

## **The New Storytellers: Documentary Filmmaking in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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### **INTRO**

Sixty years ago, synchronous sound and the advent of television dramatically transformed documentary filmmaking. Once again, we are experiencing a major technological evolution that offers new opportunities and new challenges. 21<sup>st</sup> century filmmaking tools, social media, and the Internet are giving rise to transmedia, interactive, and immersive modes of nonfiction storytelling. How we create and distribute nonfiction film is substantially changing, not only how we tell stories but also who is telling them, who is watching them, and who is participating in them.

Anyone with a smartphone can make and share a film today. Digital devices, the Internet, social media, mobile Apps, augmented reality, and other media technologies are providing a sumptuous buffet of possibilities. The challenge is how do we teach this vast array of new forms and how do we prepare students for continual change? What does a documentary program of the future look like? How do we possibly cover everything? How do we keep up with the changes? How do we integrate emerging media forms with the foundational elements of traditional media? How do we evolve our university film/TV/new media programs to inspire students to produce creative, poignant and meaningful media that has impact? How do we prepare, influence and inspire the next generation of filmmakers?

This chapter examines the future of documentary filmmaking from creation to distribution, and shares what we are doing to forge a path ahead. We have been revisiting our pedagogy for several years, trying to understand and embrace the changes while continuing to build on our solid foundation of traditional filmmaking. Often, technology dominates the discussion, luring us with its latest gadgets, Apps, and next-gen devices. But we know, fundamentally, a story that touches the human heart and soul will have the greatest impact and endure over time. The story might be about environmental, political and social issues, or about the beauty of the world around us. It might be a feature-length film or told through a series of short web videos that individuals watch on a small mobile device. It might engage viewers in an interactive theater or through a video game. Documentary film has always been an extraordinary medium of transformation and expansion, touching people through its connective humanity.

There's an old saying that it takes a village to raise a child. This adage applies, more than ever, to the next generation of emerging filmmakers. In this chapter, the authors share perspectives, concrete information and case studies from our many discussions, including statistics on how media production and distribution are changing. We scrutinize issues of inclusivity, representation, and best practices in this ever-evolving landscape. By sharing our grand experiments, failures and successes, we help each other expand our pedagogical acumen so that we can all walk a successful path with our students.

## The New Storytellers

By Maggie Burnette Stogner

*Question: What is your story, who is your audience, why does it matter?*

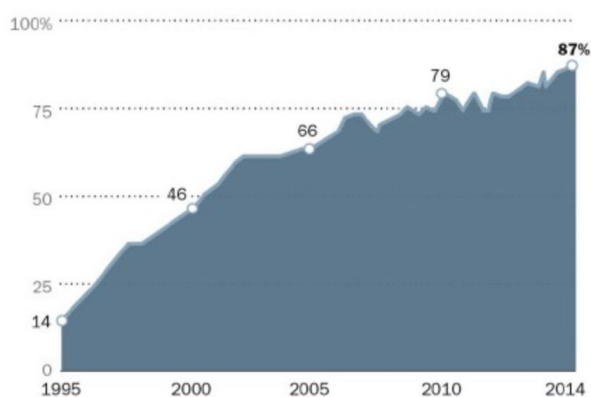
Five years ago, one of our graduate students embarked on her thesis film, “As We Forgive” about Rwanda’s reintegration of genocide killers into their home villages. She and a fellow student filmed the documentary using digital cameras. She edited it using nonlinear editing software on her laptop computer. After being turned down by PBS (the U.S. public broadcasting system), she distributed it herself on DVD to organizations that engaged people in discussions of forgiveness. Just a decade earlier, this would not have been possible. The tools simply didn’t exist. Ultimately, her film won a gold Emmy for top student documentary, aired on national PBS, and received over \$300,000 in outreach funding to travel the film throughout the U.S. and Rwanda.

The landscape for 21<sup>st</sup> century documentarians continues to evolve, in large part due to digital and web technologies. Consider this: A week’s worth of *The New York Times* contains more information than a person was likely to come across in a lifetime in the 18th century.<sup>1</sup> In the U.S., the number of adults using the Internet has risen from 14% in 1995 to 87% in 2014.<sup>2</sup> Facebook has over 1.1 billion monthly active users worldwide.<sup>3</sup> By 2014, the number of mobile phones in the world is expected to reach 7.3 billion, more than the total world population.<sup>4</sup> Today, students are using these media technologies to create, share and participate in cultural narratives at an unprecedented rate.

However, it is important to note that access to the Internet and digital technology does not extend to all students. Some lack the economic resources, education, availability, and freedom of expression to take part in today’s media phenomena. Only 40% of the world’s population is using the Internet.<sup>5</sup> A new kind of elitism is arising, marginalizing those who do not have digital tools or Internet access. The challenge of giving voice to the unheard continues. The 21<sup>st</sup> century film school can make a significant difference in decreasing the digital divide by participating in community media projects, partnering with underfunded nonprofit organizations, and helping educational organizations that lack resources.

### Internet use, 1995-2014

% of American adults who use the internet, over time



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 1995-2014.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

<sup>1</sup> Video by Parithi TV, “Did You Know 3.0 HD?” uploaded on YouTube Feb. 8, 2010. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=ygMPyP7qIkU&noredirect=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ygMPyP7qIkU&noredirect=1) (accessed July 20, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center surveys, 1995-2014. [www.pewinternet.org/2014/02/27/the-web-at-25-in-the-u-s/](http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/02/27/the-web-at-25-in-the-u-s/)

<sup>3</sup> Facebook, “Facebook Reports First Quarter 2013 Results,” [press release] May 1, 2013, [http://investor.fb.com/release\\_detail.cfm?ReleaseID=761090](http://investor.fb.com/release_detail.cfm?ReleaseID=761090) (accessed July 13, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Joshua Pramis, “Number of Mobile Phones to Exceed World Population by 2014,” *Digital Trends*, February 28, 2013, <http://www.digitaltrends.com/mobile/mobile-phone-world-population-2014/> (accessed July 13, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Internet World Stats, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

At the core of today's technological metamorphosis is interpreting how the new tools apply to the form and function of documentary storytelling. Since ancient time, the basic formula was one storyteller, typically a wise elder or other designated keeper of the culture, addressing a single audience. The structure was typically a linear narrative, relating the exploits of an archetypal hero embarking on a quest to resolve a personal or societal problem. Today, the authorial voice is shifting radically. Documentary storytelling can be collective and interactive, with global engagement that transcends time and space asynchronously. Think about it! Rather than watching a movie in a captive theater space, viewers/users can use augmented VR on their mobile devices to walk through a town

<b>DEFINING 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY STORYTELLING<sup>1</sup></b>	
<u><b>THEN</b></u>	<u><b>NOW</b></u>
Expert-centric	User-centric
Top-down	Distributed
Passive	Participatory
Observational	Interactive/Experiential
On-site	Off-site/Mobile
Local	Global
Individual	Social
Serious (education)	Playful (edutainment)
Text	Visual
Linear	Non-chronological
Continuous	Fragmented
Real-time	Asynchronous
Directional	Immersive

square, see it as it appeared in the past, and share the experience with others around the globe. They might interact with historical figures, participate in a virtual event, contribute stories, and respond to others. Rather than relying on the perspective of a designated expert, they might participate in the crowdsourcing of lesser-known data.

We have entered an age of interactive and immersive documentary. It is fundamentally different than the passive, screen-based experience. The authorial voice has shifted radically, as has authorship. Perhaps the most revolutionary outcome is that stories are no longer necessarily linear or even cohesive. The fragmentary, mash-up and "meme" documentaries that emerge from clusters of Twitter feeds and YouTube videos are continually expanded and reshaped through the random participation and contributions of others.

### *Teaching The New Storytellers*

So how do we teach documentary storytelling today? With so many options, students are understandably overwhelmed. We can help students navigate these uncharted waters by providing clear frameworks for assessing documentary's expanding range of form and function. Older techniques are condensed to accommodate and integrate new ones. For example, in my course, *Advanced Writing for Documentary*, I begin with a simple exercise called, "One Hundred and One Ways to Tell a Story." A broad topic such as "climate change" is chosen. Students form small groups and are tasked with developing the topic into a fully realized concept for a documentary film.

We begin with these core questions, such as:

- What is the purpose of your film?
- Who are you trying to reach?
- What do you want your audience to come away with?
- What kind of approach do you want to use?

We then address more specific questions, such as: What structure? Narrative and character development? Point of view? Main character(s)? Experts(s)? Interview style? Key themes?

Chronology and starting point? Aesthetic and artistic treatment? Re-creations? Sound Design? Narration? Audience impact? Call-to-action?

