Although they refer to broadly recognizable bodies of work, both “avant-garde film” and “documentary” have become increasingly contested terms. The logic of “avant-garde” in a cinematic context has always been questionable, since it is obvious that without the early development of commercial film, the means for producing avant-garde film would never have developed. And there are those who are suspicious of any definition of “documentary.” Trinh T. Minh-ha in “The Totalizing Quest of Meaning” (in her When the Moon Waxes Red [Routledge, 1991]), claims: “There is no such thing as documentary—whether the term designates a category of material, a genre, an approach, or a set of techniques” (29). In the spring of 2009, I was invited to speak at a conference sponsored by the graduate students in the Department of Comparative Literature and Film at the University of Iowa, called “Avant-Doc: Intersections of Avant-Garde and Documentary Film.” The focus of this conference was what seemed to be a new dimension of these two histories: the increasingly vital liminal zone between them, evidenced by the more and more frequent production of films that fit both categories or that function somewhere between them.

One of the advantages of the category of “avant-doc” is that it not only assists us in coming to terms with much recent work, but also allows for valuable perspectives on the ways in which these two histories have intersected over the years. To reflect upon these intersections refreshes a sense of both documentary and avant-garde filmmaking—however hard these traditions may be to define exactly—as alternative practices to commercial and narrative cinema. And at the same time it provides a useful framework for thinking about a number of new filmmaking developments.

**EARLY EXPERIMENTS**

When Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey were discovering and exploring the possibilities of photographic motion study, they were certainly the photographic avant-garde of that moment: they were discovering new possibilities for photography. And their goal was the scientific documentation of the motion of animals, birds, and human beings, presumably so that this motion could be studied more rigorously. The Muybridge and Marey serial photographs and chronophotographs contributed to technological developments that led to the improved efficiency of assembly-line industrial production and to the development of manned flight; and, at the same time, were aesthetic and technological breakthroughs that instigated, or at least predicted, new forms of artistic expression. Even the better part of a century later, American avant-garde filmmakers—Hollis Frampton and Morgan Fisher, for example—were drawn to Muybridge’s serial photographs as a model for their work.

Muybridge’s development of the Zoopraxiscope, his device for animating drawings of his motion-study photographs, and his use of Zoopraxiscope projections as part of his...
lectures, provided an important context for the development of Thomas Edison’s Kinetoscope and, finally in 1895, the Lumière Cinématographe. Of course, at the moment when the Lumière Brothers perfected the Cinématographe and the projected motion picture, they became the photographic avant-garde, and like Muybridge and Marey, their primary fascination was the documentation of motion, specifically human activity, first in their own environs and then across the globe. Like Muybridge’s serial photography, the Lumières’ single-shot, roll-long films would have a significant impact on modern avant-garde filmmaking; a major expansion of the single-shot approach was evident in Warhol’s early films and in later work by Larry Gottheim, J. J. Murphy, and many others.

**CITY SYMPHONIES**

The early street films of the Lumière brothers, the Edison Studio, and other producers revealed a fascination with the modern city that paved the way for films that explored city life. The short film, *Manhatta* (1921), by artists Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand intercuts between inventively composed images of lower Manhattan and title cards with poetic evocations of the city adapted from Walt Whitman poems. An early experimental landmark, *Manhatta* anticipated emergence of the feature-length “city symphony” in the late 1920s (a city symphony documents a composite day in the life of a modern metropolis). The most accomplished early city symphonies include *Rien que les heures* (1926), an exploration of Paris by Alberto Cavalcanti; Walther Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City* (1927), the film that gave the form its name; and *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) by Dziga Vertov, which combines documentary footage of several cities into a vision of post-revolutionary urban life in the Soviet Union.

While documentary history has tended to focus on city symphonies as reflections of diverse political ideologies, avant-garde history has tended to see these films as crucial early instances of cinema’s potential for experiment, for developing new forms, for moving beyond narrative melodrama, and for making an exploration of the cinematic apparatus the subject of film. Vertov’s self-reflexive experimentation in *Man with a Movie Camera* continues to be an inspiration for avant-garde filmmakers.

