

Sorry, this Video Does Not Exist: Curating the digital documentary

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Abstract: Documentary filmmaking has evolved through its inceptions in 1922's *Nanook of the North* to 2018's *Icarus* alongside disruptive changes in technology, production methods, and filmmaking styles. Ubiquitous video devices and internet distribution platforms have expanded the universe of nonfiction video in forms as divergent as fleeting, six-second Vine videos and studio-developed, feature-length films. Given these immense changes, film archivists have begun to wrestle with the conundrum of preserving digital moving images. Before the digital age, films could be preserved using relatively-settled archival techniques; digital production and distribution have thrown wrenches into the moving image preservation works. Documentary films are particularly fragile cultural objects because they are often produced by independent filmmakers with limited resources for preserving their digital media.

My dissertation research sits at the intersection of contemporary documentary filmmaking, moving image archiving and digital preservation. The goal of the research is to begin to identify conceptual and curatorial models for contemporary documentary films, the vast majority of which are born digital, and to consider how changes in the industry demand creative strategies for curating and preserving digital documentaries. Filmmakers must navigate an increasingly complex landscape of digital tools and services, many of which are commercial and pose challenges for curation and preservation. Comparative workflow models generated through interviews with digital documentary filmmakers will help identify how filmmakers understand and use digital platforms and tools. Outcomes of conducting this research include identifying strategies for supporting archivists, filmmakers and curators in providing effective digital stewardship for these unique cultural objects.

About the Author:

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