In the past, this exercise has resulted in a range of traditional documentary film concepts, with classic three-act structures, first-person narratives, vérité, and essayistic approaches. In recent years, students are conceiving a much wider range of possibilities that include variations of web, social media, trans-media, and participatory approaches. I have expanded the parameters of the course to include emerging concepts, forms, and approaches. Students now discuss the above exercise and come up with concepts such as the following: A global day-in-the-life of children living in war zones, created by “crowdsourcing” footage with local filmmakers, edited by the filmmakers into webisodes, and instantly uploaded on a YouTube Channel.

The class discussion includes examining how to engage and motivate multiple audiences. Documentary as a social justice instrument is not new, but there is an increasing emphasis on outreach strategies at the concept stage. To this end, I ask the students of *Advanced Writing for Documentary* to explore these questions:

Will your story approach have impact?

What distribution strategy will ensure your story resonates with your intended audience(s)?

How will your creative vision and storytelling ensure your film will rise above the vast amount of video material being produced today?

This course will continue to evolve, as will my role as professor. The transformation from idea to treatment embraces a new pedagogical framework that includes a multi-modal, multi-platform strategy and the rise of the “impact producer” that is addressed in the next section. Students today look to us for expertise, perspective and mentoring. We learn from them ever-evolving approaches and tools. It is an inspiring dance.

### **Strategic Media Making and Impact Producing**

By Larry Kirkman

*Question: How do you help students choose the most effective way to reach and engage an audience?*

More and more, our documentary students are embracing expectations for the social impact of their work. They want to take on issues of critical public importance, to tell the stories, portray the characters, and provide the evidence and testimony that drive public debate and promote solutions to social problems.

We tell them: whatever your purpose – to shift public dialogue, motivate behavior change, equip activists for advocacy and movement building, or change government or corporate policies – think of your role as an “impact producer.” Define your mission, articulate your goals. That’s the starting point.

There is a wide spectrum of narrative strategies, but compelling stories and characters are at the center of social documentary. Because great filmmaking delivers impact, engages audiences, leads to action, to results.

Framing and timing are crucial in making mission-driven media. What is the state of the issue? Is it widely known and debated, or neglected and marginalized? Assess the

opportunities for impact, whether it is changing the conversation or changing the world. Is the time ripe for policy change? Or, is it the time to build awareness and elevate the issue? Who are the intended audiences? Is the goal to consolidate the base or reach beyond the choir? At every stage, the filmmaker needs to be goal-oriented and user-focused.

For example, environmental groups and children's health organizations worked together to promote tougher air pollution standards. In focus group research, they found that target audiences opposed to federal regulations on principle responded to stories of childhood asthma. They had all seen children use inhalers on the playground and in that context they accepted the argument that air pollution travels across state borders and requires federal regulation. The coalition framed the issue as a children's health crisis and used the heads of Children's Hospitals as spokespersons with their local emergency rooms as a backdrop.

In the digital environment, people more easily migrate from the personal to the social/political, from individual needs to collective solutions and public good, from empathy to action, from volunteering to systemic change. Audiences are surprised by how much they can know and how much people like them are doing.

This migration challenges our theories of change in social campaigning. Is the focus on influencing decision makers to change policies, in a legislature or corporate headquarters? Or, is the focus on grassroots social mobilization? Some films can do both.

Many documentaries encompass a spectrum of impacts. For example, *Escape Fire* takes on the whole medical industrial complex, advocating both corporate and government policy changes. It shaped Congressional action on Defense funding for the Veteran's Administration. But, one of its key impacts was in professional education, including a tour of medical schools and most importantly as part of the curriculum for continuing medical education for doctors and nurses.

*The Invisible War's* exposure of rape in the U.S. military and the failure to prosecute rape led to extensive Department of Defense and Congressional policy changes. It was aimed at elite decision makers, but it also helped empower a community of rape survivors to sustain the struggle.

*The House I Live In* was produced to help end the war on drugs, end mass incarceration and reform sentencing policies. Its primary target has been lawmakers and law enforcement, but with a goal of shifting public attitudes, reframing drug use as a public health problem, and the war on drugs as a war against US citizens, not Narco States. The film significantly contributed to successful state-based campaigns: against California's Three Strikes Law and for Connecticut's Juvenile Sentencing Reform. Distributed theatrically and broadcast on Independent Lens, it also reached large audiences through partner organizations. 80,000 people watched the film in over 500 churches in 34 states. There were over 200 professional screenings. And, it was screened at both 2012 national political conventions and the White House to put the drug war on the policy agenda.

*American Promise* did not start out with an impact strategy to improve educational outcomes for black males. It was not until after the filmmakers finished the two-hour-and-14-minute film that a series of focus groups conducted by Active Voice identified opportunities with target audiences. In a panel at Center for Media and Social Impact's Media that Matters annual conference, co-director Joe Brewster explained how they have produced 40 different versions of the film to meet the needs of users, including a half-hour adaption for young leaders. The take-action campaign includes discussion guides, lesson plans, a reading list, a partner toolkit, directions on how to organize an event, and a professional development curriculum for educators. The campaign has created a grassroots network of parent groups,

the Promise Clubs. It has had screenings on Capitol Hill to influence policies to support black male achievement. It has worked with hundreds of partner organizations, from the United Way to Mocha Moms. The 2014 BRITDOC case study reported 650 community screenings organized by partner organizations.

In 2013, I proposed “water” as a School-wide focus that ultimately involved over 20 courses in Film and Media Arts, as well as courses in Strategic Communications and Journalism, and the *Center for Environmental Filmmaking* and *Center for Media and Social Impact*. Students were inspired by Jessica Yu’s documentary *Last Call at the Oasis*, which covers the totality of the worldwide water crisis, from scarcity and overuse to sanitation, pollution and toxic contamination, through the stories of compelling frontline advocates and scientists.

One student was interested in the conflict between farmers and environmentalists over phosphorous standards for the Chesapeake Bay. Another wanted to promote a campaign to promote tap water instead of bottled water. A third wanted to help build awareness that 2.6 billion people do not have toilets. A fourth was passionate about changing agricultural groundwater management policies.

Here are highlights of my advice to these students:

You can create powerful media with deep human stories, while deploying tools and techniques of strategic communication, including: goal setting, message research, audience targeting, partnerships for outreach and audience engagement, media relations, online and mobile communications, and monitoring and evaluation.

Get smart about the issues. Map the landscape of knowledge and action on water. Hundreds of water organizations, coalitions and campaigns provide information, policy goals and analysis. Read the best investigative and explanatory journalism. How are water issues covered in daily news -- mainstream and alternative, print, TV and online? Who are the leading experts on water? What studies and reports do they recommend?

Tap into public opinion research -- polling and focus group results. Do your issues strike a responsive chord, and with what audiences? What about diversity: race, ethnicity, age, and geography? What are the barriers we face in getting people to listen, to care, to act? Are there deep-seated attitudes? Is there a conventional wisdom that we need to address?

Assess the on-going public education or advocacy campaigns related to your issues. What problems are they trying to solve? Who are the stakeholders and change agents? Target audiences? What is their opposition? What media and materials have they produced/are producing, and for what distribution? Where are the gaps in their media strategies?

Use the Nature Conservancy’s report on the “Language of Conservation,” a strategic summary of ten years of public opinion research. The results show that safe drinking water is the top concern. Meanwhile, the urgent forecast of water depletion is much less of a concern. But, the legacy question -- “Will my children and grandchildren have clean, safe water?” -- elicits very strong emotions. In all water communications, the next generation is a central theme.

So, if you take on the overuse of water by agribusiness, then you have a difficult challenge and may have to take the measured approach of the Redford Center’s documentary *Watershed* – profiling local leaders with solutions to the depletion of the Colorado River. But, if it’s a public health story, the HBO documentary *GasLand* may be your model. *GasLand* is a personal quest to expose fracking and it holds corporations and politicians accountable. *GasLand* strikes a responsive chord in audiences ready to believe the worst of corporate greed and congressional inaction.

Form pivotal partnerships. Partners can bring knowledge, networks and public trust to a project. Get help at every stage. Map the ecosystems of change: advocacy organizations, government agencies, socially-responsible corporations, journalists, scholars and scientists, media partners. Which organizations have well-developed policy goals? Which have conducted research? What is their online presence, website and social media. Are they trusted sources of information? Can they help identify stories, find characters and broker places for production? Do they have the capacity to help with outreach and promotion and media relations? Can they help produce take-action toolkits, discussion guides and educational materials? Can they set up screenings with decision-makers? And, do they have the capacity, the network and field-based partners, to provide a legacy platform to sustain the work for years to come?

Build a team that reflects your production, distribution and engagement goals.

Design production to reflect plans/opportunities for distribution, promotion and outreach, audience engagement, movement building, and policy change.

Think in terms of a constellation of media products and platforms. It is all about dynamic content -- appropriate forms for targeted audiences -- not just a single documentary film or TV special. Think about multiple versions from the beginning, positioned in a landscape of knowledge and action.

