Dear Professor Ferguson,

This semester has been quite an experience for me. I was initially very hesitant in utilizing both film essays and video projects to help me in my writing. It seemed unusual to me and I didn't know what to expect. However, after an entire semester of drastic changes and adaptations, this innovative way of writing and revision of my written work has helped me in more ways than one.

Harvey’s Elements proved to be one of the most helpful things that I acquired in improving my writing throughout the course. Using the list, I was able to identify specific aspects of writing that I never understood. It opened my mind in realizing how important many of these features are to the comprehension of one’s writing.

Another part of the course that made me a better writer were the readings, especially that of Grierson’s “First Principles of Documentary.” He mentions that although documentary puts together different pieces of shots, when put together, it flows naturally. Like writing, it shouldn’t be forced, or cluttered with ideas-- it should be smooth with transitions and comprehensible ideas. Clutter was very much present in my writing before taking this class.

I had many problems as a writer in articulating my thoughts into words on paper. This was my biggest flaw- trying to translate my ideas and thoughts into rhetoric on paper. At first, it proved to be difficult; I’ve always had this
problem as a writer, and it seemed to have intensified during this course as this course was demanding of the translation of ideas. Nevertheless, through practice, I got better at doing so. The readings also helped: explanation of the use of “montage” aided in my understand of complicating ideas to bring them to a deeper level.

Making the portfolio was difficult, to say the least. Another one of my weaknesses is self-revision. I always thought that someone else doing the revisions helped me more because it gave me an insight as to what others thought about what I wrote. In doing it by myself, I thought I may miss something very significant. This was my main problem in the creation of the portfolio.

Although I did complete the course with all the pieces written and completed, I still have some weaknesses I need to fix. I may have improved in producing less jumbled works and more comprehensible ones, but, I still have problems of articulating my ideas into writing. Another problem I still have is with getting the motivation to write. This ties in with my last problem of having difficulty with creating sensical pieces: I have less of an incentive to write, and my ideas do not readily translate into words.

I know these are problems can easily be fixed if I keep writing and practicing the use of Harvey’s Elements. This class has introduced me to so many different angles of writing: from using the views of filmmakers, the making of film, and the revision that comes with writing a piece. These features have made me a much better writer, and English 110 has helped me do things I’ve always had difficulty in my “career” as a writer.
Again, this has been quite the experience for me. I’ve learned so much in your class. English 110 was an engaging class, full of many surprises. It was a refreshing change after the constant struggles I had in high school English comprehension. I am very glad I took your English 110.

Have a safe and enjoyable holiday, Professor Ferguson.

Sincerely,

Zarraf Choudhury
Zarraf Choudhury
Queens College
English 110- Peer Interview

Transcript

Interviewer: Zarraf (Z)
Interviewee: John (J)

Z: Alright so what’s your full name?
J: John Malach

Z: Uhm, do you live in Queens?

Z: Oh, where’s that?
J: Duchess County.

Z: Ah, Duchess County. So, you were brought up around there?
J: Yeah, I was born and raised up in the country.

Z: Ah. Do you have any siblings?
J: Yes, I have one sister, she’s 25 and was just married.

Z: Oh, really? Did she live in Queens, as well?
J: No, she lives in Newberg. (?)

Z: Uh, so you have any interests or hobbies?
J: Uhm, interests is history. I can always learn more about history. And my hobbies include games and movies, stuff like that,

Z: What’s your favorite movies?
J: Favorite movie is either Clerks or Boondock Saints.
Z: That’s nice. Uh, so what brought you here? I mean, Queens College?

J: Uhm, the teaching program, which is supposed to be really good, and it was very cost effective.

Z: Okay, yeah. Yeah, so you’re dorming here, took, right?

J: Yeah.

Z: Uh, how’s that like?

J: Not as fun as I thought it was.

Z: Oh, really? You have a roommate?

J: Uh, yea- well, a suitmate. I have my own room.

Z: Alright, well I guess that’s good.

REFLECTION:

When Professor Ferguson told us about the interview, I was very nervous. I didn’t know anyone in the class, I’ve never interviewed someone, nor have I been interviewed, and I’m not the best at using a camera. The overall idea of doing something like this in an English class seemed very odd to me. Add all this to the fact that my group consisted of three members of the class instead of the normal two. I was very anxious, and just wanted to get it over with.

