ABSTRACT

CREATIVE PROJECT: On the Backburner: An Analysis of Documentary Styles Through An Anthological Culinary Docuseries

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PAGES: 38

The concept that I explored in my creative project is documentary mode. A documentary mode is best described as a conceptual scheme used to distinguish aesthetic conventions. Documentary modes are often what determines the style of a documentary and how stories are told in the documentary format. The idea of the modes was founded by documentary theorists Bill Nichols and Toni de Bromhead. Nichols first discussed them and found six different documentary modes, which are: the Poetic, Observational, Participatory, Expository, Performative, and the Reflexive modes. Nichols was heavily criticized by de Bromhead for taking too much of an objective, journalistic approach to analyzing documentary styles, which resulted in de Bromhead finding her own modes- Poetic, Linear, Discursive, Episodic, and Hybrid.

What researched for my creative project was how a documentary mode may shape a documentary’s story. Another goal of mine was to produce a creative project that may be used to educate Telecommunications students about documentary filmmaking and modes. I have found that in my experience and research that the knowledge about documentary and its
modes/styles is very lacking- in my conversations with my peers following the conception of this project idea, I found that no one knew what a documentary mode is. I found this rather disheartening, because all of my peers come from a video production background and went through the Video Production program here on campus.

I explored this topic by producing four short, roughly three to five minute documentaries, all with the same general themes and story, but stylizing the information in a way that can be categorized within different modes. My direction I decided to take with the films was to make culinary documentaries, inspired by Anthony Bourdain’s Parts Unknown and Ugly Delicious. My intention with the story was the have each documentary dive into the philosophies of food culture, and why chefs and restaurant owners believe food to be such a key component to communities. I decided to make culinary documentaries because through my research, the popularity of culinary documentaries has risen substantially in the past few years. In addition, I am personally extremely passionate about culinary and food documentaries and hope to pursue this field in my professional career. The modes I utilized are Nichols’ Observational, Poetic, Expository, and Participatory modes, as I have found that those best suit culinary documentaries and will allow me to thoroughly explore different styles of documentary filmmaking.