In impact producing, engagement does not wait until the film is finished. It starts in pre-production -- building a network of stakeholders, through social media and events, through crowdsourcing and crowdfunding. Each stage of distribution requires specific strategies for media relations, targeted audience engagement, and partnerships, for example, as a long-form film rolls from festivals to theatrical release, to broadcast then Netflix, VOD and DVD.

Build in outreach and engagement from the beginning. Do not wait until post-production to begin development of a website, media relations strategies and social media platforms. Use emerging media. Crowdsourcing. Crowdfunding. Impact producers have to be flexible and nimble, always prototyping, testing and revising. While the film is in progress, get feedback on themes, stories and characters. Build a community before the film is released. Organize community screenings. Test lesson plans, discussion guides and media messages.

Measure impact through collaboration. Assessment is a collaborative process. Get your partners and stakeholders together. Find the expertise and support in web staff, consultants, academics, and nonprofit service organizations.

Tap into resources, tools and case studies online. The Fledgling Fund papers at [thefledglingfund.org](http://thefledglingfund.org) include *Assessing Creative Media's Social Impact* and *Distribution to Audience Engagement*. Case studies of *Blue Vinyl* and its *My House is Your House* campaign are in the impact paper and *Made in L.A.* in the distribution paper, both provide comprehensive models. BRITDOC'S *The Impact Field Guide and Toolkit* is an extensive set of resources from planning to evaluation with a wide range of case studies at <http://impactguide.org>. For a broad survey of impact assessment theories and techniques, read *Social Justice Documentary: Designing for Impact* at [cmsimpact.org](http://cmsimpact.org). Case studies and impact strategies and tools are also available at Active Voice Lab, ITVS, Participant Media, and Working Films. Brave New Films and Not in Our Town are excellent models of engagement.

At American University, we are exploring how to develop this new role of impact producing that has emerged in social documentary. We agree that it is a role that can both be embraced by a filmmaker or fulfilled by a professional partner. With what knowledge and know-how?

With the skills to build a coalition of organizations, connect to grassroots communities, design public events, use public opinion research, manage media relations, move a story through social media, work with media partners, and plan for the legacy of a film. And, with an understanding of how art affects culture and politics. We are asking, how can universities become laboratories for this role, creating new models for training, and producing research across professions and academic disciplines?

### Old Words of Wisdom for New Impact Producers

"What will you do when the lights come up?" – George Stoney

"Here's the camera and the microphone. Now it's your turn to tell the bastards what it's like to live in a slum." – Ruby Grierson

"...accuse and show the way." – Joris Ivens

"I promised them that as long as they were fighting, we would never stop fighting too." – Jon Alpert

"Everybody needs history but the people who need it most are poor folks - people without resources or options." – Henry Hampton

"So if I'm making a big movie about the vinyl industry, there still has to be something that's human, and personal, and heart wrenching." – Judith Helfand

"They aren't characters (personages)—they are people (personnes)."—Agnes Varda

"I want to address the viewer in a critical state" – Alain Resnais

### Reinterpreting Filmmaking

By Larry Engel

*Question: What tools should I use to make my film/media project? What assignments work well in this new production/learning environment?*

#### *Teaching New Tools With Established Storytelling Techniques*

Faculty in the Film and Media Arts Division have worked together to develop three core assignments for introductory graduate production courses that emphasize storytelling and the effective use of a range of tools necessary to produce strong outcomes. The following assignments teach students the aesthetics and technical aspects of filmmaking regardless of the production method.

#### *Assignment One: Creating the Soundscape*



Students work in small teams as they rotate through director, boom operator and sound recordist, to create “soundscapes.” They must explore a location, exterior or interior through sound. They are restricted to using only diegetic sounds from that location. We emphasize different perspectives in recording sound, very much as we do with shots. The overall ambience of the location may be equivalent to the establishing or long shot, and by moving closer to different sounds and creating a changing perspective on those sounds for close ups.

Students must create a multi-track layered and mixed presentation of the space and the action within, with a theme and mood related to that space. After the presentation the other students must guess the location and action within. The final project is between 1 and 2 minutes long and must have at least eight tracks (if recording in stereo pairs, then 16 tracks, essentially). Students learn a nuanced and, literally, multi-layered approach to sound recording and editing, greatly enhancing their understanding of audio as a storytelling tool.

The group then returns to the same location to interview a person or people, make selections, edit, and remix the soundscape.

Finally, the camera is added to the mix and the students return a third time to visually explore the place or location, keeping in mind the soundscape they have already created. The visualization may be harmonic or dissonant with the soundscape.

The three stages require about three weeks and the learning objectives include:

- Creating story through sound
- Focusing on hearing rather than seeing to explore a location
- Understanding how to use sound design and location recording to enhance story quality and creativity
- Differentiating between denotative and connotative sound elements

#### *Assignment Two: Autobiography*

Another core assignment is creating an “Autobiography.” I have found that many students do not seem to grasp the enormity of asking professional actors or nonprofessional subjects to participate in a film. The assignment requires students to produce an autobiography of no more than three minutes, in which they must appear before the camera for 60-90 seconds. I must be honest here, students *hate* the assignment going in and some hate it even more coming out. Almost all procrastinate. Many come to me asking what they can put into the film, but the assignment is purposefully vague so that students must choose how to define and represent themselves on film. Students are encouraged to use personal and public materials and archive, which encompasses learning about fair use of online media, as well as the aesthetics of montage and mash-ups. In the end, they get it done, but do not want to show it in class. But they do. The discussions that follow inevitably bring the students closer to one another.

The learning outcomes include:

- Clearer understanding of directing actors and subjects
- Greater sensitivity about the challenges of participating in a film
- Theory and practice of creating character profiles
- Research techniques of archival databases
- Aesthetic approaches to combining original footage with archive materials
- Applied techniques for engaging both professional and nonprofessional talent

#### *Assignment Three: The Mashup*

When I was a student in the late 60s and early 70s, there was a “found footage” assignment that the experimental filmmaker and professor Standish Lawder used. He showed us Bruce Conner’s 1958 now-classic film, “A Movie” and Leger’s 1924 masterpiece “Ballet Mécanique.” Part of the assignment was to articulate a new point of view on a particular topic or theme by taking images out of their intended sequence. The goal the Mashup assignment remains the same: to repurpose the original images and clips and build a new “thought,” a new conversation, much in line with the early Russian filmmakers/theorists. In fact, the ancestor to the modern mash-up may indeed be Vertov’s brilliant 1929 experimental documentary “Man with a Movie Camera.” AU’s Center for Social Media and Impact (CSMI) provides excellent links to mash-ups that help students learn about fair use and copyright issues. <http://www.cmsimpact.org/fair-use>.

The learning outcomes of this exercise include:

- Develop skills to navigate the Web and download video, sound and images
- Understand how to create denotative and connotative elements
- Become skilled in ingesting media of different types and formats into non-linear editing system and manage media
- Practice the art of editing archival media
- Learning about copyright and fair use in the United States

In the last couple of years, in addition to teaching students a range of digital tools as well as 16mm film, some of us have included today’s most available tool: the smartphone. It is the one piece of gear that allows us to capture footage in-the-moment. And it is always with us. We have seen globally how powerful a tool for impact and social change it is. Images and videos are shared instantaneously around the world. We want to make sure that our students understand that this mobile tool of communication can be used to achieve impact by design, much as you would use any other documentary filmmaking device.



Here are from some of my work and examples from a two-and-a-half-day practicum on smartphone filmmaking for graduate students in AU’s School of International Service:

<http://bit.ly/filmmakingatyourfingertips>

Visual (and aural) documentary storytelling starts with the character and his or her story. If we teach the critical fundamental constructs of character-driven, story-structured visual narratives, then the tools become, as the French wrote, the “cine-stylo,” with which to *write* on the visual canvas. If students learn to “see,” then they will be able to create the strongest possible story – narratively, thematically, and aesthetically – with *any* tool. For the moment, many choose the phone in your pocket.

### **Reusing, Repurposing, Redistributing - Copyright and Fair Use for Filmmaking**

By Patricia Aufderheide

*Question: There is so much footage and archive and music and great media to choose from, can’t I use whatever I want?*

Copyright is not only a forbidding legal topic; it is one that varies from country to country. How can film teachers help their students be creative, and stay legal? Film teachers increasingly face the challenge of ensuring that students understand their rights and obligations under copyright. In a world where, effectively, everything is copyrighted and where copyright extends 70 years after the death of the creator, at least in the U.S., there is little escape from it.