After we had all met up, John found a place that was pretty quiet- the basement of the Student Union building. And it was. But, once the three of us started fixing up our questions, the noise level gradually went up, until there was yelling in the background. It didn’t turn out to be the ideal place to have an interview, but we went along anyways. I was the first to get interviewed, and the interviewer was Cindy. I didn’t know what to expect at first, but as Cindy began
filming and began asking questions, I thought to myself that all I had to do was answer them. That’s it. So, I did, and within a minute and a half, I was done. Then, I had to interview John. This turned out to be harder than I exoected. Although I had a few questions memorized, after I asked them, we still had a decent amount of time left. And because of this, I started winging the questions. Which wasn’t such a good idea- the interview ended up with me saying more “uhhms” than questions.

Overall, I thought this was a very interesting project. It’s not something I’d expected to do considering that it’s an English class. But, at the same time, it was refreshing. I met knew people, I learned how to do better interviews and to become better interviewer.
Dear President Muyskens,

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Zarraf Choudhury and I am currently a student here at Queens College. I am taking a wide variety of classes, but this letter involves my English 110 course, and the particular assignment that relates to a certain artwork found on the school premises- in the Powdermaker Hall to be exact. The piece of art that I was given turned out to be a simple photograph of a house.

The piece was a black and white still life of a house in Flushing. The artwork was huge- at least 5 feet by 5 feet. The photo itself was encased in a glass cover with wooden borders. It was splendid, to say the least. It was large, and easily caught my eyes and the other students’ there at Powdermaker Hall. The photograph was a striking piece of art. After making the assignment and after showing it to Professor Ferguson, I got terrible news- this fantastic work of art was being taken down for a vending machine.

I could not believe it. Something as important and memorable as this photograph being taken down for a machine that dispenses food. This is the main
reason as to why I am writing you this letter. You cannot let this happen, and for
good reasons.

   We live in a day and age where art forms include TV shows and web series’. Nowadays, technology is the model of art. The fact that Queens College has an abundance of so many striking photographs throughout every building shows how much care is given to these representations. Around every corner, an insightful, sometimes powerful, image catches the eyes of the students, helping them realize how important these pictures are. The old saying, “A picture is worth a thousand words” comes to mind. As cliched as that saying is, it’s the truth. To take these works of art off would be a travesty to those who give so much thought and work into these photos. These stills remind us students and faculty every day that true beauty can be seen through the lens of a camera.

   Another reason why the photograph should stay is because of its personal value to the artist. As I stated earlier, hard work was given to each and every single one of these photos. The one being taken down is no exception. Unfortunately, I came up empty with my research on this photograph. The main reason being was that the identification card was stolen. With that said, however, we still need to take into consideration that the artist, or in this case the photographer, put in a lot of time and put a lot of thought into his or her particular work. He or she made sure that the piece meant something more than just the subject itself, in this case being the house. Artists do not make certain paintings or take certain photographers just because they can. There is always a meaning behind them. Taking down the photo can lead to the particular photographer’s message being completely erased. On top of that, we may never know who the photographer truly is if his or her photo is
taken down. A message in an artwork, no matter how small, must remain and be intact. It needs to be seen by everyone.

What could be the meaning of the specific photograph being taken down? It’s an intriguing work- the entire photograph is black and white, and it only shows a house. The house seems like a normal home in Flushing, NY. The black and white may represent the old, traditional values of the suburban area. I believe it’s a symbolic photograph- something as simple as a home in Flushing, all in black and white can mean so much. It’s a thought-provoking image, and because of that, it’s as valuable as any other photograph in Queens College. A house can mean so much- it’s a place where we spend time with our families and where memories are made. It’s up to the individual to comprehend what he or she sees, and I think that’s an important part in all art- the ability to make us think.

Not only is there a meaning to the picture, but there’s also a story behind it. As spectators, we may take that for granted, but sometimes these back stories are the most important aspects of the art. The black and white photograph of the house, for example, can be the home of the photographer. As I’ve stated, a home is a place of solitude- an area where memories are made. There is most definitely a story behind the photograph. Why take it down? Why not give it the same respect as the other photographs on our campus? Taking down this photograph would make the story, whatever it may be, to disappear forever. Is that worth it for a vending machine?

