

Teaching the Theatre of Argument in *Fahrenheit 9/11*

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Persuasive argument is not only the *ur-*discourse of academia, but an extension of the more familiar forms of persuasion that drive the public discourse of journalism and often the talk of students themselves. . . . It is by obscuring these continuities, or at best leaving students to discover them on their own (as a minority do), that schools and colleges make themselves seem opaque.

— Gerald Graff, *Clueless in Academe*

Because *Roger and Me*, *Bowling for Columbine*, and *Fahrenheit 9/11*¹ make strong claims supported by personal interviews, news footage, and statistical evidence, a number of secondary and college instructors teach Michael Moore's films as arguments. In fact, the director has created an on-line Teacher's Guide to facilitate class discussion of his films.² Nonetheless, Moore's signature blend of humor, provocation, and allegation has an uneasy relation to academic discourse. When I explained to a fellow conference participant that I taught *Fahrenheit 9/11* in a composition course focused on researched argument, for instance, she replied that this must have been "fun" for the students. Other colleagues have asked me pointedly why I do not teach more serious and "objective" political documentaries. Administrators at a community college in Salisbury, North Carolina, actually pulled instructor Davis March from his English composition classroom for showing the movie to his students, which administrators claim violated the school's policy that staff members remain nonpartisan during election season.³ For these critics, Moore is a populist and provocateur who plays so fast and loose with argumentative principles that his work has no place within the classroom.

I would reply that it is precisely Moore's unsettling blend of argument and entertainment, solemnity and humor, which creates a useful standpoint from which to examine the kinds of rhetorical strategies so often discussed in composition

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textbooks. In his discussion of Michel Foucault's "games of truth," Kurt Spellmeyer explains the function of this "outsider" point of view: "Foucault characterizes the formation of knowledge as a series of 'discontinuities' or redirections. Players in a game of truth—as opposed to powerless spectators—participate by learning to 'think differently,' repeatedly seeking an 'outside' to the existing confines of the game."⁷⁴ Foucault here stresses that knowledge is neither a static body of information nor submission to the rules of a discipline, but rather an activity in which we scrutinize and perhaps modify argumentative conventions. Since *Fahrenheit 9/11* makes powerful truth-claims at the same time as it modifies the techniques of more "objective" documentaries, it encourages us to interrogate the conventions of academic argumentation as well. Do Moore's "rules of the game"—which are distinctly theatrical—form knowledge different than that produced by argumentative principles in the classroom? How should we regard the relation of academic argument to emergent popular discourses that also make claims about matters of common concern, support them with research, and posit an audience that wants to know "the truth"?

I began the unit on Moore's film by asking students to reconstruct the larger context of the director's support for his claims and thus assess his strategies, and I have found the film valuable for the way that it encourages students to think about the use of evidence in their own writing, on the one hand, and makes them examine the cultural context and reception of the film's use of evidence, on the other. In doing so, it avoids several problems commonly encountered by teachers who integrate film into writing instruction. One method of employing film draws on students' visual literacy as a means of fostering their writing skills. For instance, students study the filmic principles of continuity editing or camera angle as a means of mastering analogous techniques in their own writing. When using cinematic conventions as analogies for writing strategies, however, student and instructor risk erasing awareness of the specific formal and cultural properties of film. Another approach emphasizes giving students the tools that they need to master the formal properties of film. If the course overwhelmingly focuses on this specialized language, the composition classroom may become a kind of Film Analysis 101. Here we lose the ability to reflect on the composition of film as a means of thinking about the process of writing. Additionally, as Patricia Caillé found when teaching from this model, students' well-crafted interpretations "somehow remained external to [their affective] experience of the film and tended to disavow this experience."⁷⁵ Moreover, she claims that "the privileged focus on representation squeezes out the material conditions of production and reception of film as a cultural artifact with its own shifting relationship to culture and to the viewers themselves. Film becomes instead a self-contained and autonomous rebus to be deciphered."⁷⁶ Caillé compensates for this limitation by focusing on how a set of contemporary documentary films use personal narratives to produce specific kinds of knowledge. She then encourages

her students to think about how the filmmaker's strategic use of the personal has shaped their subject positions and emotional responses to the film.

