictly appropriate time according to pre-established demands.

Instead, these "appointments" should be made entirely for the purpose of establishing connection and rapport within the community.

All other time shooting will be spent gathering more observational material or pursuing specific shots or events that unfold in real time. I do not have the privilege of spending long periods of time there due to the distance between my home and the Bay Area. Therefore, before and during the shoot, I will again make loose "appointments" with any event "staged" or otherwise I deem worth capturing. Any time I need to spend outside of Docktown (for example, getting footage of Silicon Valley or the Bair Island nature reserve), I will squeeze in between other more crucial work. These are important occasions but secondary to the direct interactions I have with Docktown occurrences.

Interviews are important to my project for two reasons. First, it is crucial to give voice to the people who are being rendered subjects by a macro-economic system. These people have established a community in a place that could potentially disappear tomorrow. To record these moments is a way of enshrining their significance into historical memory. This is similar to the use of interview and text in *24 City*. Secondly interviews can be a good way to capture the behavior and performance of subjects. Docktown is a place full of quirks and kicks and the people there are diverse in background and personality. To truly understand Docktown, one must recognize that behavior is a community's DNA.

Upon watching the footage from my last shoot, however, I was horrified to see that most of the interviews I shot were more or less packed with data and not behavior. It is true that for a film such as this, where a political narrative is unfolding in real time, data is necessary to establish story and context. But too much data is boring at best and

destructive to the aesthetics of the film at worst. To truly explore what is at stake in

Docktown, the interviews must be deeper: more personal and thus, more captivating. In

24 City, Jia allows the subjects to essentially tell their own histories. I will aim for the

same. The personal histories of the communities will then form the larger collected

history of Docktown as a place, a houser of memory and meaning.

Editing

After shooting comes editing, where structure is applied to the chaos of shooting.

I hope to dedicate most if not the entirety of the fall semester to this task. I anticipate it to

be a much longer process than shooting because it is in the edit where narrative and

thematic ideas are experimented with and implemented into structure. Furthermore,

seeing as I will be writing about montage theory for research, it seems only appropriate

that most of my time editing should be dedicated to implementing this theory into my

own practice.

The tentative title of my documentary film is *Water Color*. I came to this

conclusion for a variety of reasons. First, a major theme of the film (as of now) happens

to be water. Docktown is a floating home community. Many of these houses are at the

mercy of the river's tidal fluctuations. Heavy rainstorms can be detrimental to the

infrastructure of these structures. One must now how to persist in extreme natural

conditions. It is not rare for those living in boats in extreme low tide to wake up and find

their whole home tilted to one side in the mud. But for many of the residents it is these

unexpected trials that make life in Docktown worth it. A variety of skills and knowledge

must be mastered in order to live on the water. It's a rhythmic life; wood is constantly

creaking, and if you stay still long enough, you can feel even the biggest houses on the

row move with the ebb and flow of the tide. It is an entirely different architectural experience from living in a grounded built environment, and therein lies its charm.

Another reason for the title *Water Color* is one of perspective. Not only am I as filmmaker painting my own kind of cinematic portrait of Docktown, but so are those acting for its removal authoring their own kind of vision. The real estate developers wish to see it gone for financial gain. The local political public, fearing the demands of the tech culture and housing boom, act on its behalf and seek to remove Docktown as well. And of course, Docktown, like the rest of the world, is available on Google Earth as a kind of appropriated image within a culture of surveillance. This idea becomes more interesting to know that Google is planning a nearly 1 million square foot campus just a couple miles downstream from Docktown.

All this is to say that the community of Docktown is in the crosshairs of something radically large and dynamic, and there are a variety of perspectives attempting to portray it according to their interests. I include my own perspective as filmmaker as one of them. A further, underdeveloped idea is to document (in a separate corollary part of to the film) a water color painter constructing his own portrait of Docktown development across the bay. As the film progresses so will the painting's form. Will it be a still life? Even when its model could disappear the next day? Or will it be more abstract/impressionist, in which an economically linear narrative (like the tech world is constructing) is secondary to the themes and ideas of artistic construction.