Just telling students not to copy is not an option. Copying that incorporates existing material into new work is a fundamental act in creative practice, from the beginning of culture. Beethoven, Michelangelo and the Grimm Brothers did it. Originality flourishes on the platform of existing culture. That has never been truer than now, as enormous creativity is unleashed in the zone of the remix, the meme, and the savagely funny fake news hour. It is also obvious in works of audio-visual critique, such as Byron Hurt's thoughtful *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, about misogyny and hip-hop, and Kirby Dick's *This Film Is Not Yet Rated*, about bias in motion picture ratings.

Telling students to license everything they use is also not an option. Filmmakers can be well served by some footage houses and archives used to dealing with independents and journalists, but not always. They can find some material available through Creative Commons-licenses, but not for most of what they want. For the rest, not only are prices for the material they want often set for other kinds of uses (e.g. major commercial fiction film), but often they cannot even get a copyright holder to give them a response.

To help students be responsible creators, and ensure that their work can circulate, film teachers actually need to understand something about the area that has significantly changed in recent years: exceptions and limitations to copyright. The largest and most important exception to copyright's limited monopoly in the U.S., and in some other countries, is *fair use*. This part of copyright law permits creators of new culture to employ others' copyrighted material without permission or payment, if the new use adds value and creates something new, rather than merely copying and repeating a previous use.

Fair use is as applicable to commercial as to non-commercial new uses, to frivolous as well as worthy and noble purposes, for bad taste as well as high art. It applies the same way on the Web as it does in analog. It is just as useable for music as for photography as for video or text. It requires no notification (although giving credit is universally recognized as polite) or any kind of registration. It is what permits students and scholars to quote earlier work in their papers, investigate journalists to reproduce damning documents, broadcast journalists to play the music of the musician during his obituary. And it allows filmmakers to incorporate existing work into their own. In the U.S., it is part of the package of an individual's free speech rights, as the Supreme Court recognized in two recent cases, *Eldred* and *Golan*. It frees new speakers from always having to ask earlier speakers' permission to refer to their work.

This approach to exceptions differs dramatically from the *fair dealing* approach of Commonwealth countries, and the approach taken in many European nations. Rather than provide a general permission that can be adapted to the situation, fair dealing and other approaches make long lists of permitted uses, often constrained by terms such as "educational" and "non-commercial." They are often medium-specific. This specificity and the narrowness of many definitions have generated problems with every turn of the evolutionary wheel in media.

Fair use is internationally regarded as a flexible, adaptive policy, and one that fosters innovation. For this reason, for instance, British PM David Cameron encouraged policy

reform incorporating fair use into British copyright; Canadian copyright law was reformed to expand the Canadian exemptions of fair dealing to more closely resemble fair use; Israel adopted it word for word into Israeli copyright law. The fair use section of the U.S. Copyright Act (Section 107) merely states broadly that limited copying for new purposes is legal, given at least four considerations or factors: the nature of the original work and of the new one, whether you are taking the appropriate amount for the new purpose, and whether you are impinging on the original market (that is, whether your use is the same as the original, and did you take enough to act as a suitable substitute for the original purpose). Although myths about fair use abound, in fact that law says nothing about length or percentage or proportion of acceptable use.

Fair use, which has existed for more than 150 years in law, has become increasingly important in daily practice in filmmaking since the late 1970s, when copyright became default, and copyright terms became extremely long. It has risen in importance with the shrinking of the public domain (The public domain is the body of work that has no copyright, either because it never did or because copyright has expired.) Fair use law took a turn toward even greater flexibility after a defining law review article in 1990 expressed a shift in interpretation: a use is most likely to be judged fair when the use is “transformative”, or clearly repurposing rather than simply replicating (this puts the emphasis on shifting the context of the material, rather than doing anything to the material itself), and when the amount or nature of what is taken is appropriate to that transformative use.

In 2005, U.S. documentary filmmakers got together through their professional associations and worked with two researchers—Patricia Aufderheide, film scholar, and Peter Jaszi, legal scholar, at American University—to develop a Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use for Documentary Filmmakers. The story is told in Aufderheide and Jaszi, *Reclaiming Fair Use: How to Put Balance Back in Copyright* (University of Chicago Press, 2011). The document, and related curricular materials (including slide shows, videos, and FAQs) are available free through the Center for Media & Social Impact at American University, at [cmsimpact.org/fair-use](https://cmsimpact.org/fair-use).

This document, which was reviewed by a bank of legal scholars and lawyers for fidelity to the law, identified four common situations in which doc filmmakers encounter fair use:

- Critiquing or commenting on a specific work;
- Using material as an example or illustration;
- Material caught incidentally in the process of filmmaking;
- Archival material.

In each case, the filmmakers specified why fair use applied at all, and what the limitations of its application were. For instance, filmmakers noted that while music captured in the process of filmmaking could be used under fair use, it would not be fair use to redeploy that “found” music to act, effectively, as a soundtrack.

This document had a profound effect. In fact, ten years after the creation of the Statement, a nationwide survey Aufderheide and Prof. Aram Sinnreich conducted showed that industry practice in the U.S. had changed 180 degrees in a decade. Now, filmmakers reported, they routinely employed fair use, all errors and omissions insurers accepted their claims, and they reported no significant resistance from broadcasters and lawyers.

Its effectiveness has led to international interest in exploring exemptions and limitations at a national and regional level. For example, in Norway, researchers at the University of Bergen replicated our Center’s initial research showing that without a firm understanding of

copyright exemptions, filmmakers' creativity was hampered. They also discovered that throughout Scandinavia, the right to quotation was a broad exemption and one that appeared generally uncontroversial in use. In South Africa, filmmakers began a discussion about developing a code of best practices to use South Africa's right of quotation more effectively. In Europe, producers began to use the Statement of Best Practices in Documentary Filmmaking as a standard for co-productions.

Meanwhile, in the U.S. the Center for Media & Social Impact's copyright research project drew the attention of other creative and scholarly organizations. As a result, nine other professional communities have created codes of best practices in fair use, expanding its employment into related areas, including communication research, media literacy, open courseware, and journalism. All these codes are also available online at [cmsimpact.org/fair-use](https://cmsimpact.org/fair-use).

Effective and responsible teaching of film practices now includes educating students about their copyright options. Establishing best practices and fair use guidelines are providing the documentary filmmaking community with a clear framework for navigating the challenging waters of copyright law.

### **Quality Sound Still Rules**

By Russell Williams II

*Question: Does quality matter in today's YouTube world?*

Whether filming with a smart phone or a 4K camera, excellent audio can make a huge difference. Sound quality is often the underdog, but it does not need to be. Today there are many new tools available to help achieve better audio, in particular, new tools for location scouting and pre-production.

"In feature films the director is God;  
in documentary films God is the director"  
--Alfred Hitchcock

I believe in the school of thought that anything worth doing is worth "overdoing" as opposed to being forced to "do it over." As the THX motto says, "the audience is listening" so hopefully you are too. If you want to raise the production value of your piece exponentially without going broke, please read on.

In a recent sound design class, a graduate student filmmaker shot a series of interviews on the back porch of his subject's house that was adjacent to a wooded area. The day was balmy, sunny, bright and relatively quiet, but as evening approached the area was dominated by boisterous crickets. A sound bite with crickets is not going to work if intercut with clean sound bites. The degree of success in any style of shooting is inextricably linked to the *amount* and the *quality* of preparation done *before* you arrive at the location. In scripted work, you generally budget for location scouting, though few ever bring a sound professional to listen to the location. In non-scripted productions, you might not have the luxury to pre-scout, but it does not mean you have to completely cast your fate to the wind.

When used effectively, modern tools offer sonic clarity unattainable by the pioneers of documentary production. But documentarians are still plagued by the same issues: little to no control of the circumstances, lack of funding, and pressure to attain the unlikely trifecta of getting the job done *fast*, *cheaply*, with *good* quality. (In most cases, you can only get two out of these three.)

In his text, *Sound Theory/Sound Practice*, Rick Altman shares this observation:

*“One of the major stylistic characteristics of documentaries that use exclusively sounds recorded on location is the lack of clarity of the sound track. Ambient sounds compete with dialogue in ways commonly deemed unacceptable in conventional Hollywood practice. A low signal-to-noise ratio demands greater attention from the viewer to decipher words spoken in situ. Slight differences in room tone between shots make smooth sound transitions difficult.”*

One of the most common problems, even in this age of advanced technologies, is assuming that you can magically fix sound that is recorded in places with horrible acoustics. It is at best difficult but usually impossible to “fix” bad acoustics in post. With that in mind, if the acoustics at a location make most of what you hear difficult to understand, it will fatigue your audience very quickly, so why use it? Here are some well-established strategies: if the location audio is not good, consider filming for visual impact and recording the interviews somewhere else. Some filmmakers ignore the fact that they may have heard a sound bite over and over, so they are able to “fill in the blanks” of missing words or syllables. Remember, the audience needs to absorb all information on the first viewing (and hearing), so clarity and intelligibility are a must. If you are locked into a location (cavern, cave, mineshaft, office, or airplane hangar) body mics are almost certainly a must. Preferably, you may want to record most of this content as voice over and blend it in later with the visuals. Always, always record the ambience at every location so in post-production, you can give the impression that everything was recorded at the same time and place, and blend location and off-site interview material.