Fahrenheit 9/11 does not ask students to reflect on personal discourse, but rather on the most public of conversations. Because Moore's use of footage from press conferences, interview shows, and news broadcasts has been the subject of public controversy, students do not risk losing sight of either the construction or reception of the film's claims. I teach it in a class that focuses on researched argument, required of all first-year students, in which I want them to move beyond thinking about evidence in their arguments as bits of knowledge artfully arranged in support of a claim. For this second assignment in particular, they are to make the framing of evidence itself an area of investigation. It is useful that our textbook for the course, *Writing Arguments*, does explicitly use the camera analogy when describing the framing of evidence. "Our use of the word 'frame,'" the authors explain,

derives metaphorically from a window frame or the frame of a camera's viewfinder. When you look through a frame, some part of your field of vision is blocked off, while the material appearing in the frame is emphasized. Through framing, a writer maximizes the reader's focus on some data, minimizes the reader's focus on other data, and otherwise guides the reader's vision and response.⁷

Although *Writing Arguments* does urge students to think carefully about how they frame evidence, it provides only the most cursory treatment of what divides fair and manipulative framing tactics. Of course, many students have heard that a writer should not quote someone out of context. The debate over how Moore edits his sequences nonetheless forces them to think more deeply about the responsibilities and ethos of an author who uses quotations from authorities, statistics, and official documents to make his case.

Certainly, we had to address first the vexed issue of the genre of *Fahrenheit 9/11* in order to discuss its use of evidence. Students readily see that we cannot consider the film a documentary in the sense of a straightforward presentation of facts or information. The class found *Film Quarterly* writer Miles Orvell's definition of Moore's 1989 film *Roger and Me* as a "documentary satire" helpful. Orvell explains that what Moore delivers in much of *Roger and Me* is "not the 'straight' truth of documentary but the oblique truth of satire . . . We expect 'truth' from a documentary. We don't expect it in quite the same literal way from satire."⁸ While this distinction served as a good starting point for our discussion, we decided that it does not preclude a discussion about veracity in the film, in part because the film depicts such a duplicitous administration. The opening shots of the film show President George W. Bush, then-national security adviser Condelezza Rice,

and then-secretary of state Colin Powell, among others, as they are meticulously groomed for various on-screen appearances. These shots of make-up, lighting, and hair professionals hiding imperfections anticipate the film's portrayal of a Bush administration concealing incompetence, heartlessness, and cronyism. They suggest that Moore will take us backstage, that we will see the alliances and unscripted moments usually off-limits to viewers. While the film does not purport to be objective or neutral in any way, then, it claims to show a side of America and its leaders that mainstream news outlets and the administration would rather not have us see.

Moore provided his own explanation of the film's genre in an interview, during which he explained that the film is "an op-ed piece. It's my opinion about the last four years of the Bush administration . . . I'm not trying to pretend that this is some sort of, you know, fair and balanced work of journalism . . ." We compared this statement with the following account of an author's persuasive *ethos* in our textbook:

Besides being knowledgeable about your issue, you need to demonstrate fairness and courtesy to opposing views. Because true argument can occur only where persons may reasonably disagree with one another, your ethos will be strengthened if you demonstrate that you understand and empathize with other points of view. There are times, of course, when you may appropriately scorn an opposing view. But those times are rare, and they mostly occur when you address audiences pre-disposed to your point of view. Demonstrating empathy to alternative views is generally the best strategy.¹⁰

Students pointed out that since most Americans are familiar with Moore's political orientation, it is highly unlikely that someone powerfully opposed to his views would devote the time and money to view the film. Quick research confirmed this intuition, showing that a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll of 8-11 July 2004, found that only four percent of Republicans surveyed had seen the movie, compared with ten percent of Democrats and independents. Almost two-thirds of Republicans said they would not see the movie.¹¹ While class viewers exempted the film from the conventional understanding of argument, then, in which Moore should fully explore alternative views, they argued that, when an editorial cites research or quotes others in support of its claim, that data enters the public domain and is subject to verification.

