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Documentary Media: History, Theory, Practice, by Broderick Fox. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2018, 350 pp.

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This is a "how-to" book with a difference. When the first edition was published in 2010, author Broderick Fox, a professor in the Media Arts and Culture Department at Occidental College in Los Angeles, was also an experienced practitioner who had made a number of films in various genres ("Selected Works"). Now, as this second edition is published, Fox is widely recognised as an award-winning director and producer. His two major feature-length documentary films both explore controversial and challenging themes, and their intensely personal topics, their experimentation and their exploration of the documentary form illuminate the approach of this book. In the autobiographical, self-revelatory *The Skin I'm In* (2012), Fox faces the traumas of his young adulthood as he comes out as gay and recovers from alcoholism and an attempted suicide. *Zen & the Art of Dying* (2015) follows the Australian activist Zenith Virago as she engages with a "celebratory" approach to death. Although these two films are not discussed directly in this book, their embrace of expressivity, art, spirituality and creativity are clearly reflected in its approach.

Reflecting on his own filmmaking, Fox has stated:

> I always told myself, just shoot. In my independent fashion, with no producers or studios waiting for me to deliver a product, I knew I could always keep the material to myself or toss it if nothing developed from it. I gave myself the time to really craft something and refine it until I felt there was something there worth sharing with others. (qtd. in Whyte)

However, *Documentary Media* is a book of advice aimed at those just starting on a documentary career. In it, Fox maintains a careful balance between the advocacy of the sort of creativity and self-expression he claims for his own work, and a highly practical attention to the requirements of filmmaking in a commercial world.

The title of the book is also significant. It refers to documentary "media"—not documentary "film". "Media" covers a wide scope of nonfiction works from the Lumière brothers' *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon* (*La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon*) in 1895, which arguably initiated the documentary genre, to the participatory, multimedia *Quipu Project*, revealing the governmental forced sterilization programme in Peru in the 1990s. Developed between 2013 and 2017, it goes well beyond the limits of a conventional, screen-based documentary as it draws on a radio campaign, a telephone line, an interactive web space, a web documentary and social media profiles (15–7). In today's multimedia, interactive context, what counts as a "documentary" and who can be seen as an "author", remains in flux.

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Documentary Media's first chapter is given over to "Re-imagining Documentary" in relation to this changing media environment, in which "both democratic and totalitarian positions of media are unprecedented" (23). However, few documentary approaches are completely novel. Fox also points to the broader activities within which a film like Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer* (*Chronique d'un Eté*, 1961) was embedded back in 1960 (44–6).

Basically, this is an introductory book; everything is explained, including the meaning of specialised terms, such as "diegesis". The book directly addresses "you" the reader, and its tone is blunt, claiming that "you" are likely to subscribe to those conventional views which are to be challenged. Chapter 1 begins with the lines, "Chances are that many of you will come to this book with strong convictions about what a documentary looks like and sounds like", and Fox adds that his aim is to "explode" such conventional ideas and question concepts which are usually taken for granted: "Clear your mind of presumptions" (1). However, the practical information throughout the book is firmly grounded in real-world experience. "Rules" are laid down (such as the 180-degree rule when filming a conversation), but at every point readers are encouraged to consider exceptions as well.

This is not a book to be necessarily read from cover to cover. It is designed to be dipped into and used as a tool, structured around various types of information and advice. Within the chapters an insightful analysis of documentaries across the history of the genre is interleaved with practical advice. Each chapter is concluded by a section labelled "Into Practice" which begins with the need to analyse existing examples, then moves on to recommend a "project" by which readers can experiment with their own documentary making. At the end of the book, eleven appendices, stretching over sixty-one pages, offer detailed information on topics ranging from types of camera equipment and the principles of sound editing, through to establishing a Web presence and copyright and legal issues. Most of the appendices also suggest an exercise, with an eye to possible media projects, beginning with Appendix A, which suggests making a "cameraless" documentary based on archive and snatched film. Other appendices offer advice and help, usefully based on hard-won experience. Appendix I contains examples of forms that may be needed, including a "Location release form" and an "Emergency medical form". Across the appendices the exercises increase in complexity, and all stress the importance of preparation and planning. They explore what materials are needed (for example, a computer with editing software) but do not take too much for granted. The exercises would prove useful at several levels. After all, Fox suggests, even those without the equipment could still use an exercise to plan a project (284).

As the book's subtitle promises, the classic history of documentary is outlined, and a range of theoretical concepts are closely related to practical issues. From Chapter 6 onwards, examples from documentary history are drawn on to illuminate contemporary practice, beginning with the early stages of research, through to location finding, filming and postproduction. Attention is paid to the full range of activities which documentary making may involve—from the use of sound, which, Fox argues, is often neglected, to filling in forms and checking copyright. Each action and aspect is meticulously thought through, analysed and illustrated, while the practical limits imposed by mainstream media requirements are not ignored.

