

CILECT NEWS

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MORE THAN MEETS
THE EYE

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More Than Meets the Eye

Evolving Strategies for Film and Television Education

CILECT CONGRESS 2002

hosted by

THE VCA SCHOOL OF FILM AND TELEVISION

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

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Introduction

This is the report of the conference “More Than Meets the Eye: Evolving Strategies for Film and Television Education” that was held as part of the biennial CILECT Congress, held in Melbourne, Australia in April, 2002. The gracious and infinitely helpful host institution was the School of Film and Television of the Victorian College of the Arts, and its Dean, Jennifer Sabine.

The conference program was devised by the 2001 CILECT officers, President Caterina D’Amico, vice-presidents Henning Camre, Wolfgang Längsfeld, Henry Breitrose, and Don Zirpola, and Executive Secretary Henry Verhasselt, in consultation with many CILECT colleagues.

Panels and the question-and-answer sessions that follow are exercises in multi-sensory communication. Not only are the words themselves important, but emphasis and nuance of voice and accompanying gesture serve to enrich the discussion. In an international organization such as CILECT, in which many participants present in languages other than their mother tongue, the connotative meaning, the way in which things are said, is of similar weight to the denotative content, what the words themselves mean.

This document is based upon the transcription of the conference proceedings, edited in an attempt to re-create flavor of the event on the printed page, as clearly and readably as possible. As one of my students suggested, it is much like the difference between a translator and an interpreter. The result is never perfect, but frequently good enough to be useful.

Edited drafts were sent to each of the panel chairs and presenters, who were requested to review them and ensure that the text reflected their intended meaning. Several of the participants returned revised texts, but some did not, which I took to be a tacit statement of approval. The suggested changes were incorporated into the final text.

Henry Breitrose
CILECT Vice-president for Publications and Research
Stanford, California

Saturday, April 6, 2002



Keynote
Speaker
Andrew
Lesnie won
the Academy
Award for
Best Cine-

matography on *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*. He is also Director of Photography on *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* and *The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King*.

Andrew's previous credits include *Temptation of a Monk (You Seng)*, *Babe*, *The Sugar Factory*, *Babe: Pig in the City*; *Doing Time for Patsy Cline*, *Two If By The Sea*, *Spider and Rose*, *The Delinquents*, *Daydream Believer*, *The Saint in Australia*, *Boys in the Island*, *The Rainbow Warrior Conspiracy (TV)*, *Dark Age*, *Bodyline (TV)*, *Emoh Ruo*, *Fair Game*, *Unfinished Business*,

Apart from the Oscar, Andrew's awards include Cinematographer of the Year in 1995 for *Temptation of a Monk (You Seng)* and Cinematographer of the Year for *Babe* in 1996, both from the Australian Cinematographers Society. He has also won Best Cinematography for *Doing Time for Patsy Cline* in 1997 from the Australian Film Institute Awards and The Chicago Film Critics Association Award and the Las Vegas Film Critics Association Award for *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*.

Andrew graduated from the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) in 1979. By a strange quirk of fate, Andrew was competing with fellow Australian and former teacher Don McAlpine at this year's Academy Awards. Don was nominated for *Moulin Rouge!* and taught Cinematography at the AFTRS where Andrew was one of his students.

Keynote Address

I am not a professional speaker and public speaking definitely wasn't taught at the Australian Film, Radio, and Television School when I was there.

But I have been a film school student, and I think that for the rest of my life I will be a student of film.

I am a cinematographer, I have been one for 20 years, and I speak primarily with images. These days I am also expected to verbalize my work in television interviews, newspaper articles, behind-the-scenes documentaries, and DVD special features.

Information on how to make films is now very publicly available. My children grew up on TV, films, and interactive games. They listen to sound track CDs, they surf the net, they have access to world cinema and documentaries on "free-to-air TV". They can write a script, shoot a video, edit it, and finish a polished work, on our home computer. They watch the DVD of *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* and see the genesis of a scene from storyboard to release print. After we've been to the movies, they tell me about the quality of the effects work, or if the story line is too predictable. But I know they still respond to a good story and how a good story is told.

When I grew up, there was nothing, except for a steady diet of American television and a local suburban cinema. My mother used to take me to the local cinema, so at a tender young age I found myself sitting in an empty art deco palace watching Johnny Weissmuller in Tarzan movies, and my only company was mom and sometimes the usherettes who would sit next to me. Sometimes I wonder about what made me want to make films. I do not know to this day if the desire to make films was coupled with some future social agenda.

I studied art at high school; I made super 8 films and some animation, and even went so far as sneaking into cinemas with a tape recorder to capture music that I fell in love with. When I graduated from high school, I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to direct, as does everybody, but the industry was small, and I didn't know anybody.

A national film and TV school had just opened in Australia, and in it I saw an avenue and an opportunity, a way to realize a vague dream. When I started, there were 25 students who all wanted to direct. As the three-year course progressed, people naturally gravitated towards their specific fields of interest. Thankfully, the course was long enough for this process to take place in its own sweet time. What did I enjoy most at film school? I think what I enjoyed most was that my eyes were opened. I enjoyed the

multi-cultural diversity of the student body and staff, and their many different opinions. The school organized trips to art galleries, and orchestral recitals, and live theater. All students were invited to act or direct workshops. There were even Yoga classes for staff and students, three times a week.

Then there were the student strikes. They were my first involvement in any militant action. The strikes were part of a bigger unspoken silent struggle by many young filmmakers to make their works in the face of bureaucratic obstacles. It is said that hindsight is the gift of the masses, and looking back, I believe that this conflict also provided important lessons in perseverance and being honest to oneself. I believe that a completely harmonious film school, a school with no conflict, is not a film school at all.

The AFTRS taught me how to make documentaries, TV programs, and fiction films, but more importantly, it taught me about life and gave me invaluable experiences, and life-long friendships. The school attracted interesting people from all over the world, with many diverse views and beliefs. It was a forum, a meeting place that challenged my preconceptions about many things. If there were something that I could add to the syllabus, it would be to provide students more of an opportunity to examine their national culture and history, because it will bring greater depth to a country's national cinema, and make the filmmaker a better storyteller when he or she works in foreign lands.

I am often asked what I, a cinematographer, bring to a director. All I can say is that I come with an accumulation of my life experience: who I am, what I feel. My work is heavily based on feelings and emotions. It is not over-intellectualized. I listen to music a lot, and music stimulates my visual sense.

I start each project as though I have never shot a frame of film in my life. That quickly passes. When I first meet a director, I always ask what the film is about. I am not looking for an outline or a complete rundown of the narrative, but rather for some insight into the subtext, into what the film is really about. What drove the writer to create the script? Why did the director decide to spend a considerable amount of time and energy realizing the work? I search for stories that I would like to see, and for the people with whom I would like to work and with whom I would like to develop a mutual trust.

I want my work to be seen by as many people as possible. After all, we who work in film are in the mass media industry. I want to believe that some of my work will be thought to be as relevant in a hundred years as it is now, because I believe great stories transcend time.

I have been lucky. For me, *Babe* is an important film. It is

also a subversive film. It is really a story about prejudice. *Lord of the Rings* is a film about the nature of loyalty, friendship, and obligation. With my work on these

films came an education in digital effects. My learning was always on the run, because there was always an urgent reason to find a solution: we had a story to tell.

For me, digital technology is a tool. It joins the vast palette of tools at the disposal of modern storytellers, and like most revolutionary changes in communication, the issues remain ones of taste and application: what you are trying to say and how you are trying to say it. That's why I believe that education in fine arts is crucial, and understanding one's national history and country is a very close second.

What we dealt with on the project, in addition to just trying to tell a story with all its myriad complexities, was that obviously, we could not cast actors who were the size of hobbits. The cast would be chosen accorded their capacity to perform the parts, so it was left to us to figure out ways of achieving the appropriate scale: hobbits of approximately 3½ feet in height against normal sized humans.

Nowadays, the obvious approach would be to do all the shots as digital effect shots, which meant that we would be shooting one person or the other against blue screen, and then superimposing them digitally. We decided that while there would be some shots done digitally, it be asking far too much financially to do all the shots that involved characters of different scales as digital effects shot. So people were hired who were anatomically correct, but small, and we also hired some basketball players who were over 7 feet tall.

We resorted to a lot of very cheap tricks that utilized false perspective. We would line up a shot, and then we would cheat Gandalf or Frodo farther apart, just to exploit the per-



spective of the lens. We gave them eyelines that would make it appear as though they were looking at each other, but in reality they weren't. Elijah Wood, who played Frodo, would be sitting maybe a meter behind Ian McKellen, who played Gandalf. Basically we would line up the ideal shot and sometimes we would use the scale doubles, who were either the very big people or the very small people, and actually line up what we wanted to achieve. Then we would figure out how to use lens perspective to achieve a similar effect.

We also wanted to do moving shots with false perspective, so we would move the table or the chair on a floating rig in relation to the camera, so we were able to do have moving camera shots where in fact the entire perspective was cheated and Elijah was sitting a meter or a meter-and-a-half further back from Ian during the move.

Some shots were digital composites, where we would do a first pass with a motion control rig, with a table and one person, and another pass where we would either bring one person or a group of people forward and recede the others.

We tried to preserve the integrity of the performances by not waiting to schedule the blue screen shoots weeks or months later on a blue screen stage. We carried blue screens around with us, and we would build quite elaborate rigs and attempt to execute all the special effects portions of the shot on the set itself, immediately after doing the conventional shooting.

Our greatest priority was to get the best performances from the cast that we possibly could, and if we had to adjust the schedule, or modify the nature of how we covered a scene, we would do it. I'd say the most successful staging of any scene, where the actors could truly play off each other, was at the end of the film where, Boromir is collecting wood and he finds Frodo, and then attempts to steal the ring from him.

We were able to stage all the scenes where the actors could play off each other as a master shot, and that was basically the ongoing process. It was a great relief on days when we only had to deal with either the hobbits or the humans because we could work out the coverage without having to deal with scale issues. We were extremely glad on those rare days of

purely hobbits or purely humans because they felt like conventional filmmaking.

This project is still being made. We shot three films, and the director, Peter Jackson, has just cut the second film. We will be doing pick-ups for the second film in May and June. We used a similar process last year for the first film. Peter directed the three films and they were shot simultaneously, but he was only able to sit down and begin seriously cutting the first film last year. Once he had done the initial cut, we did pick-ups which involved specific shots or parts of scenes in order to condense what he was trying to say. We are going through the same process this year with the second film.

I have to say that the second film looks grittier than the first. It enters a darker territory, what everyone calls "the battle for Middle-Earth." I believe that they have stuck a four-minute trailer at the end of the current release print of *Lord of the Rings*.

I am heading back to New Zealand for an extended period of time to complete the filming on number two. We set up a digital grading facility in Wellington and 70% of the first film was digitally graded. I digitally graded the film myself. For the second film, 100% will be digitally graded. The benefit of doing digital grading was that, unlike my previous experience, where shots came in from digital effects houses and I discovered that there were anomalies in some of their number crunching, which meant that we were faced with the prospect of trying to resolve these issues at the lab, digital grading allows us much more opportunity to polish the image. Because it's a Super-35 film, it will undergo an optical squeeze to make it anamorphic.

We are investigating whether we can do the squeeze digitally and not optically, so that we can eliminate a generation in post-production. The actual image that we strike off the digital intermediate is absolutely gorgeous, but like most feature films, once it goes through the process of duping in order to make multiple printing masters, and this particular project had to deliver 10,000 prints for a worldwide release in December, the quality visibly degrades from generation to generation. We are hoping to resolve this in the second film, and get a release print that is slightly more pristine and a bit more like what we are used to looking at in post-production.

A huge benefit on this project was that the cast almost universally loved the book and were extremely enthusiastic about the project. Their commitment to the project was much greater than a normal film because they were all expected to move to New Zealand for a period of 18 months. It was quite a substantial lifestyle change on every level, and everyone was extremely keen to be faithful to the book. Frequently there were copies of the book floating around on

the set, so when we were preparing for scenes to be shot, it would not only be a case of studying the script, but we would also go to the relevant passages in the book. I found it particularly useful as a way to glean the feelings and the emotions that Tolkien was writing about. I felt that his language provided most of my key references for the look and the feel of the mood.

The principal photography took 274 days over a 15 month period. You need to divide that by three 180-minute movies to make sense of those numbers. On some days we would have considerable effects work, but on other days we would be helicoptered into locations with a very minimal crew. Sometimes we would just take hand-held cameras and some sheets of polystyrene and we would film an entire sequence and then get airlifted off the mountain before the weather turned nasty. This shoot had quite a variety of types of film-making.

Until recently, Australia didn't have Fox Studios in Sydney or the Warner Studios up in the Gold Coast. A lot of Australia's finest films were made in wool sheds where sometimes the corrugating iron flapped so hard that you can't hear the actors talking, and they were only 6 feet away from you. We were in a similar situation in New Zealand.

The difficulty thing of shooting blue screen or green screen work is getting a handle on what is actually on the blue or green screen. The general advice for lighting blue or green screens when you are actually lighting the foreground subject, is to turn the lights off on the blue screen and just light the subject as you want it to be lit to communicate what you are trying to say, and ignore the background. If you're on an effects shoot and are being subjected to large amounts of blue screen or green screen for long periods of time, it really does affect your sensibilities. As the crews of *Star Wars* will attest, one can go completely bonkers after several months of staring at nothing but huge amounts of very bright blue too.

Ideally, when you are doing blue screen or green screen composite effects work, you try to get some of the actual art work that you are planning to have comped in, or something similar, and if possible, do a basic matte on a monitor on the set, so that you get a sense of what the finished result will look like before you roll the camera. That technology is not actually extremely complex. It's basically an overlay facility.

I believe that there are many beautiful looking terrible films, and there are also some not very good looking fantastic films. Much as I would like to be involved in beautiful looking fantastic films, I would rather go to the cinema to see a great film than just see great photography.

Sunday, April 7, 2002

Conference Panel 1

School and Student The Conflict Between Harmony and Invention

Panel Members



Annabelle Sheehan is the Head of Film and Television at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. Annabelle has a Bachelor of Communications (film production major), Graduate Diploma in Education, UTS and an MA in Cinema Studies, New York University (NYU). She worked in post production of feature films for 17 years and her credits include *The Piano*, *Lorenzo's Oil*, *Fearless*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *Dead Calm*, *Rapa Nui*, *Mad Max 2* and *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*. Annabelle's work has earned awards in Australia (AFI Best Achievement in Sound for *The Piano*), as well as in the US (Motion Picture Sound Editors Guild Awards for *The Piano* and *Dead Calm*).



Doe Mayer is the Mary Pickford Professor of Film and Television Production at USC's School of Cinema Television where she has been teaching documentary and fiction Film-making for the past 15 years. She holds a joint appointment with The Annenberg School for Communication where her work is centered on the Practical application of communication campaign strategies and designs for social issue and health defined organizations. Professor Mayer has been working in film and Television for the past 25 years and has produced, directed and provided technical support for hundreds of productions in the United States and numerous developing countries. Much of this programming has been in the areas of family planning, basic education, health and nutrition promotion, HIV/AIDS prevention, population, and women's issues.



Marieke Schoenmakers is the Director of the Netherlands Film and Television Academy and member of the Directors team of the Amsterdam School of the Arts. She studied Anthropology and Sociology of non-western countries. She did her specialization in Visual Anthropology, and graduated with a documentary on Tibetan weavers in Nepal. She was a teacher in documentary filmmaking at the University of Amsterdam from 1987-1990. In the nineties she worked at the Arts Council and was a staff member of the Netherlands Opera. Between 1996 and 2000 she was director of the Music Theatre (home theatre for the Netherlands Opera and the National Ballet) in Amsterdam.



Victor Valbuena is Director, School of Film and Media Studies, Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Singapore. He has a BA in journalism and literature, MA in communication, and PhD in Southeast Asian Studies. He was formerly Associate Professor and Chair of the Graduate Studies Programme at the Institute of Mass Communication, University of the Philippines. Prior to joining Ngee Ann Polytechnic he was Head of the Research Programme, and later the Institutional Development Programme, at the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC) in Singapore. His film experience is in research and Production Design / Art Direction for educational films produced for Philippine Development Programmes as well as for UNICEF/UNESCO Rural Development and Women's Empowerment programmes.

Richard James is an Associate Professor in the University of Melbourne's Centre for the Study of Higher Education, a leading Centre for research into contemporary higher education policy issues.

His recent research has been into access and equity, the transition To higher education, the student experience of higher education, and The management issues associated with new student expectations.

Student priorities and school philosophies often disagree. Students want the utmost freedom, schools want artistic and organizational structure and discipline. Students live in the present, while schools honor the past and work for the future. Film and Television school is inevitably a balance between the classroom world of ideas and the studio world of action. Negotiating a balance that meets the needs of the students and the goals of the school is a continuing theme in film and television education.

Annabelle Sheehan, Chair

The panel is entitled “School and Student: The Conflict Between Harmony and Invention” Henry Breitrose tells me that the title comes from the Baroque Italian composer Antonio Vivaldi, who entitled a set of his earliest compositions “Il Cimento dell’ Armonia e dell’ Invenzione.” It’s generally known in English as “The Conflict Between Harmony and Invention,” but it is sometimes translated as “The *Hazards of Harmony and Invention*”. Either translation is appropriate for this panel, which is about the conflict between student expectations, industry realities, and the curriculum, resources and management practices of film schools. So, we look at the competing factors that influence the emotional, political, and practical daily life of a film and television school. Each of the panelists will take up an element of this complex topic.

Victor is going to discuss the balancing of the forces that make up this theater of learning, from the perspective of the stakeholders involved. Marieke is going to talk about the ways in which the current notion of the students as “clients” may have caused their hopes and dreams to become real expectations, that are at odds with the realities of industry and school practices. Doe will be looking at creativity and the institutional space in which creativity is born and nurtured. Richard will give us an educationist’s practical and philosophical perspective on the changing nature of student expectations

in higher education.

The topic is seductive and interesting because it foregrounds some traditional film school conflicts. I think that the act of recognizing them can assist us in the development of curriculum and calming the well-recognized conflict between students and teachers about curriculum, production work, and industry careers.

Art and industry, art and commerce, art and education, all conflict. In the school and the industry we and our students are inevitably faced with conflict between the idea of the autonomous artist versus the team organized on an industrial model, and with the important distinction between self-expression and creative collaboration. And these oppositions underlie the debates of students and staff alike.

Depending on the day of the week and the issue, they are used for different purposes, I know that at times we have all found ourselves decrying student’s lack of professionalism, for a lack of real-world ability, and the following day lamenting that the student is not concentrating enough on his or her true educational goals, and thinks too much about slick show-reels. We’re always trying to reconcile the two ends of the spectrum.

The problem is that no matter what we do, the debates between art and commerce will never be resolved, but we have to keep on educating students in the context of the school, where the foundation skills in technology, management, and creative collaboration must be addressed.