The city symphony has continued to evolve over the past eighty years within both the documentary and avant-garde traditions. Robert Gardner’s *Forest of Bliss* (1986) is normally understood as a documentary, while Rudy Burckhardt’s numerous film studies of New York City and Pat O’Neill’s L.A. film *Water and Power* (1989) tend to be understood as contributions to avant-garde history. And the city symphony form can also sometimes be discerned in narrative cinematic
fiction. I have argued elsewhere (Film Quarterly, winter 1997–98) that Spike Lee’s Do the Right Thing (1989) is this country’s most remarkable and insightful city symphony.

FROM VISUAL POETRY TO POLITICS

By the late 1920s, the documentary impulse had generated two major approaches: the depiction of far-flung, pre-industrial cultures, as in Robert J. Flaherty’s Nanook of the North (1922) and Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack’s Grass: A Nation’s Battle for Life (1925); and the city symphony. Meanwhile, in Germany and France, European artists became the first film avant-garde, developing a pair of relatively distinct approaches of their own. There were Dadaist and Surrealist works, notably Man Ray’s Retour à raison (1923), and Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali’s Un chien andalou (1929). Other filmmakers (including Hans Richter, Walther Ruttmann, Viking Eggeling, and Oskar Fischinger) produced abstract flights of rhythm, chiaroscuro, and color, creating what came to be called “visual music.” An approach distinct from any of these documentary or avant-garde approaches was evident in Ralph Steiner’s H₂O (1929), Joris Ivens’s Rain (1929), and Henwar Rodakiewicz’s Portrait of a Young Man (1931). In these films the movie camera is used as a means of retraining perception and as a way of producing what Steiner called “a visual poetry of formal beauty.”

Employing the skill with composition that he had developed as a photographer, Steiner renders his film’s dry, scientific title thoroughly ironic. H₂O is a montage that begins with relatively mundane shots of water being pumped, flowing over dams, and the like, but gradually moves in the direction of visual mystery: near the end, Steiner’s shots of the reflective surface of water become so abstract that viewers have trouble believing that the imagery was photographed and not generated by animation. Rain depicts the coming and going of a rainstorm in Amsterdam. While it is a city film, its focus is not so much on city life, as on the ways in which the storm transforms the look of the city. The longest and most under-recognized and under-appreciated of these films, Portrait of a Young Man, is as Rodakiewicz states in his film’s first intertitle, “an endeavor to portray a certain young man in the terms of the things he likes and his manner of liking them: the sea, leaves, clouds, smoke, machinery, sunlight, the interplay of forms and rhythms [sic], but above all—the sea.” For all three of these filmmakers the movie camera was a means of showing how much more there is in our daily surround than we normally allow ourselves to notice—an idea that would be elaborated by Stan Brakhage and many other post-war avant-garde filmmakers. Portrait of a Young Man in particular creates an experience similar to the quiet, meditative films of Peter Hutton.

The onset of the Great Depression and the changing political climate in Europe transformed the filmmaking of all three filmmakers, moving them toward more politically oriented work. What these filmmakers were seeing around them during the early 1930s—men and women in bread lines, legions of unemployed workers—could not be ignored; and during the 1930s and 40s all three filmmakers made
important contributions to canonical social documentaries. Steiner contributed cinematography to Pare Lorenz’s *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936), Sidney Meyers and Jay Leyda’s *People of the Cumberland* (1938), and *The City* (which he also co-directed, with Willard Van Dyke, 1939); Rodakiewicz was one of the writers for *The City*; and he directed *One Tenth of a Nation* (1940). Ivens, of course, became and remained until the 1980s a leading political documentary filmmaker.

**FILM SOCIETIES**

During the 1940s a crucial development for independent cinema in the United States was the emergence of a full-fledged film society movement. The leading contributors to this movement were Frank Stauffacher’s Art in Cinema Film Society in San Francisco and Berkeley, founded in 1946; and Cinema 16, founded by Amos and Marcia Vogel in New York City in 1947 and programmed by Amos Vogel and Jack Goelman until 1963. Both Art and Cinema and Cinema 16 were remarkably successful. At the height of its popularity, Art in Cinema attracted audiences of 600 in both San Francisco and Berkeley; and Cinema 16 filled a 1500-seat auditorium twice a night for its monthly programs. The programming at both Art in Cinema and Cinema 16 was an inventive mixture of documentary and avant-garde film.