Taking this knowledge into the field with you should help *prioritize* your decisions [good for camera vs. good for camera *and* sound] to record pristine tracks. But what if the location is your only opportunity at recording an interview or voice over, and you have no opportunity to scout in person. You cannot prepare for every eventuality, but you can take some steps to anticipate what the challenges will be. Here are a few suggestions:

For help with scheduling and local conditions, use Human Intelligence (HUMINT). This acronym comes from the intelligence gathering community but it can also be useful for your needs as a content creator. Is it possible to reach out to any film commissions in the region you are going? Can you contact filmmakers who have recently worked in the area to discuss any complications or wonderful surprises they experienced? Ideally, a local audio recordist would provide sound recordings so you can hear the sonic conditions. It is important to get these recordings done at different times of day or night, according to your needs. Though high quality recordings with professional gear would be optimal, tracks recorded on smartphones and other consumer devices still will give you some idea of what to expect.

Why is a recording so critical? The brain and the ear work much better than most man-made devices in isolating the spoken word. The brain also conspires to minimize continuous sounds like fans, traffic, running water, hums, and buzzes, so relying on a non-professional’s assessment of a location can backfire when evaluating the sonic suitability of a location. The brain contains novelty-detector-neurons (NDN) that actually shut off when sensing monotonous sources. They will “re-awaken” when something changes. The microphone will always respond to anything close or loud enough, and will not generally emphasize the voice(s) you want to hear without help. Professional microphones are designed NOT to emphasize a particular band of frequencies, rather to respond equally to all. Therefore, a recording of the conditions at a location will give you a microphone’s treatment of that environment. What the microphone hears is usually what you get.

You can also use 21<sup>st</sup> century location “remote viewing” technologies to assess a location. New tools include: Web Cams, Skype, Google Earth, Google Maps, Sound Cloud, YouTube, Vimeo, Still Photos, and Traffic Cams. You may not be able to get audio this way but, these may help you spot some obvious issues, e.g. an airfield, construction sites, factories and other obvious sources of “big noise” that may be out of context with the images you plan to shoot.

Some of these tools/devices/platforms are better suited for exterior scouting and others are more agile in their application. Web cams, for example, are fixed. However, they can provide crucial information about vehicular movement, patterns and habits of some of the locals, and other activities. If you are going to an area that is “in the news”, this resource is excellent for assessing both visuals and sonic information. Listen closely for general ambience, sound of local voices and language, sounds of distant combat, anything specific to the area or region. Google Earth and Google Maps can be used in conjunction with this footage to help you understand the geography of the setting.

Let us consider how using these options may help you mitigate some of the earaches lying in wait for your production. Sound in the air follows a different set of rules than light. It readily bends around corners, penetrates solid walls, bounces around inside the room and, as in our earlier example, may be completely wrong within the context of your scene. Though it might not be overwhelming, it is still contextually wrong and may distract the viewer rather than captivate them.

The above tools will help you assess your location in three critical zones: at camera position [Zone 1], the inner perimeter immediately outside the camera position [Zone 2], and the world at large that though not necessarily seen, can still be heard [Zone 3]. Each location should be evaluated using these guidelines, as well as a general idea of how much dialogue will be recorded (if any) and how critical that dialogue will be to the story. Involve your sound crew to help anticipate any unforeseen issues to stave off a lot of headaches, heartbreaks and added costs later. Think ahead. Will there be ringing phones, deliveries, construction, elevators, noisy lighting fixtures, plumbing noise, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, fans that shake rattle or roll, livestock, noisy pets, unruly children? Remember, one man’s symphony is another man’s noise.

## **Backpack Journalism and The Rise of the Solo Filmmaker**

By Bill Gentile

*Question: How do I make great films without a big crew and big budget?*

In May of 2008 I embedded with the 24<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (24<sup>th</sup> MEU) in a major offensive in the Helmand River Valley in Afghanistan. During that three-week assignment for NOW on PBS, I carried everything I needed to do my job in my backpack: camera, computer, external hard drives, batteries, shotgun and wireless microphones, toiletries, and clothes. The works. I wore a heavy bulletproof vest and helmet. Like the Marines I was covering, on patrol I carried my own food and water – in 120-degree heat. My story, “Afghanistan: The Forgotten War,” was nominated for a national Emmy Award. (You can see the story here: <http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/428>)

In December of that same year I conducted the first Backpack Journalism Workshop With NOW on PBS at the American Film Institute (AFI) in Silver Spring, MD. In March of 2010 I launched the Backpack Journalism Project at American University, where I am an Artist-in-Residence professor. This project grew out of a White Paper that we commissioned on the subject. Below is an excerpt that raises some key issues:

*Backpack Journalism is an alternative approach to journalistic story-telling that fuses audio and video reporting, with one person functioning to do the reporting, photography, narration, production, and editing tasks to create a finished product. It is a method using visual journalism to create powerful, intimate stories that take people beyond the boundary of their own life experience and connect them with the currents, forces and situations reshaping our world on a daily basis. Using multiple media tools, backpack journalists create content that engages audience intellect and emotion simultaneously.*

*The fruits of the approach occur because a journalist is being given the tools, time and freedom to assume the responsibilities of personal authorship to craft a story with value to an audience. Personal authorship is rooted in intimate connection with the story's subjects. That in turn permits extended periods of observation that get to the heart of a story.*

*Because of changes in the technology used to create journalism, changes in methods of content delivery to the audience and economic pressures to streamline news-gathering costs, backpack journalism has arrived as an alternative process for creating documentary-style narrative journalism.*

The foundation of backpack video journalism is documentary-style photojournalism. It is the kind of approach that *Newsweek Magazine* allowed me to take during the 1980s as I tromped through the mountains and back streets of Central America, spending weeks and sometimes a month at a time with protagonists in the region, getting to know them, getting to the heart of the story – very much unlike the wire service or TV guys who were restricted to the mandates of the bean counters in their home offices and were given limited time to acquire the information needed to tell their stories. It is the kind of approach that still makes exceptional documentary films today.

The current revolution in technology is a double-edged sword. On one hand this technology now is accessible to a vast portion of citizens around the world who can use it for making positive changes in the world. On the other hand, the fact that so many of us have access to this technology does not mean that we know how to use it. Often what we see on television and the Internet is “spray and pray.” In other words, put a wide-angle lens on the camera, blast everything in sight and then pray that something comes out that is useable. This is not an appropriate use of the technology or the opportunity presented by this technology. It is not a proper use of the visual language. It does not reflect an understanding or literacy of that language.

The methodology that we refer to as “video journalism” or “backpack video journalism” is composed of three components: visuals, natural sound and narration. Images are the driving force of the medium. You should be able to kill the sound and follow the story by just looking at the images. In the editing suite, I select actuality (sound) from characters that build upon, or strengthen those visual stories. And I write narration *to* the pictures to build upon those visual stories.

This methodology uses characters to make the emotional and intellectual connection. Remember, the best stories are told through the prism of personal experience. Think of Oliver Stone's movie, “Platoon,” in which he used one platoon to tell the story of the entire Vietnam experience. There is no correspondent inserted between the viewer and the characters. The story is told through the character. The greatest advantage of being a solo filmmaker with a small portable camera outfit is the ability to create an intimate, immediate story, through the eyes of the character.

*Six-Shot System*



One of the most important things we can teach is how to dissect, or deconstruct, a visual story. It is like lifting up the hood of a car and taking the engine apart. Ah! Here's the carburetor. I know what that does. And here's the distributor. I know what that does. And here's the... You get the point. The Six-Shot System is one component of a broader strategy of deconstructing a visual story. It helps identify what is important and what is not. What to document and what not to burn up time on – an important consideration when you are operating solo.

It is a system that I use and teach that enables solo filmmakers to get into a scene and allows them to deconstruct the scene, analyze what needs to be shot so they can shoot it and then re-construct the scene in post-production. Remember that the best films, scripts, stories are really "conversations" between the teller and the audience. You give viewers information that poses a question and piques their interest, then you answer that question; ask another question, and so on. It is a formula. Only the most effective stories will engage your audience in a visual conversation. You do that by posing and answering compelling questions.

This system employs six of the ten shots in our visual storytelling alphabet. You may not use them all but shooting them guarantees you will have the necessary raw materials when you edit. For example,

- CU hands
- CU face
- MS hands & face
- WS head to foot
- Over-the-shoulder
- XWS, "Master" or "Establishing" shot.