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Sheehan

At the Australian Film and Television and Radio School, our goals as the national school have to be aligned with those of the Australian film and broadcast industries. We are committed to supporting the industry, and in fact we are charged by the government to do precisely that. We are also committed to helping the industry evolve, and even sometimes leading it

through change. Ours is a specialist school from which we graduate cinematographers, editors, visual effects supervisors, composers etc, as well as writers, directors, and producers.

There are very complex energies in our student body. They have diverse learning objectives and a variety of expectations about the realities of group workshops and produc-

tions.

When they first arrive, I tell the students something of what their journey through the school will be, which relates to how they feel as students and their expectations. When they first arrive at our school, I think they are immensely pleased and excited that they've been chosen. They feel special and marvelous. Some even have told me that they thought they were admitted because of some kind of administrative error. About three months into the first year, they feel a bit more confident and start to think that maybe all the *other* students got in by the administrative error. After six months, they're convinced that it's *the staff* that got in by an administrative error.

Andrew Lesnie raised an important point in his keynote address, which is that a film school would not be a film school, and would not be worth attending, if there were not conflict. Perhaps today we can begin what will become an ongoing discussion about how we can identify conflict and use it as an opportunity for new and useful directions in our schools.

Dr. Victor Valbuena

Thank you very much. Unlike most film schools represented here, ours is very young.

It was set up by academics as well as industry professionals. In fact, it was set up by the government. We are a relatively young school. Our Mass Communication program started in 1989 beginning with television production as its area of specialization. Our Film, Sound, and Video course started in 1993, and it now has four areas of specialization: film production, radio production, sound production for music for film and television, and computer graphics and animation. Four years ago, we started a two-year advanced diploma course in film production.

Running a school such as ours requires us to reconcile the interests and expectations of several stakeholders. There is, of course, the government, which initiated the opening of

the school. In fact it was the Economic Development Commission of Singapore that initiated our Film, Sound, and Video program, and much earlier, the Mass Communication Program. Their idea was to develop manpower for a growth industry which they identified as being good for the Singapore economy: media and communications.

The government set an agenda for the school to produce technicians who could work for the local and foreign media production companies who would be being given all sorts of incentives to set up or expand operations in Singapore. The government generously gave us literally millions of dollars for the development of facilities for teaching as well as production.

Then there are the student stakeholders. The students who applied to the program did not all want to be technicians. Many actually wanted to be directors, but being pragmatic Singaporeans, they also wanted formal qualifications as well as practical skills to ensure employability in the labor market, and so they took the offer of admission to our program. In fact we had more applicants than we could actually admit but many of them wanted to direct their own movies, and many dreamt of being the next Steven Spielberg. Subsequent cohorts of students had the same expectations. They did not want to be button pushers; they wanted to be film directors, they wanted to be filmmakers, they wanted to make their films and have their stories told their way.

How did we respond to these student aspirations? As the program developed, we reassessed and restructured the curriculum to meet their interests so that we could enhance creative skills, but without losing sight of the government's mandate to provide man-

power for the industry.

We decided to reduce the amount of time devoted to the not-so-critical technical subjects, for instance

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Sheehan

principles of electronics, which were part of the original curriculum. We decided that for the students to be more creative filmmakers, we had to add more courses in art and design, and to strengthen their storytelling skills, so we included a class in storytelling techniques. We added more script writing courses and workshops.

Our students in Singapore are techno-savvy because of the information technology infrastructure as well as the IT curriculum in the high schools. This gives us the time to provide them with extra assistance in crafting their stories. We get our students when they're 17 years-old, just out of high school. They are very young and immature and they need help in crafting their stories.

We also allowed for greater flexibility for them to develop their own projects, but we insisted that they must work in various roles throughout their three years in the course. We insist that they see themselves as part of a collaborative team, so at some time they may be working as crew, producer, director, writer, editor, or cinematographer.

At the time, some external developments conspired to support the reassessment and restructuring the curriculum. A few years ago, when they determined that there was a dollar value to art and culture the Singapore government, decided to support art and culture. They also decided to launch a campaign for a more gracious society and we were supposed to be part of developing the environment for such a gracious society. They also created a panel on film in the National Arts Council. This was a welcome addition to the National Arts Council because they finally decided to give film its rightful recognition. Four years ago, they also created the Singapore Film Commission which supports many of the short films that our students in the school make every year.

We really had to reorient our thinking about our graduates. We were going to produce creative content providers, not just technicians. To ensure that we were able to do this, four years ago we developed an advanced diploma course in film production for our more mature students. These

were the students who already had degrees or diplomas, or who had been working in the industry for some time. We introduced four specializations: producing, directing, cinematography, and editing. Other factors that supported our response to the changing aspiration of students were that because of the generous support that we got from the government, we were able to recruit staff from both industry and academia, at very competitive salaries, so that we are able to provide a wide ranging of perspectives our students. Sixty to seventy per cent of our teaching staff is from overseas. Some of them are actually sitting with us here and we have been fortunate to have them teach in our school. They enrich the teaching and learning experience of our own staff as well as the students, and have widened their perspectives Many of them come from countries with more open, libertarian traditions and it is to be hoped that they have also opened up the minds of our young and not very worldly students.

We also have students with strong interests in the various production specializations. They want to be ready to work as production coordinators, video editors, art directors, sound editors, camera persons. The industry is active in our curriculum development. They tell us their needs, keep us aware of industry trends and developments, and provide relevant information to help us with continually revising our curriculum. They also provide training placements and professional attachments, which ensure that our students have an exposure to a real industry working environment. They also respond annually to a graduate employment survey, that tells us exactly how our graduates are doing in the industry, and they tell us what strengths and weaknesses they have seen in our graduates.

We have to deal with one other factor which is an essential attribute of one of our stakeholders, and this is the matter

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Valbuena

of law. As most of you know, Singapore has a restricted media environment. We have to deal with restrictions on how students can tell their stories, and I have the unenviable position of sometimes having to censor students' work before it goes into production, precisely because we know that otherwise, their films will never be shown. In Singapore there are taboo and sensitive subjects that must be treated with care, and this includes race, language, religion, and politics.

We try to encourage students to be creative in addressing the issues of their concern, and sometimes we are successful, but sometimes we are not. Let me anticipate a some of your questions by citing a few examples. Apart from issues of race, language, religion, and politics, we also cannot treat homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle. It is okay, for instance, to show transvestites in films and on television, but only as objects of pity or ridicule. We can also show homosexuals, but they cannot be portrayed as acceptable members of society because it violates "family values". So necessarily, we have to ask our lecturers to vet the scripts. Sometimes, however, I close one eye, and have to take responsibility, and occasionally we get a slap on the hand. Political films are prohibited by the Films and Publications Act, but because its provisions are very general and vague, it is difficult to determine where one may start and where one may end.

Have we met the expectations of our stakeholders? Last year we did a tracking survey of about 100 of our graduate in the Film, Sound, and Video Program, and the results were very positive. About 80% reported that they found the course and the subjects useful in their work. The majority of graduates were working in the film and broadcast industries. Their job descriptions included D.O.P for an ad agency, music, video and CD producer, video editor, sound engineer, film and television producer, TV series director, MTV script writer, and director of advertising commercials. Some have gone on to become teachers of audio-visual studies or film in the secondary schools, and others have become entrepreneurs. Some have actually started their own production companies, and some have started video shops. Among other things, they say that the technical training that we provided, and the range of projects that we allowed them to do, prepared them for work in the industry.

Every year we experience what is called the "annual graduate employment survey" which is carried out by all the tertiary institution in Singapore. Over the last four years, the findings have been consistently positive. Graduates of our film program are employed in the industry within three months of graduation, and command the highest media and communications industry starting salaries in our mar-

ket.

According to the graduate employment survey, the industry likes our students, and there is a continuing demand for graduates of the Film, Sound, and Video Programs, and the Mass Communication Program. They tell us that there is ample evidence of good training, because our graduates are able to work within two days after they are hired. University graduates, perhaps because of their theoretical training, may take anywhere from two weeks to a month to get on with their work.

The industry has also been very supportive in making suggestions about how to enhance our curriculum. We decided to include film financing and distribution in the curriculum as the result of input from the industry. Of course, the government wants us to be accountable for the millions of dollars it gives us, because it funds 90% of the cost of each Film, Sound, and Video student. It costs 20,000 Singapore dollars a year to educate each student, but the student pays only 2,000 Singapore dollars annually. They continue to give us grants for upgrading our facilities, and we have responded with efficiency, because after three years, 80% of our student cohort graduates.

Marieke Schoenmakers

I will begin with some brief statistics about my school, because everyone's been asking all day. My school was founded in Amsterdam 44 years ago, and we currently teach in 8 professions: script writing, production, directing for feature films and documentary, production of new media, camera and lighting, sound, editing, and production design.

We teach a four-year course, we have 235 students at the moment, and we will grow a little bit next year because we will be increasing our intake to 75 new students each year. We employ 50 people permanently, and we recruit over 60 guest teachers. We did a study about students who graduated between 1993 and 1996, and except for a few script writers, everyone has a job almost year-round. We were very pleased with that result. We are financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Holland. They give us the equivalent of US\$3 million. Each student pays the equivalent of about US\$1,300 each year, which makes about US\$250,000 a year, and our sponsors contribute about US\$600,000 a year, so we are heavily subsidized by the government.

I would like to make three provocations, in the

hope that at least one of them will start an argument.

“Are You Being Served” was a popular English situation comedy television series for almost 30 years, broadcast all over the world. The question I want to raise is are our students also our “clients”, who we are supposed to serve? Is the school a shopping mall, where students pick up only what they want from a variety of alternatives? Whose responsibility is it to make an interesting or comprehensive program?

Do we think of the film school as a shopping mall, a playground, or an institution that requires the students to follow a well-defined curriculum? If you wonder about my opinion, I love shopping, but not inside my school. In my opinion, teachers have to take full responsibility for the intellectual and practical baggage we give our students in order to give them a chance to be interesting filmmakers.

My second provocation is that students should criticize our programs, but mostly they don't. Even if they do, the criticism is not as useful as it could be. The two, three, or four years that they spend in our schools are a very important part of their lives, so of course, we have to discuss our programs with current students, but I think the most profitable discussions are with the *former* students, those who graduated from the school two to five years ago, and are establishing themselves as professionals. Which parts of the curriculum helped them to build professional life? What do they wish they had learned? So, my provocative suggestion is to talk to your former students as much as possible.

The third provocation is about television. Television is not inferior to film or second best, at least not in my school. Two-thirds of our graduates begin their careers in television. Granted, it's the so-called “quality” or public service television. In Holland we're quite clear what is quality television, and what isn't. There is a special fund for stimulating it, that works in coordination with the film fund. Of course, there are many things to say about this, but one of the things is that makers of quality television typically work

in a single-camera situation, with an artistic point of view. and so on.

We prepare our students for television by recruiting some of our teachers from the profession, and by working together with public television. Almost all of our graduate films are sponsored by public television, but the sponsor's role is solely advisory, and the students are the boss. Public television creates a time spot for our films, called “Film Lab,” so our student films are broadcast every year. In my opinion we need cooperation with public television to prepare students to be interesting filmmakers.

Doe Mayer

I am most interested in how students grapple with finding their creative and collaborative skills within the constraints of education, art and industry. My premise is that we can encourage more authentic creative film making that is less cliché-ridden, stereotypical and trite, if we can help students know more about themselves and what draws them to specific visual and aural forms.

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Schoenmakers

Introspection is the difficult, elusive but critical component of creativity that has to do with helping students know who they are, why they are in film school and what they can do there. A specific objective is to help them articulate a personal vision, but students and teachers often wonder how to do that.

I'm writing a book about this with two of my colleagues from the U.S.C.

School of Cinema Television called “Creative Filmmaking from the Inside Out” and we've been fortunate enough to interview filmmakers from all over the world.

I talked to screen writer Hanif Kureishi, who said “Your point of view which is your voice, your person, isn't something you have to get. It's something you uncover.” I think a primary goal of all of us who teach in film school is to encourage students to uncover or discover their voice. This is very difficult. First, it involves providing a safe place for them to discover themselves. Most of them come to film school wanting to discover themselves, but once they get there and begin to get asked difficult questions it becomes very scary for them. Either they don't have tools to deal

with the introspective part or they just want to play it safe, and they'll say "I'm just here to learn the technology" or the tools of the trade, or, at least in the case of U.S.C., "the secrets of Hollywood Filmmaking" - whatever they are.

I don't think the culture encourages them to look into themselves as the beginning of the source of their own creativity and of course we are all products of our own culture. And it's not just the students for whom this is difficult. It's also difficult for us as teachers. We too can feel threatened and frightened in dealing with these issues, particularly when students attempt to look into deeply personal or difficult areas of their own past. Certainly faculty say to me all the time, with reason, "I'm not a therapist, I'm here to teach digital technology or F-stops or whatever but I'm not here to deal with these kind of tough personal subjects."

I would argue that these are issues that are worth looking at and grappling with, and I'm going to discuss three ways that I think we can help students be more creative in that act of self-investigation.

The first is to encourage them to discover their own creative field by looking more deeply at their backgrounds. The second is to ask them to think more consciously about the kind of stories they want to tell. And the third is to help them to draw from personal experience to strengthen their own voice.

I think it's important to stress that creative filmmaking isn't synonymous with autobiographical filmmaking and I'm not really promoting autobiographical filmmaking as the purpose. I do think that if you come from feelings and ideas that are deeply personal, you can still work on material that's quite distant from you and bring something very special and specific to it. Also, I'm not talking only about writers and directors and producers. I'm really interested in encouraging introspection in students who are studying production design or editing or sound design or cinematography or any of a number of other areas to do with film and video production.

So the first part here is to discover your own creative background. Sometimes there's a clear journey from a childhood predilection to an adult career. One of the people we interviewed for the book was Walter Murch, who is a film editor and sound designer of films such as *The Conversation*, *Apocalypse Now* and *The English Patient*. He told us that as a child he was called "Gerald McBoing Boing" a 1950's cartoon

character who spoke in sound effects. It's interesting that this man, so identified with the creative use of sound, had that same quality and curiosity in him as a small boy

I think you can encourage students to look more deeply at their backgrounds, their early interests and passions. You can help them become aware of their personal journeys and get them to anchor their work in their own interests. Often teachers can help students get in touch with what made them creative as a child, which is often a real clue as to how to be creative as an adult. It is useful to get them to look at their attraction to other art forms, other intellectual pursuits which they had an enthusiasm for earlier in life. This helps them expand their ideas about what they want to make movies about.

The second component is to help them think more consciously about the kind of stories they want to tell.

I know this is something we all struggle with, not only the issue of what characters, or situations or themes or values and structures speak to them, but also to help them to understand that all films are about values and that values are expressed in very embedded and unconscious ways in all the work that they do. When we started working on our book we started from the point of trying to encourage social responsibility, working with students to get them to think about what they were putting up on the screen and how responsible they were for that.

We found that was a very hard sell. Students didn't want to be told about social responsibility or their obligations in terms of the images they produced. We realized, however, that if we looked at this from the perspective of their creativity, they became very interested. If we could explain to students that all those unconscious values that we see on the screen all the time are things they could think about and they could use to express their own personal feelings, then all of a sudden they got very interested and it became a whole lot easier to discuss these issues.

We developed a list of what we think of as embedded, unconscious values that are in films, as a way to help these students to think about some of these issues. There are some 15 or 20 sets of values.

My premise is that we can encourage more authentic creative film making that is less cliché-ridden, stereotypical and trite, if we can help students know more about themselves and what draws them to specific visual and aural forms.

Mayer

Let me just to give you two examples from the list:

The first one is class and wealth. In a story, is money a problem or source of problems, is it taken for granted, is it a worthy goal, is it a sign of decadence? Are working class characters absent or portrayed only as side characters, do middle class characters live a luxurious lifestyle, are wealthy characters all despicable, clueless, and appealing? Does the size of a character's car exceed their earnings?

The second embedded value is authority and power. How are people in authority, such as business executives, politicians, military personnel, police, religious figures portrayed? With reverence, scorn? Are institutions portrayed as trustworthy, or corrupt?

Some of the other values we ask them to look at are their family relationships, sexual expression, gender, racial diversity. We really want them to look at all the issues that are embedded in film, whether they are conscious or not. Our assumption is that the more that students understand this, the more they can become aware of how they can use this knowledge to strengthen what they do.

And third, we ask them to look at their personal memories, and encourage them to use those experiences and feelings in their work. Jane Campion says she likes to place images in her films that are based on her own personal childhood memories. "I remember me standing there, or I remember the light. I remember the feel of grass on my legs. I always feel terribly secure if I have an image as basic or as fundamental to myself as that in a movie so that I don't feel that what I am making up I saw in another movie somewhere."

I don't think this is an issue for just directors or writers. We interviewed Jeanine Oppewall, who is a production designer. She did *LA Confidential* and *Ironweed* and *Pleasantville*. Jeanine puts butterflies in all her work. She says she does it because her mother collected butterflies as a child

and she has strong connections with images of her mother and her childhood. As she says "I use the butterflies as a way of remembering my mother, my family, who I am, what I'm bringing to the film, it's the only way I know how to work."

Of course this is an unusual example, but I think the idea that we bring ourselves to our work, even if nobody understands the symbols but us and our family, can be an important piece of learning.

There's an obvious paradox here, in that by creating from the inside out, from this more introspective place, and working from our own voice and deeply personal connections to material, we make films that are much more universal.

Kimberly Peirce the writer director of *Boys Don't Cry*, says "finding the personal meaning creates the impulse to do what you were going to do, but then the discipline of the craft says, 'OK, good, now tell a story that everyone can understand, it's not just my story, it's *the* story.'"

There are many different ways to deal with these issues and I think everyone who teaches production struggles with them. Most of us realize that we don't have all the answers, but that we have to provide a safe place for students to explore these issues.

There's an obvious paradox here, in that by creating from the inside out, from this more introspective place, and working from our own voice and deeply personal connections to material, we make films that are much more universal. (...)

We think that the more students learn to work from their own distinctive taste and point of view, the better able they are to hold on to those qualities and values throughout the production process

Mayer

The filmmaking process is filled with leaps and serendipitous surprises. We don't want to detract from that. It's not a simple formula and there are few rules and no easy answers. The gift of the form is that we are constantly surprised in the process of what we do. But there are specific ways to facilitate uncovering one's creative voice and developing one's creativity, that can be both personally satisfying

and a practical means to professional success. I think that is an important link to make here.

In our experience, even the most mainstream part of the entertainment industry is hungry for people who are genuinely creative. It's true that once they are hired they are often pressured to be formulaic and clichéd, and we all have horror stories about students we thought were incredibly creative who went into the industries and their work became very disappointing. But we think that the more students learn to work from their own distinctive taste and

point of view, the better able they are to hold on to those qualities and values throughout the production process and when fresh innovative filmmaking does reach the theatrical or TV screen, it can make the responsible film makers very much in demand.

Dr. Richard James

I would like to thank Annabelle for inviting me to discuss these issues with you today. I feel very much the odd person out on this panel. I'm a higher education researcher in the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne. At the CSHE we are interested in, among other things, the student experience of attending university and how that is changing. I'd like to talk broadly about some of our research, what we're seeing happen in Australia, and what I think are international trends, at least in the Western world. I certainly can't comment today on teaching creative students, or on teaching students how to be creative, and I certainly wouldn't attempt to do so after listening to what the preceding speakers had to say.

