

A photograph of Ai Weiwei, a Chinese artist and dissident, with a long beard and mustache, wearing a dark jacket. He is holding a large quantity of grey, oval-shaped seeds in both hands, presenting them towards the camera. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with other people.

AI WEIWEI: NEVER SORRY

CLASSROOM GUIDE

USING
THIS GUIDE ▶

ABOUT
THE FILM ▶

DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS &
POST-VIEWING
ACTIVITIES ▶

ARTICLES &
REVIEWS ▶

MEDIA LITERACY
RESOURCES ▶

SUPPLEMENTAL
RESOURCES ▶

INTRODUCTION

This study guide is intended to flexibly support educators in preparing for and following up a class screening of **Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry**, a feature documentary about the famed Chinese artist and dissident. Support materials are intended to facilitate group discussion, individual and collaborative creative exercise, subject-based learning and access to resources for further investigation of material. Educators are encouraged to adapt and abridge the content as necessary to meet their unique learning objectives and circumstances.

All SFFS Youth Education materials are developed in alignment with California educational standards for media literacy. SFFS Youth Education welcomes feedback and questions on all printed study materials.

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SAN FRANCISCO
FILM SOCIETY



USING THIS GUIDE

Group screening of **Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry** can be a useful tool for inspiring group discussion and prompting further research on a wide range of topical issues. This study guide may be used flexibly within

a classroom environment to guide these discussions, inspire follow-up activities and to supplement the educational value of the viewing experience. Content is selected to challenge middle and high school students to think critically about the media at hand and to facilitate further research into related topics such as human rights, propaganda, social media, artistic freedom, performance art, etc.

ABOUT THE FILM

Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry is the first feature-length film about the internationally renowned Chinese artist and activist, Ai Weiwei. In recent years, Ai has garnered international attention as much for his ambitious artwork as his political provocations. This fascinating documentary examines this complex intersection of artistic practice and social activism as seen through the life and art of China's preeminent contemporary artist. From 2008 to 2010, Beijing-based journalist and filmmaker Alison Klayman gained unprecedented access to Ai Weiwei. Klayman documented Ai's artistic process in preparation for major museum exhibitions, his intimate exchanges with family members and his increasingly public clashes with the Chinese government. Her detailed portrait of the artist provides a nuanced exploration of contemporary China and one of its most compelling public figures.

Directed by Alison Klayman (USA 2011)
91 min, Color. In English & Mandarin with English subtitles. Recommended for ages 15 and up (Rated R)

Recommended Subject Areas:

Fine Arts
Mandarin
Media Literacy
Social Studies (Government, Economy, Current Events, Art History)
World Cultures (China Studies)

Key concepts / buzzwords:

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Ai Weiwei | Public Dissidence |
| China | Sichuan Earthquake |
| Tate Modern Gallery | Beijing National Stadium |
| Performance Art | Underground Activism |
| Installation Art | Social Media / Twitter |
| Chinese Communism | Art Patronage |
| Censorship | Human Rights |
| US Constitution 1st Amendment | Biographical Documentary |
| "netizen" | Subversive Media |
| Film Criticism | Contemporary Art |
| Tiananmen Square | "tofu construction" |



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

STORY & CHARACTERS

1. All biographical documentaries are limited in their scope to certain aspects of or periods in an individual subject's life. On which aspects of Ai Weiwei's life does this film focus? What period of Ai Weiwei's life does this film chronicle? What are Ai's personal and professional circumstances at the beginning of the film? What opportunities and decisions does he face throughout the story?
2. How would you describe the character of Ai Weiwei overall? How does he conduct his professional life? How does he conduct his personal life? How does he feel about his career? His fame? What is his attitude towards his art in general? What is his attitude towards the Chinese government?
3. In what ways does Ai change over the course of this story, if at all? In what ways do his circumstances change?
4. How does Ai Weiwei feel about social media and the opportunities it presents individuals to disseminate messages instantaneously? In what ways does he utilize social media to achieve his goals?
5. What was the most memorable moment in this movie for you? The funniest? The saddest? The most thought-provoking?

HOW DO YOU
THINK THE
FILMMAKER
FEELS ABOUT
AI WEIWEI AND
HIS MESSAGE?