I was in Cuba in fall 2011 and I was doing a story in a cigar factory and all day long we have a couple hundred people who sit behind desks and roll cigars. It is all day long. It is very, very repetitive. So I walked in and I have 200 people sitting there and I think, "Where am I going to start?" So I started with creating sequences of some compelling characters. It might be person A or person B, cigar rollers who for some reason stood out.

Take a look at the piece, which Time Magazine published on its website. You will see pieces of the Six-Shot System:

[http://www.time.com/time/video/player/0,32068,1465077893001\\_2108125,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/video/player/0,32068,1465077893001_2108125,00.html)

I spend a lot of time these days inside and outside of the United States conducting Backpack Video Journalism Workshops for people of all ages and professions who want to make videos, films and documentaries. You do not have to have fancy equipment, a big crew and huge budget. You do have to have a system and clear approach. This is part of what I tell the workshop participants as I launch each event:

*"We are, right now, at an extraordinary juncture in the history of mankind, technology and communication. Even more important than the Gutenberg press, the advances in digital cameras and the Internet provide us unprecedented opportunity. Ordinary citizens of the world now wield extraordinary power. We wield the power to communicate instantly, globally and in a language, the visual language, which supersedes both the written and the spoken word. This visual language knows no frontiers. It needs no translation. It is contingent on no corporate support. It is one of the most powerful tools of our time."*

## **Ethnographic Film and the Emerging i-Doc**

By Professor Brigid Maher

*Question: How are interactive documentaries evolving traditional documentary formats?*

Documentary storytelling continues to evolve as the technology becomes more accessible. The mash up of programming code and documentary has additionally led to new possibilities in storytelling, as well as an opportunity to access new audiences and create a new and varied role for the participant. Colleague Professor Aufderheide reminds us “Documentaries are a set of choices – about subject matter, about the forms of expression, about the point of view, about the story line, about the target audience.”<sup>6</sup>

In recent years, public television’s seminal documentary series, POV, has sponsored “hackathons” that pair up coders with storytellers in an attempt to explore the possibilities of emerging media.<sup>7</sup> The development of coding languages, such as HTML 5, and additional user-friendly resources for coding has created easier integration of interactive capabilities between text, audio and video images deployed via web or mobile platforms. Multimedia stories, such as, the New York Times’ “[Snow Fall](#)” has created an interactive template for “readers,” “users” or “audiences” to explore stories on their own.<sup>8</sup>

The growing lexicon of terminology to frame interactivity and documentary continues to be a challenge, “i-docs,” “web docs,” or “multimedia docs.” The work of sites, such as, i-Docs.org has begun to solidify some of the terminology. Yet the form is still evolving. Additionally, colleague Professor Maggie Burnette Stogner published a critical article discussing a new framework for discussing interactive.<sup>9</sup> And, colleague Professor Aufderheide has recently investigated the potential impact of the emerging form.<sup>10</sup>

A continued tension in the development of interactive documentaries is how to work with traditional narrative modes such as cause and effect. Integrating a user’s choice into the narrative inherently means a loosening of authorial control, “which in terms of engaging the viewer in more conventional affective ways – those that use, but expand on, more traditional means of engagement, especially at the emotional level – interactive narrative often falls short. Many interactive online works remain at surface level in terms of affective engagement.”<sup>11</sup>

In recent years, more has been written about the emerging opportunities for visual ethnographers when interactivity and new media visual techniques are employed as story telling devices. In a 2011 blog post for i-Docs.org, Professor Kerrick Harvey sees the possibilities of bridging anthropology and interactive documentaries so audiences can, as she puts it, “play through” real-world information.<sup>12</sup>

In order to explore this more deeply, it is important to reflect on how ethnographic films have historically been defined. In the 1950s, the camera became integrated as a tool of documentary in anthropology. And, as the technology grew, its uses became as important as a pencil and notebook, generating a discussion about best practices. In 1973, ethnographic filmmakers Asch, Marshall and Spier framed the structures of filmmaking in their seminal article, *Ethnographic Film: Structure and Function*, categorizing films into objective recording, scripted and

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<sup>6</sup> Aufderheide, Pat. Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction. Page 127.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/pov/hackathon/>

<sup>8</sup> Branch, John. Snow Fall. New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-fall/?forcedredirect=yes#/?part=tunnel-creek>

<sup>9</sup> Stogner, Maggie Burnette. Searching for Aristotle in the Digital Age: Creating Cultural Narrative with 21st Century Media Technologies. The International Journal of New Media, Technology, and the Arts. Volume 8, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Aufderheide, Pat. Interactive Documentaries: Navigation and Design. University Film and Video Journal. Forthcoming.

<sup>11</sup> Proctor and Maher, 2012: <http://www.dnaanthology.com/anvc/dna/what-is-interactivity?path=emotional-multiplicities-in-multi-sourced-work>

<sup>12</sup> Harvey, Kerric. <http://i-docs.org/2011/09/29/some-thoughts-on-social-change-through-story-telling/>

reportage.<sup>13</sup> Objective recording's structure was dictated by the action recorded, it could either be descriptive or analytical and used as data and for reference. These films were typically short and reflected a particular sequence of an event, not unlike the early films of the Lumière Brothers. Scripted filming implied that the filmmaker developed the structures of the films. The idea for what was to be filmed originated ahead of time based on a filmmaker's idea or anthropologist's previous research. Reportage encompassing a single event or a complete segment could be edited to create structure and patterns. This last category includes the early films of the Cinema Verité filmmakers, such as Drew, Pennebaker and Wiseman.

Dr. Karl Heider continued the discussion in his book, *Ethnographic Film*, and suggested two necessary considerations when producing ethnographic films: how closely does the film meet the objectives of ethnography and how does the film present research differently than its written counterpart. Heider further explains "If ethnographic demands conflict with cinematographic demands, ethnography must prevail."<sup>14</sup>

A notable example of ethnographic filmmaking was the series *Disappearing Worlds*. Produced by Granada Television in the United Kingdom beginning in the 1970s, the series included 55 films that were developed by anthropologists in collaboration with documentary filmmakers. Stylistically the series varied greatly in narrative and editorial approaches, but was ultimately most successful in how it bred a "rapid diffusion of new ideas in anthropological filmmaking."<sup>15</sup>

One of the early tensions in ethnographic filmmaking was the idea that anthropological fieldwork had to have objectivity. Professor Harvey notes in her 2011 post in *i-Doc* that this idea was largely dropped by the 1980s and eventually replaced by an alternative methodological philosophy known as "reflective anthropology."<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Harvey makes a comparison between the concept of reflexive ethnography and an interactive documentary. The conceptual shift from "subject" to "participant" in documentary and from "subjects" to "respondents" or "consultants" in ethnographic fieldwork is notable.<sup>17</sup> The lexicon and taxonomy within both fields continues to evolve, making it ripe for a renewed mash up of techniques.

Judith Aston and Sandra Gaudenzi wrote a pivotal article, *Interactive Documentary: Setting the Field in Studies* in which they outline sub-modes for Interactive Documentaries: *Conversational, Hypertext, Participative, and Experiential*. The Hypertext mode includes assets or a collection of video clips that a user can search through and "gives the user an exploratory role, normally enacted by clicking on pre-existing options."<sup>18</sup> The Participative mode enables the user to have a more active role in the development of the narrative "as it counts on the participation of the user to create an open and evolving database."<sup>19</sup>

For those in the documentary field, "interactives" are still an emerging form with an ever-changing lexicon and set of taxonomies. The challenges in creating cinematically controlled experiences remains. However, for the ethnographic filmmaker who focuses on exploration of the documentary participants' experiences, interactive forms provide new possibilities and collaboration with the researchers and professors who inform the field of ethnography and anthropology. There is still much to discuss, develop and investigate and this is just a small taste of it.

## Notable Examples:

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<sup>13</sup> Ethnographic Film: Structure and Function, in the Annual Review of Anthropology (Asch, Marshall, Spier, 179)

<sup>14</sup> Heider, Karl Ethnographic Film. University of Texas, Austin, 2006. p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Loizos, Peter. Granada Television's Disappearing World Series: An Appraisal. American Anthropologist, Issue 3, September 1980.

<sup>16</sup> Harvey, Kerric. Some Thoughts on Social Change Through Storytelling. Sept. 2011 Web Aug 4. 2014. <<http://i-docs.org/2011/09/29/some-thoughts-on-social-change-through-story-telling>>

<sup>17</sup> Harvey, Kerric. <http://i-docs.org/2011/09/29/some-thoughts-on-social-change-through-story-telling/>

<sup>18</sup> Aston, J.; Gaudenzi, S. (2012), "Interactive documentary: setting the field". In: Studies in Documentary Film. Vol. 6 Issue 2: S. 127.