The principal question that I am concerned with is how do we, in increasingly market-driven and consumer oriented systems of higher education, respond to the new preferences and expectations of students. I don't believe I can offer any answers to those question today, but I would like to propose three assertions, which I think might open up some discussion.

The first assertion is that student expectations of higher education seem to be changing. I think that what we've heard from the other panelists is illustrative of what is happening on a broader scale in higher education. Students expect higher education to be on their terms. They are less engaged with the experience. Often they are doing more paid work, and they spend less time at university. Increasingly they expect flexibility and choice in the curriculum. I am not implying that are students are lazy, far from it, but students have new priorities and are under new pressures, and academic staff throughout Australia, at least, are very conscious of this at the moment.

The reasons for the changing attitudes of students are complex. One is that we now have a more diverse student

population, and they have more higher education alternatives available to them. A second reason is that in a market-driven system, institutions compete for students. This competition, in turn, encourages students to think and behave like consumers of higher education. Finally, there are a number of social changes that have to do with the changing relationship between universities and communities.

The reasons for the changing attitudes of students are complex. One is that we now have a more diverse student population, and they have more higher education alternatives available to them. A second reason is that in a market-driven system, institutions compete for students. This competition, in turn, encourages students to think and behave like consumers of higher education.

James

My second assertion is that something very fundamental is changing in the higher education curriculum. I am not suggesting that the sky is falling in, but from an educational point of view, there are profound changes taking place which have serious consequences. Teachers and administrators describe a kind of

unplanned, piecemeal renegotiation of the curriculum taking place. This is fueled for the most part by changing student preferences and expectations, and the pressures on teachers and administrators to respond to these expectations have increased considerably. In Australia, student evaluation of teaching has become a very prominent aspect of the academic culture, and many teachers feel that if they don't respond to student expectations, then their student ratings will suffer.

During the last twelve months, we interviewed about 100 academic staff about changing student expectations, and many of them were deeply concerned because they feel that their core professional values are being threatened. Teachers like to 'make a difference'. It's a core value for them. But they feel frustrated because they are unable to see how they might make a difference in the light of changing student preferences and the way the market system in higher education is operating.

So, what can we do about it? Well, I am not too sure, but my third assertion comes in three parts. The first is that student preferences are not a proper basis for the curriculum, which is another way of saying that universities or film schools are not shopping malls.

The second part is that teaching begins with being straightforward with students about what they need and what they should expect. This is often a painful process for the students and teachers.

The third part of this assertion is that a good education, in fact the best education, requires a healthy tension between the students' expectations and the reality that we offer them. In other words, students should get more than they expect, and they should get things that they don't expect, because they are being stretched beyond what they might have anticipated.

In the end, we are thought of as educators because of our professional perspective on the field. The big challenge and the big question is how do we communicate our understanding of the curriculum and how do we encourage, persuade, cajole our students to understand its richness and accept its relevance to them?

Q and A

Annabelle Sheehan. I thought I might just make a few remarks to start. This session has raised a series of issues and metaphors about the school and the space the school represents. I think that various speakers talked about the school as a framework, as a fabric of support, as a system of values, as an instrument of culture, as a gracious society, all of which I would like to hear more about. Is it a laboratory or a shopping mall, or indeed a playground or sometimes a prison, in the eyes of the students?

I've got a few a questions for the audience to consider as well. Do you think that your students act like consumers? Does the teacher have a role as a therapist, in order to ease conflicts about content or about resources or about power itself? Those are just a few questions that we could address.

Q. Rod Bishop. This is a question for Victor Valbuena. One of the things that we talk about a lot is whether the students have stories to tell. I think that in the past five years, with the increased numbers of indigenous Australian students in our school, we certainly found that among their many qualities is that they all have stories

to tell. I can't think of a more conducive environment for developing stories than living in a country where there are certain things that students are not allowed to tell. I would be very interested to hear how the students push that envelope at your school in terms of the ideas that you find need to be removed from their scripts.

A: Dr. Victor Valbuena: They do have a lot of stories to tell. Some of those stories however, they are not allowed to film. We explain to the students that this is the culture in which you are bred, and this is the society in which you will work. This is the media environment in which you are going to operate. You will have to make compromises, like it or not. Let me give you an example. Professor Wolfgang Längsfeld of HFF-Munich taught a script-writing workshop for us when we were starting the school. One of the scripts that came out of the workshop was made into a film.

I had to ask the writer to tweak the story a bit, because it was a story about corrupt policemen. You cannot have a story about corrupt policemen in Singapore. In addition, one of the most corrupt policemen in the story was identified as belonging to a particular race. In multi-racial, multi-ethnic Singapore you cannot stereotype a particular race. "But that's a real story, you know," said the student. "I know that this story has happened."

So what does one do in such a situation? The student was very insistent on the story, it was his story. So I said "Go ahead, do the story, but set it in another place. If you set it in Australia, if you set it in Manila, if you set it in Indonesia, you can have the film made." He agreed; because otherwise I would not have been able approve production of the film. So I allowed him to make the film. I even got some of the money for him to make it.

He set it in another place, but of course people who saw it eventually, said "Oh, that's Bugis Street!" The location was still recognizably Singapore even if it was not supposed to be set in Singapore.

We also had a short film that was about four teenage girls who were coming out to each other. It was a film with

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Sheehan.

clearly gay references. We are not supposed to make gay films, but the film did not have nudity, it did not have coarse language, and it did not have any sexual activity. It was just a story about four girls exploring their feelings and coming out to each other. The staff adviser told me, “well, you decide on this one, it’s your call.” I let the story go. I said, “you know, this is an innocent enough story, just four young girls talking about their identity while playing a game of truth and consequence”. They asked if we would show it at the graduation screening? Yes we did.

Now, however slowly, there is liberalization in the industry. Some of the recent films that have been shown have sharp commentary, even about government policy.

There is currently a film in Singapore called “I Not Stupid,” which would not have been possible a few years ago. It is a comedy, and a biting commentary on the political and educational system in Singapore, and it is a hit. They are finally allowing the filmmakers to tell their stories. Maybe they will allow the filmmakers to tell their stories if they are in the form of comedy. “I Not Stupid” takes a very serious look at some of the issues confronting the people of Singapore: politics, government patronage, a very rigid educational system. But they allowed the film, and so, after seeing it I said, if they allow this film to be made, my students will now be able to make their films.

Q. Michael Rabiger. It occurred to me, that the education we deliver is not a standard education at all. In my school, part of the battle was not just introducing the education to the students; it was also getting the education accepted by the administration. They still think that education is the delivery of a specific body of knowledge into the cranium of a student, and that if we can cram more and more students into a classroom, we can cut costs.

I would like to return to the issue of orienting students to what they should expect, and I’d be grateful to hear about how you orient students, how you prepare them for what’s coming, because they arrive with very strong preconceptions about how they are going to enjoy themselves and what filmmaking is going to be like.

A. Richard James. I am not sure, in your context, because I think it is vastly different from other situations in higher education, but it seems to me the starting point needs to be your own understanding of creativity and the origins of

creativity, which is why I found Doe’s talk so interesting. If your understanding of creativity involves appreciation of the history and the traditions in the field, its technical aspects and the skills necessary for self-definition, then you need to work on helping students understand those attributes. It’s important to fight against narrow assumptions about what it means to be creative.

A. Doe Mayer. Students arrive with very different senses of what they want out of film school, and I think Annabelle’s analysis of where they start and how they change in three months, and why in the end it’s the staff that is criticized, is particularly true. On the other hand I think that if you can re-frame students’ questions in so that they can hear them, then you can teach and lead students in directions that will really benefit them wherever they go in the film and television industries. I think it’s important to provide a safe place for them to explore, and it is true that sometimes an institution can’t do that because of certain rules

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Bishop

and constraints. What we hear of Singapore that makes it seem to be very difficult for students to feel safe in expressing themselves. We have far more latitude in the U. S. and in a film school like mine, but I think the question is important and I don’t think there is a very easy answer.

A. Marieke Schoenmakers. Yes, there is no easy answer, of course. At my school we work in GEECT triangles, each consisting of a producing student, a screenwriting student, and a directing student. Last year we started with sessions of idea development on Friday afternoons for all eight professions taught in our school, not just production, script writing, and directing. Students in sound and production work with professional Dutch storytellers and with their own teachers of course, to develop ideas from which to make a film. We look for prospective students who are as mature as possible, because you must have some experience with life to tell a story. We’ve learned that we have to add a lot of additional mental luggage in art history, in psychology, in Dutch language even, in drama, in theater, and so forth.

We recently changed our curriculum to include more of this luggage of ideas, and also to make some choices possible. We didn’t convert to a shopping mall, but some choice must be possible.

One point that has become obvious is that teaching of techniques isn't always useful, because when you work with editing programs like Final Cut Pro or something similar, so much is possible in such an easy way that technique can be covered quickly and efficiently. We have to give them simple techniques in the first year, because otherwise they hide in the form instead of getting into the content. It's not an easy topic.

A. Dr. Victor Valbuena. We have several hundred applicants for the 100 places in the Film, Sound, and Video Program, and of course the school looks at the applicants' grades. That's a requirement of the Ministry of Education. Our school has insisted on doing what is called a "direct admission exercise." We ask applicants to come for a written exercise because we want to know whether they can write stories, whether they have ideas to share with us. If they pass this test, we ask them to come in for an interview where they can bring some samples of their work. During this interview, we ask them what they really want to be, and why they want to come to our school. There are people who say they want to be producers or directors, and some of them are quite focused on what they want to get out of the experience with us. I once had a student who said "I want to be a key grip," and I said "okay, there is nothing wrong with that." He is now one of the best grips in Singapore. Some applicants say that they want to be production managers for particular kinds of production company. They come to us with very focused intentions.

But our first year curriculum is general. They take audio production, basic film, location video production, all of these things. In the second year, however, we stream them. We ask them to make a set of choices, film with video, film with computer graphics and animation, video with sound production for the music industry or film and television, and the like. We provide them with a lot of experiences, not just in terms of theoretical knowledge, but also a lot of practical work. The strength of our program is that we have extensive facilities and a lot of equipment, plus a good staff, who can really guide students towards getting the best ex-

perience out of our program.

The results, from what we learned from a graduate employment survey as well as inputs from the industry appear to be that for the most part they are able to get what they intended from the program. It would seem that they got what they came for. Some of them have gone well beyond that, making their own prize-winning independent films. Of course, we're very proud. They probably don't owe that to us, but rather to their own talent, but then of course we all like to ride on the glory of our students.

A. Annabelle Sheehan. I want to respond to Michael's question about engagement. At our school, we are giving a lot of thought to the disorientation of new students when they first arrive, and how to begin aligning their values with the values of the school. As everyone else has said, it is difficult. One of the things we're trying to do is work on a micro-level in each class. We might try to start a class discussion by saying "okay, what are you here for?" The dialogue, specifying their learning objectives, and seeing them put up on the blackboard is a miniature version of what happens during orientation week. I think that once the new students feel that they've been heard, we can move on to discuss the specifics of our curriculum and to try to find the intersection of their needs and our capabilities. It's not always harmonious, but it is a strategy that we're beginning to try, and we hope that it is going to work.

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Sheehan

Q. (Unidentified) I just want to add that many of us here who teach at universities that are organized on the North American or German models provide another kind of education. While at most conferences we talk about our own film and television students, some of us also provide service courses for other students, which is very interesting. We've never talked about that in CILECT congresses. We will have hundreds of students every term in big auditorium classes in the history of film, or the art of film. This is where we can help educate the rest of the world about what we do. This kind of teaching is almost a missionary task of trying to convert these students to film because many of them mathematicians, geographers, biologists, and in the

university they typically have a choice of learning about music, painting, theater, or film.

A. Dr. Victor Valbuena. We have started an inter-disciplinary electives program at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, and part of that program is a media and the arts component. The School of Film and Media Studies has been asked to offer a number of subjects that includes a film appreciation program, for the entire population of Polytechnic. Singapore has one of the highest rates of movie-going in the world. There are more than 100 screens for a small country of four million inhabitants. Many of our students, like many of the young people in Singapore go to the movies. Unfortunately, most of the films that they see are Hollywood and Hong Kong products. When there are festivals that come from Europe, they are able to see other films, but of course we would like them to have a broader appreciation and understanding of film traditions. So it has been approved for our school to offer a film appreciation class, which is going to be offered weekly to all the students in the Polytechnic who are interested. Hopefully, we will be able to influence taste and choice in their movie diet.

A. Doe Mayer. At U.S.C. we have a new multi-media program that attempts to get better understanding of the visual image into classes and other programs in the University outside of the School of Cinema/Television. The working assumption is that within the cinema school we know about the power of the visual image but in many of the other schools, particularly the School of Liberal Arts at U.S.C., it is a new program that is trying to encourage faculty and students to use more visual ways of teaching and communicating. I think that this idea that we can be of service to other parts of the university by the kind of thinking that we bring to the process is really innovative. not just ourselves.

Q. (Unidentified) I want to ask a question about the moral angle, if there is one. When Victor Valbuena says that the

government of Singapore allows negative depiction of homosexual life but not positive depiction, in my view, that is morally indefensible, in the same sense that racism and sexism are morally indefensible. Were I in Victor's position, I would feel obligated to be seditious, undermining and deconstructive of the system, because of my beliefs. But my question is not just about that topic; it's about the issue of morals, in dealing with these tensions. Do you feel that there are times when these balances between student and institution, between society, between backers and artistic freedom and so on and so on, actually become moral issues? It's a question for everybody.

I think the obligation of school is to provide a safe place for students to explore, and I think that all of us as teachers need to work on that, because there are hot-button issues that constantly come up, and it's very hard to make school a safe place for all students, especially for those who are under-represented in the society at large

Mayer.

in the society at large.

A. Annabelle Sheehan. I think there is another aspect of morality too, which has to do with certain countries in which the film and television in-

dustry may be struggling and where the national school is encouraging students into particular career paths where there are no jobs available. In short, the students are being deceived, and that raised a moral question.

A. Dr. Victor Valbuena. This moral issue for me is difficult. I originally come from The Philippines, a country where we have very liberal traditions in filmmaking. Now I have to deal with this reality in my role as the director of a school in Singapore. I have responsibilities to the staff; I have responsibilities to the students. I am fortunate however, that I also sit on the Singapore Film Commission, and the Film Panel of

the National Arts Council, where I am able to articulate such issues. For instance the Singapore Film Commission has committed to the support of independent filmmakers and students. In fact, we even support twenty students each year with small grants to make their films. We tell them that they can write any stories they wish, and that we will not censor the stories. We tell them that “you can make your films but you will have to deal with the censors when it’s time to screen your films. We are not censors.”

Let me give you a recent example. The Film Commission gave money for a student film that would ordinarily not be shown in Singapore. It’s about a man who’s trying to define and reaffirm his manhood. It was about sexual conquest. It is not about homosexuality, by the way. But it had plenty of graphic sexual sequences. The student said, “Well, it’s a nice story. Will you give me money to make it?”

“Yes,” I replied, “but I am not sure if you can show it here. You have to deal with the censors. I will try to get you the money for it, but you will have to deal with the censorship yourself. I am not going to the board to plead your case.” The student made the film in Spain and we decided to send it overseas, and it is now going the rounds of the festivals where it has won some awards. So there was an outlet for him to tell his story. (Note: The film was allowed to screen during the Singapore International Film Festival but with an RA (adult) rating.)

There was another student script that was presented to me some time ago. It was an out-and-out gay story, however, which I knew neither the police nor the censors would allow to be produced. As you know, I use government money to fund student projects. I told him that if he could get money from elsewhere, he could make the film and show it somewhere, but for as long as I am using government money and for as long as this statute is in the book, I am bound to respect the law.

He did not make the film. I told him to make another graduation film. I don’t know whether or not he was able to make it. The fact is that I am accountable for government funds, and I am also accountable for keeping the school open. I cannot risk the future of the school, because I am accountable to a lot of constituents and stakeholders.

Q. Igor Koršic: I would like to share, an encouraging story about student expectations with you. I come from an environment that is just is the opposite of Singapore. Everything is permitted. At the same time, very little is possible, because unlike the government of Singapore, our government doesn’t understand the cultural and economic value of media and communications. I have been telling this to students for years, with no results because they demanded things from me as they would demand things from their parents, “give me my film!” They did not understand my message that they have a common interest, that they have to fight to change the environment and that they have to convince the government of the need for the political will to implement a proper media and film policy.

For ten years the individual students fought each other over little money that was available, with the consequence that the state became increasingly restrictive in giving money to film production. I resigned myself to this, and I thought I’ll die as an old depressed man who spoke nonsense for most of his professional life.

All of the sudden there was a change. My former students, now twenty years older, seemed to have remembered...or finally understood...what I told them. They established a kind of soft velvet cushion in the filmmaker’s union, they elected me vice president of the filmmaker’s union to sit on it, and now I am referred in the press as “the young filmmaker” together with them. For the past year or so we have been quite successfully, lobbying for a film policy. Recently, the parliament ordered the Minister of Culture to provide such a media and cinematography law within a year.

This came to me absolutely unexpectedly. I had been totally resigned to the impossibility of such changes, I thought that, well, we Central Europeans are that kind of people. I was thinking of Kafka, it’s a foggy climate, people just are the way they are, and they will never change. I was happy to be proved wrong.

A. Michael Rabiger. I would like to briefly return to conflict between the school curriculum and student expectations and Marieke’s idea about the school as a kind of shopping mall. What seems strange is that it sounds as though students come with expectations, and all of the people on the panel are very sensitive and skilled at actually convincing them that what they came for isn’t really what they

want and need.

It's a bit as though we went to McDonald's and suddenly someone behind the counter says "Well, this Big Mac you asked for is not really what you want. You really want something else, like a Grilled McChicken or salad, because they're better nutrition."

It strikes me that actually the real conflicts with students tend to be that when they've come to learn to direct, we tell them "you can't direct, you have to do something else. You have to hold the boom." Suddenly, there is a problem.

It strikes me that another source of conflict is the lack of a good sense of marketing, and a failure to make clear to applicants what film education is about. We all get far too many applications, and 80% of those applications are from people who want to direct. We get twenty applicants for every place that we have, and when they come to our open days, they're all sitting in rows and listening to music on their Walkmans. We ask "what do you want to do?", and they all want to direct. If you say "does anyone want to learn to design sound?" it becomes clear that it has never occurred to them that there are other highly creative things in which they could really be interested. .

What I am wondering is whether any of you have had students who say, "You're being paid to make me director but you haven't done it." Do you ever feel that you have totally failed students in this way, or are we all just very good at convincing students change is good for their souls.

A. Richard James That's a specific example of the dilemmas we have when trying to depict the complexity of product or service we offer. The dilemma is that while we can judge the quality of a hamburger rather quickly, higher education is something that takes place over a long period of time, and people change, and the curriculum changes and the world changes. So the value higher education is something that has to be nurtured over time. I don't think we can offer to make promises about what people are going to get, even though we are increasingly pressured to make promises because of the market-driven environment in which we must operate. I think it's a serious problem. The

I don't think we can offer to make promises about what people are going to get, even though we are increasingly pressured to make promises because of the market-driven environment in which we must operate. I think it's a serious problem. The challenge for us is to be realistic in our claims of what we can provide students, while helping them understand that their strengths and talents will emerge over time.