CONTEXT

1. Non-fiction films sometimes portray historical or biographical information in an objective, impartial way. Many documentaries however, including **Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry**, are made to raise awareness of certain issues or controversies. Can you think of any other films or TV programs you've seen that were made for a similar purpose? What issue(s) were raised? What viewpoints or values were conveyed? To what extent did the film or program empower the viewer to get involved or make a difference?
2. What did you know about China before seeing this film? What did you know about Ai Weiwei, if anything? What did you learn about Chinese culture from watching this film? What about the Chinese government?
3. What other historical examples of government censorship are you aware of? Why do governments censor public messages? Why did/does the Chinese government censor Ai Weiwei? Do you think government censorship is ever necessary or appropriate? If so, when? Do you think the Chinese government's censorship of Ai was necessary or appropriate? Why or why not?
4. "Every society needs someone like him." Discuss this quote with regard to Ai Weiwei. Do you think this is a true statement? Why or why not? In what ways are his art and activism culturally valuable? In what ways are they harmful, if any?
5. How do you think the filmmaker feels about Ai Weiwei and his message? What reasons do you think the filmmaker had for giving the documentary this particular title? ▶



▶ 6. What other biographical documentaries have you seen or do you know of? What other biographical films have you seen? What are some characteristics biographical films tend to have in common?

7. To what extent did this film enable you to “get to know” Ai Weiwei? Did you feel he was sufficiently introduced? What challenges do you think the filmmaker faced in terms of getting access to information from Ai? What challenges do you think she faced in terms of getting access to information from others?

MESSAGE & THEMES

1. How would you describe the “moral” of this story? If you had to summarize the message that the filmmaker was trying to convey in one sentence, what would it be?
2. How do you think the filmmaker feels about the public figure of Ai Weiwei? What impression(s) does she wish to leave the viewer with?
3. How would you describe the visual art of Ai Weiwei? In which media does he work? How would you describe the performance art of Ai Weiwei?
4. What is your definition of art? What is the dictionary definition? How do you think Ai Weiwei would define art?
5. Do you think the Sunflower Seeds installation qualifies as art? What about the Sichuan Earthquake Names Project?

WHAT WAS A COMPELLING SHOT THAT YOU REMEMBER FROM THIS DOCUMENTARY?

What about Ai’s Twitter feed? What about Ai’s behavior and monologue while on camera in this documentary? Do you think some things Ai does or makes are wrongly characterized as art? Is all art created deliberately? How do you think Ai would answer these questions?

MEDIA LITERACY

1. How was this film made? Was it shot on film or video?
2. Is this film better suited to a theatrical presentation (screening in a theater) or a broadcast presentation (screening on TV)? Why? (e.g., Who is more likely to take action after viewing this film, a person sitting in a theater or a person sitting in front of their TV?)
3. What questions came to your mind as you watched this film? Is there anything you would ask the filmmaker? Is there anything you’d like to ask Ai Weiwei?
4. What was a compelling shot that you remember from this documentary? What did you like about it? How was it framed? What elements comprised the frame? How were they organized relative to each other?

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITY

HOST A DEBATE

Split the students into 2 (or 4 groups). Have everyone research the topic of censorship in American mass media. Have half the class brainstorm and prepare to argue the benefits of government censorship to public safety, public welfare, government interest, etc. This group fundamentally will defend the responsibilities of the government; backing the premise that zero government control over media is ultimately harmful. Have the other half brainstorm and prepare to argue the detriments of government censorship, culturally or otherwise. This group fundamentally will defend the rights of the public; backing the premise that censorship is always harmful in all its forms. Select students to present arguments and rebuttals and let the sparks fly!



ARTICLES & REVIEWS

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT – AI WEIWEI: NEVER SORRY

(by Alison Klayman, *New York Times Op-Docs*, January 22, 2012)

I have always believed that the story of the dissident artist Ai Weiwei is not about how censorship stifles creativity, but rather how one artist is able to work around such obstacles. It's not about the system crushing individual expression, but about the power of an individual in the face of forces greater than himself. One thing is clear — Ai Weiwei's story could not be possible without the Internet. We cannot imagine an Ai Weiwei without the megaphone of blogs and Twitter, without the ability to communicate instantaneously and connect to like-minded netizens around China and the globe.

