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THE MOCK DOC FILM SERIES:  
HISTORY OF THE MOCKUMENTARY FILM

by

VICTORIA NAPOLITANO

A master's capstone project submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,

The City University of New York

2020

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The Mock Doc Film Series:  
History of the Mockumentary Film

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Victoria Napolitano

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies  
in satisfaction of the capstone requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **The Mock Doc Film Series: History of the Mockumentary Film**

**By  
Victoria Napolitano**

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As documentaries developed a more narrative approach to storytelling, filmmakers increasingly turned to scripted or fictional elements (events, characters, etc.) to depict or recreate “reality.” Robert Flaherty, John Grierson and other pioneering documentarians employed numerous fictional devices in their movies. These filmmakers, however, were relentlessly criticized by documentary film purists who steadfastly believed that the blending of fact and fiction was in many ways unethical and an unforgivable betrayal of the genre. Such critics feared that if truth, the key characteristic of the documentary film genre, were manufactured by filmmakers then the documentary genre would lose its uniqueness. More importantly, critics feared that filmmakers could distort or manipulate reality through their use of fictional elements. In essence, a filmmaker could push his or her own agenda, or the values of a particular group or ideology, on impressionable filmgoers.

A new genre of film, challenging concepts of truth and audience perception, arose from this blending of fact and fiction. In the mockumentary film genre, a movie is presented as a documentary even though everything in it is false. Mockumentary filmmakers use parody, satire and often humor to comment on current events and ideas.

The Mock Doc film series I created, presented through chronological film programming, explores the history of the mockumentary film and how it has developed over time. It is important to note that the goal of any mockumentary film is not to enhance credibility but to explicitly question the believability of what the audience is witnessing. My Mock Doc film series will expose the public to a variety of mockumentary films. I will also look at several films, considered “traditional” documentaries by mainstream critics, which in my view are actually mockumentaries.

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*\*The Mock Doc film series program has been submitted as part of this capstone project.*

From their inception, documentaries have attempted to capture various aspects of real life. Indeed, the primary purpose of this genre was to create an historical record of noteworthy people, places and events. An “actuality film,” the precursor to the modern documentary, consisted of nothing more than brief footage of an actual event or significant historical figure (Carrier 2014).

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Lumière Brothers, who developed a rudimentary movie camera and projector, started filming real events. These films, which, for example, depicted daily life activities, consisted solely of raw, unedited footage (Carrier, 2014). There was a single continuous shot of an event or person with no narration, music or any explanation of why the subject was worthy of attention. These early Lumière productions served as a precursor to the modern documentary.

Thomas Edison, another noteworthy film pioneer, built on work begun by the Lumiere’s. Edison invited persons of renown, primarily actors and athletes, to come to his studio in New Jersey to be filmed. The resulting short films, or shorts, are considered by many to be primitive examples of documentary filmmaking (Carrier 2014). Edison, however, was carefully staging the events he filmed. For example, in Edison’s seminal short film *The Kiss*, an elderly couple is shown kissing for only a couple of seconds. This, however, is not a spontaneous act of love. The actors shown in Edison’s 1896 short film are being directed to do this. Edison is toying with his audience, presenting a fictional situation as fact (Carrier, 2014).



Actuality films, produced by Edison and his contemporaries, gave birth to the documentary with some significant differences. Actualities were very short and usually spliced together into a “program” by an exhibitor (Sklar 30-31). The audience also had no idea whether events depicted in the actuality were "fact" or "fiction." The line between the two was blurred and was, to most early filmmakers, unimportant. However, actuality films would eventually decline. Today, the raw footage that serves as the building blocks for a documentary is called "actuality footage," paying homage to pioneers like Edison.

Beginning in the early twentieth century, filmmakers created a broader and more complex version of the actuality film. This new genre was called the documentary, which itself spawned several subgenres. Although these films were more substantive, audiences still had difficulty distinguishing between fact and fantasy (Sklar, 95). It should be noted that modern filmgoers, exposed to ever increasing doses of reality television, have a similar problem determining what is real and what is “staged” for the camera. Many argue that this confusion is intrinsic to the genre, that there will always be some distortion of the truth based on what the documentary filmmaker decides to show on screen. Even if a documentarian is attempting to address a specific truth he or she must first decide what constitutes that truth.

