

Session at SCMS (Toronto, 14–18 Mar 18)

Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) 2018

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In/Visible Aesthetics: Contemporary Documentary's Mediated Gazes

Interestingly, today's "era of information" is also defined as a time of "post-truth", where unstable claims for truth seem to be characteristic of the times. The conflict between visible and available information and an increasing sense of invisibility and disguise of information leads to a sense of baffled confusion. Since documentaries strive to inform, reflect and shape realities, this panel aims to investigate notions of visibility and invisibility in relation to contemporary documentary aesthetics, focusing on imagery that emphasizes the mediated gaze of documentary works.

In relation to the documentary film the visibility/invisibility binomial is mostly discussed in terms of a documentary's capability to make visible the invisible by making the unrepresented or the underrepresented its object of enquiry. However, in contemporary documentary production this binomial and the related issue of transparency vs. opacity are also experimented with at the level of aesthetics. In particular, in contemporary documentaries aesthetics meant to emphasize mediation are increasingly used. These include precarious aesthetics, aesthetics that rely on the idea brought into being by cinema vérité that flaws and precariousness are synonym of cinematic veracity. Instead of searching for a sense of transparency or polished images, contemporary documentary filmmakers often opt for aesthetics that make themselves visible as such, and which convey imperfection and opacity, such as glitches, a jittery focus, shaky shots resulting from the limited vision of a hand-held camera, and so on. This means that, paradoxically, in order to give an idea of veridiction, "imperfect" aesthetics that highlight construction and/or the presence of the camera by foregrounding sparse visibility are used. Similarly, contemporary documentaries also increasingly use animation to represent what cannot or was not photographed. Animation thus provides visibility to the otherwise invisible but also emphasizes its own opacity, raising questions about its constructed nature and what it makes invisible by concealing or leaving unrepresented. In other words, imagery emphasizing mediation does not hide the fact that it is not transparent and as such promotes a more honest approach. On the other hand, the less one sees, the more it is that remains hidden. This creates an interesting aesthetic paradox in a genre meant to inform, expose and examine complexities.

The panel wishes to address the relationship between visibility and invisibility existing at the level of aesthetics in contemporary documentary production and theory, questioning how this binary has evolved across time, how it determines what is accepted as "legitimate" documentary aesthetics, how it shapes the relationship between believability and signification in documentary works, notions of authenticity and viewer reception.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- The political, social and ethical implications of in/visible aesthetics used in documentary contexts
- Developing forms of mediated gazes in cutting-edge technologies used in documentary contexts (such as VR, AR, games etc)
- Post-photography and documentary studies
- Precarious aesthetics and viewer reception
- Parafiction and documentary-oriented art
- Self-reflexive documentaries in an era of information
- Documentaries and documentary hybrids in an age of post-truth
- Mediated documentary aesthetics as a sign of the times
- Precarious aesthetics, referentiality and indexicality
- The use of animation to make visible the unfilmable vs. the use of dramatization at the same end
- Animation as masking
- Precarious aesthetics and the camera made visible as a marker of veridiction
- National differences in using aesthetics foregrounding the visibility/invisibility of the camera
- The presence/absence of the filmmaker on screen
- The historical shifts in dealing with the visibility/invisibility binomial at the level of aesthetics
- Visibility/invisibility in relationship to its paired binomial transparency/opacity

Please send a 300-word abstract, a 3-5 entry bibliography, and a 100-word bio to:
invisibilitydocscms2018@gmail.com

Deadline for abstracts: August 1st, 2017. We will get back to you by August 8th, 2017.

Quellennachweis:

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