Ai Weiwei told me recently that he thinks the government's decision to detain him for 81 days last year and keep him under strict bail conditions ever since is completely related to his effective use of the Internet to communicate his views and exchange ideas with others.



He told me: "If not for my use of the Internet, I would just be an artist trying to put up a canvas in a gallery or a museum, which has almost no influence for the majority of society. It's only because I acted on the Internet that the pressure comes. It made a lot of people feel scared, because they can never really stop my influence on the netizens."

That's why I made my first feature documentary, *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry* — to record what happens when someone makes the choice to speak openly and provocatively and face down the consequences, as Ai Weiwei and so many other human rights lawyers, writers, activists and young netizens do every day in China. I hope to inspire new discussions about the role of art, social media, underground documentary and creative forms of resistance in our interconnected world.

VARIETY REVIEW OF *AI WEIWEI: NEVER SORRY*

(by Peter Debruge, *Variety*, January 27, 2012)

He helped design Beijing's Bird's Nest stadium for the 2008 Olympics, filled the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall with 100 million ceramic sunflower seeds and uncovered the government-suppressed names of thousands of schoolchildren killed in the Sichuan earthquake. Despite these achievements, Chinese superstar artist-activist Ai Weiwei remains elusive on film — until now. With incredible access and the full participation of her subject,

Alison Klayman presents a significant yet scattered introduction in ***Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry***, wrestling to strike the right balance between his public causes and personal life. Given currency by Ai's 2011 detention, the doc should see extensive fest play.

Klayman's film was already in post-production when Chinese authorities arrested Ai and held him for 81 days, and though his controversial imprisonment demonstrates just how volatile a figure the artist is, this climactic development feels tacked on to an already somewhat ▶



ARTICLES & REVIEWS

► disorganized career overview. As with any art doc, the film faces the challenge of communicating the significance of Ai's work while still trying to function as a compelling narrative in its own right. The Chinese authorities present the primary tension in Ai's life, yet Klayman seems reluctant to demonize the government, either out of respect or for fear of making things worse for Ai.

Clearly, the helmer had a wealth of footage from which to draw, tracing from Ai's days in New York City (the project grew out of a gallery show featuring photos from that period) to observations of the artist at work in his studio. She also has access to video material recorded by Ai and his assistants, sampling freely from his docs *Hua lian ba'er* and *Lau ma ti hua*. But in assembling these many elements, the director applies no overarching vision or design to the film. Individual scenes prove interesting, especially those that hold clues to his personality, such as those involving connection with his illegitimate son, though the structure provides no clear throughline.

Klayman also assumes too great a familiarity with Ai's work, referencing such projects as the *Bird's Nest* and his "Sunflower Seeds" installation without providing the tools needed to understand and appreciate these achievements. Still, consistent with nonfiction filmmaking in general, formal clumsiness is easily superseded by a sufficiently compelling subject, and Ai is nothing short of fascinating. Though China has blocked Twitter usage among its citizens, Ai actively interfaces with the outside world in 140 characters or fewer at a time, often posting photos of his run-ins with local authorities.

Rather than dwelling too heavily on his museum shows, much of the film expands upon Ai's key tweets of the past few years. Hence, the incidents that take precedence include the wrenchingly unjust demolition of his Shanghai artist's studio and his confrontational attempts to seek justice for a police raid that left him with a bleeding head wound — both major events for Klayman to have caught on camera.

Among Ai's better-known work is a series of photographs that feature his extended middle finger superimposed over Tiananmen Square and other iconic sites. Whereas many contemporary artists question authority via their work, Ai does not confine his criticism of hegemony to galleries and museums. Instead, he takes the assault directly to the powers that be, which in turn expands the scope of his work to a form of pseudo-performance art, providing Klayman with a handful of lively "happenings" to include in her film, such as Ai's heated confrontation with the officer who allegedly beat him.