Although many of Moore's critics tend to describe the film in purely emotive terms—"bombastic," "searing," "explosive," and so forth—I found the opposite to be true in terms of student response. Most class viewers did have powerful

subjective responses to the film, yet the nature of its argument pushed them beyond merely stating an opinion: they had to undertake research of their own in order to evaluate its claims, which led us to consider the relation between mainstream and alternative media in America. *Fahrenheit 9/11* won a twenty-minute standing ovation and the highest honors at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival. After its release on 24 June 2004, the film broke all box office records for a documentary. Since that time, however, scores of website authors have attacked Moore's claims in the film. He has responded to these accusations with a website of his own, citing mainstream news sources as verification of his assertions. We found this ironic because the film's opening sequence lampoons network news reports: Dan Rather projects Al Gore the winner in the 2000 Presidential election, CNN follows suit by calling the election for Gore, and finally Fox calls the election for George W. Bush. This series of shots, accompanied by raucous banjo playing, depicts major news outlets such as CNN as inaccurate and biased in their reporting. Moore, nonetheless, often quotes articles from the CNN.com website for verification of his claims on MichaelMoore.com. Moore's films, internet advocacy sites, partisan political bestsellers, and talk radio, then, provide a different perspective on national affairs than that of network news programming. When the accuracy of a claim is called into question, nonetheless, Moore, in addition to other political pundits, references network news and major urban newspapers. I pointed out to students that this does not mean that major media outlets somehow report the "truth," while the alternative media does not. As the breaking of the Monica Lewinsky story by independent internet reporter Matt Drudge illustrated, the mainstream media may follow the lead of an alternative news source. At this historical moment, though, urban newspapers and news bureaus have the name recognition and fact-checking capabilities that make them the more persuasive sources for many Americans.

After closely scrutinizing the film's claims, many students did not find the accuracy of "facts" as problematic as the framing of that evidence, particularly Moore's selective quotation. For instance, *Fahrenheit 9/11* shows Condoleezza Rice saying, "Oh, indeed there is a tie between Iraq and what happened on 9/11." Rice actually said this within the context of a statement from November 28, 2003, in which she claimed that "Oh, indeed there is a tie between Iraq and what happened on 9/11. It's not that Saddam was somehow himself and his regime involved in 9/11, but, if you think about what caused 9/11, it is the rise of ideologies of hatred that lead people to drive airplanes into buildings in New York."¹² In his editing of the piece, Moore suggests a reading that Rice herself disavows in the second line. Most class viewers saw this as a clear distortion of Rice's meaning, and Moore has not responded to readers who see this as an unethical quoting practice.

In another area of investigation, students made arguments in which they reconstructed the larger legal or cultural contexts of evidence. For instance, in one sequence, Moore exposes the close personal and business connections between the

Bush family and Saudi oil interests. He recounts that Bush's old National Guard friend James Bath had become the money manager for the bin Laden family, saying, "James Bath himself in turn invested in George W. Bush." Moore here claims that Bath invested bin Laden money in Bush's fledgling oil company, Arbusto, which would later give Bush ample motivation as President for concealing his former friendship with Bath in the Guard. In preparation for this claim, Moore displays Bush's Alabama National Guard medical form obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. One of my student writers made this argument about the clip:

America is a democracy where the citizens are guaranteed certain rights, such as the right to free speech, free press, and privacy. Michael Moore attacked the American ideal of privacy, and he also attacked those who provide protection to those living and working in the country. Michael Moore pinpoints a document released by the Bush administration regarding Bush's military service. In the copy that Michael Moore received, there were no blacked out portions. In the copy released to clear the controversy over George W. Bush's military service, there were sections blacked out. "There is one glaring difference between the records released in 2000 and those he released in 2004" states Moore in his film. The part that was blacked out was a person's name, that name was James Bath. According to Mr. Moore, this was a gross cover up of a connection between Mr. Bush and Bin Laden. A professor of philosophy at San Diego Mesa College says, "The right to privacy is fundamental to a free and flourishing society" (Furrow 1).¹³ The blackout was simply an action taken in accordance to United States law. The Privacy Act of 1974, section (e)(8) states that a person must be notified prior to the release of a document containing any information about that person. In the case of James Bath and the blackout, he was either not notified of the public release of the document, or requested that his name not be released. This is simply an example of the government following their own rules and respecting private citizens. Furrow also says, "This information is protected solely by the willingness and ability of government to mandate privacy protections" (4). Michael Moore seems to criticize America for respecting the privacy of citizens. He would apparently like to see the entirety of his criminal, medical, employment, and other personal records broadcast to America and available for anyone to see, yet a blacked out name is simply a protection of one of the basic rights of a United States citizen.

