

The Feminine Eye: lecture 3: HARLAN COUNTY, U.S.A.: 1976: 103m:

**April 18:**  
week # 3

**Women Documentary Filmmakers:**

Trinh T. Minh-ha: Vietnam/U.S.

Zana Briski: England

Barbara Kopple: U.S.

Screening:

**HARLAN COUNTY, U.S.A.** (Barbara Kopple, 1976)

Women Documentary Filmmakers:

doc film: different from narrative film:

narrative film: fiction films:

committed to dramatic storytelling:

doc film: concerned with recording of reality:

nonfiction films

doc films: we can't assume:

they tell the "truth" re: subject:

act of filmmaking: involves mediation:

between filmmaker & subject

doc films: do not tell stories:

rather: deal with facts:

real people, places & events:

not invented ones

not creating world:

reporting on world that already exists

so: doc films present facts to us:

but facts: not just record of external reality:

every film: uses formal elements & techniques:

that alter material being filmed:

narration

camera angles

editing

music

doc films: no more "true" than fiction films:

just like fiction filmmakers:

doc filmmakers shape raw material:

by selecting: certain details to include

certain details to exclude

then: they shape the details they include:

into coherent artistic pattern

Richard Schickel: discusses recent docs:

WINGED MIGRATION

CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS

BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE

"A doc is an arrangement (or, if it includes historical footage, a rearrangement) of nonfictional film, structured to support the preexisting ideas of the filmmaker.

Only the terminally stupid or the childishly innocent imagine that anyone making a doc film aspires to objective truth."

doc: not the truth: always biased:

filtered thru sensibilities of filmmaker

propaganda films: 1 type of doc film:

put out deceptive / distorted information:

concerned with style: how material presented:

traced back to Dziga Vertov: Soviet filmmaker:

1920s Russia: Vertov: propagandist:

making doc films to instruct people re: govt.

propaganda films:

used as weapons in political / ideological struggles:

structure of film: based on:

argument of filmmaker:

demonstrates thesis: focus

propaganda films: built around themes

didactic: teaching / preaching filmmaker's argument

Leni Riefenstahl: propagandist filmmaker for Hitler:

b. 1902 Berlin: d. 2003 Bavaria: aged 101  
started in show biz as dancer:

success on stage:

led to acting career: films

stars in mountaineering movies:

directed by Arnold Fank:

Riefenstahl: very popular

Fank: her mentor:

she began directing films

1<sup>st</sup> film directed by her:

1932: THE BLUE LIGHT

also 1932: heard candidate Adolph Hitler speak at rally:

mesmerized by his talent as public speaker

also: read *Mein Kampf*:

“The book made a tremendous impression on me. I became a confirmed National Socialist after reading the 1<sup>st</sup> page. I felt a man who could write such a book would undoubtedly lead Germany. I felt very happy that such a man had come.”

Riefenstahl: contacted Hitler:

he liked her work: asked her to film:

upcoming 1934 Party rally in Nuremberg

film that resulted:

TRIUMPH OF THE WILL:

became rousing success in Germany

widely banned in US as propaganda film

won many international awards

widely regarded as 1 of most effective pieces of propaganda ever made

also: made Riefenstahl 1<sup>st</sup> female film director:

to achieve international recognition

**clips: TRIUMPH OF THE WILL: subtitles ON**

**ch 2: flying to Nuremberg: god descends: 4 m:**

did any movie star ever get entrance like this?

**ch 11: Hitler youth rally: 4 m**

pure propaganda:

style: how it's done:

attention to detail: socks

masses shown after closer shots: impact

films in SSU Library:

TRIUMPH OF THE WILL: DVD 460

OLYMPIA: DVD 2628

Leni Riefenstahl: continued:

in later years: Riefenstahl:

denied her dedication to National Socialism:

said she was never really a Nazi:

just a filmmaker

in 1974: she published *The Last of the Nuba*:

book of photographs taken in mountains of southern Sudan:

documenting the Nuba who live there: ~ 8,000 people:

aloof, godlike

emblems of physical perfection

with large, well-shaped, partly shaven heads

expressive faces

muscular bodies: decorated with scars

smearing with sacred gray-white ash

*The Last of the Nuba*: called by Susan Sontag:

“certainly the most ravishing book of photographs published anywhere  
in recent years”

Sontag: wrote this in article:

published in *New York Review of Books*: February 1975:

“Fascinating Facism”:

exposes “disquieting lies” / “misinformation”:

re: Riefenstahl’s career & her encounter with Nuba

reveals true purpose of book:

rehabilitation of Riefenstahl’s reputation in eyes of public

demonstrates how Riefenstahl’s photos show that:

deep in her heart she was still a Nazi:

still believed in superiority of white race

article: “Fascinating Facism”:

easily available online: google it

copy for you to look over

Trinh T. Minh-ha: Vietnam/U.S.

Trinh: filmmaker / writer / academic / composer

b. 1952: Hanoi, Vietnam:

brought up in South Vietnam:

during US war

studied piano & music composition:

National Conservatory of Music & Theater: Saigon

1970: emigrated to US:

U of Illinois: Champagne-Urbana: studied:

music composition

ethnomusicology

French literature:

received: MFA / PhD degrees

has taught at: among other places:

Harvard

Smith

Cornell

my teacher at SFSU:

early 1990s: terrific teacher: 1 of best I've ever had:

really knows subject --- & lot more

offers gentle guidance

brings it all to classroom

has powerful, yet serene, presence

since 1994: Berkeley:

teaching in Gender & Women's Studies Department

teaches courses that focus on women's work:

as related to:

cultural politics

post-coloniality

contemporary critical theory

the arts

offers seminars on 3<sup>rd</sup> World cinema

the voice in cinema

feminist theory --- & more

Trinh T. Minh-ha: continued:

1<sup>st</sup> film: REASSEMBLAGE: 1983: 40m:  
 filmed in Senegal: part of 3-year project on:  
     ethnographic field research in West Africa  
 montage of fleeting images from Senegal:  
     no narration: occasional comments by Trinh:  
         but: none of her statements gives meaning to scenes  
         there's music sometimes / silence sometimes  
 Trinh explains in film:  
     she intends "not to speak about / just speak near by":  
         refuses to make film "about" a culture:  
             dealing with viewer's expectations:  
                 & need to assign meaning  
 REASSEMBLAGE:  
     unlike traditional ethnographic doc films:  
         when she showed it in class at SFSU:  
 I remember her saying: in part: she wanted to give viewers:  
     a "real experience":  
         like we actually would move thru village:  
             remembering just bits & pieces:  
                 of larger whole  
         never seeing entire process:  
             just parts of it

**clip: REASSEMBLAGE: ch 2: 3 m**

copy on DVD: for you to borrow

also: 1 of her books to check out:  
*Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality & Feminism:*  
 theoretical attempt to come to grips with:  
 writings of women of color

Zana Briski: England

Briski: b. 1966:

English artist: photographer & filmmaker

also: activist: now lives in NYC

early interest in photography:

MA: Cambridge

later study: International Center of Photography: NYC

1995: 1<sup>st</sup> trip to India:

story on female infanticide

1997: returned to India: began project:

prostitutes of Calcutta's red-light district:

led her to work with kids of prostitutes

BORN INTO BROTHELS: 2004: Oscar: Best Doc Feature:

grew from this work with kids:

written & directed by Briski & Ross Kauffman

Briski: went to impoverished neighborhood:

Calcutta: red-light district:

dangerous place for everyone:

disease

drugs

possibility of being sold into slavery by parents:

girls expected to "join the line":

become prostitute, like mom

these things: kids deal with every day

befriended 7 kids of red-light district:

gave each a camera

started photography workshop for them

this act: changed kids' lives

changed filmmakers' lives, too

look how she captures world kids live in:

**clip: BORN INTO BROTHELS: ch 1: 4 m**

Briski: "I think it's really a story about kids & how they blossom & are transformed thru art."

founded organization: Kids With Cameras:

[www.kids-with-cameras.org](http://www.kids-with-cameras.org):

dedicated to sending photographers to work with kids:

in other parts of world

Barbara Kopple:

- b. 1946: NYC: grew up in Scarsdale:
  - studied psychology at Northeastern U:
    - there: worked with Albert & David Maysles:
      - Maysles brothers: doc filmmakers:
        - cinema verité works include:
          - SALESMAN: 1968
          - GIMME SHELTER: 1970
          - GRAY GARDENS: 1976

Kopple: has won 2 Oscars:

1<sup>st</sup>: 1976: HARLAN COUNTY, U.S.A.

2<sup>nd</sup>: 1991: AMERICAN DREAM:

re: Hormel Foods strike:

Austin, MN: 1985-6

other docs:

A CONVERSATION WITH GREGORY PECK

docs on Mike Tyson & Woody Allen

2006: SHUT UP & SING:

re: controversy over:

Dixie Chicks' comments re: G.W. Bush

Kopple's latest doc: 2011:

GUN FIGHT: follow-up to Michael Moore's 2002:

BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE:

looked at state of guns & gun control in US

investigates where issue stands in 2011:

Kopple: such a hot-button issue:

"often times reason is lost"

premiered on HBO: last Wednesday: April 13:

3 days before 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary:

Virginia Tech shooting:

33 people killed

1 week before 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary:

Columbine massacre:

12 people killed

DVD for you to borrow

HARLAN COUNTY, U.S.A.

history:

1. US labor history: struggle of coal miners: bloody:
  - some of most violent episodes:
    - happened in Harlan County, KY
  - 1 battle between miners & coal companies:
    - “bloody Harlan”: culminated 4 May 1931:
      - shootout: large number of dead & wounded
  - 1 song: made 1931 struggle part of US labor folklore:
    - “Which Side are You On?”:
      - plays important part in film:
        - reminds us of historical continuity of miners’ fight
2. Tony Boyle: 1963-1972:
  - President: United Mine Workers of America:
    - as president of UMWA: widely believed:
      - more concerned with protecting mine owners’ interests:
        - than interests of his members
    - 1969: Jock Yablonski: challenged Boyle for presidency:
      - election: widely seen as corrupt:
        - conceded election: but asked US Dept. of Labor:
          - to investigate it for fraud:
            - 31 Dec 69: 3 killers shot & killed:
              - Yablonski, wife & daughter: as they slept
        - after Yablonski’s murder: US DOL:
          - assigned 230 investigators to case
      - Boyle: eventually found guilty for slayings: 1978:
        - died in prison: 1985: aged 80
    - Kopple: initially intended to make doc re:
      - Miners for Democracy: rank & file movement:
        - started because of Yablonski murders:
          - & its attempt to unseat Boyle as president
      - but: when miners at Brookside Mine: Harlan County, KY:
        - went on strike: 1972:
          - Kopple: went there to film strike vs. Duke Power Company:
            - & response of UMWA: or, rather, lack of response
        - she & crew: spent 18 months with families in film:
          - filming what happened as it happened:
            - people opened their hearts & their homes to them
          - documenting dire straits of families while they’re striking for:
            - safer working conditions
            - fair labor practices
            - decent wages
          - most significant point of disagreement in strike:
            - company’s insistence on putting no-strike clause in contract

HARLAN COUNTY, U.S.A.: continued:

Kopple: rather than using narration to tell story:

lets words & actions of people:

    speak for themselves

    “HARLAN COUNTY came out of the tradition of Albert Maysles & [Richard] Leacock & [D.A.] Pennebaker, documentarians who went somewhere & stayed there & watched & listened & made a record of what happened.”

produces some interesting facts re: strike:

    fact that Duke Power’s profits increased 170 % in 1 year:

        meanwhile: striking miners: many living in squalid conditions:

            only received 4% pay increase:

                while cost of living rose 7%

important film: 1 of miners:

    attributes conclusion of strike: to presence of Kopple & her film crew:

        “The cameras probably saved a bunch of shooting. I don’t think we’d have won it without the film crew. If the film crew hadn’t been sympathetic to our cause, we would’ve lost. Thank God for them; thank God they’re on our side.”