Though the doc provides occasional insights into Ai's personality, China serves as the more interesting character here, a complex adversary capable of inspiring a range of creative reactions from the artist. By opening with a metaphor about an exceptional cat that has learned to open doors, Klayman stresses the one-in-a-billion odds of someone like Ai existing. The film is a good start, but such an important artist deserves a more rigorous portrait. ►

CHINESE SUPERSTAR ARTIST-ACTIVIST
 AI WEIWEI REMAINS ELUSIVE ON FILM
 — UNTIL NOW.



ARTICLES & REVIEWS

► EPOCH TIMES REVIEW OF *AI WEIWEI: NEVER SORRY*

(by Joe Bendel, *The Epoch Times*, January 28, 2012)

Ai Weiwei's distinctive "Bird's Nest" design for the Beijing National Stadium was one of the defining images of the 2008 Olympics, but Ai sought to redefine the Beijing games, forcefully decrying the tremendous suffering they caused for China's vulnerable underclass.

Choosing the struggle for Chinese human rights over a life of privilege, Ai is arguably the world's most important activist-artist, whom Alison Klayman profiles in the fascinating and infuriating **Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry**.

Considering the recurring middle finger motif in Ai's work, it's hardly surprising that he is not a favorite of the regime. Yet, there is more to Ai than mere symbolic defiance. Klayman trenchantly traces the roots of Ai's nonconformist spirit to the suffering his family experienced during the Cultural Revolution.

While Ai made some noise when he repudiated the Olympics, few could hear it within China. However, his mastery of social media, specifically Twitter, would change all that. Indeed, Ai and the legions of everyday Chinese citizens he inspired through tweets ought to put everyone following vacuous celebrities to shame.

Most Westerners should know that Ai was recently held incommunicado for a long stretch by the police, but the projects that earned the artist the communist regime's wrath may come as a revelation.

THERE ARE SCORES OF LESSONS TO BE FOUND IN THE FILM, INCLUDING THE IMPORTANCE OF RECORDING SUCH TRAGEDIES FOR HISTORY, RATHER THAN LETTING THE INNOCENT VICTIMS OF SICHUAN FALL THROUGH THE COMMUNIST MEMORY HOLE.

Most notable were his efforts to document each name of the thousands of school children who died during the Sichuan earthquake as a result of flimsy ("tofu") school construction. In any transparent society, this information would be in the public record, but in China all such efforts were explicitly forbidden.

There are scores of lessons to be found in the film, including the importance of recording such tragedies for history, rather than letting the innocent victims of Sichuan fall through the communist memory hole. At times, Ai's public criticisms of the regime are shockingly bold. Clearly, his guts are made of steel-reinforced concrete.

Although Klayman largely focuses on his activism, she still conveys a vivid sense of Ai's personality. Partly this comes out through some shrewdly edited interview segments. Yet more fundamentally, Ai just seems to be a what-you-see-is-what-you-get kind of person.

Indeed, Klayman wisely focuses squarely on her subject. As a documentarian, she is rather blessed that Ai recorded so many of his protests and the subsequent crackdowns for his social network followers. The word "controversial" should not really apply here. What Ai says has happened, most definitely including a notorious police assault, really did go down. He has the scars and the video to prove it.

Aside from some helpful context provided by talking heads and an innocuous score, this is essentially Ai's show—and appropriately so.

We want to call a film like this "inspiring." It is a term that undeniably applies to Ai. Unfortunately, ►



ARTICLES & REVIEWS

▶ though he might be out of immediate physical danger, Ai's relative freedoms within contemporary China remain harshly curtailed, so viewers are likely to feel several conflicting emotions when the film ends. Anger would be a good one to go with.

This documentary is important because the international

spotlight must shine with far more intensity on his situation if circumstances are ever going to change. Given the Chinese regime's nasty habit of harassing its critics, Klayman also earns a fair amount of credit for having the guts to tackle this project in the first place. Hopefully, she will have to produce a happy postscript for the film sometime in the future, but surely she would not begrudge the extra work.

GUARDIAN REVIEW OF AI WEIWEI: NEVER SORRY

(by Andrew Pulver, *The Guardian*, February 13, 2012)

Sometimes, as a filmmaker, you just need to be in the right place at the right time. Alison Klayman, an American freelance journalist working in China, was Johnny on the spot, and her documentary about artist-activist Ai Weiwei has, through Ai's own rocketing international profile, become an essential portrait of a key contemporary figure.