And finally, the biggest reason why you shouldn’t allow the photograph to be taken down is because of its beauty. Art is defined as the quality, production, or
expression of what is beautiful and appealing. Although the word beauty may be used differently by different people, art will always be an expression that aims to convey meaning through its image. Meaning in itself is a form of beauty, but add that to the impact of the image, and you have something truly magnificent. As mentioned, the image is simple enough- a black and white still of a home. But, it shows so much more- a traditional view through the lens of a traditional home. If you remove this picture, not only will you remove the simple beauty it conveys, but replacing it with a vending machine is an insult to the meaning of art.

A picture is worth a thousand words: a thousand thoughts, a thousand ideas, and a thousand visions. This photograph illustrates numerous things about its art form and its meaning. Its significance to the college is indubitable. Not only is this photograph sacred to the person behind the camera, but it’s sacred to our college as well. Taking it down would mean silencing the thousand words that this photo speaks to its viewers- members of the community at Queens College.

Sincerely,

Zarraf Choudhury
Zarraf Choudhury
Queens College
English 110- Reading Response

Grierson begins his work with the explanation of how documentary is a type of film that is made from "natural material." That is, material that hasn't been in any way tampered with or changed. I completely agree with Grierson in the sense that documentary is the filming of certain images or stories that, in some manner, show truth. He then goes on to explain an example of what he believes is type of documentary- the "peace-time newsreel." Of course, Grierson believes that this type of documentary is "just a speedy snip-snap" of something that is "unimportant", like the "babblings of a politician." I think that Grierson does have a point in that, many times, this journalistic type of documentary is less entertaining. But, I think this is because journalism aims more at informing, and less on entertaining.

Grierson then brings up the filmmaker Flaherty, stating that the documentaries that Flaherty makes are the ideal documentaries. Grierson states that Flaherty believed the story of the documentary must be "taken from the location..." He defines the principles of documentary that Flaherty accomplishes
with his own films- the documentary must master its material it is showing and it must "follow him in his distinction between description and drama." Grierson goes on to say how Flaherty uses "story" to go about his documentary. But, even though a certain stories are used in his films, they in no way change facts. And this ties up to what Grierson was saying earlier- in the end, all documentaries are formed though natural material. They just happen.

Grierson brings up many good points about what documentary really is. And although they can be shown in different forms (newsreel, with a story, expanding on the individual) they all have one thing in common- they tell the truth with facts.

Srivatsan’s article tries to “comprehend” what the “role of photography” truly is in our society. He uses different mediums, such as television and cinema, to show how photographic “visual medium”, whether a still image or a moving one, can have an effect on its viewers. Srivatsan argues that the “photographic image is present...everywhere”, that the “photographic vision is employed in cinema, television, newspapers..incessantly communicating and making meaning.” It is this particular line that Srivatsan uses as his main idea- that the “photographic vision” is a “power[ful]” yet “subtle” experience that gives its viewers the thoughts and ideas behind the photograph itself (771). This article will be useful in my paper because not only does Srivatsan bring up why the photographic vision is a powerful means of expression, but he uses that idea and represents it in different mediums. In fact, the author states, “instead of asking the question ‘what is photography?’, [I’ll] ask instead ‘how does photography work.” I want to understand if there IS a bigger meaning behind the photograph of the home I took, and if there is, what it is.

Voelker’s article explains how on one of her visits to a school, she “witnessed...uplifting messages and reproductions of artwork [that] filled the hallways.” She states how these particular works of art have a profound influence on the students that go to the school. Voelker gives us a very “warm” message of how “students were able to explore new stimuli...via the art in the gallery [and within the halls]” (367). She then states that the artists that made these art forms “expand[ed] understanding of literary practices.” Voelker uses the author Elliot Eisner as an example: Eisner states in one of her books that “research...supported [the] correlation between experience in the arts and academic achievement.” Voelker makes use of this information and other statements made by Eisner to show how students who view and experience art in their every day lives have a better chance of gaining knowledge. I’d also like to use this for my paper- to show how simple art can have an impact on the students of our campus. As to whether or not this was the reason my particular art piece was put up in that location is another question I’d ask to the photographer.

