

Week 11: Nov. 29 Study Questions

Juhasz “Phony Definitions” and Lerner, “Troubling Taxonomies,” pp. 1-35

Juhasz

1. Why does the question of indexicality matter when we start to consider the satirical or parodic aspects of the faux documentary?
2. What are the differences between a fiction film and a fake documentary?
3. How can a fake documentary be “productive” in relation to documentary reception as well as production?
4. Why does Juhasz’s definition of the “fake documentary” require discovery, and what do you think we should call it if it isn’t “found out”?
5. Compare the critical potential (to make us think about documentary as constructed) of the “fake documentary” with that of what Nichols would call “reflexive” and Bruzzi would call “performative.”

Lerner

1. What do you think are the most difficult problems Lerner believes Juhasz’s definition of “fake documentary” poses for the hybrid documentary?
2. Why, according to Lerner, was it not possible for the parodic to arise in the silent era documentary?
3. What does Lerner mean by the “tropes” of observational or verite documentary and how is this different or not different from documentary style?
4. Lerner starts to classify films that “trope” documentary as those that remake other films, those that set off hoaxes and those that use documentary sensationally as on the border and therefore not exactly documentary or fiction or fake. Evaluate his categories at this stage, proposing alternative terminology.

Week 12: Dec. 6 Study Questions

Lebow, “Faking What?”; Juhasz and Lerner, “As a Finale”

Lebow

1. Explain what Lebow means when she says that the question of “faking” is moot because documentary is “already a fake of sorts.”
2. Why does Lebow prefer “mockumentary” to “fake doc” and which term do you think does the most to challenge the credibility of documentary work?
3. What does she mean by the mockumentary as “propping up” documentary and why do you think it would need “propping up” at this time in its evolution?
4. Why should we be concerned that documentary’s verisimilitude should be “subject to highly conservative, normative codes of reality”? Or, when does documentary’s “this is so” mean “this is normal therefore everything else is abnormal”?
5. Lebow is willing to concede that there might be one thing that could be called subversive about the mockumentary. What is this?
6. Give examples of the kinds of things contemporary documentary makers might say that could be understood as the “rhetoric of the unmediated *real*.” Why do makers continue to use this language in reference to their practice?

Juhasz and Lerner

- 1. Explain how it would be possible for one student documentary to “throw into crisis” the entire proceedings of an academic conference on Fake Documentary. Which categories and what definitions are challenged?**