James

challenge for us is to be realistic in our claims of what we can provide students, while helping them understand that their strengths and talents will emerge over time.

A. Doe Mayer. It's absolutely true that students all want to direct when they arrive, but I think they fairly quickly realize the sort of market issues that you are talking about. Besides directing, most of them realize that if they graduate

from school with some other skills, it may help them in pursuing their ultimate goal. We are very lucky at U.S.C. because we provide strong training in cinematography and sound design and other areas where many of them find that they can get work. Obviously, they don't begin as cinematographers, but they work in the visual media in some way, that may ultimately get them there.

It's not so much a bait-and-switch operation, but rather a matter of presenting some of the real options available to students, even though they come to us with expectations that are romantic and idealized and not necessarily very appropriate. We try to give them an array of skills that will help them make a living while they try to direct. Some students really do change their minds in the process, realize that directing is not for

them, and that they have other skills and talents. I don't mean to paint a totally bright and positive picture, because people do walk out of film school disappointed and angry, and that certainly is something that all of us have had to deal with.

A. Marieke Schoenmakers. May I add something? Our students have to choose the profession they want to study before they apply to the school, so we really don't take students in the sound department who really want to direct, because that would be a mess. They have to work in crews from the first day, so we have to have the same numbers of scriptwriters and so on. Another thing is that because we educate in eight professions, we sometimes think the directing students are at a bit of a disadvantage because they have to absorb so much influence from the seven other students in their crew, and that sometimes, they are more victim

than they are privileged persons. The sound students and production design students may already be developing their own ideas, so the creative process in the school is perhaps especially difficult for the directing students.

A. Dr. Victor Valbuena. When we market our programs, we tell prospective students that we have a general course, but that they may elect options in the second and the third year. We tell them that we cannot place everyone into these options, and that while many of them want to be producers and directors, we cannot accommodate all of them, because of the limitations of our resources. It is for this reason that we set up a new course, a two-year advanced diploma course in which we teach producing, directing, cinematography, and editing. If students want to carry their education further, this is an avenue for them.

A. Annabelle Sheehan. I think that in the changing world, where there are more and more possibilities of specializing within schools, the kinds of disappointments and conflicts are now different. Sometimes it's about problems self-actualization within their own specialization that might cause students to go away feeling disappointed in not becoming the kind of sound person they thought they were going to be, or not working in the part of the industry in which they wanted to work.

Q. Michael Rabiger. Speaking as documentary filmmaker and film teacher, sometimes I have the feeling that I am fitting people into a blocked pipe, and I worry about that because when I look at the number of opportunities that actually exist for these people to make documentaries out there, there are few. I think it behoves us, whenever we see in the marketplace, which for documentary pretty much means in the world of television, that there are things that are possible or good for film students, the school's professional staff must reinforce and push it. For instance, last year we had a show on television called "Stranger Than Fiction" which I happened to host. It is not clear whether it will be repeated. It was on at 11 o'clock at night, and it was a wonderful showcase for *verité* documentaries. It's very important that people lobby for programs like that. When you see something happening in the marketplace that is good for your students, it really needs to be reinforced through articles on the Opinion pages of the newspaper about the importance of documentary or about the importance of searching for the truths. Lobbying politicians, or lobbying the broadcast stations really does have an effect. The decision of whether or not "Stranger Than Fiction" will go again, may very well depend on two or three letters that may be written tomorrow. It is very, very impor-

tant that film schools avoid being just some ivory tower situation, but that they be in the world and see their roles as trying to impact so their students have more opportunities.



Sunday, April 7, 2002

Conference Panel 2

Technology and Curriculum

Panel Members

Alain Auclair, President La Fémis, Paris, France

Aimée Boulos, Director IESAV, Beirut, Lebanon

Hugo Rodriguez, Documentary Department, CCC, Mexico City

Kristine Samuelson, Chair Department of Communication, Stanford University, USA

Louise Spickler, Executive Director INIS, Montreal, Canada

Tatiana Storchak, Vice-Rector VGIK, Moscow, Russia

Georges Homsy, IESAV, interpreter for Aimée Boulos

Juan Paco Urrusti, CCC, interpreter for Hugo Rodriguez



Alain Auclair



Juan Urrusti

Hugo Rodriguez



Louise Spickler



Tatiana Storchak



Georges Homsy

Aimée Boulos



Kristine Samuelson

Sunday, April 7, 2002

Conference Panel 2

Technology and Curriculum

Evolving technology gives us new creative means, and this has been reflected in the curriculum of many schools. Have new sound and image technologies made older technologies obsolete, or is an understanding of traditional ways of film making necessary in order to master the art of the cinema? How have sound, camera, editing, animation, and other curricula changes as a result of evolving technology? What is the potential for distance education to radically alter the ways in which we think about teaching and learning?

Alain Auclair

First of all I have to make a statement about language. None of us, except for Kris Samuelson, are native English speakers, so we will have a kind of surrealistic experience this afternoon, and I hope that you can understand something of this experience.

Our theme is "Curriculum Change and Technologies." This theme is about the impact of new technologies, by which I mean digital technologies, on the film school curriculum. For this discussion we have organized this panel so as to highlight very different experiences among old and new schools, schools from very highly developed countries, and from countries where the cinema is new.

We are not all specialists in digital techniques, nor are we propagandists for digital cinema. We all do use digital devices, and we will to present some of our personal experiences.

After a brief introduction, we will hear from Kristine Samuelson, who is Chair of the Department of Communication Stanford University, then, we will hear Hugo Rodriguez, from the Documentary Department of the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica, Mexico City. Hugo will be speaking in Spanish, and his talk will be translated. Then Louise Spickler, from Montreal, who is Quebecan French speaking, but is very able to speak Quebecan English. Then, Tatiana Storchak from VGIK in Moscow will speak, followed by Aimée Boulos from IESAV, in Beirut.

What are the relevant questions to be asked? Have new technologies of sound and image made all the old ones obsolete? Is it necessary to keep traditional methods of production for the teaching of cinema, or should we aban-

don them? What new developments are made possible by new technologies, not only for the countries that are most developed in film production, but also for those countries that lack certain facilities, or lack knowledge, tradition, and experienced personnel? There are many questions that we have to try to answer this afternoon.

I am not as confident about these technologies as I once was. One of the reason is that last year we organized a conference in Paris for GEECT, the European regional group of film and television schools. One of the themes was precisely on the relationships between new technologies, the art of filmmaking, and film teaching. The previous year we had co-organized a colloquium, on the same theme, and we are planning to publish a short book based on the colloquium.

The main sense of the presentations by the participants in the colloquium was that in 2000 and 2001, there was a very strong interest in digital production in France. Digital production and digital techniques in broadcasting, exemplified by a program financed and initiated by After Television, part of the Centre National de la Cinématographie's national initiative, CRAC, in the city of Valence. The program consisted of producing a series of TV movies entitled "Les Petites Caméras." Some of these films were also shown in theaters.

The principle of this project was very simply economics. The shooting had to be done on DVCAM, and cameras were available in the shops for about 20,000 francs, which is approximately €3,000, and less than US\$3,000. That was the only constraint.

One of the directors in this series was Claude Miller, and I remember that he said that he found the shooting very pleasant. He worked with a very small crew, and shot in a confined area in a hospital. Shooting was very fast, very intense, greatly motivating, and it was a very good experience for him. But, he added, his next film... this film was "Betty Fisher et autres histoires" now screening in France... would be made in traditional ways, with a Panaflex or Arri camera, a complete crew, full preparation, and without any improvisation.

I also remember talking with Jacques Vansten, who is a producer and director in France, at the beginning of the "Les Petites Caméras" project. He said that the single important consequence of digital technology for the cinema was to draw many institutions and people to a one-day meeting at the Cannes Festival, dedicated to "digital something."

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He said that it was now time to make films with whatever technique was appropriate to serve content, and therefore he no longer wanted to participate in discussions of the kind that was held in Cannes.

I also remember one of the observations made by Jean Alibert, who was very interested in shooting with DVCAM because he believes that it enables us to be closer to the actors, and to let them play, and to capture any movement, any details of the skin or gesture, and it allows us to have more truth from the actors.

Pascal Arnold said the problem with DVCAM was essentially the problem of power. In traditional cinematography, we have the power of the cinematographer, the director of photography, who is very, very important and impressive. We always wait during production, sometimes for hours and hours, for the placement of the lights, and for all the other mechanics necessary for shooting to be made ready. In fact, the camera turns for a very short time. With DVCAM, instead of that, we are ready to shoot almost immediately. It is very fast, and we can shoot in a very natural manner. It is a fresh point of view, nearer to the truth.

After that, I was not in an easy mood because I was not certain that as a school, our problems, our task, was to teach digital filmmaking. Sure, this is a special category of audio visual production in which we should be interested because of factors such as proximity and efficiency. We all share the objective of being more efficient, more economical, and more knowledgeable about the products provided by technical industries, but we are not affiliated with Sony, or Microsoft or Apple, or similar industries.

So, what conclusions can we draw? For us at Fémis, we have some very simple conclusions. We are fully equipped with digital equipment, DVCAM and Avid technologies, and all our sound facilities are now digitalized. We are even now entering into the world of computer-assisted script writing with the French version of Final Draft. But at the same time, most of the production personnel, the directors, cinematographers, and set designers in France, except perhaps some of sound designers, ask us to keep our traditional film equipment, 16mm and 35mm, for cinematography. They consider it a necessary means of learning the highest values of their crafts.

Even the students, who naturally are very excited about

experimenting with the new technologies, want to keep the traditional 35mm or 16mm film-based facilities because they think it's normal to show the film on large screen. Maybe it is not the future for the industry, but at this moment it is the reality for the majority of the French industry.

So we have tried to find a compromise. We are now prepared to teach technical skills, and we are giving priority to teaching aesthetic issues, and not just as an add-on to skills training. Moreover, the situation of digital techniques is not defined with any finality. There are extremely rapid changes because of the constant and impressive innovation by the digital industry,

and we know that our students will have to be able to deal with new techniques that we cannot even imagine. Not only will they have to use these techniques, but they will have to create them. So we have to equip them with the capacity of creativity and the ability to control the shooting situation. But perhaps it is not essential to give each of them an actual computer system, or Avid, or Final Cut Pro, or DVCAM, because the technology is eternally in flux.

Auclair

The other consideration was that our curriculum requires almost four years,

and it is out of question to extend it. Along with that consideration, I must note that Fémis does not have animation or special effects departments. We have departments of directing, screen writing, editing, cinematography, sound, set design, and producing, and we have to anticipate the introduction of digital technologies in every department, so that our students may use digital tools as a basic part of their learning.

In conclusion, we have looked for a very progressive and prudent introduction of digital technologies, as a complement to our teaching. The main objective of our activities is to enable to students to conceive a project, to carry the project forward to its conclusion, to manage a crew, and to make intelligent editing choices. This is primarily about artistic conception, ideas, and intellectual activity, and only secondarily about technical issues.

We are very conscious that the current situation is very temporary, because of what we teach, and we are aware that every year brings a new stage in the evolution of the digital world. We will maintain all the traditional technologies as long as they are important to professional practice. The problem for all of us is one of introducing the right technologies at the correct time.

Kris Samuelson

Our school is a small, two-year post-graduate program in non-fiction filmmaking, and we use both film and digital technologies to help our students develop their filmic voices and become strong visual storytellers. I believe that it's more important than ever that we work with both film and digital technologies in our curriculum because of the resource issues that have changed over the past several years. Many of the students come to our program having done quite a lot of media making, mostly in video, and in most cases they've learned some dreadful habits. It is our job to remind them, or teach them, that they should not use the camera like a hose, and that they need to bring thought, intelligence, and precision to their work.

We actually begin our training with 16mm film, using old Bolex cameras with spring motors that the students must wind in order to run a shot. It really makes them aware of what a shot actually means, and it starts to rein them in and pull them back from all the undisciplined shooting that they have played around with prior to coming to our program. We feel strongly that making the students work with the film medium first, using very simple cameras and hard lenses, helps them develop strongly disciplined habits before they embark on video in their second term.

We really love to work with digital video because ours is a documentary program, and for our students to become strong observational cinematographers who can capture powerful images of reality, they need a lot of practice. We find that dedicating specific parts of our curriculum primarily to the visual component of documentary story telling works very well for our students, and so the second term primarily deals with telling visual stories that involve on-camera interviews, and considerable observational shooting.

It may seem surprising, but we go back to film in our third term, so that the students have the opportunity to learn 16mm sync shooting and gain experience with color film stocks. They gain experience with image control and awareness of color and how it works in telling documentary stories. I should note that their film experience in the

first term, was in black and white, and given the skills that they had to master, a serious consideration of color would have been impossible. We also want the students to gain mastery over the 16mm production tools, even if they may not ever use them again, as a way of reinforcing the need for technical precision in making production decisions. Film seems to demand a stricter discipline.

The color film shot by our students in the third term is digitally scanned and the editing is non-linear, which is dictated by the realities of current professional practice. We want the students to become really comfortable with that particular mode of production.

In the second year, our students produce their diploma films, and while they can choose to work in any medium, in almost every recent case they work in digital video, largely for financial reasons. This is consistent with the current professional situation for most documentaries in the U.S. which find distribution almost exclusively on television. The economics of digital video enables the documentary maker to accumulate a great deal of visual material at reasonable cost. On the other hand, easy image acquisition raises other problems that are important to our curriculum. For example, we address the challenge of what we call "media management," which is how to actually handle the many hours of material without becoming totally lost.

We think that it's valuable for the students to find themselves drowning in footage for a limited period of time, because it helps them confront the problem of how to deal with the material efficiently, view it, log it, make notes about it, organ-

ize an initial edit on paper, and give careful consideration to how the work should be structured. It's usually so overwhelming that they vow never to

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Sometimes, in trial-and-error experimentation, all sort of serendipitous and surprising juxtapositions occur that students might not have otherwise been able to conceive of without actually seeing it on the screen.

We want our students to start thinking about ways to link their documentaries to the internet.

Samuelson

work with such a high shooting ratio again, so it is a useful exercise as well.

We find that nonlinear digital editing is very useful for the quick restructuring of student work. In the past term I worked with students in a digital video class and I was stunned by what they could do. I love it because they're able to try so many different possibilities, which I think is incredibly important in teaching documentary. Sometimes, in trial-and-error experimentation, all sort of serendipitous and surprising juxtapositions occur that students might not have otherwise been able to conceive of without actually seeing it on the screen.

We want our students to start thinking about ways to link their documentaries to the internet. Frequently, in documentary work there is all manner of information that may be useful to the audience, but that doesn't lend itself to inclusion in the finished work, so we are now asking students to create websites for their projects, so that when they eventually do get into the professional world they'll be able to make that transition easily. For example, the Public Broadcasting Service, which is a major sponsor of documentaries in America, requires that all nationally distributed documentaries have an accompanying website with additional material about the film. The website might have links to other organizations or websites, to out-takes of interviews, unused archival and original visuals, and other content that audience members might find interesting. We now require all the students to create very simple websites for their diploma films, as a way for them to start thinking about ways in which the internet and their finished documentaries will interact.

We haven't yet embarked on video streaming of student work on our department website yet, but it is under study. We're trying to begin with baby-steps into that area, especially because the broadband connections necessary for high quality video streaming are still rare outside of academic institutions, and there are issues of copyright protection to be resolved.

Louise Spickler

As Alain Auclair told you, I am from Canada, but I am also from Quebec, which means that my first language is French, so if I miss some English words, please excuse me.

My school, INIS, is a professional training center and we started in 1996, which means that we are a very young institution. Since the beginning, I have always the same feeling, which is that technology is moving very quickly, and each year I felt that we had to make some changes. These were

not major changes, but rather a response to reflections on our program and looking closely at the ways in which young talent work in current production practice.

INIS provides two distinct programs: one in television and another in film. Both provide training for screenwriters, directors, and producers. We now also have a new media program.

For many different reasons, INIS decided that the writer will be the only one responsible for the script, which means that the director cannot write the script in the manner of the *auteur*. Understand that I am not talking about exercises. I am talking about the final script. This decision is based on our recognition that the writer, the director, and the producer have to work together as a collaborative creative team.

When we first established our television curriculum, it was entirely based on television drama. It's still much the same, but now we have to deal with the fact that in the television industry, the switch to digital has already happened, so our students are now in the multi camera studio or shooting on location with one or two digital cameras. During our training, we produce a television series, which means, that for each episode there is a writer, who writes the episode, a director to direct it, and a producer who is in charge of the series.

The writers have to write bearing in mind the fact that they will have to shoot in a multi-camera studio or with digital cameras on location.

With the digital technology comes new opportunities. Sometimes the students shoot too much, but the technology gives them the opportunity to explore different approaches. I mentioned that our students are being trained in the manner of the traditional TV series, but some students are trying to do something different. I cannot say that it is a revolution, but I can say that it is different. They are trying something new, and in itself, that is interesting, that for school, I think it's an important thing.

With the film curriculum, we decided to require our students to work with several technologies. At the beginning, they have to produce a very short digital film. After that, they are given the possibility to play with the digital tools, and after that, they have to shoot on film. At the end of their program, they may choose digital or film technology. If I can use the expression, we've had students who are really digital freaks. They really want to work with digital technology and they are doing something interesting, but others believe very strongly that they want to work with film.

What makes the program interesting for us, is the fact that

many of the film students want to work with both digital and film cameras, and when they are doing their short films, they can shoot with either.

While the new digital technologies give our students the possibility of a new production experience, they will also have to face the same old question. What do you really want to say? What is your story all about? Can you explain your personal vision? Is there any specific reason why you choose to use either digital or film technology? Can you explain the relation between the script and your shooting plan?

Emotion, creativity, personal vision, will always be the key to making good work in film and television, but as I see it, new technologies are deeply changing our curriculum. From the first day we started our new media program, it was something totally different from TV and cinema. First of all, the separate roles that we know as writer, producer, and director, are very different in making the new media. We must think about a team, working together, rather than about individuals in carefully defined separate roles.

When we talk about telling a story interactively, it's not simple. It's not like telling a traditional narrative story with a beginning, a middle and an end. It means that the interactive story-teller has to give the choice over to the viewer. Even if it's a website or an educational program, it means that unlike traditional story telling, the story-teller doesn't make the choice for us.

Our new media program is based on exploration. Of course, we offer courses, seminars, and the new media students do some kinds of traditional exercises, but they also have to work on the special ways of writing interactively. In the end, we don't have a final product such as a short film, or a television series. We have prototypes. And for us, I must say that the challenge is more about convergence. How can we cope with treating animation, video, film, and the internet, and at the end create an interactive story with emotions?

