

What is in a 'Talking Head'?

Narrated Selves and Event Structure

– exploring performativity, narrativity, and phenomenological psychology

Linda C.H. LAI + Kimburley CHOI

About 60 talking-head video segments were collected between 2005-2009 via field research initiated and supervised by Linda Lai. Appointed video researchers, Lai herself, and students in her course, Visual Ethnography & Creative Intervention, invited people within their circle of acquaintances to tell a story in front of a video camera.

In one phase of the research, 12 children were to re-tell the story of Cinderella as they recalled it, then their revision of the story, followed by a story of their own choice.

In another round, 3 educated women were invited to improvise their own Cinderella tale, using 3 objects they picked from the various versions of Cinderella from around the world, and then improvise a story about themselves using the same set of objects.

In a few other rounds, adults were invited to bring a story of their own free choice to tell in front of the camera... Some of them mindfully selected stories of great significance to themselves, some determined to cheat the audience, some simply talked spontaneously whatever came to their mind; yet some 'performances' could not be easily classified.

The starting point of this research was two-fold:

- (1) to collect stories – to see what stories occupy the minds of individuals we encountered
[anthropology of story-telling]
- (2) to set up the most minimum camera work, a close-up headshot, with a person talking, to see what we would get [visual ethnography]

As Kimburley Choi and Linda Lai began to dig into the rich pool of talking-head 'documents', many interesting issues emerged.

Talking heads are usual practice in mainstream documentaries, assumed to be purely vehicles for information, transparent and neutral in showing the subjects' opinion. The talking-head documents we collected, however, demonstrate the constructedness of talking heads as cultural artefacts whereby camera presence becomes observable events of a performative nature.



Retelling *Cinderella*: interaction and the creation of self, relations, and the world

/ Dr. Kimburley Choi

Early in 1893, Cox (1893) published a book about 345 versions of Cinderella. Many Hong Kong children know the *Cinderella* story. So what'll happen when they are asked to narrate the story? The retelling reveals the endless re-fabrication and re-creation of the same story, and the process of creation goes beyond memorization and repetition of the story. My study demonstrates, first, that narrative structure emerged during particular occasions of interaction. Second, I argue that children actively create various structural features and qualities of the Cinderella tale and develop certain styles of narration and presentation in front of the camera. Their recreated narrative and particular performance reconstruct their selfhood, their relationship to others, and their organization of the world. This adds on to Levi-Strauss' argument that folk tales constitute myth and that they can be translated, paraphrased, reduced, expanded, and otherwise manipulated *without* losing its basic shape or structure.

“Narrated selves and event structures: a phenomenological view on glocal connectivities”

/ Dr. Linda Lai

Facts and fantasies mingle in the 60-something video documents collected. The complex speech-performance event in each clip challenges assumptions on narrated 'truth', demanding attention for the textual and performative richness of speech, from mannerism, rhetoric, subject matter, anecdotal deployment, narrativization strategies, culturally coded self-confessions, to the articulation of one's 'life philosophy'. In one speech, a local individual in context maps her/himself multifariously onto a web-work of discursive practices with global implications.

My analysis of the 'process' of each performance is informed by phenomenological thinking. Speech configuration, the 'process' in each case, carries implied notions of 'events' ('lived experiences') and 'event structure' ('logic of events'), revealing how each subject makes sense of what constitutes an 'event' to her/him, thus her/his own unique inner temporality.

Floating Projects Collective

June 26, 2010 (Saturday) / 2:30 – 4:00 pm

Video works evolved from this project would be shown at the venue.

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