

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Uses of the Past": Exploring the Motivations for Keeping History Alive
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A Note on Structure:

We would like to acknowledge that our literature review takes an alternative structure, and justify why we chose to approach the literature in this way. We have chosen alternative forms for our thesis project, and therefore we felt that no texts directly compare to the questions and arguments we hope to make with the content and forms of our project. Therefore, we hope to build on the existing literature on reenactment, film theory and new media theory, and an annotated bibliography was the most effective way to demonstrate what arguments were made from the texts we have read, and how they are informing the decisions we are making about our thesis project.

CONTENT: Reenactment Literature

Compiled by Nadia Mahmassani

Introduction:

For the content portion of our literature review, we have chosen five sources that help us think about the themes we want to emphasize and questions we want to bring up in our documentary. Since we are interested in the diverse ways reenactors are using the past, the first two texts we have included explore American approaches to history. With this broad foundation, we move into texts that focus specifically on reenactment and the motivations behind it. Together, these sources highlight the ways reenactors bring the past into the present and the challenges they encounter as they pursue authenticity.

Pole, J.R. *Paths to the American Past*. New York: Oxford UP, 1979. Print.

Paths to the American Past explores American historians' use of values that are distinct to the present in order to understand and frame the past. Pole bases his arguments on the insistence that an objective past exists and that it is "free from the present, does not need us, and is not listening to us" (xi). Though he recognizes that the present inevitably informs history, he continually emphasizes the sharp divide between the past and present and warns us not to let our current economic, social, and political needs—"the demands inflicted on [the past] by the present"—corrupt our understanding of past events (250). In a series of essays on early American history, he attempts to counteract misconceptions that have arisen from previous historians' anachronistic thinking (226). While we are not focusing specifically on any of the historic events that Pole covers in these essays, his idea that we can misunderstand history by approaching it with a modern mindset helps us think about the concept of authenticity, which is very important to many reenactors. In their insistence on being as "true to the past" as possible, reenactors are engaged in a project that is similar to Pole's book: escaping modern ways of thinking to access the authentic past, the past exactly as it was.

Pole's work is also useful to us in that it provides an argument on how Americans relate to the past. He describes a "peculiarly American version of the space-time continuum" in which Americans view the country's past as their own "property" that they can use instead of a dead and removed entity (250-51). He mentions, for example, "Those Virginians who still talk about Mr. Jefferson as though he might, at any moment, train his telescope on them from Monticello" and the

typical American historian who “[feels] a momentary uncertainty as to which century he [is] actually in” (250-51).

This sense of fluidity between the past and present, which arises from the assumption that the past is very close to the modern day, is an attitude we have noted in our conversations with reenactors as well. Thus, reenactors are engaged in “‘presentism’; by which is meant that the historian plants his own political values, or those which he thinks belong to his own time, in the minds of people of the past, and approves of their achievement or judges their shortcomings according to these present-day standards” (250). Overall, when applied to reenactment, Pole’s theories allow us to consider how our subjects balance the pursuit of authenticity with this mindset of “presentism.” Additionally, with his belief that there is a “sense, inescapable in Europe, of the total, crumbled irrecoverability of the past, of its differentness, of the fact that it is dead,” Pole has motivated us to explore why Americans approach the past so differently—as something that can be kept alive (251).

Rosenzweig, Roy, and David P. Thelen. *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*. New York: Columbia UP, 1998. Print.

Like Pole’s text, *The Presence of the Past* investigates the ways Americans relate to the past. Echoing Pole’s argument, the authors state, “For the Americans we interviewed, the past exists not as a distant land but in the here and now” (63). However, while Pole’s focus is primarily on professional historians and their scholarship, Thelen and Rosenzweig analyze how and why average Americans use the past in their everyday lives. They synthesize the responses they received from

1,500 Americans—constituting both a “national sample” and a “minority sample” of African Americans, Mexican Americans, American Indians, and other groups (9-11)—who were asked about their connection to the past. They come to the general conclusion that Americans actively engage with the past on a daily basis and also argue that Americans are “not just passive consumers of histories constructed by others,” but rather, dynamic participants in the process of “popular historymaking” (3). Since many of the reenactors we have met are not professional historians, it is helpful for us to have this text on how and why “unofficial,” personal histories are created.