A major subgenre of the documentary film is the mockumentary. A mockumentary takes the form of a documentary, but the people and events depicted are fictional and are often viewed satirically. Through the lens of parody, filmmakers

examine and comment on current events and issues important to our society (McKittrick 2019).

One of the earliest examples of the construction of non-fiction cinema and its validity can be traced back to director Robert Flaherty's 1922 film, *Nanook of the North*. Considered by many to be the first feature-length documentary, Flaherty's movie captures the life of an Inuit man named Nanook and the struggles he and his family face surviving the harsh conditions of the Canadian Arctic. Flaherty was hired years earlier to explore and document the lives of people in this region. However, while testing his film in front of an audience, a cigarette burned the original film stock and all the footage was lost (Ettleman 2019). In 1920, Flaherty returned to the Canadian Arctic, refocusing his narrative solely on one man and his family.

Flaherty's film was one of the first to reject the conventions of the dominant travelogue genre of film. Such movies, generally short in duration, were created so the public could view different cultures and societies from around the world (Sklar). The events depicted on screen were happening in real time and simply recorded by the filmmaker. Audiences began to lose interest in this style of filmmaking, so directors like Flaherty began carefully editing such footage into longer, feature-length narrative films with a story to keep audiences entertained. These types of films became more profitable and enticing to audiences (Sklar).

Although *Nanook of the North* has been praised for its artistry and is considered culturally significant, there is much controversy surrounding the legitimacy of the film as a documentary. Film historians discovered that Flaherty staged many events in his film and presented them as reality. In one scene, depicting

events inside an igloo, Flaherty initially discovered that his camera was too large to fit inside the structure. To solve this problem, Flaherty built his own igloo large enough to accommodate his camera. Even the name given to the protagonist, Nanook, was not the Inuit man's real name (Ettleman 2019). Nanook was named Allakariallak, and his "wife" in the film is believed to have been Flaherty's real wife. Flaherty adopted the same practice of renaming "native" participants in his 1926 documentary *Moana* (Ettleman 2019).

There are several other changes Flaherty made to enhance the real narrative of his film. Allakariallak used guns in his hunting. Nanook, however, used only traditional weapons like spears (Ettleman 2019). This small change served to obscure or fictionalize the Inuit's true lifestyle. Flaherty, to his credit, offered audiences a compelling glimpse into a society they would never actually encounter. Unfortunately, that society was in many ways constructed by the filmmaker.

It can be argued that *Nanook of the North*, is an early example of a Mockumentary. Mockumentaries generally use the same cinematic elements as documentaries to depict their skewed version of reality. Both genres typically feature characters who break the fourth wall and speak directly to the audience. In some cases, there may be an on-camera director who actively participates in the story and provides a framework or backstory for the fictional documentary (McKittrick 2019). Also, mockumentaries often utilize full or partial improvisation to create a sense of spontaneity or reality as seen in reality-based documentaries. Within mockumentary films, there is little or no explanation as to why the events shown are being filmed.

The audience is expected to suspend their disbelief. Finally, the mockumentarian often criticizes practices used in documentaries (McKittrick 2019).

Mockumentaries are heavily influenced by the *cinéma vérité* style of filmmaking, which became popular in Europe during the late 1950s. The term *cinéma vérité* was coined by European filmmakers and emerged during the French New Wave Movement (Axmaker 2019). Using *cinéma vérité* as a model, French director Jean Rouch, was one of the filmmakers who developed the “direct cinema” subgenre of the documentary. By foregoing many of the conventional standards of filmmaking and embracing new technology like the hand-held camera and synchronous sound, Rouch and other members of the Direct Cinema Movement strove to depict reality in its truest form (Axmaker 2019).

Bill Nicholas was one of the first film historians to study the documentary genre in great detail. Nicholas developed six modes of documentaries: poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflexive, performative. The *cinéma vérité* style, as developed by Rouch, best reflects Nicholas’ observational mode. In this mode, the filmmaker observes the truth of his or her story by letting the camera capture its subjects uninterrupted (Nicholas). When documenting individuals, the audience understands that those on camera are aware that they are being filmed and this awareness may affect the way they appear on screen. Directors employing the principles of *cinéma vérité* acknowledge the presence of the camera and crew, allowing filmmakers to freely interact with the subjects of their films (Nicholas).