To successfully meet these self-imposed demands of the project will be a challenge but not impossible. I have connections in Docktown both because my brother has lived there since August and because I have already shot more than 20 hours of

footage from a visit there last January. Therefore, I feel confident I will be accepted within the community enough to continue telling a story. And I said before, I hope to dedicate the entirety of the fall semester to the task of editing.

Conclusion

I expect to gain a deeper understanding of how documentary films, particularly those of Chinese filmmaker Jia Zhangke, come to represent larger meaning behinds the images they present in their films through experiments in montage and semiotics. I expect to encounter films that, through the theoretical use of editing techniques investigate how cultures relate and come to embody the signs and signification of their physical environments. Largely, I am interested in film theory and its potential application towards techniques of effective storytelling, cultural critique and conceptual exploration. Ultimately, I expect to find that only through a self-reflexive (even if subtle), semiotic interpretation of film theory can an audience be invited into the interpretation process, and thus, trigger more durable and symbolic meaning capable of transcending the industrial limitations of the cinematic apparatus.

The film I am analyzing only represents a very disparate and thin display of the infinite world of documentary theory and technique. Though I have confidence the films I chose are indicative of a mastered sense of technique and theory, there is always the chance that upon close analysis, I will find portions of them lacking in conceptual value, and thus, of no practical value for documentary filmmaking. This being only a research proposal, I simply do not know how the films will factor into data analysis. Methodologically, there are potential limitations regarding my sampling process which

could affect the analysis portion of research. Though my methods for choosing the four films of Jia are justified through scholarly reference, the fact remains that I have not yet analyzed them with any theoretical scrutiny. Thus, the possibility remains that the analytical process could lack density.

Future projects concerned with documentary theory could benefit from research that is designed with a more specific focus concerning the particulars of peoples and places. Because semiotics is the business of uncovering the larger meanings behind smaller, more specific objects or instances, it is possible that a more geographically specific study could provide greater nuance and detail. Furthermore, because semiotics, if nothing else, is also the process of expanding the micro-specific into the macro-abstract, a more focused and detailed textual analysis could more efficiently represent larger significance. In other words, in semiotics, the more specific the focus is, the more universal the meaning is. Therefore, to keep the scope of the research small could result in more meaningful conclusions.

References

Undrilled, Jean. (1981). *For a critique of the political economy of the sign*. (Charles
      Levin, Trans.). Telos Press.

Chanan, Michael. (2010). Going south: Documentary as a form of cognitive geography.
      Cinema Journal. Vol. 50(1) 147-154.
      http://www.jstor.org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/stable/40962845

Comolli, Jean-Louis. (2015) *Cinema against the spectacle*. (Daniel Fairfax, Trans.)
      University of Amsterdam Press.

Ehrat, Johannes. (2005)*. Cinema and Semiotic: Peirce and film aesthetics, narration, and
      representation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Eisenstein, Sergei. (1949). *Film form: Essays in film theory*. (Jay Leyda, Trans. and Ed.).
      New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.

Li, Ying and Narayanau, Shrikanth. (2003). Movie content analysis, indexing and
      skimming via multimodal information. In A. Rosenfield, D. Doerman & D.
      DeMenthon (Eds.). *Video mining*. (123-154). New York: Springer Publishing*.*

Larsen, Peter. (1991). Textual analysis of fictional media content. In K.B. Jensen & N.W.
      Jankowski (Eds.) *A handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass
      communication research*. (121-134). London: Routledge.

McGrath, Jason. (2007). The independent cinema of Jia Zhangke: From postsocial
      realism to a transnational aesthetic. In Z. Zhan (Ed.) *The urban generation:
      Chinese cinema and society at the turn of the Twenty-first century*. (80-114).
      Duke University Press.

Tsang, Hing. (2013). *Semiotics and documentary film: The living sign of the cinema*.
      Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Wu, Shu-chin. (2011) Time, history, and memory in Jia Zhangke's 24 City. (3-23). *Film
      Criticism*. Vol. 36 (1).

Veg, Sebastian. (2007). From documentary to fiction and back: Reality and contingency
      in Wang Bing and Jia Zhangke's films. *China Perspectives*. Vol. 3 (130-137).

Zhang, Yingjin. (2010). *Cinema, space, and polylocality in a globalizing china*.
      University of Hawaii Press.