Of course, we offer courses, seminars, and the new media students do some kinds of traditional exercises, but they also have to work on the special ways of writing interactively. In the end, we don't have a final product such as a short film, or a television series. We have prototypes. And for us, I must say that the challenge is more about convergence. How can we cope with treating animation, video, film, and the internet, and at the end create an interactive story with emotions?.

Personally, I think that new media program challenges us with the fact that this new way of "writing" will take time to become a language with its own unique codes, a language with different types of image, and sounds, used by creators to create both understanding and emotion.

Hugo Rodriguez (interpreter)

I am part of a school that is always searching for technological improvements, and we try to apply these technologies to production. This may be the reason I have been asked to participate in colloquium about new technologies. The first thing I reflect upon is what is meant by "new technologies." When we talk about new technologies, I don't know if we are referring to high definition television, data, film processes, digital devices, shutters, cameras with variable speed shutters, fast films, low power consumption lighting... So "new technologies" applies to many things.

But all of these so-called "new" technologies are at least ten years old, which is a lot of time for an art form that is only about 100 years old. It may be that "new technologies" is a term that serves the film school as it defends itself from changes. Please take this as a useful provocation.

Film has always been linked to new technologies from the very beginning. It began as a new technology. I think that we should abandon the idea that new things arrive in order to substitute the old, and also break with the belief that the old or traditional means are somehow "pure." This conservative way of thinking, is responsible for having kept film schools away from the use of these new technologies and has prevented

them from updating their technology. But to live this technological revolution, we must turn first to the industry, not the film school. It is the industries which develop these technologies, find applications for them, and ultimately decide which ones are

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useful, and therefore which ones we should teach.

In film schools we can only grab whatever is within our reach, and whenever we dare to do so. You need millions of dollars to actually develop technology, and that's why the development of technology is done by big corporations. But on the other hand, whenever someone develops a new expensive technological process, at the same time there is somebody else who is developing a cheaper version of that technology, and yet another person who is thinking about how

best to apply this technology intelligently. And finally, there are those who dare to apply the technology, and that's us, in the film schools. So I invite all the schools' students to think about which part of this change to become involved in. In the best case, I think that we can only participate in the very last stage, which is to grab whatever we can, and use it as intelligently and creatively as possible.

The main question is not so much how the new technologies affect the academic curriculum, but rather how we approach the relation between research and the curriculum, and what chances we have to use the results of our research. This is an very old story that goes back to the beginning of mankind: you teach what you know, then from that knowledge other questions arise, and you do more research that alters your knowledge, which in turn affects what you transmit to the next generation of students.

This research is not something that students usually embrace because students are new to the industry and often very conservative. Researching technology is a responsibility of the film school itself, because art stems from research, and art reflects society

In the last few years, we at the CCC in Mexico City have produced feature-length films with DV camera and digital backgrounds, and also short films with digital effects that were generated in the school. We've done two documentaries, originally shot on digital video and then transferred to 35mm film using the school's resources. By next year all of our film school's exercises will be edited on nonlinear equipment. We have now extended the possibilities of digital sound to all films in the school, and next year we will

have THX sound dubbing facilities available for all exercises. We have acquired digital-to-film transfer equipment, and now one of the school's main concerns is to work in these new technologies and in high definition television.

This would appear to be quite expensive, but actually, we were able to introduce these new technologies with very little money. Some of them were designed by the school, which demonstrates that if you do proper research, you can come up with solutions that are not expensive to develop.

Tatiana Storchak

I am from VGIK, the Moscow Film School, and before addressing the main issue, I would like to point out some unique aspects of how my school is organized and operates. We work on the principle of workshops in all our six departments, and the students are admitted to study in a workshop in a particular faculty, with a specific teacher. As a result, the student faces one problem, which is that he or she must make a very important choice very early.

The second point is that sometime in the academic year, certain obstacles arise on the way to digital technology. It has to do with the nature of the filmmakers who teach in VGIK. According to our statutes, our teachers are supposed to be professionals who are actively working in the film industry, and as a result, many of them are not wholly familiar with digital technology. This then is a problem for both students and teachers.

Our rector, Alexander Novikov, reminded me of one very good example. Our well-known head of cinematography, Vladimir Yusav shot a reportage film of a Russian delegation visiting the

Beijing Academy on digital video three years ago. It still has not been completely edited and they are still working on it as we speak. Vladimir Yusav says that he loved using the digital camera, but he did not have a strategy for completing the film. So the need for a proper production strategy is one of the steps that must be accomplished in order for us to capture this wonderful new bird, digital.

There are also financial problem for the VGIK. We are a State Institute and we are mostly supported by the state

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Rodriguez

budget, but at the same time we have to raise some of the money needed to run the school ourselves. Right now, we are trying sales. New equipment must mainly be bought by the school itself, and this is a strong motivating factor to help us move ahead.

So, having confessed all our failures, mistakes, and problems, let's come get to the achievements which have been accomplished in recent years. As Eisenstein used to say, every human being may become a film director, but one may need 200 years to be trained, the other three or four years. So whatever new technology comes along, a good talented student and classes in the fundamentals will enable mastery of digital technologies.

We were very much influenced by our past experience. In late 80's and early 90's, we decided to lead the world by creating a new curriculum for the video class, and we decided that it would be a little bit different from the fundamental academic curriculum that was created by our founding rector Lev Kuleshov and the many other famous people who contributed to the development of our school. We created and announced a "special video workshop" as we called it. We decided to combine the instruction of cameramen and directors. We created the new curriculum, we selected the students, we started the process, and after the first year of studies the students revolted. They said that they wanted traditional academic exercises and that they wanted to work with 35mm camera and make films. "Video is video," they said, "but films are films!"

I think that the same applies to digital. As far as the curriculum is concerned, we will make some changes. We won't reconstruct the curriculum, we'll try to be close to the fundamental academic content, but we will add some special modules that will be about digital technology. This particularly concerns camera, where we offer several courses: a video course, a digital video course, and a video course in the special program. Then, there is an extensive digital curriculum module for artists and animators.

We are interested in theoretical works in this field that address the aesthetics of digital, how they advance the imagination, appreciation, and vision of the audience for

whom we ultimately all work. This is also one of the biggest problems in the film criticism and film theory curriculum. We try to address these aspects as well.

As I have said, we've purchased a lot of digital equipment for editing. Every workshop has digital cameras but this is merely a device, an instrument. Some of you may have seen the film "Telephone" made by our student Ekaterina Visnapou, which has been very well received in many countries. She insisted on making her diploma film on 35mm.

Some Finnish exchange students who studied with us shot on digital, and they were very happy because we gave them digital cameras and they could work quite cheaply. I must confess that on the other hand, one of our students, a documentary student who was an exchange student in France demanded that she shoot her diploma film in 35mm. She doesn't want to have a diploma, but she wants to work in the field, and needs a 35mm work to show. So she insisted and we agreed to give her the camera and the cameraman for three days.

We all are trying to work with the digital technology insofar as we are able, but still too take into consideration the fundamental and vital challenge for our institute, which is to train artists. Our fundamental priority is with the artistic language, and if we educate an artist, I don't think that it will be difficult for him to obtain the appropriate technology. Technology is just an instrument, and if it enriches the artistic aspects of production, then bravo. If not, let's do it the primitive way as some of the Iranian filmmakers and other people are doing right now, with great

success.

Aimee Boulos (interpreter)

I am not going to be long, and I will get to the problem immediately. I am the head of a school which has been witness to the revolution of technologies, from S-VHS, through Betacam and 35mm to the current digital. This rapid revolution has caused us a lot of problems, because the school

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Storchak

Panel 2

is a private institution and it has no governmental funds. It's sponsored by itself, one might say, by the non-governmental university of which it is a part.

It was very important to question the issue of investment, and to create a new strategy of our own. We think that the students who begin with basic methods, and then go forward to new technologies which demand more attention, must conceive of the new technologies in new ways, that go beyond the basics. This puts in question the relation

between the students and the new technology, the students and the curriculum, and the students and the teachers.

I am in complete agreement with Tatiana Storchak's comments about the relationship between the new technologies, and the teachers and students. We now have, in our university very new young teachers who are very capable of teaching digital technologies, as well as older directors, who are experienced with working on film and analogue video systems.

In Lebanon, we don't have a film industry as such. We are in a transition period in which this industry is going to take a prominent place. The myth of the 35mm feature film is very prominent among the people in Lebanon and, of course, it is very much in our consciousness, and those of our students. The students are very much in favor of DVCAM, because it's economical and it allow them to work quickly, especially in documentaries. But their goal is to make their work on 35mm film. That is what we are going to do, as the first film school in Lebanon.

Q. and A.

Q.

Two rather different questions. You brought up the issue of convergence. Technology is converging, but you can't converge people. I feel that there is quite a different problem suddenly facing us, in which we're trying to converge the

conception and the utilization of these technologies. Before digital technology, there were rather clear divisions among the different departments of a film school, dealing with capturing images, editing, special effects, and so on. Suddenly these digital machines can do anything, and there are pressure appearing for us to teach students become Jacks of all trades and masters of none. I would like you to address that problem because I think it is very, very difficult to converge people to do all of these things.

The second thing is that the misunderstanding that it is cheap. It is cheap for the student to use the school's technology, but if you went out to the commercial equipment rental companies after graduation and had to pay the cost of 15 weeks in an editing suite, it would be rather expensive, perhaps more expensive than the traditional technology. So I would like you to look at both of these problems.

Kris Samuelson.

I will take that one. In terms of converging people, I think there is only so much convergence that can happen. I think one of the things that can make digital video look or sound really terrible is when too few people try to do too many things. We reduce our crews slightly for work in digital video, but not much, and in particular, we are very keen on keeping sound under control, because sound problems, seem to come up again and again in digital video. We've actually tried not to converge much when our students work in digital technology, and I think that is very important.

Boulos

Similarly, when one tries to direct and shoot at the same time, it is staggeringly difficult to get a good outcome and we find that when students try to do that, they fall into every trap that can be fallen into with a digital video. For example, shooting outside in extremely contrasty situations and not trying to improve the ugly capture you are getting, or working in a very low light situation and not bringing in just that little bit of light that would make all the difference in reducing the ugly video noise in the image. When students divide the videography and the directorial roles, each is then able to concentrate on what needs to be done, and the results are always bet-

ter.

As for the rental situation, two or three years ago, I would have agreed with you, but now we find that we can walk away from the really expensive nonlinear editing technologies such as Avid and use Final Cut Pro which is so much more affordable. Yes, it is not quite versatile as Avid, but it gets the work done, and I know from activities outside my school that there is an awful lot that can be done. Even cutting feature films that eventually need to be assembled in 16mm or 35mm film can be done easily with Final Cut Pro. You can cut PAL or NTSC with Final Cut Pro and we think that people who want to do long-form factual or fiction projects require a considerable amount of time in the editing room are just not buying into the older, more expensive, more established nonlinear technologies. They're just going with Final Cut and it's working for them..

Tatiana Storchak.

We decide to arrange new positions for volunteer teachers who will be initiators of innovations in film, digital animation, digital and computer graphics and so forth, or the camera. They will create an atmosphere, a world around the students in which convergence is a possibility.

Q. Stephen Bayly, NFTS, UK

Following on from the second question of the previous questioner, I would like to just talk a little bit about post-production which we haven't really dealt with. The panel has been much more focused on digital production and it's true that digital production has its possibilities and its problems. But it seems to me that we sometimes become over-anxious, bordering perhaps on hysteria, about these issues, and we forget that in the history of filmmaking there is constant change in technology. If you just think back to the Aaton Camera, for example, what an innovation it was: light-weight filmmaking that revolutionized documentary filmmaking. A lot of opportunities came about, there was a seismic shift in documentary filmmaking, but we weathered that and we are on to new technologies.

I come from Britain where we've had to deal with, for example, the change of currency, and the change to the metric system. We really are in a period of transition, and

we've got to keep an historical perspective. Certainly with the introduction of the Euro, other European countries having to endure mentally running two currencies at one time. The historical experience is that after a while the old currency will be forgotten, and one thinks in the new currency and uses it as the everyday tool, so I don't think we should be overwrought about these issues.

All of that having been said, recently, I become overwrought by an experience we had at the National Film and

Television School in Britain, and this is the area of post-production. Harking back to this previous session about student expectations, we find that more and more, students want to venture into the realms of digital post-production. Digital design expands their imaginations, but at the moment this is a very, very, very expensive and time consuming process.

I brought with me an example of a film that we made which was very heavily based on digital post-production, a fantasy-comedy-adventure, a very commercial sort of film, which got more or less completely out of hand. It's called "Inferno" and I am hoping that somehow we might manage to squeeze it into this program, because I think we should look at this film, and ask ourselves what is the future in terms of the expectations of our students in the realm of digital post-production.

Our normal cost for a diploma film is about £10,000 US\$15,000 dollars. We allow our producing students to augment the cash budget by getting

outside sponsorship, and in this case, Channel 4 got behind the film because it featured two of their favorite artists, and it was quite experimental in a way, and the initial budget went from £10,000 up to £30,000. The film was completed for about £35,000, and if you look at the digital work in it, you can easily estimate this as costing £200,000-£250,000 on the commercial market. The film was not delivered on time for graduation, it drew very

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Bayly

heavily on the resources of the school, and we had to go out to the industry and beg, borrow and steal in order to complete the film.

When it finally was completed, there was great celebration, everybody said, "what a fantastic piece of work, wasn't everybody happy after all," and I became greatly despondent because in terms of a film school trying to mount effective digital post-production, I just couldn't just see how we could sustain this., I would be very interested in your comments on it, and your help, as a means of helping all of us to see into the future of digital post-production.

A. Aimée Boulos

I just wanted to give an example, just we had Abbas Kiarostami at our school. I think you know him. He is an Iranian, very famous and well-known. He was at IE-SAV and he conducted a workshop with our student. He is a champion of the new technology DVCAM. His last film is entirely in DV, and he is now having it blown up to 35mm in Paris. The important thing is your film language, which is not the same thing as the instrument with which you make your films.

A. Hugo Rodriguez

You might be able find alternative technologies at all levels and prices. Last year we bought a digital-to-35mm film printer that cost US\$60,000, and now you could buy one for US\$30,000. In a professional film school, it can pay its cost back within 6 months, because it is actually cheaper than a blow up from 16mm to 35mm. If you make a mistake, you can always find another way to get what you wanted. I say from that from experience, because we were involved in a project for five years and we made a lots of mistakes in those years.



Conference Panel 3

Monday, April 8, 2002

Triangle, Six Years Later

Panel Members

Pavel Jech, FAMU, Prague, Czech Republic

Renen Schorr, Director JSFS, Jerusalem, Israel

Lauri Törhönen, Director, UIAH, Helsinki, Finland

Malte Wadman, Director NFS, Lillehammer, Norway



Malte Wadman



Pavel Jech



Lauri Törhönen



Renen Schorr

Monday, April 8, 2002

Conference Panel 3

Triangle, Six Years Later

In 1996, CILECT began to address the issue of communication and collaboration among the creative triangle of writers, directors, and producers. Some viewed the Triangle project as a necessary corrective to the 1960's *auteur* ideology that dominated many film schools. Others saw it as diminishing the role of the individual film artist in an increasingly market-oriented system. How has *Triangle* affected the film and television school curriculum, and what lessons can be learned from the process as well as the outcomes?

Lauri Törhönen

Dear friends and colleagues, I will present the panelist. First I present the empty chairs: Bob Nickson is on the agenda but couldn't come. From the beginning Bob has been our outside point of view for the Triangle process. He brought an American point of view to this European process. The empty chair on the left is actually mine, and I am sitting in the empty chair in the middle, which actually belongs to Professor Dick Ross, who has been the soul, if not the body, of the Triangle Project. The poor man has already written two books on Triangle meetings and a third one is coming. Dick wasn't able to attend, so I am sitting in for him.

The other panelists, who are in their chairs, are Renen Schorr, from the Sam Spiegel Film and Television School, Jerusalem. Renen is both a producer and a director, so we can describe him as a Triangle skeptic. Pavel Jech from FAMU, Prague is a screenwriter, and Malte Wadman, from Lillehammer Norway is neither a producer nor a screenwriter nor a director.

I am a director by profession, and I inherited an ancient, old-fashioned film school in which there was a lot of analysis and theory, but very little filmmaking. The motion picture theater was the core of the film school, instead of the studio. The students, who I also inherited, and some of them unfortunately are still there, wrote scripts by themselves for the 10-minute films they were assigned to make, which finally emerged as 52-minute features. As a result, just one student could ruin the budget for the whole year. So my taking the job of running the school was an act of true optimism.

I missed my first CILECT General Assembly because my predecessor wanted to travel to Mexico with his wife. In

Mexico I might have at least met the faces and seen the hair color of the people who were to become my international colleagues before they turned gray, in and during the Triangle process, but I missed the opportunity. So when the original Triangle documentation started to arrive, I instinctively went to Rome to attend the first meeting without knowing much about what was going to happen. I only wanted to see the CILECT people.

The Rome meeting changed my life and my world, and with that, the film school and my point of view towards everything about it. Triangle, as it began, was everything I wanted to happen in the film industry in my country and in the film school as well.

For those of you who don't know anything about Triangle, this is a project sponsored by GEECT and CILECT and it's a European response to Hollywood because somebody noticed that European cinema is overwhelmed by the producer-driven American studio system, and the weak point in European film is the producer. Somebody had to do something about it. I think it was a good idea for the film schools to pick up the ball, and in Rome, six years ago, we decided that the right place to educate film producers was in the film schools instead of the schools of business or university departments of economics. We need film producers, not economists or corporate managers.

We will try to be brief and try to save some time for discussion. I'd like the first round to be about what the film schools did before Triangle, and then we will go on to what happened during and after Triangle. First, Renen Schorr.

Renen Schorr

I cannot give you a full report on the situation of the schools before Triangle because our school in Jerusalem is not the typical "six pack" type of school by which I mean meaning admitting six directing students, six screenwriting students, six editing students, six cinematography students, six producing students, etc. to each of the six departments. Our school, which is twelve years old, admits students who have not yet chosen a specialty. It is only during their studies that they evolve into directors, writers, editors, etc. and all students have the option to direct and to make a second year film or a diploma film. So it's not a typical, European film school in that regard. Our philosophy is that, especially in small countries like ours, a school should have a role in changing the industry, and I

Panel 3

must say that after our twelve years of existence, it's my belief that we have contributed to a subtle change within the Israeli industry. Yet, without doubt, we failed to bring producers to the industry. Our school, like most of the European schools taught students how to be production managers, or line producers. We've still not succeeded in producing an executive producer.

Our thinking was that we should proceed one additional step and that's where we are heading now, maybe even one step ahead of Triangle. We wish to make the producer's role in the school more successful, and to take the radical step of fully assimilating the role of the producer into the organization of the school.

Given that until now, the director is the person who is running the show, we would like to do something which is quite dangerous in a film school. We want to select in advance the most promising people to be producers and educate them not only in the basics of production, but especially in story editing, storytelling, costing, and scheduling, and then give them the opportunity put their knowledge to work and to select the projects to be made in the school and actually produce them.

