

Academic skills

Week Three

Project Development Seminar II: Primary Sources

Dr. Šárka Gmitterková

Agenda

Structure

Identifying primary sources

Securing your object(s) for analysis

Targeted Learning Outcome

Identifying and securing suitable primary sources

- What is a primary source (in your opinion)?
- Let's unpack its characteristics...
- How many of them do you need? (... the more the better..?)
- True or false – works of art (novels, paintings, movies, songs) are **always** primary sources

Identifying a primary source

(for a 6–8 pages long research paper)

- In order to do so you have to know (or at least be aware of) what you are researching and what your research question is.
- For a short paper, start small: with one source and see where it takes you, in how many different directions. Once you see how the research question and the primary source interact (supporting or undermining the hypothesis), you can add one or two more.
- Works of art, archival data, official documents and records, letters and diaries, photographs and video footage (primary sources' usual suspects) do not always fall under this category. Some areas of research require primary materials of different nature.
- And those materials might be usually considered as secondary sources, which are...

Primary X Secondary Sources: Differences

- A first-hand or contemporary account of an event or topic
 - Created by people or things that were there at the time or event.
 - Not modified by interpretation
 - Providing direct access to the subject of your research
 - Qualitative or quantitative data that you collect yourself (e.g. through interviews, surveys, experiments) or sources produced by people directly involved in the topic
 - Original materials, regardless of format.
 - Authoritative and authentic
- Anything that describes, interprets, evaluates, or analyzes information from primary sources.
 - Offer interpretation, analysis, methodological perspective or commentary:
 - **Books, articles and documentaries** that synthesize information on a topic
 - **Synopses and descriptions** of artistic works
 - **Encyclopedias and textbooks** that summarize information and ideas
 - **Reviews and essays** that evaluate or interpret something
 - The researcher usually tests its arguments against new evidence or uses its ideas to help formulate his or her own.

However!

For some projects and methodological perspectives newspaper articles, reviews or documentaries might be better suited as primary research materials.

Research project about Marilyn Monroe

- One of the greatest acting icons of 20th century
- Small chance of accessing previously unseen materials concerning Monroe herself
- What can we research about her?

⇒ A project analyzing ways in which we remember Monroe (e.g. materials created after her death, without her presence)

⇒ How? Through which materials (books, posters, imagery)?

⇒ What kind of language is being used when describing her posthumously?

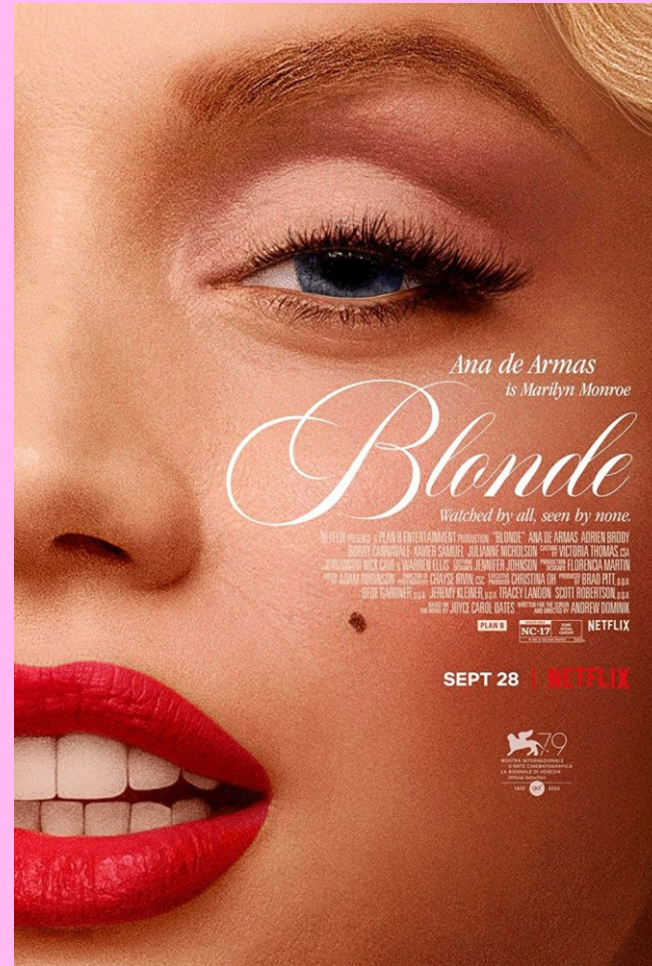
⇒ What kind of values we infuse her post-image with?



What are the primary sources in such project?



A signed photograph
(a collector's item)
Probably not



Blonde (dir. Andrew Dominik, 2022)
YES



A Jean Louis gown worn by MM in 1962
As a material object – **NO**
As a piece of cultural heritage worn
previously by MM - **YES**



Campy reinterpretations of famous stars
YES



Interview with a memorabilia collector
Probably not



Police photographs from MM's bedroom where
her dead body was found

NO

Returning back to your own research topics...

- ... what are your primary sources?
- Do you think you will have any issues with accessing them?
- What about their amount?
- Have you been shaping your research questions vis-a-vis your primary materials (films, screenshots from social media, photographs)?
- Is anyone working with primary sources such as newspaper articles, essays, documentaries or any other materials interpreting already existing data?

Take-aways

- Identifying your primary source(s) is a necessary step, right after you settle on the topic of your interest.
- It generally goes hand in hand with formulating your research question and choosing the methodological perspective => your primary source excludes some research questions, welcomes others and narrows down possible conceptual frameworks
- Secure your primary sources as a first practical step and remember, that with some primary sources this takes time (archival data)
- Once your primary sources are with you, start analyzing them and think about...

Next time

- ... which secondary sources you are going to use. Although we value primary sources higher than the secondary ones, a good research paper combines both.
- Date: 13. 10.
- Instructor: Šárka
- Topic: Project Development Seminar 3: Secondary Sources
- Outcome: Finding and using secondary sources
- Prepare: Open the portal of electronic information resources and try to find at least three secondary sources for your project.
 - <https://ezdroje.muni.cz/index.php?lang=en>