Klayman picks up Ai's story in 2009, as he is beginning to prepare for what became the Sunflower Seeds installation at Tate Modern, and is already deep into a campaign over the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. Klayman's film suggests that it is this latter activity that was pivotal in triggering Ai's ascent, transforming someone who was an art world cult into a domestic and international figurehead for the pro-democracy movement's confrontation with China's authoritarian system.

Quickly neutralizing a well-rehearsed criticism that Ai is not a hands-on creator of his own work (one assistant likens himself to Ai's "assassin" as he carves a bit of plasterwork), Klayman establishes Ai as an ideas-man whose artistic practice and ideological convictions become entangled and merged. It's easy, for example, to see his attempt to sue a Chengdu police officer for assault — videoed and tweeted every step of the way — as a months-long piece of performance art, as well as a test case of China's opaque bureaucracy. Or the act of being photographed at Tate

Modern with a handful of those ceramic seeds as an act of political theatre.

But in Klayman's film, at least, everything goes back to the earthquake campaign. The list of names of school-kid victims, that the government won't release, becomes an artwork in itself. The miserable sight of their discarded backpacks in the earthquake rubble is transformed into the primary motif in a giant display outside his So Sorry exhibition in Munich. And, as an avid Twitter user, his call for people to each record themselves speaking a single name of an earthquake victim forms an undeniably moving digital art happening.

Of course, Ai has one or two rockstar-esque blind spots that don't quite match up to the wise-teacher persona he has adopted: notably his unfazed announcement that no one minds he's just cheated on his wife and had a child. The kid's cute, though, and when Ai lets him play in the Tate's sea of sunflower seeds, Klayman gets a nice shot out of it.

As a documentary, it's hard to assess Klayman's achievement. On one hand, she had a first-timer's astonishing luck — but everybody has to start somewhere. But she also had to structure and edit a mass of material, which has been done with lucidity and no little degree of intelligent sympathy. Her film closes with Ai, muzzled by stringent bail conditions after 81 days of detention, disappearing behind a firmly closed door. Let's hope Klayman gets to make a sequel.



MEDIA LITERACY RESOURCES

SCREENING WITH MEANING

The vast majority of interpersonal human interactions taking place at any given moment are taking place via some type of medium. Every image projected on a screen, every word published on a page, every sound produced from a speaker – each comprises a piece of media content, a media message of some sort. The ability to discern between and understand the vast array of media messages by which we are continually surrounded is an essential skill for young people to develop, particularly in a mainstream commercial culture that targets youth as a vulnerable, impressionable segment of the American marketplace. Most teenage students already have a keen understanding of the languages different media use and the techniques

they employ to inspire particular emotions or reactions.

Analysis of a media message – or any piece of mass media content – can best be accomplished by first identifying its principal characteristics: (1) the physical means by which it is contained and/or delivered, (2) the person(s) responsible for its creation and dissemination, (3) the information, emotions, values or ideas it conveys, (4) the audience to whom it is delivered, and (5) the objectives of its authors and effects of its dissemination.

Students who can readily identify these five core characteristics (abbreviated in this section with the keywords Medium, Author, Content, Audience and Purpose) when faced with mass messages will be equipped to understand the incentives at work behind them, as well as their potential consequences. Media literacy education incentivizes students to become responsible consumers, active citizens and free, critical thinkers. ▶

CORE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA ANALYSIS

MEDIUM

All Mass Media Messages Are Constructed.

How is the message delivered? In what format?
What technologies are used to perpetuate the message?
What expectations do you have of the media content, given its medium and format?

AUTHOR

All Mass Media Messages Are Constructed by Someone.

Who delivers the message?
Who originally constructed the message?
What expectations do you have of the media content, given its author(s)?

CONTENT

All Mass Media Messages Are Constructed Using a Language.

What information, values, emotions or ideas are conveyed by the media content?
What visual elements comprise the media content?
What auditory elements comprise the media content?
To what extent did the content meet your expectations, given the format/author?

AUDIENCE

All Mass Media Messages Reach an Audience.

Who receives the message?
For whom is the message intended?
What is the public reaction to the media content and/or its message?
What is your reaction to the media content and/or its message?
How might others perceive this message differently? Why?