<sup>19</sup> Aston, J.; Gaudenzi, S. (2012), "Interactive documentary: setting the field". In: Studies in Documentary Film. Vol. 6 Issue 2: S. 127.

### **Gaza Sderot**

<http://gaza-sderot.arte.tv/>

An early example of using new media for ethnographic filmmaking. The documentary, made in 2008, uses “spatial montage” (two simultaneous videos on a screen at the same time), to show the effect of occupation in two communities in Gaza.



### **Planet Galata**

<http://planetgalata.com/korsakow/en/>



Planet Galata, an interactive documentary by Florian Thallofer and Berke Bas, uses a custom non-linear system called Korsakow. The user can choose between the smallest narrative units (SNUs). Planet Galata originated as a linear documentary for broadcast and was re-edited into its current interactive form.

### **A Mosque of Her Own**

[mosqueofherown.com](http://mosqueofherown.com)



A Mosque of Her Own is an i-Doc that investigates the oldest all-women’s mosque in China. It uses a 360-style interface to enable people to explore the and virtually interact with the women who worship in the mosque. This immersive interactive documentary experience enables users to interact with a fading cultural tradition.

### **Project Syria**

<http://www.immersivejournalism.com/category/immersive-journalism/>

Project Syria debuted at the World Economic Forum’s Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland. The objective was to document the plight of Syrian’s refugees from the current civil war conflict using the *oculus rift* virtual reality technology, which enables users



of the device to *feel* as if they were in the space and virtual present for the moment. Nonny de la Pena, University of Southern California, developed this type of interaction and refers to it as “immersive journalism.”<sup>20</sup>

The National Film Board of Canada has made a large investment into interactive documentary forms in recent years. The most notable example is *Highrise* produced by Canada’s Filmmaker-in-Residence, Katerina Cizek, <https://www.nfb.ca/interactive/>.

iDocs are just one new frontier for ethnographic filmmaking. Gaming platforms and virtual environments are also providing innovative ways to convey news, documentary and non-fiction stories.

### **The Future May Not Be Televised, but It Will Be Played**

By Lindsay Grace

*Question: Is gaming the future of media and education?*

Undeniably the present indicates a departure from linear media, to interactive media. It signals a change from authorial control, to participatory production. This is not merely a change in the way content is delivered, turning feature films into webisodes or games. It also includes the way media is consumed. Watching has become less of a passive experience and more of an active one. Viewers live Tweet, take and post pictures while watching and converse via social media networks. Viewing has become a digitally mediated dialog. The foundation of that mediation is interactive media, the catchall term for everything from websites and games to social media and the cadre of technology-assisted systems that expand media potentials.

This new media is one of many disruptors to the relatively stoic higher education tradition. Interactive media is at the center of newly proposed solutions like massively open online courses (aka MOOCs) and a clear ingredient in the projected future of education at all levels. Interactive media also serves as an appropriate metaphor for the likely future of higher education. Like the relationship of viewer to media, contemporary education is becoming more of a dialog than a lecture. Students translate their participatory media consumption practices into expectations in the classroom. As such, the trajectory for creative pedagogy is toward interactive, adaptive, data-rich, and inquiry-lead education, a similar trajectory to the technology that supports it. Here are several methodologies:

It is tempting to declare that today’s student is a technical student. The assumption is that because they interact with technology on a daily basis, students are more technical than their predecessors. This is the championed basis of the term digital native (Palfrey and Gasser). It is perhaps more accurate to say that the modern student is interactive. Interactive technology has changed the way they perceive problems and seek solutions. The modern world is an interactive world. It is a world, to use interaction design terms, of a series of feedback loops. Students provide input and expect output. This is the fundamental relationship of an interaction. Contemporary students work via digital-mediated interactivity, in their social lives (via social media) and their practical lives (e.g. banking online).

The pace of these interactions has been moving faster, not slower. The resulting expectation is that the feedback loop must be close and tight. In this environment, students evaluate the quality of their education as a kind of interaction. Are they able to do something better than they did the day before? Are they receiving feedback often, or does it feel like the system is

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.oculusvr.com>

broken? Is there latency that prevents them from succeeding? From this perspective, quality is evaluated by its interaction. Was the interaction seamless? Was it clear? Was it what was expected? Was it better than expected? These are all common assessment-linked questions.

For education this means more feedback and more levels of feedback. It is not enough to give grades; they must be qualified, frequent, standardized and clear. In short, they must meet the expectations of a good interactive system. This trend is apparent in course management systems, which leverage the relatively low cost of collecting and storing data to provide more ways to understand progress.

Games have been one of the 21<sup>st</sup> century darlings of interactive media. Besides experiencing a meteoric rise as an industry and ubiquitous pastime, games have been recognized as a resource for understanding how to create good interactions. A typical interactive game system provides lots of useful feedback and is structured to keep people engaged. As a growing trend, more educational systems have tried to integrate elements of games via a gamification model that applies game design theory and loyalty program principles to non-game environments. The incentives of these systems are badges of achievement, payout systems and all of the elements commonly used, from Las Vegas slot machines to Xbox consoles. We expect gamification application to increase as a means of providing motivational feedback to students.

A good interactive system does not tell the user what they need, it asks them. It is not surprising then that as higher education adapts it has begun to mimic this characteristic. Framed as the inverted classroom (Lage et al. 2000) or inquiry-based learning (Edison et al.), effective pedagogy often comes not from providing students with the questions they should all ask, but instead by allowing them to ask the questions they want individually.

In well-designed interactive feedback loops, one size does not fit all. Students understand themselves as individuals, with their own needs, and expect the ability to ask their own questions. The benefit to this model is a high-fidelity experience that allows student to pursue the questions they are most concerned with. The challenge is that the instructor must consistently manage these inquiries to drive toward the best education. Good interactive systems communicate positive and negative feedback to help the user toward their goal.

The result is that effective educators become project managers, able to foreshadow pitfalls and create educational moments down paths they have not scripted. Game design theory tries to predict user behavior and structure an effective illusion of control (a term commonly used in the design of games). A good game designer, like a good educator, understands how to lead without seeming to lead, and how to keep their audience motivated toward the ultimate goal. In games, designers discuss their practice as linking a series of interesting problems, not a series of choices. Games provide an illusion of control, by presenting players with a series of problems that they must solve to matriculate. Few games offer the ambiguities of real choice, because that is expensive and inefficient. Instead, players are presented mandatory problems, things that must be solved or the player fails.

Inquiry-based learning is more adaptive. Under this model, students propose the primary question and work with the instructor to design a potential solution. The learner seeks feedback quickly and often, and spirals inward toward a solution. Tracy Fullerton's Playcentric model (Fullerton 2008) is a good example of this iterative approach. It is the model underlying the 2012 Game of the Year, *Journey*<sup>21</sup>. Another example is *Dragonfly* that

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<sup>21</sup> <http://thatgamecompany.com/games/journey/>

excites student interest in environmental challenges (Yager 2009). Importantly, the initial goal may be very different than the final product. An iterative design approach is imperative.

The most exciting interactive technologies, the ones that change society in substantial ways are currently ones that adapt. These include everything from learning algorithms (Aha et al 2011) to self-driving cars (Sullivan 2014). Adaption is what keeps students of the future from falling out of the future. The average student can expect far more job changes in their lifetime than their parents. Adaptation is important for future educators as well. The nature of inquiry-based learning inherently means students will encounter problems that educators have never faced. Adaption is also about accepting and embracing failure. Design cannot respond to failure if it does not recognize it. To adapt, something must be performing short of expectation or need. It must fail.

The two game concepts that most inform pedagogy are *hard fun* and *deep play*. The concept of hard fun was first introduced at MIT (Prensky, 2005). In short, it is the state of mind a player enters when they are challenged by something with little short-term benefit, but clear long-term benefit. Learning a language might offer hard play if the person is excited about learning the language for a vacation abroad or to talk to a person for whom they have romantic interest. Hard fun is at the foundation of every game tutorial or sticking point. Players can hit hard play from the start, or in the middle of a game. What keeps them playing is not the challenge in itself, but the expectation of an eventual, long-term payout.

Deep play is a bit more nefarious. When someone is involved in deep play, nothing else matters. They are so consumed by the experience of the game that they fail to care about the external non-game world. The worst examples of this include individuals with gambling addictions who mortgage their homes to keep playing. The best example of this is the musician who practices through the middle of the night enraptured in the mere practicing of their instrument. With deep play, players may skip meals, but it can also lock them into a state of utter focus that doesn't stop until they have solved the problem.