Fritzke explains how a certain amount of information is needed to understand the monetary value of a piece of public artwork. She explains how there are many “types of records” needed to “support the financial value of artworks.” Not only are these taken into consideration when an artwork is faced with a monetary value, but the “originality” of said artwork must be proven, as well as who made the artwork and why it’s there. She points out that the “display and location of the artwork” both play a role in financial value. Fritzke came to the conclusion that “quality records...support the value attained.” I want to use this information to understand the monetary value, if any, the artist received or gave for his or her work to be put up in the campus. I would also like to know the reason why it was put in that specific location on the campus- was it for financial reasons, or something else?


Zarraf: Welcome to tonight’s show! I’m your host, Zarraf Choudhury, and we have one heck of a show for you this evening. My guests tonight are one of the greatest documentary filmmakers of our time, Frederick Wiseman, and we have the prestigious Dr. Srivatsan. Welcome to the show, gentleman.

Wiseman: Thank you.

Dr. Srivatsan: Thanks for having us.

Z: On tonight’s program, we’ll tackle the question, “Does Film Tell the Truth?” Very interesting topic we have here this evening.

W: Oh, yes indeed. It’s a very thought provoking one, too.

Z: What do you believe then, Mr. Wiseman?

W: Well, quietly honestly, I believe that answer to that question is, “Yes.” As I’ve showed in most, if not all of my documentaries, they give off facts and truth of the American life.

Z: Ah, I see. And what about you, Doctor? What’s your take on whether or not films tell the truth.

S: Well, in a way, some do. As I’ve stated in my article in the magazine *Economic and Political Weekly*, I’m a firm believer that the role of photography is very important in films. I also believe that photographic view, in this case through the film camera,
often show us the “real world”, and its corresponding issues. These things a very much present in the genre of filmmaking of documentary.

Z: So, you both belie-

S: However, not all material in films and, in this case documentaries, show the whole truth. Or any truth for that matter.

W: I completely disagree. The main purpose of documentary is to expose or to emphasize certain events through facts.

S: Sure it is. But, what about the subject of the films themselves.

W: What about them? I’ve made films about the American Ballet Theatre rehearsals to EXPOSE the audience and other viewers to what these dancers go through during their normal routine.

S: But, why did you pick ballet? Why not the tango?

Z: Well, it was his choosing, was it not, Mr. Wiseman?

W: Of course. At that particular time, they were on tour through the States and Europe. I took this time to truly see the work of the dancers, choreographers, and so on. And it’s all through facts,

S: You may say it was all with facts. But, why should I believe you? Can’t I ask myself, “Why did Mr. Wiseman go on tour with the ballet dancers? Maybe he’s trying to hide something else going on. Or maybe he’s blatantly lying about everything occurring in this film. Or these ballet dancers were paid off to dance and give pre-made answers to questions.”

W: I see what you mean. It’s a valid point. But, it’s up to my audience and what they perceive to be real and not real.
S: That’s exactly my point. So, you can’t truly say that film speaks the truth. No film can TRULY tell the truth. However, they can influence individuals through what they think are facts.

Z: But, Doctor, you are a firm believer in photography and its many uses in the media. How can you believe in such a thought, but still think it doesn’t fully tell the truth.

S: Well, through my research I’ve learned that a picture or moving image can be real. BUT, it can be manipulated to mean more than what it expresses. The news on TV, for example, can manipulate a picture of soldiers running through an empty street, and have it subtitled “Soldiers Protecting Citizens”, when in reality they are fighting another group. It’s subtle. This is also true for many films.

W: I’ve already said it is up to the audience to truly know what is fact and what is fiction. But, there are films out there that show nothing but a particular location on a college campus. No facts, no manipulation. How can that not tell the truth when nothing is altered?

S: Ah, great example. And, a good question. Well, although it sounds crazy, a viewer may question the authenticity of that entire sequence- he may wonder if this is a college campus.

W: Now, that’s ridiculous.

Z: Ha. Well, you both have excellent points. But, both of you have brought up the main point, and that is that it is often up to the audience to know if what they’re seeing is telling the truth. I agree that manipulation in the news media can have a directly wrong influence on the viewers, but film influence is different. Viewers of news are easily swayed because they expect the truth. In film, they don’t know what they’ll get, and because of this, it’s very difficult to answer the question I
posed. At the end of the day, it’s not us that make the call- it’s the people we’re showing our works. So, to summarize- Mr. Wiseman, you believe that film does tell the truth, and Doctor Srivatsan, you believe that that film usually does not tell the whole truth. And if it does, it’s being manipulated in some way.