PURPOSE

All Mass Media Messages Are Constructed for a Reason.

Why was the message constructed?
Who benefits from dissemination of the message? How?
To what extent does the message achieve its purpose?
What effect does the message have on the audience it reaches, if any?



THE NON-FICTION FILM

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DOCUMENTARY

- 1895 Lumiere Brothers develop the first motion picture film reels, capturing brief, unedited clips of life around them called “actualities” (e.g., *Train Arriving at the Station*)
- 1922 Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* is the first feature-length film to be called a “documentary,” employing the “creative interpretation of reality” to tell a factual story
- 1936 John Grierson releases *Night Mail*, an example of the more poetic, experimental approach to documentary that his movement embodied

TYPES OF DOCUMENTARY

All documentaries may be measured along a spectrum of impartiality. Some documentaries attempt to record and present information in as objective and unbiased a manner possible, as if the film were made by a fly on the wall. Other documentaries present real-world information, but do so in a highly obtrusive, manufactured, often biased manner. Arguably no documentary can be 100% unobtrusive to the events it seeks to record (subjects are almost always aware of the presence of a camera, for example), and no documentary can be 100% objective (a single edit represents a subjective filmmaking decision). Media literate students should be able to discern the plausibility and purpose of documentary programs based on their authorship, the nature of their content, the extent to which bias is expressed, etc. Generally, all documentary films and programs occupy one (and sometimes more) of the following categories:

1. **Poetic:** The most abstract type of documentary. The earliest documentaries were essentially poetic; images were organized based on associations and patterns, creating a fragmented, impressionist, lyrical record of actual places, objects and people. Poetic documentaries do not include characters or plots, and were largely made by early filmmakers looking to subvert the coherence and standardization of early narrative films. Some modern music videos can be considered poetic documentaries. Notable examples: *Rain* (Ivens, 1928), *City Symphonies: NY, NY* (Thompson, 1957)

2. **Expository:** Documentaries that speak directly to the viewer (via titles and/or voiceover) in an effort to persuade, convince or educate. Most modern documentary films and

- 1963 The cinema vérité movement begins in Europe, shortly followed by “direct cinema” in the U.S. Films of these movements attempt to present factual information objectively and observationally, though many were produced with political or ideological motivations.
- 1999 *The Blair Witch Project* is released, becoming the highest grossing film of all time (relative to its production cost). Marketed and styled as a documentary, the suspense/horror film used the genre to unprecedented effect, fooling millions of filmgoers into believing it was a non-fiction film (obviously enhancing the fear factor). The “mockumentary” has since caught on as a comedic sub-genre.

TV programs are primarily expository. Expository docs may be further categorized as follows:

– Persuasive:

- Commercial: Docs that advocate a particular product, service or brand
- Political: Docs that advocate a certain position on political contests/issues
- Theological/Ethical: Docs that advocate a certain position on religious/moral issues
- Topical: Docs that advocate a certain ideological position on social issues



THE NON-FICTION FILM

- ▶ – Educational:
 - Scientific: Docs that attempt to convey factual information on science topics
 - Historical: Docs that attempt to convey factual information on historical topics/periods
 - Biographical: Docs that attempt to convey factual information about individuals
 - Topical: Docs that attempt to convey factual information about social issues

Both persuasive and educational documentaries present information in traditionally efficient ways. Impartial, “omniscient” voice-over narration, on-screen text and insert shots of supporting charts, illustrations, maps, etc. are stylistic techniques common to most expository documentaries. The combination of interview audio and “b-roll” footage of associated visuals is another classic convention of non-fiction filmmaking. It is not uncommon for filmmakers or television producers to take advantage of the credibility that this format lends, and to present fictional (or, at best, debatable) information as factual. Thus, the distinction between a persuasive doc and an educational doc is largely based upon purpose and audience; a film made to argue a point of view or perpetuate a myth may appear no less fictional than an educational doc about photosynthesis.