Understanding these key game design concepts has resonated with educators. Seeking to foster the power of deep play or hard play, syllabi are constructed with game-like principles. The most cited example of gamification in the classroom is by Lee Sheldon, a former film and television writer turned game faculty (Barata G et al, 2013). While gamification is ultimately a combination of the traditional loyalty programs used by airlines and hotel groups, it does indicate a future trajectory toward a new kind of interaction design. Instead of biasing toward the practiced, matter of fact interaction design of first generation systems, there is a trend toward newer interaction designs, in particular the playful experience. The benefit of playfulness is not just a way to candy coat a mundane task. From psychologists' perspective, it is a distinct state that encourages learning, experimentation and focus (Brown 2009). Players are not just users, they are critical, hyper-focused, highly experimental, and experiential.

Play is highly effective for increasing the effectiveness of the interaction loop. The future it seems can facilitate a highly engaged, highly focused, creative student with a little help from games. If so, the future may not be televised, but it will be played.

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## **How to Teach 21<sup>st</sup> Century Documentary Filmmakers to Succeed in the Real World**

By Chris Palmer

*Question: What are students' prospects for having successful and fulfilling careers?*

As the student came into my office, I could immediately see something was wrong. She was pale and her shoulders sagged. "Are you OK?" I asked her. She replied, "Not really. I'm graduating in two months and don't have a job. I've been looking everywhere and networking like crazy, but nothing is panning out for me. I can't find a job."

She was deeply worried about her future, overwhelmed by the difficulties facing her, and exhausted trying to navigate today's media landscape.

This student is not alone. I asked a random group of film students (seniors and graduate students) what they feared about the future and here is what they said:

- *"I am deeply afraid that all of the effort, time, and investment my family has so generously placed in me will be wasted and I will not achieve anything significant in the film industry."*
- *"My biggest fear about the future is not being successful and failing to make it as a filmmaker."*
- *"I'm afraid that the film industry won't understand who I am as a filmmaker."*
- *"My biggest worry is not ever finding out how I will impact the world through making films and not doing anything worthy of me."*
- *"There are so many incredibly talented documentary filmmakers out there who don't get the recognition they deserve. It's scary."*
- *"I'm terrified of graduating from college as a film major. I have no idea where I am going to be this time next year."*

Film students are worried about finding jobs and careers when they graduate. They know it is not easy and they know that even when they are lucky enough to find out about a possible job, the competition is intense. They also worry about finding a job that pays decently, so that they can pay off their student loans.



Jerry Griffith, President of TIVA, a nonprofit educational organization in Washington DC that educates and trains media professionals, reports that *Forbes* magazine ranked “Film, Video and Photographic Arts” as the second worst major for return-on-investment, with an unemployment rate of 12.9 percent for recent graduates.

Those of us who teach at film schools can do a lot to help our students allay these worries by teaching them valuable technical skills, such as animation, cinematography and editing. We can teach them about interactive media, trans-media, participatory media, and immersive media. We can build their competence on digital devices, social media, mobile Apps, and augmented reality. And we can work with them to create meaningful and purposeful media through visual and aural storytelling.

But this is all useless if film students cannot find jobs or only can find jobs that painfully under-employ them and do not use their full potential—which seems to be the case for far too many film students across the globe if anecdotal evidence can be believed.

So as faculty, we need to do more than teach our students technical skills. We need to teach them how to succeed. This means we must help to sharpen their soft (or life) skills, including leadership, professionalism, collaboration, lifelong learning, adaptability, resilience, resourcefulness, business acumen, ambition, and integrity. We need to help them constantly initiate actions and make things happen, to be entrepreneurial, to seize opportunities, and to work hard. They must learn how to run a business and to persevere and stay focused, despite setbacks and rejections.

Are we doing enough to teach our film students these skills? Are we adequately preparing our students to find jobs when they enter the work force? I worry that we are not teaching them the most useful things they need to know in order to succeed. We may be over-emphasizing technical skills, which will be soon out-of-date anyway, while saddling them with a ton of crippling debt.

When our students graduate, they face challenges that go beyond the technical competencies we teach them in the classroom. They need to network and create partnerships. They need to be able to negotiate, listen, coach, and raise money. In the real world, technical know-how is not enough. They need to be self-motivated, tenacious and know how to work well with people. These necessary skills all require leadership and professionalism. Unfortunately, unlike business schools, most documentary film schools do not teach these proficiencies.

Leadership requires entrepreneurial skills, as well as competence in delegation, time management, listening, and critical thinking skills. A leader must be ready to think big and boldly. Team building skills, mentoring and coaching are also vital. Perhaps the most important characteristics of a leader are the ability to take initiative and to have a moral compass. Leaders have to set effective goals and think about the legacy they want to leave behind. They have to have the capability to enroll people in a vision and to pursue it with passion. They need to network relentlessly so they are in a strong position to hear of new opportunities, hire the best people and tap into the best financial resources.

Professionalism involves civility, courtesy, a solid work ethic, balance, networking, and strong communication skills. Professionals acknowledge and learn from mistakes, act as team players, consistently give their best effort, always treat others with respect, and keep their promises.

Perhaps the most important thing our students will ever do in life is build and maintain long-term, happy, healthy, fulfilling relationships with other people they respect and who respect them. They need to mold themselves into human beings with great integrity, trustworthiness, reliability, decency, ability, and a great work ethic, so that people want to work with them. They

also need to become persuasive speakers, so they can pitch their films, campaigns, and projects in the most exciting and dynamic way possible.

Film schools should do more to teach these crucial life skills through classes, workshops, and outside speakers. We should offer courses specifically focused on leadership, entrepreneurship and professional behavior. We can also encourage more group projects so our students learn how to get along with others to accomplish a common task. And we can provide students with more opportunities to manage their own projects from start to finish. Students can also obviously gain professional experience through more internships with film companies, broadcasters and filmmakers.

In Paul Tough's book, *How Children Succeed*, he argues that simply teaching math and reading (the so-called cognitive skills) to young kids are not nearly enough. He writes that the most important things to develop in children are non-cognitive skills, i.e., character traits like integrity, self-control, self-discipline, focus, resilience, time-management skills, ambition, perseverance, and resourcefulness. What is true for children is also true for college students and grad students at film schools.

Film schools across the globe need to add formal training in professionalism and leadership to their programs. The Center for Environmental Filmmaking at the School of Communication at American University, which I founded and direct, is making a start in this direction, but we need to create more programs to help better prepare our students for the challenges they will face in the real world.

## **CONCLUSION**

*What does the future hold?*

Documentary storytelling continues to be a reflection of modern culture, whether looking forward, looking past, or trying to make sense of the here and now. New tools will shape the way we tell and share the stories, and the methods we use to teach emerging filmmakers. Just as traditional narrative storytelling is changing, traditional pedagogy is as well. The concept of one teacher at a set location lecturing to one audience is fading. In its place is a range of teaching styles that have all the attributes of new forms of storytelling: interactive, immersive, asynchronous, fragmented, mobile, global, and a loosening of authorial control. Our role as faculty is shifting. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century film school, we mediate, we guide and, perhaps most important, we inspire.

The role of the 21<sup>st</sup> century storyteller is evolving. Let us learn together.

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Special thanks to graduate students Vanina Harel and Viviana Bravo for their research assistance and copyediting.

Bios:

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**Bill Gentile** is an independent journalist and documentary filmmaker. His career spans four decades and five continents. He is the founder and director of American University's [Backpack Journalism Project](#), and author of the "Essential Video Journalism Field Manual." He's worked for United Press International, Newsweek Magazine and Video News International. He completed assignments for The Learning Channel, Discovery Channel, National Geographic Television, ABC's Nightline With Ted Koppel, NOW With Bill Moyers, Court TV and Lion TV. He shared the Robert F. Kennedy Award for Human Rights Reporting, Honorable Mention. He shared two National Emmy Awards and was nominated for two others.

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**Larry Kirkman** is a professor of Film and Media Arts, teaching social documentary and film history for MA/MFA filmmakers. As dean of the School of Communication, 2001-2012, he directed programs in Journalism, Film and Media Arts, Public Communication, Communication Studies, and International Media. He established centers for innovation in public service media, including Center for Media and Social Impact and Center for Environmental Filmmaking, and media partnerships, including *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, NBC, Sony, and New America Media. His work has focused on media for public knowledge and action: public television documentaries and social advertising campaigns, including *Connect for Kids* with the Advertising Council, which received \$300 million in donated media, and *Union Yes* for the AFL-CIO.

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**Russell Williams, II** is a seasoned veteran of the motion picture world has spent more than thirty years plying his trade. His career has spanned the 1973 Watergate Hearings, radio production, theatre sound design, multi-track recording, film documentary and feature-film sound recording. His quest for perfection has garnered him two Academy Awards and two Prime-Time Emmys while he was based in Los Angeles. A native of Washington DC, Mr. Williams received an Inter-Disciplinary Bachelors Degree in Film Production, Art History and Literature from American University in 1974. In 2002, Mr. Williams relocated to Washington, DC where he serves as the Distinguished Artist-in-Residence in the School of Communication Film & Video at American University.