A major theme that comes up in this text is the average American’s sense that experience is the best way to understand history. The authors note, “Historians, like lawyers and journalists, have long believed that participants make the best observers” (38). This opinion that firsthand knowledge of the past is the most reliable and informative knowledge is prevalent in reenactment communities as well. This text helps us consider why reenactors are so intent on experiencing the past instead of just reading about it with its look at specific ways Americans reflect on their experiences “to question and discover identity” (39). Experience not only gives Americans a more intimate understanding of the past but also allows them to “say with authority, ‘This is who I am today’” (63). When applied to reenactment, the text brings up a question for us: how do reenactors’ “experiences” of the past differ from the experiences of Thelen and Rosenzweig’s subjects, given that a reenactor’s “past” is a recreated one? Can we draw reliable and useful information from the experience of a simulated past?

After their discussion of the ways Americans use the past “to live in the present,” the authors explore the use of the past “to shape the future” (63). In this section of the book, Thelen and Rosenzweig highlight their interviewees’ tendency to think of their pasts as narratives they can critique. Through this process of reflection, people create plans for their future (76). This discussion has been critical to our understanding of the way Claude Moore Colonial Farm is using the past. Just like Thelen and Rosenzweig’s subjects, the living history interpreters we interviewed at the farm told us they keep the past alive because its lessons can help us avoid mistakes and create goals for the future.

Anderson, Jay. *Time Machines: the World of Living History*. Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1984. Print.

As one of the first scholarly studies of reenactment, *Time Machines* is a foundational text in the field. Drawing on his experience as a living history interpreter and his background as a folklorist, Anderson identifies three major motivations behind reenactment: education, experimental archaeology, and recreation. Anderson’s overarching assessment of all forms of reenactment is that they are a means of “time traveling” by which people “slip away from the modern world” (10). As we have looked into the motivations behind reenactment, this theory that it provides an escape from the present is one of the major ideas our interviewees have discussed.

While some scholars who followed Anderson in reenactment studies, such as Jenny Thompson, have criticized his work as simplistic, the three-section framework offers a clear starting point for categorizing and contrasting reenactors’ uses of the

past. We do not plan to study experimental archaeology, but the two remaining sections are very relevant to our topic. With regard to living history museums, Anderson advances the thesis that their goals are primarily educational. In addition to transporting people to the past, these museums aim to give people a better understanding of themselves (17). In this section, he also explores the tension between education and entertainment that characterizes these museums (25). He leaves us with an important question, particularly applicable to our study of Claude Moore Colonial farm: how do living history interpreters balance their commitment to historical accuracy with the pressure to attract visitors and provide an enjoyable experience?

Since we have interviewed two people who reenact as a hobby, Anderson's section on "living history as play" also informs our project. He identifies these hobbyists as "history buffs" who reenact for "the joy of getting away" (12). Their purposes tend to be more emotional than educational; they are motivated by the thrill of feeling like another person in a bygone era (147). This discussion has helped us better understand the term "magic moment," which one of our interviewees brought up. It seems that hobby reenactors are in pursuit of these "magic" instants when they forget they are reenacting and feel they are in the past.

This attitude of escapism presupposes a sharp divide between the present and the past, but as we have seen with the application of Pole's theories, reenactment also seems to express continuity between the past and present. Thus, we are left with another question: how do reenactors manage to make this hobby a form of escape when, ultimately, they cannot leave the present?

Thompson, Jenny. *War Games: Inside the World of 20th-Century War Reenactors*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 2004. Print.

War Games is an in-depth study of a specific type of hobby reenactment known as the tactical battle, which is an event that brings various “units” together to recreate a historic battle. Since many of our contacts are involved in tactical battles, this book has helped us indentify different ways they may be using history.

Thompson sets out to complicate Anderson’s arguments about reenactment as time travel. She recognizes that this hobby can serve as an escape, but her thesis is that “reenacting is as much about the present as it is concerned with the past” (xviii). By detailing the conflicting points of view within the hobby about the best way to represent wars and achieve authenticity, Thompson reveals that reenactors are involved in a debate over who owns history and who has the right to interpret it. In this way, she explores “the contemporary nature of a hobby that at first glance seems to be concerned solely with history” (xviii).