In order to create this sense of reality, *cinéma vérité* filmmakers used handheld camerawork and synchronous sound to present reality in its most objective form.

Mockumentarians utilize these same tools and exploit the audience's familiarity with the conventions of documentary filmmaking and *cinéma vérité*, to trick audiences into believing that the film they are watching is real. It can be argued that mockumentaries have a completely different end goal. While documentaries in the *cinéma vérité* style strive to depict an objective truth, mockumentaries depict a false truth disguised as reality (Axmaker 2019).

Mockumentaries are often more appealing to audiences due to their satirical content and comedic tone. The goal of most mockumentary films is to trick the audience into believing that the people and events depicted are (or were) real. Indeed, to capture the audience's trust, directors of mockumentaries apply many of the techniques and conventions of documentary films. Mockumentaries leave the audience questioning the truth of what they have experienced. Based on this deliberate manipulation, a mockumentary can appear to be both real and fake, both shocking and humorous, both projected and actual.

Mockumentaries are also purposefully structured to force audiences to question the reliability and believability of what they are witnessing. While many early documentary films used fakery to enhance realism, mockumentaries are designed to look as realistic as possible, both to manipulate the audience and to challenge them to question what they accept as truth. Indeed, mockumentary filmmakers want the audience to become more critical of what they see on screen (Axmaker 2019). One interesting element of the mockumentary is that most of the time an audience is or becomes aware that what they are seeing on screen is false.

This makes the experience more enjoyable because the audience member feels that he or she is in on the joke.

Although the mockumentary became most successful during the 1980s, there are several early examples of the genre that greatly influenced subsequent filmmakers. Director Luis Buñuel's 1933 surrealist film *Land without Bread* parodied the popular ethnographic documentaries that were being released at the time. Buñuel references travelogue films of the period to explore the public's fascination with "exotic" destinations. Ironically, the subject of *Land without Bread*, the Spanish town of Las Hurdes, is plagued by poverty. Buñuel replaces the idyllic village of the viewer's imagination with a nightmarish wasteland of hopelessness and despair. Buñuel staged many scenes in the film and was met with heavy criticism for the director's unsympathetic approach to the subject matter and the film's dispassionate narration (Goodmill and Shapiro, 86).

Although revolutionary for its time, *Land without Bread* paled in comparison to a subsequent radio drama devised by director Orson Welles for the Halloween episode of the anthology series *The Mercury Theatre*. Welles' 1938 adaptation of the H. G. Wells novel *The War of the Worlds*, skillfully blurred the line between reality and fiction and created a blueprint for future mockumentaries. Welles updated the story to the present day and presented it through a series of fabricated news bulletins (Doherty, 22). Welles' serious approach, bolstered by the recognizable format, created a believability that convinced many listeners that the Earth was under attack by an army of alien invaders (Doherty, 23).

It is speculated that the mass panic that ensued was intensified because many listeners did not hear a disclaimer that was read at the beginning of the broadcast. In addition, many Americans were anxiously awaiting some type of global conflict based on events that were unfolding in Europe at the time. Police officers unsuccessfully attempted to silence the broadcast based on reports of widespread hysteria (Doherty, 24). While the scale of such hysteria is unknown, the *War of the Worlds* broadcast advanced the notion of fiction presented as fact.

Some thirty years after the director's infamous broadcast, filmmakers like Richard Lester and Federico Fellini began to experiment with Welles' mockumentary approach. In Richard Lester's film *Hard Day's Night* (1964), the Beatles played highly fictionalized versions of themselves. The movie was a comedy and sharply satirized the events that constituted a "day in the life" of the band. The camera technique used in the film is also meant to show that the film is real. Instead of more traditional stationary shots, the camera moves throughout the film with the members of the band (Springer, 22). For example, when the Beatles are being chased down the street by their fans, the camera is jagged and bumpy, which serves to reinforce the reality of the events depicted in the film (Springer, 22).