W: Yep.

S: That is correct.

Z: Well, we can talk about this topic for hours, and we still won’t get a definite answer. But, unfortunately, we are out of time. Mr. Wiseman. Doctor. Thank you for coming on the show.
Vertovian script:
- Overlapping text, “Kino-Pravda” Film Essay.
- Image of black and white photograph of a house.
- Voice over, “A house.”
- Underneath moving shot of photograph with background music.
- Left, Medium close-up on photograph.
- Right, Medium close-up shot, going down, white text over shot, voiceover of the text.
- Image of house, going down-right, voiceover “Meaning behind house.”
- Black screen, white text, “Ask opinion of students…”
- Shots of student being interviewed.
- Black screen, white text, “…another student…?”
- Shots of another student being interviewed.
- Black screen, white text, “How about professor?”
- Shots of professor being interviewed.
- Black screen, white text, “…take on artowork in Powdermaker?”
- Rest of the shots of interview with professor.
- Black screen, different texts, with voiceover of the text, “As professor said… larger meaning behind…house.”
- Upbeat piano playing in background, shots of photograph, close-up, medium
close-up, backing up, white text over shots of photograph.

-More shots of interview with professor.

-Left-angle shots of photograph of house, white text over shots.

-Right angle shots of photograph, white text.

-End credits. End upbeat piano in background.
Zarraf Choudhury
Queens College

English 110- Film Festival Program Notes

Program Notes: Jenny Lu

Jenny Lu’s 2010 film Kino Pravda explores the ideas of Dziga Vertov and his belief that “cinematography’ must die so that the art of cinema may live.” Jenny’s Kino Pravda film essay on a group of sculptures in the campus of Queens College masterfully captures Vertov’s radical thinking, as well as his unusual style of filmmaking.

What is Kino Pravda? It was a news reel series created by Dziga Vertov. Its literal definition is “Film Truth.” Made in the 1920s, Vertov used clips of what seemed like random moments in everyday-life, and put them together to form a deeper meaning. These news reels were very experimental during that time, often being completely ignored by film critics. However, later years, he was applauded for his efforts for doing something entirely different. Jenny Lu does something similar with her film, but with a clear subject— The Romanesque Remembrance and Gothic Remembrance sculptures.

Jenny Lu is a freshman at Queens College, the location of those sculptures. She has three films prior to her Kino Pravda, two of which also relate to the sculptures— an Observational Documentary and a Community Interview Film. Her Observational Documentary consists of many different shots and angles of the sculptures and their surrounding area. The Community Interview Film consists of Jenny interviewing students and faculty regarding the art pieces. Some found it interesting, while others didn’t seem to like it.
The art pieces, a Jenny points out in her Kino Pravda film, were created in 1957 out of carbon steel. The creator Sassons Saffer was born in Iraq. After coming to the United States, he enrolled in Brooklyn College in New York City. Later in his life, he built his sculptures in Maine, and he wanted his works to be “placed outdoors” and was “very picky” about the location. In the end, he located The Romanesque Remembrance and Gothic Remembrance sculptures near the children’s playground on the Queens College Campus.

The Kino Pravda film begins with shots of the college itself, including its banner and the campus, shot beautifully against the sunset. Images of pink flowers are seen until we see The Romanesque Remembrance and Gothic Remembrance sculptures. Throughout the scene Jenny puts in specific information, regarding both Saffer and his art pieces. We finally see the reason why Jenny has made this Kino Pravda— to stop the president of Queens College from putting in vending machines over the sculptures. Does she succeed?

Using similar methods as Vertov, Jenny brings to light a problem of taking down art for machines. She uses striking images of flowers and a sunset to set the tone, and uses information gathered through research to add background to everything she films. A viewer can tell that she was very dedicated in her work, and it shows, especially when she calls out the college and the president himself and asks if what they’re doing is right.

Although it isn’t as radical and different as Vertov’s Kino Pravda, Jenny’s Kino Pravda manages to make and send a deep message of what is right and what is wrong. Instead of using clips of very different items, she uses very different film techniques and genres to put her film together, and bring to light to what she stands for.