In brief, this means that the school will surrender its artistic power and its funds to five, six, or seven senior producers, with the hope of getting two really outstanding producing graduates. I think we can change the industry, not in a cumulative way, but from above, because in Israel, and I believe many small countries, we lack real producers who can identify a good story and go with it, and find the right director, the right writer and production team, and understand costing and finance and marketing. If our school can educate one or two really good producers every year, it will change the industry and make a revolution.

Malte Wadman

I had no experience of film school before Triangle. My fantastic opportunity was that in 1997 I was asked to start a film school in Norway, from scratch. Of course, there had been many groups and subgroups from the government,

from the ministry, from other film schools, who were setting up the parameters within which we were supposed to work. The groups and consultants had all been traveling around the world for a long time looking at film schools, but unfortunately, I could not get very much out of their reports.

From my own experience of teaching at different schools, I learned about the problems with the existing system. We found that at many schools the cinematographers graduated and went straight out to shoot commercials, the documentary people were all right because they were getting work in television, and the scriptwriters also got nice jobs when they graduated, but there wasn't any producer training at all, and the role of the directing students within the school was very different from what existed in the industry. The film school students were being trained as *auteurs*. The reason for these director-led schools had to do with the historical situation that existed when they were organized. The schools in Western Europe were largely set up just after the introduction of television, which coincided with the invasion of the *nouvelle vague*, the "new wave," and they were mostly school for directors and cinematographers.

The introduction of screenwriting into my school's curriculum came in the 1980's and producing didn't come until the 1990's, initially somewhat outside of what one might consider the core curriculum. This led, for example, to scriptwriters, who were very much aware of the situation in the real world, writing a lot of scripts, but they were never produced, because the directors, living in the obsolete world of the *auteur*, were writing their own scripts and making their own films.

The producing student was reduced to being a kind of production manager or first assistant for the director, who was actually running the show. So, when we began to design the school, we discussed this very thoroughly. This was between the first and second Triangle meeting. I stole Ian Closson from the Dramatiska Institutet in Stockholm, to be our curriculum coordinator, and he had been to the first Triangle meeting, so we picked up some ideas from there and started to organize our new school in a different

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Schorr

way.

We decided very early to create a “storytelling school” with six equal storytellers, one from each of the school’s departments. They would all be involved in telling the story of the film. At the same time, we introduced the idea of the Triangle.

Lauri Törhönen

I remember that on the first day in Rome, someone proposed the idea of educating creative producers. After all the decades of educating very creative directors, should we start educating creative producers? What is a creative producer? It started that simply. We started by realizing what we lacked in the European film industries and in many other countries in the way of creative producers, and agreed on the need to grow them. We started with many answers, but no good questions, and because there is no trade or profession called “creative producer” in the official vocabulary of film schools, we decided to start educating “producers” who are creative, together with directors and screen writers, as a creative triangle.

Pavel Jech

It’s fascinating to be here in Australia to see this international collage of jet lag. Everyone falling asleep! Once the Australians start to sleep, we know we are in trouble.

Lauri asked us to divide our presentations into two parts: one pre-Triangle and the other, dealing with what happened after the concept was introduced to our schools. As far as I understand Triangle, the goal is not simply to enhance the role of the creative producers, but also to ensure that the education in the film schools accurately reflects the reality of film production. For that reason, the producer needs to have a more prominent role, and if it isn’t that way in some countries, it will need to be addressed soon, because that’s the reality of how more and better films can be produced. The reality of the situation which my school, FAMU, in the Czech Republic, has been in for the last 50 years has been quite different, for obvious historical reasons. Most of its history has been under a Communist regime and the realities of the film industry were very different from the present.

FAMU was actually founded in 1946, shortly after the end of World War II and two years before the Communist takeover of the country, and but it’s interesting to note that the same year, both the film industry and the Barandov Film Studio were also nationalized. The system that evolved, and FAMU itself, were very analogous to the realities of film production in Czechoslovakia. At that time there was a pervading ideology that “for us, film is the most important of the arts,” as Lenin proclaimed, because of the propa-

ganda value. Film could reach the mass audience. The film industry at that time was very highly subsidized. There was no problem in financing films, and each year there were 30 or more feature films made in Czechoslovakia. Likewise, the school was a very well funded and a very privileged place to be.

From the very beginning, the school had a system of departments. There were five original departments, including what would become the core of Triangle, a producing department, a directing department, and a screenwriting department, and they also used a system of practical exercises, all funded by the school, which combined the efforts of the departments, so there was a producer from the producing department, director from the directing department, and so on.

Perhaps paradoxically or unintentionally, the system created strong artistic personalities, because the first group of the students who came into the industry after going to school in the 1950’s were those famous names who created the Czech new wave. As I said, FAMU was in a very privileged position. Its graduates were guaranteed jobs in the state film industry because they had been trained by the state. This went to such extremes that when Vera Chytilová, perhaps our most famous female filmmaker, was banned from making films during the 1970’s for seven years, she wrote an open letter to the President of the country stating that, because the state had paid for her education, the people who were preventing her from making films were actually committing a crime against the state. I don’t know if that’s a persuasive argument for other film school graduates, but it actually worked for her and she was reinstated, somewhat grudgingly, but nevertheless, she was allowed to make films again.

Where were the producers under the old system? Like all industries in the communist system, the school and the film industry were centrally planned. Financing was not an issue. The money was there because it was important to the state to have films. The only issue was ideology, and so producers weren’t producers in the sense that we know them today, they were basically production managers, and it was the same in the school. A student at the school was trained to be a production manager, and his or her function in the school on a school production was to be a production manager.

Over the years, some additional departments were

added, but the main filmmaking departments were directing, documentary, and animation. Each department accepted about five or six students per year. The producing department accepted 15 students per year because they wanted each one of those student to service the productions of the directing, documentary, and animation students. As a result, there was not a strong tradition of creative producers either in the country or in the state's film school.

Now the situation is changing, I will save that story for the second half, the Triangle half.

Lauri Törhönen

When I graduated from the film school, the head of the school was a very well-known director who not only wrote scripts and directed and edited his own films, but he owned the production company. In one case he even fell in love with his female star of the comedy he was making and he just wasn't able to cut his girl friend's performance, so the film was half-an-hour too long for the script. I had an ongoing argument with him about this in my diploma year. I didn't know anything about Triangle, but my simple idea was that two pairs of eyes and two brains are better than one pair of eyes and one brain. Later on, after graduating, I was working as Warren Beatty's assistant director on "Reds." This was Warren Beatty's ultimate performance. He had a close-up taken of himself in 113 takes, because after all, he was the producer, and the star, and the director, and the co-writer of the film, and as a result of this "auteurism", making the film was a production catastrophe. After graduating from film school, witnessing such craziness in this business affected my point of view when I got to Rome for the first Triangle meeting.

Melbourne's wonderful tram system is a useful metaphor. Once you step on the tram there are designated stops and you can't turn the tram away from the track. On the Triangle tram, Rome was stop number one, Terni was number two and Torino was number three, and we asked to have number four as well. Sometimes, trams go from point A to point B and in some places like Helsinki, for example, they make loops or even figure-eights, and I ask myself whether the Triangle track will turn out to be a loop. The *auteur* was abandoned, and then came the Triangle and perhaps *auteurism* will come back at some point. The Swedes had a seminar in Gothenburg last winter which was called "The Return of the *Auteur*," so I suppose that for some film schools, taking up something like Triangle is an act of violence toward film education.

As Caterina D'Amico's mother, the great screenwriter Suso

Cecci D'Amico said in the first Triangle, "the school should exist to teach the skills, the craft. Then, when the students have learned the craft, they can go out and do what they want." That's basically what this is all about. Now we come to what happened after the Triangle concept was introduced into the curriculum and where we stand at the moment.

René Schorr

I begin with a very radical idea. I think that Triangle should have more of an edge, because the fundamental problem in the schools is still helping producing students learn how to make decisions. Even if it's collaborative work on the Triangle model, firm decision has to be reached, and the model we are thinking about at our school is to give the student producers the full responsibility of initiating projects and bridging between the writers and directors within the school. I think that we can have real producers coming out of the school in the same way as we now have directors or cinematographers or editors.

Producers trained in this way would certainly be quickly kidnapped by the existing industry, but with proper training they will form an alternative industry.

Malte Wadman

When we began to organize the Norwegian film school, we had a long meeting with all the incoming professors. We agreed that we would run the school on the Triangle model and incorporate Triangle into the teaching system. I think one of the most important things need in order to run the Triangle system is that there be complete agreement among the entire the teaching staff. You can't have strong competition among your professors or heads of departments, because at some later stage it could easily lead to conflicts and antagonisms. We discussed this at length and we designed some exercises to introduce the Triangle concept at a very early stage of the students' film education, because as we all know, students, especially directing students, arrive with very *auteuritarian* ideas. Their self image is that of the director who decides on everything. Most of them have shot some films on digital, and they have edited on Final Cut Pro or something similar, so they have had some practice in this.

When they come to the school, students have to quickly adapt to a collaborative situation. We designed the first film exercise so that the entire class, consisting of six students from each of the six school departments, would form into production teams. That meant that on a particular Monday, each student would come to the school and tell a story that they had written down on one sheet of paper. Interestingly, I found out that they very often, the best story ideas came from sound technicians.

The screenwriting students would pick twelve ideas from the 36 ideas that were submitted, and return in one week with a story outline or synopsis for each one, which they would then present to the group. Then, the directors and the producers would pick the six to be made. In this way, they are introduced to highly collaborative work at a very early stage.

This method is used in all but the last production exercises until the last exercise. In the last exercise, they themselves choose how they work, but whatever they decide, they must use the scriptwriters. This means that the directors can't write their own film, but they may collaborate with a scriptwriter. We ask that producers give us six films of a certain running time over a specified number of months, and that they work with a fixed amount of money from the school. They may also raise more money from outside sources. The producing students are responsible for running both the finances and logistics of the final film exercise.

This has worked rather well, but we've also experienced some unexpected problems. The most important problem is that there is a tendency to shift over to the old television style where you have a clear division between the non-technicians and the technicians, the "creative triangle" and "the rejected triangle" as they call themselves, consisting of the editors, cinematographers, and sound technicians. This is because the directors, screenwriters, and producers are so involved in creating the story and script, that when they come to working with the visual side, they put less effort into it, and the traditionally strong connection between the director and cinematographer has been weakened. We also have had a problem with the scriptwriters, because they have a tendency of doing their thing in the triangle at the beginning, and then jumping out of it, and then returning and saying "I didn't write that film."

Then, of course, there is the producing side. It's very hard, to train producers, because if you are a producer outside the school, you get your idea or your script and you take five to seven years to get financing. In the school, we have precisely the opposite situation. A producing student doesn't

have any idea of what he's going to do in twelve months, except that he has to deliver the film. We have had to include some specific training for producers that uses case studies and development ideas, and to enable them to work on projects outside the film school in order to train them properly.

And then of course, we have a problem, the director. The directors have a problem when they get out of the film school. While in the film school, they were the heroes, and they had all these people running around helping them. After graduation, all these producers get jobs, all these editors, cinematographers, and sound technicians disappear into the industry, and there is the lone director, standing there and wondering what happened to everybody.

When directors, who arrived at the school with the idea of being *auteurs*, get into the situation where they are working in a triangle, they become a bit insecure because they are not who they thought they'd be, and they really don't know what to do. Everybody else can hide behind a computer or behind a editing table, camera, or sound console, leaving the director feeling rather lonely. As a result, we have to be much more detailed in the training of directors in the handling of actors and the skills of leadership, and this has to be a very specific part of the training of the directors.

In conclusion, I should tell you that what we will be discussing among our staff, two weeks from now when I get back to Lillehammer and we look back on this year of Triangle at our

school, is how we add to this chain. How do we make the Triangle roll, how do we bring this collaborative effort which has worked rather well to function for the rest of the chain as well.

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The screenwriting students would pick twelve ideas from the 36 ideas that were submitted, and return in one week with a story outline or synopsis for each one, which they would then present to the group. Then, the directors and the producers would pick the six to be made. In this way, they are introduced to highly collaborative work at a very early stage.

Wadman.

Lauri Törhönen

I've been observing what happens in Sweden and Norway from the sidelines, as a spectator, and even if Malte is having problems with students of directing, it is fascinating. It seemed at first that the Norwegian school was a Xerox copy of the Swedish school, where Malte previously taught, but it's really a different kind of school. The auteur tradition is very hard to get rid of it, but I must say that Malte has succeeded in his new school in many things so well that I can't agree with him more.

Pavel Jech

As we speak about entrenched traditions, that's definitely the case with FAMU. When communism ended twelve years ago, the film industry had to change almost immediately because it was no longer feasible for the state to fund all these feature films. In fact, the Studio Barandov no longer produces its own projects. It hasn't done so for almost a decade. Films are now the result of co-productions with the Czech Television, grants based on a tax on movie tickets, and some international co-production. The films are generally low budget. But the film school still remains a state institution and it is still funded by the state, and the traditions of how students are taught have also remained the same. The main reason, perhaps, is because it had been so successful in the past.

FAMU remains a strong influence on the national cinema. In the past year, twelve films were produced, and all but three were directed or written by FAMU graduates. Interestingly, two and a half of the three films that weren't made by FAMU graduates, were made on digital video. That's another revolution that is still on its way to FAMU.

The FAMU system, which has evolved slightly over time, still remains fundamentally the same. We have nine departments now, and they are still based on inter-departmental exercises which are led by the directing students. The other departments help out in their respective crafts. There is still this tradition of creating a strong individual film artist.

Actually, the fact that we are divided into departments has helped facilitate this in some way because there is a *de facto* competition among the three departments that create the most *auteurs*. There are the screenwriting department, the documentary department, and the directing department. At least three of the most prominent young director-writers are graduates from the script department. One of them had a Oscar nomination last year. The same is the case the documentary department, where one of the documentary directors won a student Oscar.

What happens in the school is that directing students often write their scripts. They don't accept scripts from and they don't collaborate with screenwriting students. Scriptwriting students prefer to focus on their own screenplays, with the hopes of finishing a feature script which they can later direct themselves. The documentary students usually make quasi-fictional films with the hopes of eventually entering into fiction film directing.

Within this system, the producer is still a production manager for the other students. There has been a little bit of an attempt to train creative producers. In the past, our school had always been a five-year program. Now, consistent with European Union higher education directives, it is divided into a three year of Bachelor's program and a two year of Master's program. At the master's level in our school, producers are expected to find outside sponsorship or other methods to co-produce the projects on which they are working. Usually, that means the school going to Czech Television but they are expected to take on a some of that role.

There's also something at school called "the producer's project." It's competitive, and there is one each year. Producing students are supposed to initiate a project by themselves, find the scripts that they like, put the team together, and produce the project.

Unfortunately the reality is that producing students complain, because there is not enough incentive for them. The school doesn't give them any money, it just gives lends the equipment and tells them to go out and produce a film that the school will co-own. The students want to produce their own films, but if they are going to do that, they'd rather do it without the school at all. So, that needs to be looked at more carefully. As I said, the tradition of the creative producer is not part of the country's film culture, and that is one of the reasons why the school has been slow to change.

Happily, there has been some influence from Triangle. FAMU has been to several of the Triangle conferences. As was pointed out to me by one of our deans, in 1992 we had a GEECT conference in Prague in which the nascent ideas of the Triangle was explored. As some of you are aware, FAMU is a bit uncertain about where they belong in CILECT, because of the changes in our society. In the past, CILECT was an organization that allowed FAMU and many of the other Eastern European schools to have international contacts. That is no longer necessary, and now they are looking for new rationales.

What would be good for FAMU are activities that would more directly benefit the students. One way in which CILECT has directly benefited at least one of our students is that we had one of our best producing students attend the

“Producing Producers” conference in Helsinki. She was strongly influenced by what was discussed there and she is now writing her diploma thesis about Triangle. Her supervisor, the dean of our school, is also a producer, and her ideas will be officially presented to our school and to our producing department. It’s at a nascent stage but the seeds of influence are there right now.

Questions and Answers

Q. I am one of those Australians who has been traveling to CILECT events for some years and who have fallen asleep while the rest of the world talked. My question relates to something that happened a few years ago when a party from China came to our school, led by a Chinese actor. We showed them some of our films, and they couldn’t speak in English, so the dialogue had to be translated. When the screenings were completed, the actor who was the leader of the group said to me, “you don’t have acting in your school do you?” and I said, “no, we don’t, but how can you tell?”. And he said “you can tell by the way every single department is trying to dominate the frame.”

And in terms of the issues that have been discussed here in relation to Triangle, and the necessity for creative producers to be able to bring the departments together whether they be the other two in the creative triangle or the ones in the rejected triangle, I wonder whether this is an issue for film schools. It seems to me that many students see film school as a way of producing films that they can take out of as their show reels or calling card. As a result, you always seem to have a set designer trying to develop a very extravagant and noticeable set design, a sound designer and an editor trying the same kind of thing, and so forth.

I think that in some ways, what we ask of producers in our school is something more difficult than what they are being asked to do in the industry, and that is to produce a film that will also exhibit the characteristics of the other departments so that those students will have as much opportunity to get positions in the industry as possible. I wonder whether that has been discussed at any of the Triangle meetings?

A. Lauri Törhönen

There is an article written by Joost Hunningher, who gave it to me yesterday. He has quoted the first Triangle book, in which the British director Stephen Frears, when asked to give a lecture at the British National Film and Television School began his talk saying something like “I was asked to talk to students about collaboration, but I could not think why I had to talk about it. It seems obvious, however I have noticed that students find it very, very difficult.”

I suppose that is because of 35 years of the *auteur* theory. This is a European point of view as is another quote in the same article from *Le Monde* in France. The headline read “Has the auteur killed the French cinema?” Even the French cinema is becoming aware of this problem now. The smaller countries and probably England were already aware of this issue.

Comment – Malte Wadman

I totally agree with you. There is a problem because our goal should be to give each student the best possibility of developing and displaying his or her own voice and talent. On the other hand, I have been working in the industry for quite a lot of years, and the most horrible thing when you are working on a film is where you notice that the cinematographer is doing one film, the sound guy is doing another film, and so forth. You get this splitting of creative efforts, each of which in itself is very good, but which in combination fail to develop the story or serve the idea or the theme of the film.

Comment

It strikes me is that in the film industry, when you work on a production in a way you are working for two masters. One is the producer who controls the money, and the other is the director who, to a certain point, controls the artistic identity of the piece. It may be that this is too complex and there are too many evolving relationships to be handled in a film school context. It seems that unless you give the producer the money and the creative control of the movie, you probably can’t control the rivalry be-

He then wrote an article about how the school might influence the industry itself. He spoke to the filmmaker’s union and to the ministry, and told them that something is wrong, that we underestimate the abilities of the producers, and that the producers are not sufficiently involved in the script development. I think that Triangle is very important for giving students opportunities.

Storchak

tween the director and the producer, within a film school context. I don't know how you would get around that.

Comment – Zuzana Tatarová

I would like to add something about the past of socialist cinematography. The scriptwriting department was really not a scriptwriting department, it was “screen dramaturgy,” which meant script editing, and script editors were in part creative producers. They were responsible for the whole film. They chose the themes, following them to the editing room, and then organized the advertising and the distribution and so on. They were midwives for film.