As a child in Italy, director Federico Fellini was fascinated by the circus. Fellini drew on his childhood obsession to create *The Clowns* (1970), another early mockumentary that followed the Welles blueprint. Throughout the film, Fellini fuses his dreamlike storytelling with the mockumentary genre to explore the theme of child wonder. The line between fact and fiction becomes increasingly blurred, as the film progresses. The first half of the film, which follows a boy's growing fascination with

the circus, has all the hallmarks of a conventional narrative film. Halfway through the film, however, the narrative abruptly shifts. Fellini and his crew suddenly appear, and we learn that they are in the process of filming a documentary on the history of clowns (Carroll, 2014). It becomes difficult for the viewer to distinguish what is real. For example, the audience doesn't know whether actress Anita Ekberg is playing a character in the boy's story or herself (Carroll, 2014).

The mockumentary genre arguably reached its peak in 1984 with the release of director Rob Reiner's *This is Spinal Tap*. Reiner's film tells the story of Spinal Tap, a fictional British heavy metal band. Reiner uses the conventional elements of documentary filmmaking and parody to probe the nature of fame in modern society (Roscoe and Hight). Reiner also casts himself as a character in the film. The director ironically plays documentary filmmaker (Marti Di Berger) who is seen on screen filming the band.

*This is Spinal Tap* was inspired by the Rolling Stone's film *Gimme Shelter* and Bob Dylan's *Don't Look Back*. In each film, the director takes a cinéma vérité approach to his subject, filming the respective musicians both onstage and off. It should be acknowledged that the filmmakers in each case approach the subject as a fan and, over the course of filming, formed a strong bond with their subjects. Thus, the audience is presented with highly subjective and at times glorified versions of the performers (Hight and Roscoe).

Reiner's very successful film would inspire numerous music-themed mockumentaries. Director Rusty Cundieff's 1994 film *Fear of a Black Hat* explored the evolution of hip-hop and the rap community. The movie follows fictional



sociologist Nina Blackburn (Kasi Lemmons) on her yearlong study of rap artists and their impact on American culture. The comedy parodies several prominent figures in the world of rap music and exposes existing racial tensions. To create an air of reality, Cundieff casts real-life hip-hop artists to play fictional versions of them. The film is replete with stereotypes associated with the genre and portrays the community as hypersexual and male-dominated (Hight and Roscoe, 124 ). Through comedy, satire and his faux documentary approach to the material, Cundieff engages the audience in a larger and far more serious discussion about race (Hight and Roscoe, 124).

Although past their peak period, mockumentaries remain popular with film audiences. A current auteur of this subgenre is actor, writer and producer Sacha Baron Cohen. Cohen, who starred in *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (2006) and *Bruno* (2009), created two very real characters. Cohen began his career in television, taking the same mockumentary approach in his successful television series *The Ali G Show*. Cohen's mock interview program spawned several highly successful television programs that follow a similar format and style. Successful comedies like *The Office*, *Modern Family*, *Arrested Development* and *Parks and Recreation* have used the mockumentary style to great effect.

Behind the over-the-top and often bizarre personas of his characters, Cohen has explored serious social issues like bigotry and fundamentalism. Cohen's film *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* has become the most successful film of the genre, having grossed in

excess of one hundred million dollars, demonstrating that the genre still resonates with audiences. In the film, Borat is a Kazakhstani television host who is sent to the United States by his nation's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Throughout the film, Borat interviews real Americans who clearly believe that he is a real reporter from Kazakhstan. Borat struggles with the language and is completely ignorant of American society. The movie is not merely a satire of the foreigner in a strange land; it is a commentary and at times a deconstruction of American culture and values (Brkan, 2019).

*Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* repeatedly parodies documentary film and journalistic conventions. The film uses parody to expose the "truthfulness" of documentaries. The movie is also equally critical of the Kazakhstani and American cultures (Brkan, 2019). The film was controversial immediately upon its release. Several individuals who appeared in the film, among them prominent politicians, said that they were baited into making racially insensitive or anti-Semitic remarks (Brkan, 2019). The purpose of the film, however, was to expose such prejudices and, by doing so, change society for the better.