This writer reframes the document as evidence: whereas Moore constructs the larger context of a government cover-up, she situates the image within the context of legal protection of a citizen's private information and so changes the subject position of the viewer as well. That is, while the film posits the viewer as an American with the right to know the truth, this writer sees herself, a private citizen like Bath, as an American with the right to confidentiality. Thinking about the framing of evidence as analogous to looking through a camera lens is particularly useful here in that we see how criticizing a claim need not mean uncovering new or contrary evidence, but rather reframing the same evidence for one's own argumentative purpose.

Most of my students concluded that Moore's contextualization of evidence was troubling at some points. Yet many also insisted that the film nonetheless raised important and provocative questions, especially about military recruitment of the poorest Americans. It exposed them to footage, such as that of wounded soldiers trying to come to terms with their injuries, that they had not seen elsewhere. I set up the assignment so that students had to take a stance: they could choose to argue for or against critics who charged that the film constituted "slander" or "propaganda." Many writers found that they needed to go beyond a simple "yes" or "no" answer to these critics and eventually formulated a multifaceted thesis that reflected their complex responses to the film.

I see the film as eminently teachable because it encourages this kind of reflection, yet Carol Wilder has recently suggested that its desire to entertain nullifies its claims to speak the truth. In her analysis of *Fahrenheit 9/11* and the 1974 anti-Vietnam documentary *Hearts and Minds*, she characterizes Moore's film as "docutainment" and shows how media consolidation, "the tabloidization of American mainstream media," and the debut of the Fox News channel, which all make "news less and less distinguishable from entertainment, serve as the historical context in which to view *Fahrenheit 9/11*."¹⁴ Wilder claims that Moore "knows how to speak the cinematic language of popular culture where the elision between news and entertainment is complete."¹⁵ She suggests that he disregards factual accuracy, particularly in comparison with the 1974 documentary.

Yet, the film's packaging of news as entertainment stimulates dialogue about ethical practices in argumentation and the presentation of evidence, evident in the internet debate over Moore's editing techniques. Bill Nichol's description of "performative" documentary filmmaking better captures the status of truth-claims in the film. Wendy Hesford explains that, as opposed to more traditional documentary techniques that create the illusion that we have an unmediated access to reality, "the performative modes of documentary suspend realist representations and generate a tension between performance and documentation and thus often have a defamiliarizing effect in that they re-orient the viewer's sense of the historical 'real' through what Nichols calls 'unexpected juxtaposition.'"¹⁶ Moore's use of the comic

montage, in which he might juxtapose footage from a popular television show with an American intelligence officer interview, followed by an excerpt from a network news broadcast, and concluded by an interview with an American soldier, constantly calls the American media's construction of the "real" into question.

Overall, then, I have found *Fahrenheit 9/11* constructive for the way that it elicits powerful reactions from students, prompts meaningful research, and encourages them to reflect on the fair presentation of evidence. When I had them investigate persuasive argument in popular culture, I expected that they would apply our classroom principles of argument to the film, or reflect upon the differences between academic and popular political discourse, assessing their relative strengths and weaknesses. Unlike my previous integration of Moore's other work in my composition classes, though, I found that *Fahrenheit 9/11* flipped a switch, as it were, in some of my students' essays. They uncannily imitated the tone and style of such popular political writers and media personalities as Moore, Al Franken, Ann Coulter, Bill O'Reilly, or Sean Hannity. Even the student writing the excerpt above, which is relatively restrained, manifests the more hyperbolic language of this discourse: "He would apparently like to see the *entirety* of his criminal, medical, and other personal records *broadcast to America* and available for *everyone* to see" [my emphasis]. When confronting the relationship between academic discourse and this form of political writing more and more prevalent on bestseller lists and the internet, I found myself revisiting core principles of researched argument in composition, seeing them from Foucault's vantage-point "outside" the "truth-game" of conventional academic discourse.

The argumentative essay has its roots in classical rhetoric in which the rhetorician had to change the minds of embodied listeners within a specific locale; yet many student-researched papers can seem to weary instructors like a forced march from claim to evidence, from claim to evidence, and so on, because we have lost the sense of what Charles Bazerman calls "socially located sense-making,"¹⁷ of a real author appealing to an actual audience. Certainly, teachers of writing try to create that sense of audience for students via peer review groups and local publication of student work. Investigating rhetorical strategies and the staging of argument in popular culture would nonetheless do much to make students more conscious of the author-audience relation in their own textual performances.