By adding this layer of complexity to Anderson’s argument, Thompson’s text gives us another way to think about how reenactors might be using the past. That is, enacting history helps them grapple with modern-day issues and questions of identity. In particular, Thompson suggests that men are attracted to this hobby because it allows them to enact an idealized view of masculinity. In creating “one’s own war story,” these men are able to see themselves as heroic warriors leading an adventurous life (184). This discussion of gender as it relates to the tactical battle is important to us because one of our interviewees is a woman who has, at times, struggled to find a place in male-dominated battles.

Thompson also provides a useful discussion of the obsession with authenticity in the hobby, which she attributes to a desire to maintain the illusion of the battle. She discusses different terms for levels of authenticity, ranging from “Stitch Nazis,” who insist on being as accurate “as humanly possible,” to “Farbs” whose outfits and behaviors are anachronistic (210). “The Moderates,” the middle ground between these two groups, recognize that ““complete [authenticity] is not achievable”” (211). Navigating these levels of accuracy and questioning why authenticity is important has been a major discussion topic in our interviews thus far.

Horwitz, Tony. *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War*. New York: Pantheon, 1998.

Confederates in the Attic follows several “hardcore” Civil War reenactors who take drastic measures to recreate the era. These men change their vocabulary, rework their sleeping patterns, and even starve themselves in an attempt to “become” Confederate soldiers. Horwitz explains, “this fundamentalism [produces] a time-travel high, or what hardcores [call] a ‘period rush,’” which seems to be another way of describing the “magic moment” (7).

By telling these reenactors’ stories, Horwitz examines the South’s obsession with the Civil War and the ways this conflict continues to define the region. Though our documentary does not focus on the Civil War, this book is useful to us in that it conceives of reenactment as a means of creating individual and regional identity. Horwitz discovers that nostalgia plays a large role in this process. He admits, “Like most Civil War buffs, I’d always focused on the grim but glorious history of battle” and goes on to analyze the ways the reenactors he follows romanticize the war (20).

This topic is important to us in that it brings up the selection and framing of history that takes place in reenactment. Do our interviewees choose to focus only on the events and themes they find honorable and exciting? If so, are they fulfilling their commitment to authenticity?

Another aspect of reenactment that Horwitz explores is how these people balance their “real lives” with their lives as reenactors. In many cases, the hobby is entirely consuming, taking massive sums of money and energy and leaving little time for any other pursuits. The difficulty reenactors have relating to people outside of the hobby becomes a topic of discussion in the book and has also come up in our interviews (11-12). Both Horwitz’s subjects and our interviewees struggle with the public’s perception that the hobby is strange and a waste of time. These attitudes sometimes endanger their relationships with non-reenactors. Since we have been following couples so far in our interviews, the book helps us frame our questions about how they manage personal relationships when they spend so much time reenacting. Additionally, it motivates us to ask, is there a place where the hobby ends and “real life” begins? It seems that for many reenactors, a clear divide does not exist. As Horwitz explains, reenactment often becomes “a way of life” (8).

FORM: New Media Theory

Compiled by Abby Hollar

Introduction:

For the new media portion of our literature review, we have chosen five sources that will help inform the construction and integration of a website component with the content of our film. The sources chosen have provided a historical context to the evolution of technological innovation in society, theoretical frameworks on how to approach digital media within a scholarly context, instructional information on how to construct an effective website, and a website that provides concrete examples of various functionalities and structures of web pages. These sources will form the foundation of knowledge for the construction of our website component, and how it can be used to enhance the content of our film.

Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (The MIT Press, 2002).

Language of New Media is a foundational text works to establish key terms and frameworks of thought in the developing discipline of New Media studies. Manovich begins by establishing his method, which is to “analyze the language of new media by placing it within the history of modern and visual culture”, by drawing on “art history, literary theory, media studies, social theory and computer science” (10). Manovich argues that doing so results in five main trends in the development of new media, namely digitization, modularity, automation, variability and transcoding, all of which have profound consequences on information and knowledge within society. He also argues that New Media studies can be approached through five elements of its composition: the digital medium itself and

its material organization, the human-computer interface and its operating systems, the operations of its software and applications, the illusions of the digital images these create, and the forms of conventions used for organizing data in these mediums.