Expository documentaries are inherently more impactful on the people and environments they attempt to capture than observational docs; but inherently less impactful than participatory docs. The presence of the filmmaker is usually acknowledged and/or obvious (audible interviewer in conversation, voice-over narration, on-screen titles/diagrams/maps/schematics, character interaction with crew, etc.) under the pretense that the filmmaker(s) are only involved peripherally. Some filmmakers include dramatic re-enactments of story content in their

“documentaries.” While this can be as emotionally compelling as a heart-wrenching Hollywood tragedy, it removes any pretense of factual impartiality.

3. **Observational:** Docs that attempt to simply and spontaneously observe some part of the world with minimal intervention. Observational films are less abstract than poetic documentaries and less biased or forceful than expository documentaries. Observational docs date back to the 1960s when the advent of mobile lightweight cameras and portable sound recording equipment enabled non-fiction filmmakers to capture events in an organic, unobtrusive way (new celluloid films also needed less light to achieve exposure). This mode of documentary historically avoids stylistic “add-ons” like voice-over commentary, music, titles, re-enactments, etc. These films aimed for immediacy, intimacy and revelation of individual human character in ordinary life situations. Examples: *High School* (Wiseman, 1968); *Gimme Shelter* (Maysles, 1970); *Don't Look Back* (Pennebaker, 1967)

4. **Participatory:** Participatory documentarians rightly believe that it is impossible for the act of filmmaking to not influence or alter the events and characters being filmed. Much like an anthropologist studying a culture by taking part in it, a participatory filmmaker inserts him/herself into the action at hand as a means of inciting and documenting reactions and as a means of making his/her authorship transparent and spontaneous. The encounter between subject and filmmaker inherently becomes a critical component of the film. Autobiographical documentaries are 100% participatory. Examples: *Man with a Movie Camera* (Vertov, 1929), *Sherman's March* (McElwee, 1985), films by Michael Moore.

Adapted from Bill Nichols, Representing Reality (1991) and Introduction to Documentary (2001)



SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED MOVIES

Man on the Moon

(Milos Forman, Universal, 1999)

I'm Still Here

(Casey Affleck, Magnolia Pictures, 2010)

Marina Abramovic: The Artist is Present

(Matthew Akers, Dakota Group, 2012)

WEB LINKS

Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry on IMDB

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1845773/>

Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry Press Kit

<http://ff.hrw.org/sites/all/files/2012/AI%20WEIWEI%20Press%20Notes.pdf>

Ai Weiwei Twitter Feed

<http://twitter.com/#!/AIWW>

Ai Weiwei Wiki

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ai_Weiwei

Translations from Ai Weiwei's Blog

<http://mitpress.mit.edu/catalog/item/default.asp?type=2&tid=12437>

China Digital Times: Ai Weiwei News

<http://chinadigitaltimes.net/?s=ai+weiwei>

Economist Article on Ai's Blog

<http://www.economist.com/node/21017836>

Ai Weiwei homepage

<http://www.aiweiwei.com/>

Documentaries by Ai Weiwei

<http://ikono.org/2012/02/3-documentaries-by-ai-weiwei/>

Ai Weiwei Undergoes Brain Surgery after Attack

<http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/32619/ai-weiwei-undergoes-brain-surgery-after-beating/>

Censorship of Sichuan Earthquake Coverage

<http://www.cpj.org/2011/05/media-memorializing-sichuan-earthquake-harassed-ce.php>

Sunflower Seeds (ArtAsiaPacific)

<http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/72/SunflowerSeedsAiWeiwei>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2010/oct/11/tate-modern-sunflower-seeds-review> ▶



SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

► Chinese Censorship vs. the Internet

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/libertycentral/2012/apr/16/china-censorship-internet-freedom>

<http://news.yahoo.com/china-internet-censorship-futile-ai-weiwei-234805249.html>

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/CHINAcommunist.htm>

<http://www.cpj.org/>

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/freedom-speech/>

<http://arthistory.about.com/cs/arthistory10one/a/performance.htm>

<http://www.reelchina.net/articles/03.htm>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeJJ8DVfE-A&feature=endscreen&NR=1>

<http://marinafilm.com/>

Info on Chinese Communist Party

Committee to Protect Journalists

Freedom of Speech Philosophy

Art History: Notes on Performance Art

History of Chinese Performance Art

Biography: Andy Kaufman

Marina Abramovic: The Artist Is Present