JEFFREY GEIGER

Taking Aim:
New Documentary and War

Abstract: This essay examines some of the contours of new documentary’s relationship to war, first characterizing historical and theoretical frameworks while considering the social and spectatorial impact of moving images that have engaged with war themes and imagery. The focus falls on new documentary and representations of the war in Iraq, asking if these cultural mediations of war might indicate shades of an ‘Iraq syndrome’ in the making. Finally, a close reading of Michael Moore’s Fahrenheit 9/11 considers the film in light of social and representational issues facing new documentary, marking the film’s postmodernist and surrealist tendencies. I argue that Moore’s film ends up projecting ambiguous and perhaps self-contradictory conclusions about the US’s reliance on war as a mechanism for advancing its global social, ideological, and economic agendas. At the same time, the film manages to capture elements of the heterogeneity and instability of Americans’ own national and patriotic self-perceptions.