Stauffacher’s primary commitment was to avant-garde film. The first Art in Cinema series of programs focused on the European avant-garde of the 1920s in order to contextualize Stauffacher’s commitment to the support of American, and particularly Bay Area, avant-garde filmmakers. But documentary was represented during the first season by the seventh program, “Fantasy into Documentary,” which included *

Rien que les heures, Berlin: Symphony of a Big City, and The City*. In subsequent years, Stauffacher’s programming often included what were considered poetic documentaries: *Rain*, for example, Basil Wright’s *Song of Ceylon* (1934), and Sidney Meyers’s *The Quiet One* (1948).

At Cinema 16 documentary and avant-garde film tended to contextualize each other within dialectically arranged programs (Vogel was a great admirer of Eisenstein’s editing). Cinema 16’s earliest programs pioneered the formula that would become typical of other American film societies. The inaugural program included five films: *Lamentation* (1943), a study of Martha Graham’s interpretative dance; Douglas Crockwell’s hand-painted abstraction, *Glens Falls Sequence* (1941); Sidney Peterson and James Broughton’s Surrealist riff, *The Potted Psalm* (1946); *Monkey into Man* (1938), a documentary on ape behavior by Stuart Legg; and Philip Stapp’s political animation *Boundarylines* (1945). The second program included *The Feeling of Rejection* (1947), a psychological study of childhood emotional ties on the behavior of adults; *Five Abstract Film Exercises* (1941–44) by the Whitney Brothers; *And So They Live* (1940), a study of an Appalachian family by John Ferno; and *Hen Hop* (1945) and *Five for Four* (1945), animations by Norman McLaren made by painting and scratching directly on the filmstrip.

Vogel stood by his approach of using documentary and avant-garde film to contextualize each other, despite complaints from the Cinema 16 membership, which tended to divide between those who were excited about documentary and those whose primary interest was avant-garde experimentation. The special program of “Damned Films” presented in 1953 offered the quintessence of Vogel’s dialectic of

*Song of Ceylon*
documentary and avant-garde: after a revival of Carl Theodor Dreyer’s *Vampyr* (1931), Vogel presented Kenneth Anger’s gay, psychodramatic *Fireworks* (1946) and then *The Blood of the Beasts* (*Le Sang des bêtes*, 1947), Georges Franju’s beautiful and bloody documentary on Paris slaughterhouses.

**SOUND OPTIONS**

The development of lightweight cameras and tape recorders, more sensitive microphones, and faster film stocks during the late 1950s created additional options for filmmakers that in one sense drove documentary and avant-garde film apart and in another sense created a different kind of intersection between the two traditions. The opportunity to do sync-sound shooting gave documentary filmmakers the option of avoiding an earlier reliance on the extensive use of narration and music; and while many filmmakers continued to make films in the older mode, the option of sync-sound shooting made more experiential forms of “cinéma vérité” documentary possible. Erik Barnouw in *Documentary* (1993) describes two basic approaches: “direct cinema” (fly-on-the-wall observational filmmaking) and provocational filmmaking: films in which the process of shooting instigates interesting situations that are recorded as they unfold. The new equipment also allowed filmmakers to create forms of entertaining documentary that could compete with Hollywood and sometimes found a place on television. Drew Associates, D. A. Pennebaker, Frederick Wiseman, and the Maysles brothers were able to fashion engaging melodrama out of real life in *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* (1963), *Don’t Look Back* (1967), *High School* (1968), *Salesman* (1968); and Pennebaker’s *Monterey Pop* (1968) instigated the rock documentary.

Many avant-garde filmmakers, however, explored non-sync alternatives or resisted the new sound technology altogether. Peter Kubelka was the crucial figure in exploring ways of working with sound other than sync. *Our Trip to Africa* (*Unsere Afrikareise*, 1966), his film about a big-game hunting safari in the Sudan, used both image and sound, but in a dialectic arrangement. Kubelka painstakingly edited the film so that the non-sync sounds we do hear in conjunction with his imagery seem both fitting and suggestive. The technique allowed Kubelka to lay bare the colonialist racism of the Austrian businessman who had organized the safari and hired him to document it, thinking the result would be a typical souvenir travel diary.