Popular persuasive argument is certainly "socially located sense-making." This genre of popular political writing has its origins in multiple media: Rush Limbaugh in talk radio, Al Franken in television sketch comedy, Ann Coulter as a syndicated newspaper columnist, Bill O'Reilly on a television talk show, Sean Hannity on radio and television, and Michael Moore on television and film. Although these writers hail from diverse media backgrounds and clearly have very divergent political views, they utilize several common techniques that create what one might call a "theatre of argument," an especially performative type of argument. For instance,

they provide clearly demarcated “roles” for their actors. Bill O’Reilly’s *The No-Spin Zone: Confrontations with the Powerful and Famous in America* actually organizes chapters around specific issues (such as sexual education or capital punishment) and against stated “opponents” (Steve Allen, James Carville, or Jesse Jackson).¹⁸ Al Franken likewise singles out specific adversaries to humorous effect, as suggested by his chapter title “Ann Coulter: Nutcase.”¹⁹ Moore colorfully lumps his nemeses into a single group in *Stupid White Men*.²⁰ Sean Hannity also depicts his opponents as a collective, designated “liberals,” “the liberal establishment,” or “the liberal media” in his *Let Freedom Ring: Winning the War of Liberty over Liberalism*.²¹ I do not suggest that these authors never admit that their opponents have some strengths. O’Reilly admits, for example, that “opponent” James Carville is a “very smart guy.”²² Nonetheless, the authors give their characters specific parts to play in the ongoing drama of political debate.

As they embody ideas in human actors, these writers often physically characterize their opponents. Of all the political pundits, Franken takes the most delight in the *ad hominem* move so sophomoric that it becomes self-parodic: *Rush Limbaugh is a Big Fat Idiot*²³ is a case in point, in addition to chapter titles such as “Bill O’Reilly is a Lying, Splotchy, Bully.”²⁴ O’Reilly himself takes a more subtle approach, but one that still creates a physical picture of his adversaries for his readers. In describing his interview with rap mogul Puff Daddy, O’Reilly sets the scene: “He showed up, all 5’7” of him strutting into the studio. He was decked out in a white T-shirt, khaki short pants, and sneakers. Followed by an entourage of ten, he checked the lights, the set, the crew.”²⁵ Then the author observes that Puff Daddy “was used to being in control. Finally, he was ready to go and sat across from your humble correspondent with a look of bored detachment. He didn’t stay bored for long.”²⁶

As this scene suggests, the larger arguments in political bestsellers often come to a standstill as their authors vividly and minutely describe dramatic confrontations with their antagonists. Al Franken recounts his debate with O’Reilly at a BookExpo America luncheon, for instance. O’Reilly had claimed several times on record that he and others who work for the tabloid show *Inside Edition* had won a Peabody when in fact the show had won the much less prestigious Polk award, and after he had left the show. Franken describes his confrontation with O’Reilly at the luncheon in great detail. He also tells of, when he first saw O’Reilly on C-Span claiming that he and the show had won Peabodies several years before, and how, after his own internet research revealed the error, he phoned in and suggested that O’Reilly clear up the confusion.²⁷ Hannity likewise reconstructs specific scenes of confrontation, occasionally from his televised show. For instance, he reproduces Moore’s contention that he would rather have 200 FBI investigators finding terrorists planning to kill thousands of Americans, instead of spending “three or four years investigating the president’s zipper.”²⁸ Hannity then argues in the chapter that the

Clinton-Gore camp let Osama bin Laden slip through its fingers on numerous occasions,²⁹ seamlessly moving between textual and broadcast argument as he does so. Moore himself, of course, has perfected the spectacle of dramatic encounter in *Fahrenheit 9/11*, particularly when he confronts members of Congress in the street and tries to get them to enlist their own children in the armed forces.

In the theatre of argument in this political discourse, the climactic moments are those in which the “truth” is revealed, as opponents are shown to have misrepresented their past or the record. This may take the form of reproducing photographic images of actual documents: Franken includes O’Reilly’s voter registration card in his book,³⁰ while Moore reproduces the current federal tax form for people seeking a refund of \$1 million or more in *Dude, Where’s My Country*³¹ and displays Bush’s National Guard registration in *Fahrenheit 9/11*, as discussed above. In the case of Franken, the dramatic unveiling takes the form of a sustained critique of the opponent’s research methods, as he exposes the inaccuracies of Coulter’s claims in her *Slander: Liberal Lies about the American Right*.³²