The people on top who were making decisions hadn't any idea about film. They were purely administrators. They were not creative. They closely watched the films from an ideological perspective. I began as a script editor and worked at it for ten years, but without any power. There was some important advice that Lenin gave us and it is that there needs to be a last word. Who is the last person who makes the decision? You have the example of David O. Selznick, the producer who re-wrote and re-edited the script for “Gone with the Wind.” This was a nice struggle in the history of film between the creative producer who really wants to be an *auteur* as well, the scriptwriters, director, and editor. In that situation, it was clear who the person was who made the last decision. It was Selznick. He owned it.

Comment – Joost Hunningher

I have found it very interesting how different schools have adapted the issues that were brought up in the Triangle meetings and have made them their own, and I find it very interesting that the little article that I wrote and that came out of this idea did make us focus on a way of working which we hadn't done before. I want to come to Rod Bishop's point about a competition within the triangle. I think that if it's done properly, there need not be competition of that kind. On our most successful film last year, the designer got a very high mark. You would think it was just a student's flat and a designer shouldn't have any trouble doing that, but she thought about it very carefully and I think she served both the script and the film.

There is one quote from Caterina's mother in Dick Ross's book, which is my favorite, and I am going to read it to you. Writing about the early neo-realist films in Italy, she says, “the collaboration was so tight, in those first films that it was very difficult to understand who was doing what. The director was not an isolated figure. He was one among the many who collaborated in the making of the movie.”

She felt that if the director became involved in the scripting too early, he wouldn't have anything new to add when the shooting started. He would be bored with the story. If he was bored he would want to invent something, and this moment of invention could lead him astray. Ideas born out of boredom lack richness.

Q.

I would like to ask a question, Lauri. You mentioned working with Warren Beatty on “Reds” and the madness and craziness and so forth. My question is, to the extent that Beatty is representative of typical Hollywood production excess, how could you make these concepts and principals of Triangle more relevant to Hollywood production community?

A. Lauri Törhönen

I can't. I think the Triangle is more relevant to those schools and those countries that have a tradition of film being art and culture instead of business. For example, in my country there was a very strong producer's tradition before the Second World War, but television killed off all of it. We are trying to revive the traditional film industry in many countries in Europe, but money talks. If you own a film, you can do whatever you want with it. As a director, I am sort of the skipper of the film anyway, Triangle or no Triangle, I am responsible for it, I have to make the final decisions, I have to be important enough to do it.

Comment – Tatiana Storck

I would like to support the idea of Triangle forever. I think that Russia is in the same position as the rest of the Eastern European countries. What surprised us greatly this year, or last year, as we have been changing our film industry, is that the producer is not in our trade ministry's register of job titles, so we cannot give the diploma of “producer.” We may give the title “management” to financial activity and so on, but what happened this year is that we had a very big discussion about who is the producer, which we derived from Triangle. A lot of things are changing but a lot of things are not, so we sent a delegation to the Triangle meeting. There were two students and two teachers, and one of the teachers was a very well-known Russian director. He came to Triangle in Italy and he did some exercises with the students. He found out that the student from the directing department were weaker than the students from the producing department, and when he returned he said that something is wrong.

He then wrote an article about how the school might influence the industry itself. He spoke to the filmmaker's union and to the ministry, and told them that something is wrong,

that we underestimate the abilities of the producers, and that the producers are not sufficiently involved in the script development. I think that Triangle is very important for giving students opportunities. These are vitally important activities for my school. Thank you very much for those people who organized Triangle.

Comment – Annabelle Sheehan

I want to agree with what Malte was saying about the rolling Triangle. At the AFTRS that notion of the Triangle moving along slowly as the story gets carried by all the players. It's been an important image for students to work with, about the way the way the producer, director, and designer, or other kind of triangles that form as time goes by work, until you get to producer, director, editor.

There is creative tension within the Triangle, and one of the things that we have been trying and that some other schools may also have tried, is to introduce instruction in "conflict resolution." We are trying to come up with a better name for it. It is not about compromise, but rather about members of the triangle mapping the way to drive the project forward, so that they can define their objective and the stakes.

Malte Wadman

I think that one of the side-effects of Triangle is that we are now putting a lot of effort into teaching students how to speak with each other in language that expresses their visual or creative thoughts. The students have to do this with each other within the triangle, and they have to learn to express their ideas to the cinematographer and later on to the editor, and to make people actually understand and accept their ideas and to work with them. When the director was a lone wolf and was not taught anything about explaining his ideas, he became very isolated. Now he is asked to explain or discuss his project and it's no problem. I never had problems with the producer running over the director, but it is a tension at the beginning in the writing of the script even if it is, as it very often is in our school, the director's idea written by the scriptwriter.

Renen Schorr

Students think that the secret of their success is in the school's selection process, and since the myth of the director is still very deeply rooted, especially outside America, we have very few role models of producers. When students apply to the schools, or choose their intended specializations, most of them still choose directing and then, perhaps writing. Producing is less attractive. I think that with the importance of Triangle, the schools could make the role of the producer more significant and prestigious, so as to attract more of the best people, those who would otherwise go to directing and screenwriting.

Comment– Allison Wotherspoon

I just spent five years teaching, and as a graduate of AFTRS where I specialized in producing, I went into a university where we spent five years working in collaborative teams, and it is really encouraging for me to listen to this discussion of Triangle and know that we are on the right track. To go back to the question about the Hollywood model, our first year students start with a case study of the making of "The Big Lebowski." First we read the book of the film that actually goes into an interesting study of collaborative work and the different specialized role of the collaborative creative team. The students are very much aware of the collaboration of the Coen brothers. It is also working in a way that's much more in keeping with the Triangle idea by recognizing the contributions of different skills.

Comment

I don't know how this would work in other countries, but I would say that the influence of the people in the film industry can do a lot to help the status

of the producing faculty in the eyes of the students. Students are extremely susceptible to the models that are put forward in the film industry. Our school actually built classrooms on the on the stu-

There is creative tension within the Triangle, and one of the things that we have been trying and that some other schools may also have tried, is to introduce instruction in "conflict resolution." We are trying to come up with a better name for it. It is not about compromise, but rather about members of the triangle mapping the way to drive the project forward, so that they can define their objective and the stakes.

Sheehan

dio lot of CBS Television in Hollywood. We didn't have a producing program until we had access to the film industry, and at that point, producing became very sexy. The contact that the students have with the profession can do a great deal to change the dynamics within the film school. It's very difficult for the faculty to do it, but it's much easier for the industries to do it.

Malte Wadman

The problem is when we look for producers in the Norwegian industry, we find one special effects guy, one fellow who had been selling loans, one former bookkeeper, and if I go on like that you will understand that the producers of today are not very good role models. I think that in our situation we first have to change that. Triangle also will change the industry and ensure that the producers are not just guys who manage to fiddle some money for some film at some time. The new producers are also people who are dedicated to film, because that's what happens with the producers in the school. At least they are dedicated to the cinema.

Q.

We know that one main aspect of the Triangle approach from its very conception, was to revitalize and rebalance creative collaboration, and from what you are saying it sounds like that's an arduous piece of work, but at least it's fairly straightforward. My question is how has the Triangle approach affected the other big creative balance that exists, the tension between the need to train people for the compromises of a professional career and the need to develop their individual voice. In your experience, has Triangle been of benefit to the creation and individuation of students' creative voices, or of benefit primarily as preparation for professional careers in the industry?

A. Lauri Törhönen

I guess there is not yet an answer. The process that started in Rome six years ago was the first loop of this tram. We need to come back after six more years, when the first Triangle producers start pushing the amateur producers out of the frame. And then we need another two loops of the tram when they come back to the film schools as honored lecturers, and then the culture of Triangle will be fully mature in the film schools. Like anything else, it needs time to ma-

ture. Until about 100 years ago, nobody could fly. Then some amateurs started flying, and later on one needed a pilot's license to fly, and further down the line, other things happened with airplanes. We are building the basement of a big house which is going to be an old and established house one day.

I think that one of the side-effects of Triangle is that we are now putting a lot of effort into teaching students how to speak with each other in language that expresses their visual or creative thoughts.

Wadman



Monday, April 8, 2002

Conference Panel 4

Documentary in the Teaching of Fiction

Panel Members

Jim Awindor, NAFTI, Accra, Ghana

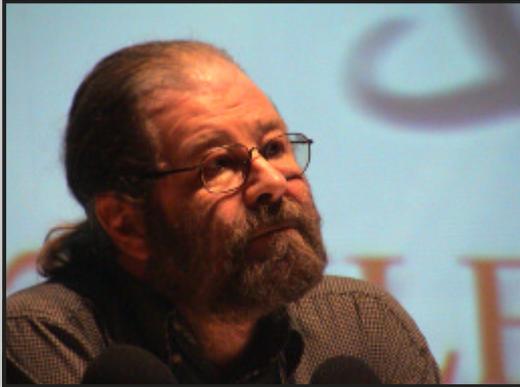
Michael Rabinger, Film director, USA/UK

Michael Rubbo, Film director, Australia

Silvio Fischbein, Director, UBA, Buenos Aires, Argentinian

Paco Urrusti, CCC, Mexico City

Malte Wadman, Director NFS, Lillehammer, Norway



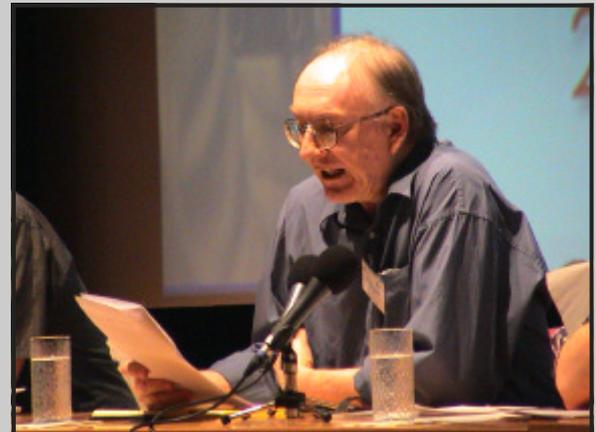
Malte Wadman



Fara Awindor



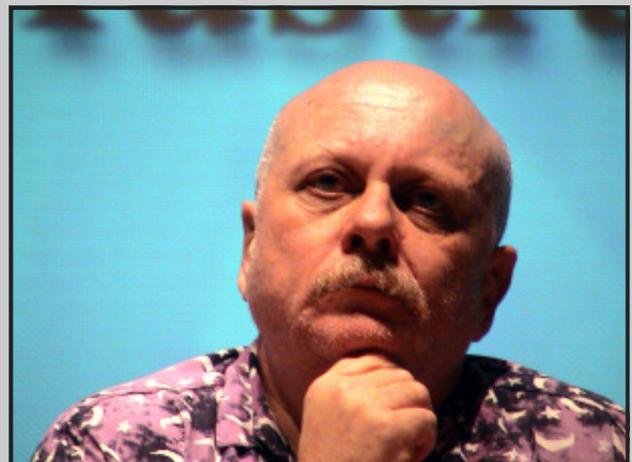
Michael Rubbo



Michael Rabinger



Paco Urrusti



Silvio Fischbein

Saturday, April 8, 2002

Conference Panel 4

Documentary in the teaching of fiction.

We often tend to think of documentary and fiction as two distinct genres, and the “docu-drama” as a special exception. If, as Aristotle wrote, “art is the imitation of life,” is there an argument for using the documentary, which is about the people, objects and events of real life, as a way into the art of fiction film and television?

Michael Rabiger

My name is Michael Rabiger. Before we start, Michael Rubbo has something sad to tell us.

Michael Rubbo

I just want to say a few words about Robin Anderson, who died about 3 weeks ago. Robin and her partner and husband Bob Connolly were probably the most wonderful *verité* documentary team here in Australia. They were awarded the *Cinéma du Réel* award at the Paris Ethnographic and Sociological Film Festival. They made a fantastic trilogy of films in New Guinea, “First Contact”, “Black Harvest”, and “Joe Leahy’s Neighbors”, and then they came home and together they made an extraordinary film inside one of our local city councils called “Rats in the Ranks” which was about backstabbing and connivance and cunning as we had never seen it before. More recently they made “Facing the Music,” inside Sydney University’s Music Department which was going under because of lack of funds. Amazingly, after Robin’s death, an anonymous donor came forward with millions of dollars to save it.

Michael Rabiger worked on twelve feature films in England most notably under directors Raoul Walsh and Tony Richardson. In 1962 he moved to television documentary and went on to edit around thirty films for BBC, Norddeutscher Rundfunk, Granada Television, and others. Between 1967-72 he directed twenty-one documentaries in six countries for BBC Documentary Department, and helped pioneer an oral history series.

Migrated to USA in 1972 to teach at Columbia College Chicago in a fledgling film department of 60 students. Wrote reviews and criticism for the *New Art Examiner*, and in late 1980s published the first editions of *Directing the Documentary* and *Directing: Film Techniques and Aesthetics* (both Focal Press). In 1988 he founded the Documentary Center at Columbia College. In 1994 he designed and led the first VISIONS European documentary workshop for GEECT/CILECT which met in Berlin, Prague, and Amsterdam. In 1994-5 he was Distinguished Visiting Professor at NYU Dept of Film and Television. Returning to Chicago he published *Developing Story Ideas* (Focal Press), and in 1996 became Chair of Columbia’s Film/Video Department, now grown to 1,700 students.

In 2001 he retired to write full-time. In 2002 he was made an Honorary Professor at the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina. His directing books are translated into Spanish, German, Chinese, and Korean. He has given lectures and workshops internationally. He has also published articles and essays about the British poet and novelist Thomas Hardy. He is currently writing the libretto for an opera adaptation of Hardy’s striking novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Unfortunately she didn’t live to see it happen.

Robin developed a pain in her hand about a year ago and took no notice of it at first. The pain spread and it became a terrible cancer that ate her up. Fortunately her going was not too painful physically, but she leaves two daughters and a bereft Bob, who has lost his wife and sound person, his collaborator and his brains and everything else. It’s a huge loss for Australia.

Juan Paco Urrusti

Although I come from a very remote place, where there is no jet lag, we know her work, their work, and we admire it. Their films always addressed important questions pertinent to our age and to the times in which we live, knowing the otherness of people, and identifying ourselves with the other. I never met them personally, but I remember that when Elaine Charnov of the Margaret Mead Film Festival first showed me their work, I was deeply struck. I was seeing something new, something different, and very powerful, and so I want to say that in the brotherhood of documentary, her death has been a loss and we all grieve.

Michael Rabiger

Our job today is to explore what documentary education contributes to fiction filmmakers. I think it’s important to keep an open mind, since compared with schooling in other arts, teaching filmmaking is still its infancy. Today, students learn techniques better than ever. The digital camcorder lets them wrestle more directly with the subject and the form of their films, instead of having to be obsessed with tools. Nonlinear editing helps them to quickly master narrative principles, and the digital process lowers the cost of producing screen works, while increasing the number of production cycles that a student can accomplish. Of course, making good fiction has many layers of difficulty, and it requires a maturity of judgment that nobody can teach, but as we encounter fewer technological obstacles, we can see more clearly where fiction film training is still failing.

Each year the critics report from the Sundance Independent Film Festival that the documentaries are more intelligent and more interesting than the fiction films, which at their worst tend to be imitative, poorly acted, badly written, and full of basic dramatic problems. This, I believe, exposes a fundamental truth about how film students learn. If they can first make a documentary about a world

Panel 4

already in existence, they learn observational skills and how to handle the medium well, and they come into unforgettable contact with the complexity of real people and their lives. Documentary also needs a dramatic form to effectively comment on the human condition, so students learn that out of necessity. When students make fiction, they must invent a world before they can film it. Almost universally, they regurgitate clichéd ideas and clichéd characters, the stored-up detritus of their 18,000 hours of television viewing.

Quite simply, making fiction is too great a creative leap for most, but in America at least, nine out of ten students yearn to make fiction, so we cannot rest easy while the majority of them fall short. In the film schools of smaller nations, there is even more at stake. Making successful cinema may be their country's only chance to claim the world's attention, and wrench a real identity away from the National Geographic Magazine view. Fiction is still the most effective way to give voice to those who suffer injustice, those left out of world prosperity, or those being exploited by the greedy tentacles of globalization. Remember that "Schindler's List" reached more people than all the documentaries made about the Holocaust combined.

Our students want to connect with the pain and beauty in the world, and to place it before audiences, just as the screen has done for them. It is urgent that film schools experiment with more effective ways to do this, and that we recruit our students not just from the middle classes. Each participant in today's panel believes, for different reasons, that work in documentary can help fiction filmmakers develop. They are drawn from four continents and represent very different kind of experience.

Jim Awindor teaches at the National Film and Television Institute of Ghana in Accra. In preparation for his teaching he started in America, learning how documentary and fiction were taught there. He speaks from the perspective of having been a student and now as a teacher who must keep the particular needs of the African students in mind.

Silvio Fischbein is an architect and head of the Cinema Department at the University of Buenos Aires. He has directed two feature films and 13 short films.. He and Maria Dora Mourão of the University of São Paulo have been the prime movers in the MIRADAS project, which is sponsored by FEISAL, the Latin American regional CILECT organization. MIRADAS has been demonstrating documentary approaches and teaching methods to teachers and students throughout Latin America.

Malte Wadman is the head of the Norwegian National Film School and long has been involved in wide ranging experiments to improve both fiction and documentary in Scandinavia. He is knowledgeable in the cultural and other impediments that people of all ages bring with them to filmmaking, and has thought deeply about how these might be overcome if they wish to make fiction at a professional level.

Michael Rubbo is an Australian by origin, trained in documentary at Stanford, who has spent much of his life at the National Film Board of Canada. He returned regularly to Australia to lead intensive classes in documentary. He was a pioneer in developing the reflective documentary voice, and has directed four features. Most recently he made "Much Ado About Something," which explores the relationship between Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe. His perspective is that of a professional filmmaker working at the intersection of the two forms.

Juan Paco Urrusti comes from the C.C.C. in Mexico City, and brings a teacher's and ethnographer's view. He and the CCC have long been champions of documentary as part of fiction filmmaker's education, and they have been an important force in the MIRADAS Project.

Michael Rubbo

I had a lot of trouble unraveling my thoughts about my relationship to documentary and fiction because it was such an unconscious one, such an intuitive one, that I didn't really know how I had brought documentary to fiction. In fact, I wrote another paper, which you will not hear today, because I was on the wrong track, I realized this yesterday when I was talking to Michael at lunch, and I told him what my paper was about, which was about *cinema verité* and he said "no, no, no that's not what I want to hear about at all. I want to hear about how you brought documentary to fiction, or what documentary did to your fiction." So I had to do a huge rethink, and I realized that it was a tremendous amount.