Several recent mockumentaries have rejected Cohen's comedic approach to the genre. For example, 1999's *The Blair Witch Project*, considered by many to be a supernatural horror film, contains numerous elements that make it a mockumentary. Directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, the film tells the fictional story of three film students who travel to Burkittsville, Maryland to make a documentary about a local legend, the Blair Witch. Over the course of the film, each student

mysteriously disappears. Heather (one of the students filming the documentary) takes a cinéma vérité approach to her film, provoking her companions to force a response (Highley and Weinstock, 2014) .

During the course of the movie, the fictional film crew constantly reminds the audience that what they are watching is “recovered footage” shot. Found footage is a film subgenre that is most often associated with the mockumentary. The events on screen are typically seen through the camera of one or more of the characters involved, often accompanied by their real-time, off-camera commentary (Turner, 2014).

*The Blair Witch Project* was one of the earliest “found footage” films. For added realism, the cinematography was designed to appear as if the participants themselves were filming the action. This was achieved through shaky, pseudo-amateurish camera work and naturalistic acting. In addition, the footage was given an incomplete or "raw" look as if those who “found” it had edited it into a coherent narrative (Highley and Weinstock, 2004). Finally, the directors did not include a framing device to explain how the students’ lost footage was found.

There are several elements that are deliberately missing from *The Blair Witch Project* that reinforce the illusion of reality. For example, there are no visual cues that would lead the audience to recognize that they are watching a work of fiction. The cast is made up of unknown actors, there is no music score, production values are minimal and there are no establishing shots. Even the local townspeople who are asked about the myth seem real (Turner, 2014).

The mise en scène and cinematography of the film also contribute to the “false factuality” the directors have created. Additionally, the absence of special effects and gore add to the realism. The directors’ deliberately minimalistic approach allows the audience to accept the film’s core fiction that a supernatural being is stalking the students as they move through the dense forest (Turner, 2014).

Another aspect of *The Blair Witch Project* that made many believe it was an actual documentary was the marketing and promotion of the film. The movie is one of the first films to be marketed almost exclusively via the Internet. The directors created an official website for the film containing faux police reports and newsreel interviews about the incidents surrounding the students’ disappearance (Turner). This type of marketing led to public debate as to whether the film was a real documentary or a work of fiction. In addition, during screenings of the film, flyers describing the students as “missing persons” were distributed to audiences (Turner, 2014).

Ultimately, this type of promotion spurred public interest and substantially boosted box office receipts. More importantly, *The Blair Witch Project* became the catalyst for a numerous “found footage” films (Highley and Winestock, 2004).

Many of the elements of the mockumentary genre can be seen in purely fictional films. One notable example is the 2015 film *What We Do in The Shadows*, directed by Jemaine Clement and Taika Waititi. Filmed by a fictional documentary crew, the movie explores the lives of four roommates living in modern day Wellington, New Zealand. The roommates have one significant trait in common, they are all vampires. The film mirrors a contemporary reality television show where the characters talk directly to the camera and are aware that they are being filmed.

Throughout the film, we see the centuries old vampires trying to navigate life in the modern world (Rabin, 2015).

The directors purposely satirize the archetypes and tropes found in vampire films. The vampires in the film are based on their predecessors, such as Dracula star of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The film juxtaposes the mundane with the supernatural. Superhuman creatures are forced to deal with the various mundane chores that humans perform on a daily basis (Rabin, 2015). Unlike many of the films previously discussed, the film is not meant to trick the audience into believing that vampires exist. On the contrary, the film is mocking the multiple film genres.

Within the mockumentary genre, there are several films that are particularly good at deceiving audiences. One such film is director Casey Affleck's 2010 film *I'm Still Here*. The film documents actor Joaquin Phoenix's transformation from actor to rapper. Over the course of a year, Phoenix writes, rehearses, and eventually performs his own rap music for the first time in front of an audience. Before the release of the film, there was no comment made by the director, crew, or cast as to the validity of the story (Robinson, 2010).