    1990: selected for preservation in US National Film Registry:

        as being “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant”

    2005: preserved by Women’s Film Preservation Fund:

        that’s version we’ll see in 5 m

1:40 pm: break

1:45pm:

**screening: HARLAN COUNTY, U.S.A.**

post-screening:

does film retain its power:

35 years later?

which side are you on?

crew: 2 or 3: camera, assistant camera, sound:

never told not to film anything: even organizers treated them very well

camera: sometimes it was protection for filmmakers:

Kopple: "That's why we were there all the time:  
with film or without film"

sometimes: it made them a target

cinematography: Hart: "capturing the beauty in people's faces":

political stories: also personal stories: written in their faces

no artfully composed shots: no silhouettes vs. horizon:

people: beautiful element in film

interviews: Kopple's voice often heard in dialog:

doesn't try to disguise her subjectivity / engagement with subject:

her authorial presence different from Michael Moore's:

Moore's "1<sup>st</sup> person antics"

constitutes initial step: "toward an ethics of self-reflexivity"

music: authentic: comes from real people:

intensive use of working class anthems: 14 tunes:

serve several functions:

as transitional devices between scenes

as reminders of rural cultural heritage

as editorial supplements:

bringing home messages of misery & defiance

people: had emotional connection to music: part of their lives:

coal miners: geographically isolated:

music reflects what they're going thru

dominant musical voice: female:

fits with wider themes of film

Florence Reese: song: "Which Side are You On?":

1970s: singing same song she wrote in 1930s:

can't rest: have to keep pushing

Hazel Dickens: Kopple spoke to her at a concert she gave:

after seeing film: Dickens said she'd do anything to help:

wrote last song in film especially for movie:

song: about continuing struggle:

"Ain't No Way They Can Ever Keep Us Down"

who are most effective picketers?

miners' wives?

Lois Scott: plays major role in galvanizing community:

1 point: pulls pistol from her bra

"They may shoot me, but they can't shoot the union out of me."

Kopple: picket line: dangerous:

never knew what would happen

sheriff: lets company's "gun thugs" to use their weapons:

prohibits strikers from using theirs

violence:

guns fired at strikers

Kopple & cameraman: knocked down & beaten:

Kopple: "I found out later that they planned to kill us that day":

didn't want record of what was happening

but: DP: Hart Perry: got unforgettable shot:

armed company employee driving past in pickup:

warrant issued for his arrest

different locations used:

Harlan County: local picket line: cut to:

North Carolina: Duke's corporate headquarters: cut to:

NYC: Wall Street: protestors

each new location: action framed in such a way: we're disoriented:

pattern: makes us see how local miners' issues:

are connected to our own immediate economic concerns

effect of this: posits abstract concept:

solidarity of miners & urban energy consumers:

by way of small fragments of actuality

turning point of strike:

almost full year into it:

Lawrence Jones: striking miner: fatally shot during fight:

young, well-liked, 16-year-old wife & baby:

mother collapsed from grief at funeral

this was the event: more than anything else:

finally forces strikers & management:

to come to bargaining table

Tony Boyle: shown early in film in good health:

later: frail, sickly, using wheelchair

HCUSA: calls attention to class war in US:

but does it offer enough balance?

struggle: seen only thru eyes of miners

humor in film:

encounter: striking miner & NYC cop:  
 exchange info re: benefits:  
 miner's job more dangerous than cop's

history: miners' strikes:

nothing improves: struggle goes on:  
 Kopple: "it's a continuum"  
 Sheila Benson: "HARLAN COUNTY is, regrettably, timeless."  
 1931: "bloody Harlan"  
 1953: SALT OF THE EARTH:  
 women  
 1973: HARLAN COUNTY, USA:  
 miners' demands: their own safety committee  
 standard UMW daily wage: \$45/"portal to portal"  
 standard rate for coal: 75cents/ton:  
 for medical/retirement benefits  
 main stumbling block to settlement:  
 management demands no strike clause  
 compared to "bloody Harlan":  
 had things improved in 1970s: since 1931 strike?  
 "The laws are not made for the working people of this country."  
 2011: Wisconsin: Gov. Walker:  
 proposes ending collective bargaining:  
 for public employees:  
 except cops, firefighters, state troopers  
 retain right to bargain for wages: but not benefits

criticism:

Peter Biskind: narrative structure confusing:  
 begins to unravel towards end:  
 but its faults: consequences of its virtues:  
 energy, immediacy & passion  
 power of film: comes from:  
 Kopple's intimate involvement with people she filmed  
 risks she took  
 places she forced her camera into  
 strength: lies not in its beauty or its politics:  
 "but in the moral authority that is inscribed in every frame"

other movies inspired by success of HCUSA: came in its wake:

MATEWAN / COAL MINER'S DAUGHTER / NORMA RAE  
 HCUSA: paved way for more recent docs: very successful:  
 FAHRENHEIT 9/11 / SUPER SIZE ME / ENRON / THE CORPORATION

commentary: Barbara Kopple: director / Nancy Baker: supervising editor:

opening: no question re: where to put footage inside mine:  
 because film is re: strike: we don't go into coal mine later:  
 these men: do everything there: always kneeling:  
 noise level deafening  
 men: glad they were there: but it was scary  
 myth: no women in mines then: now lots of women:  
 black lung: fills lungs with soot: eventually kills  
 people in film: inspired them: gave them energy to keep going  
 time it happened: they thought they could make positive change:  
 not much chance to do that  
 they listened to people: separated knowledge of filmmaking:  
 from political knowledge  
 everyone ate together during filming: big lunches made:  
 "we never knew where the next roll of film was coming from":  
 sometimes: no film in camera at picket line  
 had to beg DuArt to develop film: owed them so much \$  
 interesting mix of people: some in 60s / some young  
 Kopple & crew: stayed with Jerry & Dorothy Johnson:  
 crucially important: for their safety  
 & to feel connected to people they were filming  
 pride of people: can be seen in film: impressed Kopple & crew:  
 sharing stories  
 archival footage: coal fields: people's basements: 16-mm films kept: Yablonski, etc.  
 National Archive: hunting for footage  
 guns: everywhere: people use them when necessary:  
 armed guards: escorted them to screening for people of Harlan County  
 women: films shows how important they were to strike:  
 filmmakers moved by their courage:  
 wanted safety for their men in coal mines  
 became role models for filmmakers: took care of them  
 threat to Kopple's life: told re: it after film finished:  
 people of HC felt they had to protect her:  
 years before: man came to film them: shot & killed  
 trip to Wall Street: miners showing up at board meeting:  
 shook up company  
 filming: we wanted to explore everything:  
 to leave nothing uncovered: local people helped set up meetings  
 Kopple: HC: "the most important film for me":  
 feels closest to it: knows every line: "it got inside of me"  
 editing: began after shooting done: took 9-10 months  
 Kopple: shipped film to her father after shooting: to safeguard it:  
 people shooting into houses where crew stayed in HC  
 funding difficult: constant pressure

commentary: continued:

Yablonski: murder: important to people of HC:

they had to figure out how to show that:

weaving history into the present day

objectivity: not part of film: like song says: "Which Side are You On?"

they had to pick sides: no one neutral in HC

winning contract: had big impact on people of HC:

they felt they had power / respect given to women / hot running water

after film completed: women of HC showed it to raise money:

\$: to help miners / black lung / etc.

Kopple: still in touch with many of women:

clip from HCUSA: woman's funeral / eulogy

**clip: THE MAKING OF HARLAN COUNTY, U.S.A.**

next week:

**April 25:**

week #4

**Women Directors in the Southern Hemisphere:**

New Zealand: Jane Campion / Niki Caro

Australia: Gillian Armstrong / Sue Brooks

Screening:

**JAPANESE STORY** (Sue Brooks, 2003)