

ENGW 1302 Project #2: Rhetorical Analysis of a Documentary Film

(Worth 15% of your grade; due on February 25)

Overview

Rhetorical analysis is the process of closely examining an artifact (the remnant of some communicative event) to determine the choices made in composing the message and then to evaluate those choices. For our second assignment, you will analyze a documentary film and present your analysis in a “video essay” that weaves together scenes from the film and your critique of the film’s argument.

We live in a world of messages, appeals, arguments, claims, agendas, pleading, persuading, and other communicative efforts. Rhetorical analysis is a central method for understanding this world of messages and for sharpening your evaluative and critical abilities. We will review several approaches to rhetorical analysis in class, and I will help you practice your skills as a rhetorical critic so you can develop a toolbox of techniques for analyzing any type of artifact. In addition, this assignment will push you to extend your technological literacy by experimenting with new software tools and composing in an unfamiliar medium.

Assignment Details

During the next few weeks, we will follow these steps to help you craft a polished video essay:

Step 1: Select a film for analysis. The artifact you examine for this assignment will be a single full-length (i.e., at least one hour) documentary film. Because this project asks you to analyze the film’s arguments, you should select a film that raises issues about which reasonable people might disagree. Your analysis of this film will serve as the springboard for your Research Paper (Project #3), so choose a film that addresses issues you’d like to keep exploring after this assignment ends. Practically speaking, you will have to be able to capture the film and manipulate it digitally for the video essay. That means downloading, ripping, and converting—all within fair use guidelines. (We will practice how to do this in class.) You will submit a first and second choice of films on Monday, February 1, and I will approve your choice before you proceed with the project.

Step 2: Take careful notes as you watch the film. Because any well-made film will be far too complex to analyze exhaustively in this assignment, you will need to make a well-considered choice of a few features (“units of analysis”) in your film that promise to yield the greatest gain in substantive understanding. As you watch (and re-watch) the film, take notes about which scenes would serve to illustrate the argument *you* want to make in your analysis. Keep track of time-stamps so you can come back to these scenes when you compose your video.

Step 3: Draft a written script. You will write a very tight, substantive script that will serve as the basis for the voice track of your 2–3 minute video essay. As you write, keep in mind the differences between *spoken* language and *written* text. Your script should adhere to the conventions of standard written English, but your word choices, sentence lengths, etc., should lend themselves to oral delivery. You will submit your written script on Friday, February 11.

Step 4: Create your video. After you submit your script, you will meet with me in an individual conference and will work with your classmates to polish your script for recording. During this phase of the assignment, you will also capture and edit scenes from your film, then compile the scenes and your recorded essay into a polished 2–3 minute video. In class, we will be using Jaycut (a free, online video editor) to practice editing techniques; however, you may use another software program if you wish.

Step 5: Submit your project for evaluation. Your video is due at the beginning of class on Friday, February 25. You will submit your video in its final, viewable form, either on a DVD or uploaded to my Dropbox account. In addition, you will submit a printed copy of your revised script, as recorded for the video.

Evaluation Criteria

I will evaluate your video essay using the following criteria:

- Do you analyze, not just summarize, the film you have selected?
- Do you make a clear, substantive, focused claim about how the units of analysis you chose exemplify rhetorical strategies to persuade audience members to do, think, feel, learn, and/or believe something?
- Do you support your claims with well-chosen examples and reasons?
- Do you answer the “so what?” question? (In other words, what difference does it make now that you’ve shown what you’ve shown and analyzed what you’ve analyzed?)
- Is your project organized logically and coherently? Does your project show a high level of attention to detail and polish, *including writing for oral delivery*, delivering the script in a smooth and clear voice, editing, and proofreading?
- Does your project show effective use of basic video and audio editing software (timelines, clips, tracks, trimming, rendering)?
- Do you have an MLA 2009 format Works Cited for your film?
- Does your script adhere to the conventions of standard written English (i.e., spelling, punctuation, grammar)?