

Critical Reflection - Josh Plante - Unpacking @ 10 King St W.

My project positions me as the author and main character of my own story. I am used as a sort of intermediary between the audience and the project. I provide the entrance into myself and my work at THEMUSEUM through everything the player does (including: learning about objects, listening to my narration, viewing the gallery, and examining the items in the cubby). I think of Jill Godmilow's manifesto on documentary film, her 9th stipulation states "at the very least, find a way to acknowledge your authorship". I've done my best to situate myself to players of the project using the methods listed above.

Another layer I consider to be me acknowledging my authorship, is the method of construction. I used so many skills to make this project that I developed at THEMUSEUM, coding for example was something I was nervous about in approaching this project, but I have had some practice at THEMUSEUM doing some simple coding and programming activities with children that eased my hesitancy towards a big coding project like this one.

My authorship of the project was intentionally a central focus of the project, in an auto-biographic project it was important to include my voice, my stories, and my body, all of which the player is meant to interpret and reflect on.

My work was primarily inspired by my own desire to reflect on myself and my workplace. But equally I approached the project with an expanded documentary mindset. Jihoon Kim has a great quote from their book that illustrates my own goals when creating my piece.

"For software and other information technologies transform a cultural object into data whose form is amorphous and thus not tied to any specific medium.

In this way, they establish a new model of communication, in which the computers

user interfaces and the softwares operations structure the users enhanced capability for dealing with the data in various ways: “Daily life and work in our society to a large extent revolve around new types of behaviors and activities which involve seeking, extracting, processing and communication large amounts of information, often quantitative one.”(9)

I was interested in exploring how objects could be documented in ways that allowed for interaction. My knowledge from game studies classes, my own life, and through work, all reinforce the idea that being able to touch, examine, inspect, and spend time with objects is more likely to interest and educate a viewer when compared to a single channel video. Not to say that single-channel doesn't offer ways to examine objects (of course it does, and there are great examples of this), but an expanded documentary mindset really benefited my goal of archiving my cubby objects in a way that encouraged viewers/players to actively seek out and be curious about all the different archived objects.

The biggest formal choice that was influenced by ethics was the choice to make an auto-biography. After reading about extractive filmmaking in Patricia Aufderheide's "Ethics in Documentary Film Production: Asserting and Changing Norms" I was a little weary of creating an extractive film. Looking back it could have been an interesting subject to challenge myself, but for a first try at a documentary, I felt like an auto-biography was a good direction to take things. I knew I wanted to make a document of my workplace, It makes for a unique and story rich subject for me to explore, but I wanted to represent it fairly, thus I decided to tell the story through my own personal lens, making sure it was obvious enough that the project was about the relationship between two separate things (myself and THEMUSEUM).

Additionally, Aufderheide states "documentary makes a claim to authentic communication about reality. Work done by documentary filmmakers affects what people assume is real."(15) This line also influenced me to focus on auto-biographical subject matter, as that way I could stay as authentic as possible and not risk misrepresenting reality. This way I was able to speak honestly about myself and my job in a real way that reflects who I am and what I do. I feel good about this choice as I feel my project does honestly reflect the truths of myself and my professional life. I believe that by scanning my objects and myself into my game, I was able to recreate a faithful digital archive of my work life.

My project most closely addresses the subjects of archive, memory, and creative treatment of reality. Firstly, the archive is the heart of my project, taking away all the narration and story from my project still leaves the impressive cataloguing feat that was the scanning and digitization of my work cubby. These objects which previously lived as forgotten relics in my cubby now have a life as digital files that will last as long as the internet. My approach to archive came from a perspective of interaction, I needed players to be able to interact with the archive. This encourages thoughtfulness, which is exactly the effect I intend for this project.

Secondly is memory. Memory also plays a large role in my project, especially as an auto-biography and reflection on the object in my cubby, and on my experience at work. My exploration of memories informed the majority of the narration and story of the project. Each object has a specific narration that recalls memories I have of that object which ties together the concepts of memory and archive neatly. I am really proud of this system, to the point of wondering whether or not an overarching narrative was even necessary.

Last is my project's position regarding the creative treatment of actuality. I did struggle quite a bit with how much I wanted to keep strictly real vs adding fictional elements. Especially for a videogame, certain things needed to be allowed despite them being far from real. For example the scale of the objects was something I struggled to decide on, I wanted my objects to be true to their real life scale, and ultimately the solution I found was by scaling every single object by 103% I could preserve the scale of Josh (the player) and the cubby, while enlarging all my objects to create a unique effect where it looks like Josh has shrunken down where actually, all the objects around him are simply enlarged unrealistically.

Other examples of creative treatment of reality in my project include: a) the actual physical position of objects in my cubby, it was a mess in reality which I slightly cleaned up to allow the player to move about easier in my game. b) again the actual position of objects was adjusted to offer some gameplay puzzles and challenges for the player to overcome. For example the fidget toys are placed in front of the hole between cubbies to challenge player progression, they will either have to figure out how to grab and move the objects out of the way, or have figured out how to jump over objects. Either way certain objects are placed to offer gameplay nuance rather than reflecting their position in reality.

The project does have some unresolvedness to it. For example the voice narration could have used some more formal polish, as well as perhaps a bit more enthusiasm. Another less formal example would be the way that I illustrated myself in relation to THEMUSEUM. I did include a gallery feature for viewers to get a look at who I am and the actual space that I work in, as well as some voice narration explaining the workplace and what I do, but to me it feels unresolved in a few ways.

First I would've liked to do more in terms of exposition and situating myself, I thought that the 2011 web documentary "Welcome to Pine Point" (Paul Shoebridge and Michael Simons) did a fantastic job of situating the author in position to the subject in a very short amount of time. Mike Simons spends the first three slides of the documentary providing details about himself and his memories growing up around Pine Point, which adds necessary sympathy to their story. This is something I have somewhat tried to replicate in my own project with the gallery functions and some early narration.

Second and finally, my story integration could've used some improvement. My work would have massively benefited from play-testing, but that was unfortunately out of scope. This would have helped me be proactive in deciding how the narrative gets across to the player, as by seeing the players actions throughout the game, I could've seen that the main audio narration was perhaps unnecessary. Or that I could've somehow better tied the main narration into the object audio system somehow. Maybe I could've had different points for different kinds of objects, but that will have to wait for when I come back to the project.

Citations

Aufderheide, Patricia. "Ethics in Documentary Film Production: Asserting and Changing Norms." *Journal of Film and Video*, vol 76, no 1, 2024, pp. 15-31.

Godmilow, Jill. "Kill the Documentary as we know it." *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: a Critical Anthology*, Scott MacKenzie, University of California Press, 2014, 473-476.

Kim, Jihoon. Documentary's Expanded Fields: New Media and the Twenty-First-Century Documentary. Introduction, pp 1-31, 2022.

Paul Shoebridge and Michael Simons, *Welcome to Pine Point*, 2011.