At the beginning of the film, Phoenix states that his career is fake and shortly after is seen announcing to the public that he plans to quit acting and pursue a new career as a hip-hop musician. Phoenix slowly transforms into an unkempt, erratic version of himself. Prior to the film being released, the "new" Phoenix was a guest on host David Letterman's *Late Show*. During the interview, Letterman questions Phoenix on his career change. It's clear to his viewers that Letterman does not know if this was real or some type of performance art. Phoenix maintains a serious façade

throughout, reinforcing the truth of his career change. Later, while filming the mockumentary, Phoenix tells director Affleck that he cannot understand why people will not accept his desire to become a rapper (Robinson, 2010).

Although Affleck and Phoenix subsequently revealed that the film was a hoax, there are many elements in the film that contribute to the film's aura of reality. The actors are all in on the joke and never break "character." For example, Sean "Diddy" Combs, an actual rapper and producer, coaches Phoenix on the finer points of music production. The film's main purpose is to expose the media's gullibility and to remind audiences that they must always question, not only what they're told, but what they themselves perceive (Robinson, 2010).

In a 2010 interview with film critic Roger Ebert, Affleck discusses his reasons for making *I'm Still Here*. The director states, "My aim was not to fool. My aim was to provoke thought and stir emotion...I was making a movie. In a movie we try to deceive. In theaters, as they say, the deceived are the wisest. I was trying to help the audience suspend their disbelief" (Ebert, 2010). Affleck describes the powerful impact a mockumentary can have on audiences. Affleck, like many mockumentary filmmakers, wants his audience not just to question what they are witnessing, but to think about the fine line between fact and fiction. He also describes his film as a satire of our celebrity obsessed culture.

Years before directing the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Peter Jackson released his own mockumentary, *Forgotten Silver* (1994). This television movie tells the story of a forgotten New Zealand film director, Colin McKenzie (a fictional character portrayed by actor and filmmaker Costas Botes). Throughout the film, Jackson

uncovers several “lost” films directed by McKenzie. The mockumentary contains deadpan interviews from real actors, film historians and archivists, which highlight McKenzie’s many contributions to early film. McKenzie, who is compared to filmmakers like Thomas Edison and the Lumiere Brothers, is portrayed as a technological innovator who pioneered color on film and sound on film (Miller, 107). The film is so convincing that the audience can easily accept McKenzie as the forgotten genius described in the film.

Before *Forgotten Silver* was broadcast, *New Zealand Listener* magazine ran an article about the film and how Jackson had “discovered” a historically significant lost filmmaker. In addition, the film was billed as a documentary that supported a New Zealand Film Commission initiative to discover and preserve lost or forgotten films (Miller, 108). All these elements, together with the film’s parade of film historians and other experts, led to the public’s acceptance of McKenzie as a real person, albeit one long forgotten by history.

When Jackson ultimately revealed that his film was a hoax, he was met with some public criticism. Many viewers felt betrayed and were embarrassed that they believed in the film’s veracity. Others felt that the film wasted public funds, having been supported financially by New Zealand’s national film commission (Miller, 109-110). Today, *Forgotten Silver* is seen as an ode to movie history and reinforces the importance of film preservation.

For my capstone project, I developed my own curated mockumentary film series entitled, “The Mock Doc.” The idea for my capstone project arose out of numerous classroom discussions and a final project, which I created for a previous

class that focused on documentary films. Specifically, the class included a unit on the mockumentary film. I was intrigued by this unique film subgenre and decided to make it the focus of my capstone project.

My interest in film programming began from my yearlong internship at a Manhattan based performing arts center. During my internship, I worked with the Director of Film Programs to help with the different film series and events that took place throughout the year. First hand, I saw the hard work that goes into hosting a public screening or an individual movie series. With film programming, you must select several films and gain permission from distributors to market and exhibit or show each film.

At the performing arts center, there were various themed events and films would be curated to address such themes. This helped me to design my project since I had to narrow down a broad theme and focus on a specific genre of film. From my initial research, I noticed there were not many film series specifically dedicated to this genre of film. I ultimately decided to focus on a series dedicated to the mockumentary film. In my view, the mockumentary is a worthy subject for a film series based on its palpable cultural impact and popularity.