Of the filmmakers who refused sound altogether, Stan Brakhage is the best known. Committed to the idea of cinema as a visual art, Brakhage provided remarkable confrontations of visual taboo—*Window Water Baby Moving* (1959), *Three Films: Bluewhite, Blood’s Tone, Vein* (1965), *The Act of Seeing with One’s Own Eyes* (1972)—exploring with a handheld camera many of those aspects of the body-as-process that society (and conventional cinema) had censored, as well as many dimensions of perception that our acculturation within a consumer culture tends to erase. While Brakhage was not the first avant-garde filmmaker to commit to silent film (the 1943 silent version of *Meshes of the Afternoon* by Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid was an inspiration), he liberated a generation of filmmakers whose limited economic resources or whose interest in working with visual imagery alone caused them to abjure sound. One need only see John Marshall’s cinéma-vérité *Pittsburgh Police* films (shot in 1970–71) and the first section of Brakhage’s *Pittsburgh* trilogy, *Eyes* (completed in 1971), to understand the difference between sync-sound documentary and silent avant-garde treatments of the same subject—though the Brakhage films (like Kubelka’s *Our Trip to Africa*) are increasingly accepted as part of documentary history.
Avant-garde film and the new sync-sound documentary also came together in Jim McBride’s fiction feature *David Holzman’s Diary* (1967). McBride and L. M. Kit Carson had done a good bit of research on cinéma-vérité filmmaking during the 1960s, but when they decided to critique the (implicit and sometimes explicit) claim that cinéma-vérité shooting produced films were more *real* than other forms of documentary because it allowed subjects not merely to be seen, but to be heard, their inspiration for the struggling cinéma-vérité filmmaker David Holzman was avant-garde filmmaker Andrew Noren, whose candid, personal (and silent) evocations of his daily life had become an important part of the avant-garde tradition exemplified by Brakhage.

**THE FLAHERTY SEMINAR**

In 1955, Francis Flaherty, Robert’s widow, hosted a symposium of filmmakers to honor her husband’s *œuvre* and to promote his commitment to filmmaking “without preconceptions.” Within a few years, “the Flaherty,” as the symposium came to be called, was attracting dozens of filmmakers, programmers, scholars, teachers, students, and other cineaficionados for an annual, week-long immersion in screenings of mostly new documentaries and discussions about them. By the mid-1960s, the Flaherty had become known as an event focusing solely on documentary, provoking an avant-garde guerilla action led by Jonas Mekas and Ken Jacobs. Mekas, Jacobs, and their companions decided to invade the 1963 Flaherty to present Jack Smith’s *Flaming Creatures* (1963) and Jacobs’s own *Blonde Cobra* (1962), which they saw as a new way of cinematically representing the real. Mekas documented the event and later depicted the experience in the “FLAHERTY NEWSREEL” section of his *Lost Lost Lost* (1976): an intertitle, “REJECTED BY THE FLAHERTY SEMINAR WE SLEEP OUTSIDE IN THE COLD NIGHT OF VERMONT,” introduces Mekas’s voice-over narration: “While the guests proper, the respectable documentarists and cineastes slept in their warm beds, we watched the morning with the cold of night still in our bones, in our flesh. It was a Flaherty morning . . . It was very, very quiet, like in a church, and we were the monks of the Order of Cinema.”

By the end of the 1960s the nearly exclusive focus of the Flaherty seminars on documentary was also being contested from within. Programmers D. Marie Grieco and Willard Van Dyke instigated a substantial presence of West Coast avant-garde filmmakers in 1968, and during the following two years Adrienne Mancia and Van Dyke maintained the new balance between documentary and avant-garde. Since then, Flaherty programming has continued to reflect a debate about the correct balance between documentary and avant-garde film. Generally speaking, documentary has remained the Flaherty’s primary commitment, but presentations of avant-garde film have continued to punctuate the seminar programming. In recent decades, programmers Bruce Jenkins and Melinda Ward (the 1983 seminar), Richard Herskowitz (1987), Ruth Bradley and Kathy High (1992), Richard Herskowitz and Orlando Bagwell (1999), Ed Halter (2002), Susan Oxtoby (2004), and Irina Leimbacher (2009) have made a substantial presence of avant-garde film at the Flaherty if not quite the norm, certainly no longer unusual.