Manovich argues that new media has its origins in two historical trajectories of data and media, starting with the invention of the Babbage engine that was able to compute and store data as well as the daguerreotype photographic process that could capture and solidify images. He claims both were equally fundamental to the development of a modern mass society, in that these two capabilities would ultimately converge into computing machines that could store, exhibit and distribute data, as well as give users the ability to produce their own data.

Furthermore, the capabilities of developing media had profound effects on the way we structure, interact with and understand data. The digitization of information meant that all data was converted into discrete units of binary code that could be manipulated and programmed, much like the structure of a film in breaking up continuous time into frames and sequences that could be shaped to tell a narrative. Modularity means these discrete units could be assembled into a collection of units, without changing their composition, such as pixels in an image, and scripts in a code. Automation means templates and algorithms can be written to automatically index vast amounts of data through a string of text in search engines and organized media assets in databases. The quality of variability results from this digitization and modularity, and means that new media can exist in “infinite and variable versions” from the master copy.

Manovich proposes that the quality of variability is an example of how changes in media technologies correlate with social change, in that the logic of old media structured data according to systematic standardization, while the logic of new media “fits the logic of postindustrial society, which values individuality over conformity” (41). For instance, Manovich notes the invention of the assembly line, the typesetting machine, and the dimensions and frames of cinema aspects as representative of the logic of old media, while the interactivity of hyperlinking, the scalability of typefaces and fonts as well as the customization of digital content are the hallmarks of the logic of new media. In relation to cinema, Manovich argues that cinema was the first medium to sample continuous time and turn it into discrete frames that were accessible to a mass public, and therefore in essence was the first form of modern multimedia. Yet once this film is digitized, its frames no longer have to be in chronological, linear order, and become subject to manipulation enabled by the variable qualities of new media.

Lastly, the quality of transcoding is based on the fact that the structure of new media is first and foremost its “file format, type, and compression”, not its “content, meanings, context”, so on a technical level, to convert something is to restructure its data (46). However, this conversion process also has a cultural level that impacts the user experience with this new data, and Manovich calls this the “conceptual transfer” that is the transcoding of culture to a new medium. It is this second layer of transcoding, where multimedia can converge on a platform such as a website, that can have broad reaching cultural implications on human

understanding of digital content, and can have concrete effects outside of the digital sphere.

James Monaco, *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, and Beyond*, 4th ed. (Oxford University Press, USA, 2009).

In *How to Read a Film*, Monaco provides a comprehensive historical overview of the development of images and technology throughout history as narrative visual mediums, and how the physical mediums have enabled “ideas, feelings, descriptions and observations to be captured and preserved” over time (518). He argues that information has joined labor and capital in the controlling forces of society, and therefore information architecture is playing a fundamental role in our cultural architecture (524). Monaco explains that, in the 1950s, computers were strictly seen as number crunchers. However, with the creation of the graphical user interface in the 1970s, and development of tools like word processing and the mouse to interact with it, the following microcomputer revolution of the 1980s meant that the resulting access to and control of information brought the user experience with data to a new conceptualization of the potential of a computer.

Monaco references the iconic Apple Super Bowl commercial, which seemed to indicate with the slogan ‘the computer for the rest of us’ that “there was more to a computer than processing, but it could be wielded for cultural change” (522). Ultimately, Monaco argues, through developing technologies, the consumer of the 50s and 60s had become the user of today. We no longer passively watch films, but we blog about them, tweet about them, visit their website and click on further information that interests us.

Monaco also tracks the development of recent architectural possibilities and limitations of new media technologies in relation to film. In 1991 Apple released QuickTime, which was the first software program to enable audio and video text in the same environment, meaning there was a new capability of video producers to wed text, as well as sound and images, with their narratives (530). Yet these video files were still constrained by hardware such as CD-ROMS, which had too limited data storage for a full feature film, and slow internet modem speeds to stream content. The development of DVDs in 1995 meant that there was now a viable product to distribute feature length films on, and a much broader extend to which the public could purchase and consume video content. This growth in data storage is in line with a principle Monaco mentions earlier called “Moore’s Law”, developed by Gordon Moore, a founder of Intel. Moore suggests that the capabilities of storage on computer hardware is growing exponentially, doubling currently at a rate of eighteen months. The implications of this statistic on future computing devices is staggering.