At the same time, throughout the book, Fox indicates his strong awareness of ethical issues, in particular his respect for those who appear in a film and his concern with the relations of power between documentary makers and filmed subjects. Chapter 5 focuses on "Documentary Ethics", and discusses a range of "gazes" which characterise relations between

them. The Chapter also points to significant examples in which ethical issues arise: was Claude Lanzmann justified in including secret recordings of Nazi perpetrators in *Shoah* (1985)? Was Joshua Oppenheimer justified in encouraging re-enactment of torture and violence in *The Act of Killing* (2012)?

Ethical relations between filmmakers and subjects are central to debates around documentary "modes", originally proposed by Bill Nichols in his book *Representing Reality*. Chapter 2 of *Documentary Media* deals specifically with the history of documentary, and is built around the "modes". The concept is a handy analytical tool—but, although Fox argues that they should not be seen as a prescription, nevertheless it is clear that this may be a danger, even in this book, since the exercises recommended in Appendix B are based on them. In fact the list of "modes" has never exhaustively covered the wide range of ways in which documentary can be—and has been—approached.

A greater historical awareness could have made more of the *context* of new approaches ("modes") as they were introduced. Very often, changes in the style and structure of documentary work have been associated with developing technology. In fact, in the light of contemporary online and digital possibilities, Fox himself notes the need for a new "mode", and adds the "interactive" to the well-known list. His enthusiasm for the democratic possibilities of multimedia, participatory work has much in common with the campaigning spirit with which new approaches have been introduced in the past. For example, the "direct cinema" practitioners who developed the "observational" style, described their aims with an almost moral commitment, as they evolved their self-denying "rules" which aimed to make the filmmaker invisible and ensure the transparency of their relations with their subjects.

A lack of attention to historical context has also led to what, I would argue, is a misinterpretation of some of the other examples which attracted critical comments in the book. Robert Flaherty was visiting an Inuit community in the north of Canada and making *Nanook of the North* (1922) at a time when the documentary genre had not been defined. Rather than focusing on the exploitative aspects of Flaherty's work, more attention could have been given here to the collaboration between the filmmaker and Allakariallak (who plays Nanook) as this was clearly essential to the development of the film. Moreover, Fox frequently criticises the "victim structure" of earlier documentaries. In particular the "Griersonian tradition" earns numerous negative references. *Housing Problems* (Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton, 1936) is frequently referred to for condescending to its slum-dwelling contributors, including by the framing of the shot. However, *Housing Problems* marked, at the time, a considerable innovation, and not only technically, in its pioneering use of sync interviews. In 1936 the experience of working-class people had hardly ever been publicly heard, and the individuals who appear in the film are treated with considerable respect. It is claimed that Ruby Grierson, the interviewer (who, it has been argued, should have been credited as director of the film), told the interviewees "the camera is yours, the microphone is yours. Now tell the bastards what it's like to live in the slums" ("Tackling" 122). And the crew was aware of the significance of framing. Co-director Edgar Anstey explained "we felt that the camera must remain sort of four feet above the ground, and dead on, because *it wasn't our film"* ("Tackling" 123; emphasis added). It is true that both *Nanook* and *Housing Problems* have frequently been criticised by film scholars, and Fox makes reference to their work. However, I would argue that this sort of criticism is too easily taken for granted, and does not do justice to the full historical context, nor to the social worlds which gave rise both to the filming and to the reception of the completed films at the particular time of their production.

Documentary Media ends with a chapter on distribution, outreach and engagement, with an exploration of the contemporary explosion of outlets, both commercial and independent—including the internet, streaming video, and social media. This chapter has a particular concern with audience engagement. Fox is interested in films and media productions which aim to influence their viewers. Makers should ask how they want audiences to be *affected* by their work (251). The chapter contains a number of case studies and striking examples of campaigning projects. For example, *Uncovered: The War on Iraq* (Robert Greenwald, 2003) adopted a "transmedia model" of distribution, partnering with campaigning organisations. As well as rapidly producing DVDs and arranging cinema screenings, the producers organised "house party screenings" when the documentary was streamed online, followed by post-screening forums and discussion (256). The chapter makes a passionate and engaged conclusion to the book: "You *are* the next revolution" (269) (emphasis in original).

Broderick Fox's autobiographical film, *The Skin I'm In*—in which he appears throughout, reflecting on his mental health and undertaking, as part of his recovery, a full-back tattoo based on a design by an indigenous Canadian artist—ends with a shot of him singing over the final credits. The words of the song are simply "Fuck it, Fuck it, Fuck it". Although not a sentiment to be adopted by the aspirant filmmakers who read this book, it certainly "explodes conventional ideas" and says something important about the spirit behind *Documentary Media*.

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