For this project, I watched many films of all different genres to determine which movies to include in the film series. I narrowed my list down to twenty films. Each film ultimately contains all the hallmarks of a mockumentary and examines a social issue relevant of today's society. In addition, each film I selected represented the filmmaker's discreet worldview. I presented the finished "mock" screening at the



Graduate Center on Monday, December 3, 2019. I invited friends, faculty, and students to experience the films included in my series.

The one film I chose to screen that night was director Peter Jackson's 1994 mockumentary, *Forgotten Silver*. I chose this film because I believe it's a perfect example of the mockumentary genre. It is also one of a handful of films that audiences often believe is a true story. I also considered the marketing aspect of my choice, especially if this should become a real event. In my experience, audiences tend to skip a film series when the individual movies are available to purchase or are easily accessible through a streaming service. *Forgotten Silver* is unfamiliar to most viewers. It is not easy to find and, if you can find it, is very expensive to buy. This makes the film more of an event.

Although this was a mock screening, it was important for me to contextualize the film for those in attendance. Before the film was shown, I briefly introduced it, providing viewers with a simple backstory. I also provided the audience with a general overview of the mockumentary film genre.

The second part of my project was to create a program to enhance the movie going experience, which I would distribute at the screening. I decided to present the films chronologically to better track the history and development of the mockumentary. I next concentrated on writing a detailed description of each film including an explanation of why it fit into my series. I also identified visuals to compliment the text. Since attendees might not be familiar with the mockumentary subgenre or the specific films in the series, I included a general explanation of the

series as a whole that explained the significance of this subgenre. Finally, I printed a hard copy of the program and had it professionally bound.

My ultimate goal is to work in film programming in either a theatre or film festival. This capstone project has helped me to prepare for this career. Throughout my time in graduate school, my passion for film has grown tremendously. I strongly believe that such passion is the key to becoming a good film programmer.

Curated film programming is also important because it allows the public to experience films that they may not have seen. It also is vital for film preservation, to ensure these films live on. I strongly believe that the film series I developed for my capstone project could be presented publicly and I would like to explore this topic in greater detail after I graduate.

The mockumentary is a powerful subgenre because of its social and political awareness. The mix of comedy and sarcasm normally found in these films provides the impetus for the frank discussion of serious social issues. A mockumentary allows the viewer to more easily confront uncomfortable subject matter. In short, the mockumentary is a softer version of its more respectable and serious counterpart, the documentary. The mockumentary is worthy of study and the public should continue to be exposed to films of this genre.

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## Filmography

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3. *A Hard Day's Night*. Directed by Richard Lester. United Artists. 1964.
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5. *The Atomic Café*. Directed by Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader, Pierce Rafferty. Libra Films. 1984.
6. *This Is Spinal Tap*. Directed by Rob Reiner. Embassy Pictures. 1984.
7. *Fear of a Black Hat*. Directed by Rusty Cundieff. The Samuel Goldwyn Company. 1993.
8. *Forgotten Silver*. Directed by Peter Jackson. First Run Features. 1994.
9. *The Watermelon Woman*. Directed by Cheryl Dunne. First Run Features. 1996.
10. *The Blair Witch Project*. Directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez. Artisan Entertainment. 1999.
11. *Dark Side of the Moon*. Directed By William Karel. Point du Jour International. 2002.
12. *A Day Without a Mexican*. Directed by Sergio Arau. Altavista Films and Televisa Cine. 2004.
13. *Incident at Loch Ness*. Directed by Zak Penn. Abramorama. 2004.
14. *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*. Directed by Larry Charles. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. 2006.
15. *For Your Consideration*. Directed by Christopher Guest. Warner Independent Pictures. 2006
16. *District 9*. Directed by Neill Blomkamp. Sony Pictures Releasing. 2009.
17. *I'm Still Here*. Directed by Casey Affleck. Magnolia Pictures. 2010.
18. *Exit Through the Gift Shop*. Directed by Banksy. Producers Distribution Agency. 2010.
19. *What We Do In The Shadows*. Directed by Jemaine Clement and Taika Waititi. The Orchard. 2014.
20. *Pop Star Never Stop Never Stopping*. Directed by Jorma Taccone and Akiva Schaffer. Universal Pictures. 2016.