The ongoing debates about programming avant-garde film at the seminar reflect a more fundamental debate about Flaherty himself. While they are usually categorized as documentaries, Flaherty’s films create experiences that are generally quite distinct from what became conventional documentary practice in the 1930s and remained standard through the 1950s. What distinguishes *Nanook of the North*, *Moana* (1926), *Man of Aran* (1934), and *Louisiana Story* (1948) is the way in which Flaherty worked with non-actors.
from indigenous groups over substantial periods of time, without screenplay or script, to produce romantic evocations of particular places and times. This experimental narrative approach has as much in common with avant-garde film as with the forms of documentary that were popular during most of Flaherty’s filmmaking career, and the Flaherty approach remains very much alive in films usually identified as avant-garde: Sharon Lockhart’s Pine Flat (2006), for example, and Naomi Uman’s Unnamed Film (2008, part 1 of her “Ukrainian Time” project).

THE PERSONAL

Avant-garde filmmakers have always found ways of exploring the personal, first by dramatizing their inner disturbances (Deren and Hammid’s Meshes of the Afternoon and Kenneth Anger’s Fireworks are landmark instances), and later by filming the particulars of their daily lives—as Brakhage often did. So too did Mekas in Diaries, Notes & Sketches: Walden (1969), Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania (1972), and Lost Lost Lost (1976) among other films; Carolee Schneemann in her autobiographical trilogy: Fuses (1967), Plumb Line (1972), and Kitch’s Last Meal (1973–78, various versions); Andrew Noren in Huge Pupils (1968); and Robert Huot in Rolls: 1971 (1972) and Third One-Year Movie (1973). But the 1980s saw the emergence of what was essentially a different form of personal filmmaking.

Unlike earlier avant-garde filmmakers, Su Friedrich and Alan Berliner combined avant-garde and documentary techniques in order to confront their family histories. Especially notable are The Ties that Bind (1984) and Sink or Swim (1990), Friedrich’s films about her relationships with her mother and her father, respectively, and Intimate Stranger (1991) and Nobody’s Business (1996), Berliner’s films about the maternal grandfather he never knew and his relationship with his father. These films incorporate material gathered from a variety of sources—home movies and family photographs, recycled film and television imagery, visual and auditory documents of the filmmakers’ conversations with their parents, along with documentation of their own personal lives, travels, interests, and political concerns—into finished works that function as a form of therapy for some of the frustrations the filmmakers have experienced as a result of family traumas.

What has come to be called “personal documentary” was instigated in the early 1970s by Martha Coolidge’s David: Off and On (1972), Miriam Weinstein’s Living with Peter (1973), Amalie Rothschild’s Nana, Mom and Me (1974), Alfred Guzzetti’s Family Portrait Sittings (1975), and especially by Ed Pincus in his teaching and in what became his Diaries (filmed from 1971–76; completed in 1981). Several of Pincus’s students at MIT contributed to this approach, among them Jeff Kreines (The Plaint of Steve Kreines as Recorded by His Younger Brother Jeff, 1974), Robb Moss (The Tourist, 1991), and Ross McElwee, whose Backyard (1984), Sherman’s March (1986), Time Indefinite (1994), The Six O’Clock News (1996), and Bright Leaves (2003) are part of an ongoing saga. All these films document the experiences of the filmmakers with family members, often involving conflict with parents and siblings.

These closely related developments were occurring more or less simultaneously, though, early on, the individual makers worked generally in ignorance of each other’s work and in rough concert with approaches familiar from earlier developments within the particular history they saw themselves part of. The personal avant-garde films exploit formal tactics familiar from avant-garde history. In The Ties That Bind, Friedrich interviews her mother by scratching her questions into the film emulsion and by allowing us only to hear her mother’s responses. Her mother’s comments are accompanied by passages of complex montage editing that subtly intersect with the film’s soundtrack. Berliner punctuates Nobody’s Business with heavily edited moments of precisely organized montage, sometimes evocative of Peter Kubelka’s precision editing in Our Trip to Africa. The personal documentaries evoke the history of cinéma-vérité filmmaking: family relationships are represented primarily through candid, sync-sound recording of the interaction between the filmmakers and family members.