Professor George P. Landow, *Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, 2nd ed. (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

George P. Landow’s *Hypertext 2.0* is a seminal text that brings together literary and computer theory, to say that the technology of hyperlinking has revolutionized conceptual systems of linearity, hierarchy and centralized thinking, in favor of multilinearity, nodes, links and networks. Landow claims this marks a paradigm shift in human thought in a postmodernist era, and is a direct response to

the strengths and weaknesses of constructed knowledge in the printed book.

Landow builds on the theories of readerly and writerly texts proposed by Barthes, the emphasis on networks and nodes in the thought process highlighted in Foucault, as well as the decentralization of the book through textual openness and intertextuality emphasized by Derrida. Landow converges these ideas with the main theories in computer technology, such as the Nelson's hypertext and Vannevar Bush's MEMEX. Ultimately, Landow argues, "Bush and Barthes, Nelson and Derrida, like all theorists of these perhaps unexpectedly intertwined subjects, begin with the desire to enable us to escape from the confines of print", and this fundamentally informs how we develop, interact with, and think about new technologies such as hypermedia. It is the potential that hyperlinking on the web that has played a fundamental role in freeing text from the confines of print.

Daniel Jared Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

Cohen and Rosenzweig provide an introductory guide to exactly what the title suggests "Gathering, Preserving and Presenting the Past on the Web". The text walks through the history and theory of web development, as well as what some of the capabilities, benefits and dangers of bringing content online might be. They discuss the seven enhancing qualities, being capacity, accessibility, flexibility, diversity, manipulability, interactivity, and hypertextuality, as well as the five dangers of quality, durability, readability, passivity, and inaccessibility.

Fundamentally, the authors believe that, just as much software is open source, key

historical texts should be open sources to the public as well, and historians should have the knowledge and tools to proactively accomplish this themselves. Therefore, Rosenzweig and Cohen call their work “a practical handbook rather than a theoretical manifesto”, which outlines the historical development of the online history world, the first steps to getting a project started, the costs and benefits of digitization, visual and structural aspects of web design, issues of copyright and fair use and issues of preservation and access online.

***The Buddha: A Film by David Grubin.* Prod. David Grubin Productions. Dir. David Grubin. PBS: Public Broadcasting Service, 2009. Web. 09 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.pbs.org/thebuddha/>>.**

The accompanying website to the PBS documentary *The Buddha* brings together many multimedia components and technical functionalities to extend the impact of the documentary itself. It provides users with the ability to quickly find and access the information they are looking for, and supplement their knowledge of the film. In ‘The Program’ section of the site, users can find information about the production company, the scholars and poets featured in the film, credits, listed to the music in the film and view an image gallery of clips from the film. The ‘Story and Teachings’ section of the site break the film into thematic segments that can be viewed with narrative text below them. This helps conceptualize the arc of the film, and directs viewers to the themes and concepts they are most interested in viewing. In the ‘Discussion’ section of the site, the user can find articles from contemporary publications, scholars and Buddhists discussing various relevant topics about Buddhism in everyday life, as well as interviews that the scholars in the film have

given in the past. There is also a section entitled 'Share Your Stories' for users to offer their feedback to the film, and enter the discussion with their experiences with Buddhism. Lastly, there is a section for 'Educational Resources', with teaching materials and lesson plans aligned to the film that teachers can integrate into the classroom curriculum.

FORM: Film Theory Literature

Compiled by Bridget Power

The American Studies department at Georgetown University stresses that one of the strengths of American Studies is its interdisciplinary nature. As a result of this emphasis on recognizing diverse ways of learning, we have decided to focus not only on a topic that can be approached from different disciplines, but also to take a multimedia approach to our thesis. Although our topic has evolved this semester, we believe that we can best explore and share our interest in how and why reenactors use the past by making a documentary film in conjunction with building a website. Together, these two mediums allow us to be transparent about our process, work effectively as a team, and produce a thesis that more people will access, consider, and analyze.

