

## ***Music and the socially committed documentary in the Americas***

### **Call for papers**

November 8, 2024 at Sorbonne Université

A day-long conference organized by the Institut des Amériques, Sorbonne Université (CRIMIC) and Université de Strasbourg (SEARCH)

In partnership with L'Écran cinema in Saint-Denis, as part of the third edition of the Socially Committed Documentary Festival in the Americas (November 5-10, 2024), which will focus on music.

This Day-long conference will explore the multiple relationships between music, social commitment, and documentary in the Americas. While a great deal of research has been carried out on music in cinema, from the pioneering work of Claudia Gorman<sup>1</sup> in the United States to Michel Chion's<sup>2</sup> essential bibliography in France, the proposed reflections have mainly focused on fiction films<sup>3</sup>. Some analyses have focused on extradiegetic music (or pit music in Chion's terminology) and its aesthetic and narrative roles in relation to narrative time and diegetic space, whether original scores or pre-existing musical quotations. Others have focused on the introduction of intradiegetic music (or screen music) into the filmic text. The mutual re-semantization of music, lyrics in the case of songs, and other visual and aural components of the filmic text has also been studied in depth<sup>4</sup>.

Nevertheless, since the birth of cinema, music has been an essential component of documentary films –Nanook of the North (Robert Flaherty, 1922), was screened with musical accompaniment even before it qualified as a documentary–, but this presence has been called into question by filmmakers who considered that the introduction of an extradiegetic score, leading the viewer to interpret the image according to the connotations induced by the music, constituted a manipulation of the viewer. The question of ethics, which is ontological to documentary filmmaking, arises both in the realm of filming (distance from the filmed subject, influence of the camera's presence on the set, possible manipulation of image editing, etc.) and in the sound dimension (voiceover of omniscient narrator guiding understanding of the image, extradiegetic music arousing emotions and eliciting empathy in the viewer). As Bill Nichols points out, documentary “is not a reproduction; it is a representation.

<sup>1</sup> Claudia Gorman, *Unheard melodies*, Narrative film music, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1987.

<sup>2</sup> Among others: Michel Chion, *La voix au cinéma*, Paris, Éditions Cahiers du Cinéma, 1982, *L'Audio-vision*, Nathan, 1990, – *La musique au cinéma*, Paris, Fayard, 1995, – *Un art sonore le cinéma, histoire, esthétique, poétique*, Paris, Cahiers du cinéma, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, one book edited by Holly Rogers should be mentioned: (ed.), *Music and sound in Documentary films*, New York, Routledge, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Marianne Bloch-Robin, *Carlos Saura*, *Paroles et musique au cinéma*, Lille, Presses du Septentrion, 2018.

Therefore, they are not documents as much as expressive representations of what documents may contain”<sup>5</sup>.

Nevertheless, even if these films - in contrast to news reports - apprehend the world from an expressive point of view, the discourse they construct is attached to reality, and some filmmakers limit or even oppose the addition of music during editing: Frederick Wiseman, for 50 years, has systematically refused to use extradiegetic music in his films.<sup>6</sup> Certain documentaries belonging to direct cinema - or *cinéma-verité* - such as *Chronique d'un été* (Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, 1962), whose emergence coincides with the technical means that have enabled the generalization of direct sound recording, seek, in an ethical approach, to limit the filmmaker's intervention on reality by reducing musical occurrences (El Eco, Tatiana Huezo, 2016) or by using music as an ironic counterpoint to the images or as a lyrical expression of commitment in the construction of a militant political discourse, as is the case, for example, with Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's *La hora de los hornos* (1968). Music can also become the subject of socially committed documentaries, highlighting dissident or subaltern voices, as in the Brazilian films *Emicida: AmarElo - Étudo para ontem* (2020) by Fred Ouro Preto or *O rap do pequeno príncipe contra as almas sebosas* (2000) by Paulo Caldas and Marcelo Luna. Music thus plays a full part in the construction of a discourse that opposes the notion of unconscious listening defined by Claudia Gorbman in the context of Hollywood fiction, whose form was considered manipulative by the proponents of the new cinemas of the 1960s. This concern has also been at the heart of the rise of documentary cinema since the late 1990s, with the emergence of digital technology opening up the possibility of filming the world over time, thus modifying the relationship to shooting time that had until then been a hindrance to the director's relationship to the world (*En construcción*, José Luis Guerin, 2000, *El cielo gira*, Mercedes Álvarez, 2004). Nevertheless, many documentary filmmakers use music to construct a discourse that they wish to be equivocal, polysemous and hybrid, with music playing a part in blurring the lines between fiction and non-fiction (*Documenteur*, Agnès Varda, 1981) or in a style of *politainment* that combines entertainment and activism (*Fahrenheit 9/11*, Michael Moore, 2004).

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<sup>5</sup> Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, p.9.

<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Wiseman, who records the sound for his films, attaches great importance to diegetic music.

The relationship between music and commitment in documentary cinema offers many avenues of analysis. With this in mind, the speakers at this day-long conference will be able to present papers in English, French, Spanish or Portuguese on the following topics:

- \* Ethical issues surrounding the esthetic and narrative roles of music in documentaries.
- \* Social commitment and propaganda: the role of music in the construction of documentary discourse.
- \* Musical compositions of commitment. Migration of emblematic songs and compositions.
- \* Music and resistance: social movements, socially committed musicians.
- \* Music and sound: what are the boundaries and ethics of documentary?
- \* From the spoken word to singing: the relationship between song and filmic text in socially committed documentaries.
- \* Musical practices and identity struggles in political documentary.
- \* Filmic representations of cultural and social resistance through the creation of a musical identity.
- \* Interactions and tensions between globalization and musical identities.

As this day-long conference is co-organized by the Institut des Amériques, the call for papers is open to all countries on the American continent (North, Central and South America).

Paper proposals (title and abstract accompanied by a brief presentation of the author) should be sent by April 30, 2024 to the following address:

[musiqueetdocumentaireengage@gmail.com](mailto:musiqueetdocumentaireengage@gmail.com)

Presentations should be 20 minutes long and may be in English, Spanish, French or Portuguese. Proposals must be submitted to the Scientific Committee of the day-long conference, with responses due on May 15, 2024.

This day-long conference will take place on November 8, 2024 at Sorbonne University.

**Organization:**

Marianne Bloch-Robin (CRIMIC, Sorbonne Université) Alberto Da Silva (CRIMIC, Sorbonne Université) David Lipson (SEARCH, Université de Strasbourg), Véronique Pugibet (CRIMIC, Sorbonne Université), Milena Santoro (Georgetown University).

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