In addition to creating dramatic moments through the unveiling of previously unseen documents, these authors construct scenes of revelation in which politicians, consummate performers, drop their guard and depart from the scripts that their staff members have carefully prepared. O’Reilly takes particular pride that his staff does not agree to any pre-conditions for interviews, so that his aggressive questioning will force his interviewees to speak spontaneously in the “No Spin Zone.” In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, a similarly unscripted Bush on the golf course looks foolish in a scene that suggests his hypocrisy. The president here tells reporters, “I call upon all nations to do everything they can to stop these terrorist killers. Thank you.” “Now watch this drive,” he then says jovially. How does this scene purport to show the “real” Bush? Erving Goffman’s work on performance in the presentation of the self in everyday life provides a useful distinction here. For Goffman, sincere performers believe that the impressions of reality they stage are authentic.³³ Cynical individuals, however, are not “taken in” by the roles that they play. They have no ultimate concern with the conception that the audience has of them as actors. This clip works perfectly for Moore’s overall method in the film because the statement, “Now watch this drive,” references a common upper-class leisure activity and suggests a boastful attitude, both of which reinforce the director’s characterization of the President in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Yet partly because it appears unrehearsed, it seems sincere. The “I call upon all nations” declaration, on the other hand, has a cavalier delivery and formal diction that comes across as cynical. In this political theatre of argument, “reality” and “sincerity” emerge when politicians are either so tested or so relaxed that they eschew a cynical performance in favor of an apparently spontaneous and sincere one.

Various elements of this discourse have manifested themselves in my students’ writings on the film. They often adopted an aggressive and comedic tone, “staged”

scenes featuring a political antagonist, highlighted the physical presence of their characters, and eschewed calculated performance in favor of something more straightforward, more “real.” We see a number of these tendencies in the following brief excerpt from a student essay:

Conservatives and the like absolutely love to claim that the media has a liberal bias, they now have a fantastic example in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. What Michael Moore seemed to not understand while making this film is that he is, by in large, correct in most of his assertions. Therefore, he did not need to present a slanted, biased argument; a non-partisan report of straight facts and figures already points heavily against Bush and favors liberal Americans. In other words, the Bush Administration did not need Michael Moore to make them look bad, they did a fantastic job of that all on their own. This means that walking up to Congress members, and the like, to “ambush” them on camera and attempt to make them look foolish (while entertaining) is not a good way of making a point. Rather, it makes him appear like a slovenly Sean Hannity, something that nearly everybody (sans, of course, Sean Hannity) can agree is an unflattering comparison.

I found it encouraging that this writer reflected on argumentative strategies (“a good way to make a point”) and constructed a larger argumentative context (“Conservatives . . . love to claim”) for his commentary. I and the writer’s peer reviewers, though, did find aspects of the passage problematic. For instance, we did not find the sweeping unsupported generalizations convincing. What “straight facts or figures” does the author have in mind here? What person or organization provides these numbers, and in what context? The most pressing issue here is one of audience: the language takes on an air of exclusivity; this writer posits an audience who must know Hannity in order to get the joke, which was not the case with all his classmates. Thus, whereas popular political writing can assume an audience familiar with the world of political punditry, a student writing for his professor and classmates cannot.

When revising, this student cut out the Sean Hannity comparison and, at my urging, developed his point about how ambushing people on camera may not be the best argumentative strategy. He did not seem happy about the revision, though, and claimed that I wanted him to make his paper “boring.” I heard these affective terms (“boring,” “dry,” “interesting,” “kept my attention”) far more often in student talk about drafts than I normally do in this class, and I found it heartening that student writers thought like rhetoricians as they displayed greater awareness of how their readers—in this case, I and their classmates—would respond to their appeals.

Whereas focusing on *Fahrenheit 9/11* did encourage some argumentative techniques that do not translate well to an academic setting, student writers paid more attention to the affective dimensions of their argument than usual, and, as a result, we foregrounded the issue of audience. For this reason alone, we should not dismiss popular forms of argumentation that provide opportunities for analyzing the knowledge and values that readers bring to texts. As the reception of Moore's film attests, this sense-making may include independent research and consideration of ethical practices in argumentation. Most importantly, we should recognize that persuasive argument, particularly in the alternative media, is a force to be reckoned with. Since, to some extent, the discourse of popular argument shapes the political identities of students, they should learn to negotiate this form of communication intelligently. Although we have devoted much attention to the textual performance of the self in the autobiographical writing of students, writing instructors need to have a comparable conversation about textual performance in researched argument, which includes its existence in "documentary satire," "docutainment," or whatever term best captures the features of this emerging genre. Ideally, this discussion would scrutinize argumentative strategies in the alternative media, recognize how those techniques manifest themselves in student writing, and theorize meaningful relations between the culture of argumentation in the academy and evolving, hybrid forms of argument in popular culture.