However, while Friedrich, Berliner, and McElwee have sometimes been understood, and have understood themselves, as belonging to separate traditions, their similarities are as interesting as their differences. Not only do all three filmmakers use the process of filmmaking as a way of coming to terms with family issues, but their films also have formal elements in common. For example, all three filmmakers recycle their family home movies as a means of situating present struggles within family history; and all three develop inventive first-person narrative strategies for presenting their family narratives. Finally, all three reveal how the filmmaking process itself has become an intrinsic dimension of their relationships with family members. McElwee and Berliner, in particular, struggled with their fathers’ disapproval of their filmmaking careers, as is clear in Time Indefinite and Nobody’s Business.

CONTEMPLATING NATURE

Strangely enough, nature film, which has long been among the most popular documentary genres, has been largely ignored by those who have chronicled documentary history.
In recent years, however, widespread recognition of the realities of climate change and a resurgence of interest in animal life have provided an expanded popular interest in nature filmmaking—the success of *Winged Migration* (2001), *March of the Penguins* (2005), and the recent television series *Planet Earth* (2007) are preeminent instances—and this popular interest seems to be instigating long overdue critical attention.

Some recent nature documentaries demonstrate a final intersection of documentary and avant-garde film. The Claude Nuridsany–Marie Pérennou feature, *Microcosmos* (1996), which helped to instigate the recent revival of the feature-length theatrical nature film, was the result of years of commitment to the filming of insects; their finished feature provides viewers with an opportunity to contemplate the remarkable feats of adaptation that can occur in a pastoral landscape. The recent *Ice Bears of the Beaufort* (2008) by Arthur and Jennifer Smith also required a remarkable commitment: the Smiths live in Kaktovik, a tiny town on the north coast of Alaska on the Beaufort Sea, where they film what they claim is the healthiest population of polar bears on the continent. The Smiths’ commitment is driven by their concern about climate change and its potential impact on these polar bears: the film reminds us that this specific environment is an area of the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge that the Bush administration opened for oil drilling. Nuridsany–Pérennou and the Smiths can both be considered among the vanguard of documentary filmmakers dealing with issues of climate change, but their films also make use of strategies familiar from the avant-garde tradition.

While Nuridsany–Pérennou’s and the Smiths’ use of music and informational text (*Microcosmos* uses only two brief passages of voiceover text; *Ice Bears* uses intertitles in a manner reminiscent of *Nanook of the North*) evokes the history of documentary, both films are closely related to the tradition of meditative avant-garde film and video, exemplified by Larry Gottheim’s *Horizons* (1973), Nathaniel Dorsky’s *Hours for Jerome* (1982), Peter Hutton’s *Skagafjörður* (2004), James Benning’s *casting a glance* (2007), and Sharon Lockhart’s *Double Tide* (2009). All these works ask for a new, more patient kind of audience, willing to see the experience of cinema less as a source of information than as a way of learning to be more fully present during gradual revelations of the particulars of the natural environment and human engagement with it. Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor’s recent documentary *Sweetgrass* (2009), a video focused on shepherding in the Montana mountains, fits comfortably within the traditional history of documentary. Indeed, according to Barbash, the title is a reference to Cooper and Schoedsack’s *Grass*. Like *Microcosmos* and *Ice Bears of the Beaufort*, however, and like the avant-garde films mentioned above, *Sweetgrass* is also a contemplation of a particular natural environment as it is revealed over time.

The idea of “avant-doc” suggests that what, in earlier decades, may have seemed a set of intermittent and unrelated crossovers within the relatively distinct histories of documentary and avant-garde film can be understood as an evolving tradition. In particular, the proliferating combination of social and environmental anxieties during recent years seems to have energized an increasingly widespread desire on the part of filmmakers to combine cinema’s ability to engage serious political issues (long considered a focus of documentary) with its capacity for retraining perception and providing experiences akin to meditation (generally identified with avant-garde film). As scholars and critics respond to this development and situate it historically, it is likely that the two filmmaking traditions will increasingly be seen as affiliated rather than antagonistic, which is surely a development to be welcomed.

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**ABSTRACT**

An overview of the interlinking aesthetic and institutional histories of avant-garde and documentary film in terms of: early experiments; city symphonies; visual poetry and politics; film societies; sound options; the Flaherty Seminar; the personal; contemplating nature.

**KEYWORDS** documentary film, avant-garde film, city symphonies, film sound, nature film