While we have found some written theses that deal with reenactment in different ways, there are very few films that deal with the subject. *Marwencol* is the most similar film that we have found, as it focuses on a man who has lost his memory, and for therapy, creates and reenacts historical themes using dolls. In thinking about how to construct our story, we are inspired by the way that a film such as *Spellbound* is able to weave interviews of several different subjects together into a cohesive story. We also hope to watch some of filmmaker Les Blank's work after reading *A New History of Documentary Film*. Ellis and McLane's book offers a comprehensive chronological review of the history of documentary filmmaking. When writing about Blank, an American documentarian, the authors say, "He has continuously explored American subcultures, finding revelation and celebration in

life's ordinary details" (309). As we explore reenactors' motivations and values, we want to respectfully and uncritically demonstrate how reenacting is ordinary for some Americans who consume, use, and share the past in different ways. Ellis and McLane praise Blank because his "subjects are allowed to speak for themselves; the camera is respectful, not intrusive. The editing is not jarring or flamboyant, and the music flows naturally from the situation at hand...If Ken Burns captures the realities of American history with the accuracy of detailed research and minute exactness, Les Blank captures it by simply witnessing" (310). Whereas in *Documenting Ourselves: Film, Video, and Culture* Sharon Sherman promotes self-reflective filmmaking, which we will steer away from in our finished product, we want to emulate Blank's ability to "witness" and convey a sense of authenticity and honesty about our filmmaking.

Sherman is interested in "folklorist filmmaking," which she views as something distinct within documentary filmmaking because it focuses on objects or aspects of life that are familiar to the filmmaker and is highly self-reflexive. While we will not be purposefully taking a self-reflexive approach in our finished film, we will be sharing on our experiences in videos that we post on our website. Sherman explains that "Folklore films combine the goal of documentary to record unstaged events with the goal of ethnodocumentary to provide information about culture" (63), which we hope to achieve as we examine different subcultures within reenacting. When offering descriptions of different movements within documentary filmmaking, Sherman explains the four "modes" of documentary filmmaking: expository, observational, interactive, and reflexive. We will use each of these modes

in different ways as we construct our film and website. Sherman's book also offers some themes (such as nationalism—or the absence of it) and approaches for us to consider as we begin to construct our film (such as post verite, ethnodocumentary, portraits of individuals, and community-centric films). Sherman would agree that documentary filmmaking is an appropriate approach for something as serious as an American Studies thesis because she claims that "The analytic approach to documentary is similar to that used by researchers in the social sciences and the humanities. One begins with raw data, analyzes it, and presents an edited interpretation to an audience of readers or viewers, who then evaluate the findings of the researcher" (5).

With this rawness in mind, we were compelled by a chapter in Keith Beattie's book, *Documentary Display*, that focuses on "rockumentaries" as a way to engage with the direct cinema approach. This book is useful because of its focus on performance and performers. While our reenactors are not rock stars, they are performers because of the activity, job, or hobby that they participate in and because of the way that they perform for us on-camera. By interviewing reenactors reenacting and by allowing them to reflect on their own reenacting, we are similarly giving our audience access to "backstage," which "is imagined as a far more 'real space' than the stage" (62), or in our case, a farm or field when they are interacting with the general public. Many reenacting events are closed to the public, and reenactors, themselves, acknowledge that it can be difficult to find out how to join the reenacting community. In addition, we are giving our viewers direct access to our filmmaking process by sharing footage and written accounts of our work as we

go throughout the year.

This is a process involving deep exploration. In his “Translator’s Preface” to Michelangelo Antonioni’s book, *That Bowling Alley on the Tiber: Tales of a Director*, William Arrowsmith explains how film is special among art forms because its process reveals meaning and direction. The process of making our film is a key component to our thesis, although this will be shared primarily on our website, not in the final version of the film, itself. Arrowsmith shares Antonioni’s own “archaeological metaphor” (xi) for filmmaking, stating that “Film, in sum, as self-discovery” (xii). Filmmakers make choices about what interests and compels them, and respond to the actions and behaviors of their subjects. With Antonioni’s idea of “self-discovery,” we understand that filmmakers are present in the film because their experience shapes what footage they capture, even if they are not purposefully trying to be “self-reflexive” as Sherman argues. Arrowsmith relates some of Antonioni’s views, saying, “My films are always works of searching...My work is like digging, it’s archaeological research among the arid material of our times” (xi). This gives all documentary filmmakers hope as they search for topics, subjects, and stories that they can make sense of and share. We are excavating a treasure in a fascinating American subculture of reenactors, which wants to explain why and how it uses the past.

Sources

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