Notes

1. *Roger and Me*, dir. Michael Moore, Warner Brothers, 1989; *Bowling for Columbine*, dir. Michael Moore, United Artists, 2002; *Fahrenheit 9/11*, dir. Michael Moore, LionsGate Films, 2004.

2. "Fahrenheit 9/11 Teacher's Guide," 10 May 2005 <[http://www.michaelmoore.com/books-films/fahrenheit 911/teacher's guide](http://www.michaelmoore.com/books-films/fahrenheit%20911/teacher's%20guide)>.

3. Gail Smith-Arrants, "Teacher Shows 'Fahrenheit 9/11,' Gets Rebuked," *The Charlotte Observer* 18 Nov. 2004 <www.charlotte.com/mlid/charlotte/news/10210344.htm?1c>.

4. Kurt Spellmeyer, "Foucault and the Freshman Writer: Considering the Self in Discourse," *College English* 51 (1989): 715.

5. Patricia Caillé, "Interpreting the Personal: The Ordering of the Narrative of Their/Our Own Reality," *Cinema-(to)-graphy: Film and Writing in Contemporary Composition Courses*, ed. Ellen Bishop (Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1999) 5.

6. 3.

7. John D. Ramage, John C. Bean, and June Johnson, *Writing Arguments: A Rhetoric with Readings*, 6th ed. (New York: Longman, 2004) 117.

8. Miles Orvell, "Documentary Film and the Power of Interrogation: *American Dream and Roger and Me*," *Film Quarterly* 48.2 (1994-95): 17

9. Jack Shafer, "Libel Suit 9/11," *Slate.MSN.com* 21 June 2004, accessed 12 May 2005 <slate.msn.com/id/21022725>.

10. Ramage, Bean, and Johnson 132
11. "Republicans Invited to Anti-Bush Movie," *MSNBC.com* 15 July 2004, accessed 12 May 2005 <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5445185>>.
12. Kelton Rhoads, "Propaganda Tactics and *Fahrenheit 9/11*," *WorkingPsychology.com* 9 September 2004, accessed 12 May 2005 <www.workingpsychology.com>.
13. Dwight Furrow, "The Privacy Paradox," *The Humanist* (May/June 2004): 1-4. http://www.24hourscholar.com/p/articles/mi_m1374>.
14. Carol Wilder, "Separated at Birth: Argument by Irony in *Hearts and Minds* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*," *Atlantic Journal of Communication* (2005) <<http://homepage.newschool.edu/~wilder/SeparatedAtBirth>>.
15. 11.
16. Wendy S. Hesford, "Visual Auto/biography, Hysteria, and the Pedagogical Performance of the 'Real,'" *Journal of Advanced Composition* 20 (2000): 371.
17. Charles Bazerman, "Textual Performance: Where the Action at a Distance Is?" *Journal of Advanced Composition* 23 (2003): 380.
18. Bill O'Reilly, *The No Spin Zone: Confrontations with the Powerful and Famous in America* (New York: Broadway, 2001).
19. Al Franken, *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right* (New York: Dutton, 2003) ix.
20. Michael Moore, *Stupid White Men . . . and Other Sorry Excuses for the State of the Nation!* (New York: Harper, 2001).
21. Sean Hannity, *Let Freedom Ring: Winning the War of Liberty Over Liberalism* (New York: Harper, 2002).
22. O'Reilly 97.
23. Al Franken, *Rush Limbaugh is a Big Fat Idiot* (New York: Dell, 1999).
24. Franken, *Lies* ix.
25. O'Reilly 36.
26. 36.
27. Franken, *Lies* 65-82.
28. Hannity 17.
29. 17.
30. Franken, *Lies* 75.
31. Michael Moore, *Dude, Where's My Country?* (New York: Warner, 2003) 161.
32. Franken, *Lies* 5-20.
33. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959) 17-21.