What happened was in the early 1980's I'd run out of steam making documentaries, I was doing a documentary about the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood and I was stuck with her on a lonely island, and there I met my match. Margaret was too much for me, and I realized that I had to take a break from documentary filmmaking. At the same time, my son was six years old, and I also realized that I was spending very little time with him. Here was my dilemma: I wanted to keep on making movies and I wanted to spend time with my son. So I came up with the most wonderfully selfish solution. I would make children's films so that I could tell him stories, perhaps he could be in the movies, and we could share a life together. At that

same very time there happened to be a producer in Montreal named Rock Demers who had the same idea, and who wanted to do a whole series of low-budget feature films, on budgets of about \$2 millions each, that would be full of imagination. They would not have violence in the extreme ways that we saw in so much children's material at the time. I decided to work with Rock in a collaborative way, in a "Triangle way" as you were discussing this morning. But how to do it? I knew I didn't have much background in this field. All I had were some stories that I was telling to my son Nicholas.

I've always felt that you have to face the future today, not tomorrow, so I had to get real. I telephoned 50 schools and made appointments to go to them as a storyteller, and tell the germ of my story to the grade six classes. Day after day I went around Montreal, telling a fantasy story about a child who had found a way to miniaturize himself, become part of the picture on a postage stamp, and mail himself around the world. It was a nice idea, but that's about all I had.

This was a very documentary sort of process, because as I would tell the story to the grade 6 class, they would fall absolutely silent during the parts that they really liked, and of course, as a storyteller I loved those moments. I loved their silence, I love their rapt attention, and I wanted to keep on going, so I would start inventing and try to stretch their silence longer and longer.

In that way, over a period of two or three months, the story expanded through these interaction with the kids, and when I felt really confident I invited Rock, my potential producer, to come along to one of the classes. I told him to sit at the back, not to say anything, and just listen. So he did, and that was the day that I got my contract. After the story was finished, a little boy interrupted our huddle and said "Oh, that was such a wonderful film," and Rock turned and said, "But you didn't see a film," and he said, "Yes I did. I saw a movie."

Rock said "I believe in this project, I believe in your story and I believe you can do it", and so we went from there. That was a result of my documentary belief. In the second phase, having worked on the story through this process, I now believed in schools as sacred places and I believed that everything good for my project would come from the

integrity of the schools. I want nothing to do with professional child actors, and I decided that I would find my actors in those very same schools.

I recast my net, and remade appointments to go back to the schools, this time not to tell the story, but to take key sequences from the story and to workshop them with the class, and again, being a documentary filmmaker and a slavish prisoner of reality, I let every single interested child in every class try out for a part, even if it took a very long time. Everybody got a chance to try for the main character if they wanted to, and I remembered that at one school the teacher

took me aside and said, "Well now, Ralph, he won't do it, because he's got a stutter. Don't push him, you know, because this is too much for him."

Of course I was suddenly fascinated with Ralph, and Ralph came up and tried out, with a terrible stutter, but something about me, the documentary filmmaker, decided that he had to be the star of my movie. My producer was absolutely horrified. "I mean, are you shooting yourself in the foot," he said, "with a child who can't talk, who has the main speaking part?"

And I said "I am sure that he will be able to talk by the time we are ready to shoot." In fact, Ralph talked very well in the film, and people who have seen the movie are quite certain that he's a very clever actor, putting on the character trait of a stutter.

That was the second phase of my documentary engagement with fictional material. The third phase was when I came to look for locations and for actors. Everywhere I went I had a little camera under my arm, which I treated a bit like a garden hose. I'd never look through the finder, I just had it on, and I pointed it vaguely in the direction of the children who were improvising,

When I finally came to the day shooting started, all of that lovely documentary stuff, all that spontaneity, was put aside. I had a script in front of me and people on my back, six grip trucks lined up, and when I arrived in the morning I said to myself, "my god, they are all here to make my movie.(...) I was always really wishing that I had my little camera and I could shoot this story in an intimate way.

Rubbo

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or at scenery. In this way I shared everything with my producer. The sad thing is that I love those tapes perhaps even more than I love the finished feature film, because I found what the sad reality of feature filmmaking is when I finally came to the day shooting started, all of that lovely documentary stuff, all that spontaneity, was put aside. I had a script in front of me and people on my back, six grip trucks lined up, and when I arrived in the morning I said to myself, “my god, they are all here to make my movie.” There were all these people standing around, all these light stands, and all that stuff. I really didn’t like it at all. I got through it, but my heart was never really in it. I was always really wishing that

I had my little camera and I could shoot this story in an intimate way.

I had to protect my children from all of that, so I would take them away and play with them and do other scenes totally unrelated to what they were about to act, until someone told me that we were ready to shoot. The lights are set and the cameras are in place. Everything is right for take one, and at that magic moment I would dash the children in as if it were some sort of great game, and I would put them back in the mood of being in that school classroom where I first found them, and somehow we would get it. They would take two if necessary, or take three, and of course they got better and better and they hit marks and they did all those professional things after a while. But to me it was somehow terribly important that the documentary flavor and reality pervade the fiction process. It was like keeping honest. It was like keeping my feet on the ground, and although the story was not really a nitty-gritty one in the manner of Ken Loach or Mike Leigh, it was terribly important to me that it had an anchor in reality.

My second film was called “Vincent and Me” which was about a girl and Van Gogh. I started to make that film when I heard about Madame Calment who was 117 years old at the time, and who had known Vincent Van Gogh when she was a young girl. In fact, she thought he was an awful man, rude, “*grossier*” she said in French. Anyway, she gave me the clue for my second story, about a young girl and Van Gogh and anchored in that little scrap of reality I was ready to go ahead and road test...play test... my second film with the children again. I did that with four films over eight years. The films did quite well, and sold to 80 countries, but there was no distribution money so they never hit the big, big, time. I won an Emmy with one of them, and then, gratefully came back to documentary.

Juan Paco Urrusti

I have always made documentaries and only documenta-

ries so I cannot personally speak about the benefits of making fiction films with the knowledge of documentary. The fact is that I have never felt attracted to making fiction films, but I can tell you about the experience in the school where I teach. It is a school that has always privileged the teaching of documentary for many reasons. I’ll try to point out some of them.

To start with, getting into the C.C.C. is very difficult. We receive more than 300 applications every year and we can only admit a handful of these students, 15 at the most. It’s a very elitist school because we always choose the people who have had good education, and they tend to be brighter and better-nourished. In a country in which 40 million people live in extreme poverty, the people who are in the film school are middle class and upper class, largely disconnected from most of the Mexican reality. They know more about New York or Paris than they do about many areas of Mexico City.

Documentary is an opportunity for them to look at themselves and to see the reality they live in with fresh eyes, and to question themselves as to their role as a filmmaker and artist in these times. It puts people in context. It says “Wait a minute, you may want to be a great filmmaker and do films in Hollywood, but this is the country that has been nourishing you, and the school is highly subsidized by your country, so what can you do for the people around you and for your country?” That’s a way of getting the students familiar with the real problems of real people, of their flesh and blood and bones. That’s one of the reasons, but also there are also creative reasons.

Superficially, it would seem that an ideal film school is one that prepares the students to eliminate variables in shooting. It’s a Hitchcockian model. Hitchcock used to say that anybody could shoot his script. He would do wonderful storyboards and he said, “now this is the storyboard, anybody can shoot it.”

This kind of ideal film school would eliminate chance and lack of control from a film altogether, in order to eliminate all variables. Chance is seen as a catastrophe, and the work of the director is control everything, every little movement of the actors lips, the lighting, you name it. No wonder so many films are stiff and pretentious as Michael Rabiger pointed out. So many filmmakers regurgitate stereotypes, and their films are so unbelievable, so untrue, because they lack the observation of real life and its unpredictability.

Teaching documentary forces the student to look at chance in a different way, perhaps even as an ally, to trust the gods and to say, “well if I have the right attitude and I have my heart and my mind in the same place, if I’m lucky I will find something revealed in the chaos that I am ob-

serving.” This is important because we take reality for granted as if it were something tangible and true, and most people still cannot tell “Big Brother” from reality or sometimes think reality is CNN.

There is nothing more constructed or more false than those so-called “reality shows,” so to be able to venture into the unknown, to let yourself discover things for yourself, and take risks has a big payoff. Students become more self-confident, they know more about the subject, and they start seeing that filmmaking is not just a passive attitude toward reality, but it’s also an active way of transforming reality.

Through documentary, students learn the importance of doing research in order to craft a good story. There are many things that a student learns in the process, but perhaps most important thing is self-confidence. If an actor fails, or if he becomes ill, people with documentary training or experience can deal with the problem and solve it.. The documentary person always has a plan B if something doesn’t work, or a plan C.

Maybe that’s the reason why now, unlike in the past when nobody wanted to do documentary, people realize that they can be as creative in documentary as in fiction film, that they can tell a great story with real, wonderful people. No wonder people are more interested in making documentaries right now. Students no longer see it as something that has to be endured in order to get a diploma. Right now people are looking forward to receiving a documentary degree. My school has invested a lot of effort in bringing documentary filmmakers and documentary film teachers to Mexico City, and now the students are familiar with names from Flaherty to Connolly to Michael Rubbo, and they love to read Michael Rabiger’s books.

Documentary expands your world. It’s the best antidote against the univocal view of life and reality. It demonstrates that reality is not just what’s there but something we have to reach for.

Silvio Fischbein (through interpreter)

I come from Argentina, a country that is going through serious difficulties. Many of you will ask, “with the difficulties that this country is going through, how, what is this man do-

ing here?” But just as Michael Rabiger said a few moments ago, we are all in the same boat. This boat is in the middle of the ocean, navigating at full speed.

I am convinced that through projects you can solve any problem, not by cutting or downsizing budgets for education, and that’s why I am here. I’m here in order to generate new projects, and to tell you about our education

project, from fiction to documentary, or documentary from fiction, I think that both are fully possible. Besides, fiction with documentary elements or documentaries with fictive elements is simply an academic choice. It is a strategy. The challenge is to make films that allow us to reflect on our lives or to tell stories that make us reflect on our own lives. In our case, we have opted to choose the direction from documentary to fiction.

In many ways our school is very special. To start with, it has 4000 students. It is public and it is 100% free. It has been the decision of the Argentine government for many years, that anybody wishing to go to university could attend, without any selection process. This is why we have 4000 students. First year studies are common to all the students in the university. The second year is dedicated to an introduction to aural & visual language. The third year is dedicated to documentary, and the fourth to fiction.

As I said, this is one of many possible strategies. Why we choose this one? In fiction, the director must start with the unspoken phrase “once

upon a time there was,” just as in children tales. Documentary allows the a student to discover that once upon a time *is*.

Documentary makes people realize that there

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(...)

Documentary makes people realize that there are things that happen and never come back, so through documentary students learn that in order to make documentaries they have to open their eyes wide and observe, whereas for fiction they have to let themselves shut their eyes and imagine.

Fischbein

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are things that happen and never come back, so through documentary students learn that in order to make documentaries they have to open their eyes wide and observe, whereas for fiction they have to let themselves shut their eyes and imagine.

This choice allows us to develop three attributes that we think are key to producing fiction: to realize that in order to make a film one has to have a particular way of looking at things. To discover, in order to look up at the sky, you first have to look at the floor.

Before making any film you have to have an idea and a certain standpoint about the world and about this idea, and a certain distance from subjects.

If the bullfighter is too close to the bull, his life is in danger. If he is too far away from the bull, he gives no performance. You have to look for the right place to be. The director must do so too. A film director has to discover that any story is indeed a progression of events, that the story advances, and that things change. Documentary allows us to develop all these skills.

We think that there are two types of filmmakers. On one hand there are those who express themselves, entertain people, and earn money. The other type is the difficult one, the filmmaker who also expresses himself, entertains as well, but struggles for a better world. Making documentaries allows us to work in that second model.

Malte Wadman

Michael contacted me about a week ago and asked me if I could talk about this subject from my experience, because I started out as a documentary filmmaker in the 1970's and was rather successful until the documentary trend disappeared and the money dried up. So I moved into editing rather rapidly and became a feature film editor, which I did for many years. After that, I ended up being script editor, and on the last film I worked on, I was script editor on a documentary, which might sound very strange but really wasn't. I ended up as head of a film school which is not allowed to teach documentary. This is an academic administrative misunderstanding, because in

Norway, documentary is considered journalism, and we are a film school and not a school of journalism.

Of course I am trying to fiddle this by running lectures and classes in "non fiction film." which they can't object to because it hasn't a documentary label. This is my background, and I will speak mainly from a career as both documentarist and feature film editor, and I'll look at the spill-over between the two, and then I have some thoughts about what all of this has to do with the training in the film schools.

In documentary you learn to explore negative space, the things that are not there. In observational documentary you very often have the problem that comes from actually being there all the time, capturing the crucial moments on films. You often have to use certain editing tricks to get the audience to identify and experience the crucial moment, the turning point in the story, or the very sad or happy moments in a person's life. By bringing that experience from documentary into fiction, you can concentrate the storytelling in a way very different from the skills of pure fiction film writers and directors..

Wadman

For some peculiar reason, after having made many documentaries that were very much in the observational tradition, moving into feature film editing was very easy. It was incredibly simple, because all the shots in a fiction film were intended from the beginning to hang together and this was set down in the script, unlike documentary, where even if someone intended the shots to hang together, they very seldom did. A documentary editor had to do all kinds of tricks to get the images to work.

But when I moved into the editing of fiction, I felt that feature films very often lacked tension, they were over-told, and they had very boring pace compared to what I thought was appropriate, so I started playing with them a bit. On the first feature film that I edited, I cut out 18 sequences out of a total of 64, and it was much better. Of course had this been done at the script stage, the producer would have saved a couple of million kroner. Obviously, there is value in my bringing this knowledge into the school, but it might have more to do with editing than with documentary.

When I discovered this method, I started to get popular and I was asked to save various films that had run into problems. I began reflecting a bit on the nature of documentary knowledge, and what skills I picked up in documentary that were useful in fiction film.

There are three main areas I felt to be important. The first one, which has to do with removing 18 sequences out of 64 and getting a better film, is that in documentary you learn to explore negative space, the things that are not there. In observa-

tional documentary you very often have the problem that comes from actually being there all the time, capturing the crucial moments on films. You often have to use certain editing tricks to get the audience to identify and experience the crucial moment, the turning point in the story, or the very sad or happy moments in a person's life. By bringing that experience from documentary into fiction, you can concentrate the storytelling in a way very different from the skills of pure fiction film writers and directors.

The second area, which is which is extremely important, is about narrative position or point-of-view. When doing documentaries, I experienced that, some documentaries worked very, very well, while others, that were much fancier, didn't work. In analyzing it, I found that it had to do with whether or not the narrative position or the point-of-view of the film was appropriate. I learned that it's very important in the teaching of fiction that at every moment in the film you know which scene you are doing, whose scene it is, and from what point of view you are telling this.

The third area, which is the most important, is that we bring to documentary the reality of our own country, of our conflicts, of our culture, and find stories within that reality. We are not making them up by copying other films, or finding them in the world of the saga. By bringing what we might call the reality of our own doorstep into fiction film, we will get more interesting and more important films on the screen.

At the Norwegian Film School, I am sneaking documentary in as we go. When I gave my first lecture on documentary method and history, we involved the whole school, all 36 students, for a week. I managed to run through the history and methodology of documentary from the "Voice of God" narrated films into the newer autobiographical styles, and for some peculiar reason, the students were all still there when I finished, which is rather rare in that kind of screenings. The rarest thing was that afterward, there were several people who came up to me, but they didn't thank me for giving nice lectures about film history. They thanked me for having given them the first interesting history lessons in their lives. They learned the history of the twentieth century from that week of documentary experience, and that, I felt, was very nice.

Jim Awindor

My talk is entitled "Teaching Documentary – An African Perspective."

In 1997, I was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to pursue an MFA degree in Documentary Filmmaking at the Columbia College, Chicago, USA. At the end of the year

2000, I returned home to continue my job as a lecturer. Going to the States was premeditated. I had thought about it, nursed it and dreamt it - I guess most people do about this 'world of opportunities'. For me it certainly was a place that I could realize a long coveted dream – to become a documentary filmmaker and teacher.

I arrived in the States with lots of hope, aspirations and promise. I was socially, politically and emotionally passionate with my purpose; I wanted to change things, change minds and change structures. I wanted to do that through teaching, that way a lot more people could achieve greater results.

African images have been presented in several derogatory ways, African minds have to be decolonised, communities need to come out of poverty, and so on. What better place could I have gone to study than to go to the home of the makers of western cinema – the very people who have misrepresented us, and raped our virgin space in time, to learn their 'tricks' for reconstruction of our lost image, lost wealth and dignity.

Well, so I thought.

There was later going to be a change in purpose that was to benefit me tremendously because Columbia College was offering one of the best comprehensive courses in Documentary filmmaking.

I went to Columbia College somewhat more anxious but full of enthusiasm. The first few months saw all my exuberance go dashing down. I was somehow disappointed. The first year courses had nothing to do with documentary filmmaking, all fiction stuff. I complained to a few friends in my class about the rationality of this nonsense, why would Columbia decide to waste one precious year teaching documentary students fiction? Why couldn't we just go into our specialization straight away and do the course in two years instead of three? The subsequent years answered all my questions. My 'revolutionary spirit' had been humbled. I said "huh, now I understand". Columbia College saw the necessity of bridging fiction and the non-fiction genres together. After all, both are about telling stories. This was the first lesson I had discovered which stood as the bases for all that I learnt during my three-year stay at the college.

Telling stories by the fireside is an age-old African tradition. Even now, the tradition still goes on. But how do we do it? In recent years Ghana has been plagued with a proliferation of cheap videos. These

videos are in no doubt very good stories but how many of these videos depict the realities of Africa in the documentary vein? They are almost none existent. There is a reason for this disparity. 'Cinema is one of Africa's new art forms' dating back to the forties. In Ghana for instance, filmmaking was introduced in 1948 by the British colonial administration for the singular purpose of creating in the minds of the colonized a new sense of values to serve and promote the successes of the colonial objectives. A production company, the Gold Coast Unit was formed to produce mainly documentaries and newsreels. These documentaries were didactic and largely for brainwashing and indoctrination.

However, after independence the new emerging film directors who had had the privilege of studying abroad in the new administration took the initiative to breakaway from this documentary syndrome and produce feature length fiction films. These films were taken very seriously and were largely produced to create new images from the African point of view.

Didacticism was still not lost in this new genre. Within that framework they addressed issues, hoping to foster social and political change. They strived for an identity within the complex conflict of traditional African and European values. Documentaries were not entirely left out, but the few that ventured into making them used the styles and techniques of the colonial masters. Words rather pictures dominated these documentaries.

Now, after 40 years of Independence in Ghana, the making of documentary films has not changed. This brings us to the role of the National Film and Television Institute, NAFTI. NAFTI was established in 1978 to train professional filmmakers with the unique role to develop, promote and propagate the African culture along professional traditions. NAFTI has been playing this role faithfully with emphasis on training and the production of materials that will reflect the intellectual and spiritual aspirations of Africa. So a curriculum was developed to try to Africanize filmmaking.

Obviously, documentary was placed within the directing and television department as a subject. Directing students were required to do an average of 13 hours of documentary studies within their school year. This was so because it was not a specialization course, but a student could opt to produce a documentary as a final year project. Also within one's school year you were likely to have a couple of workshops on documentary filmmaking from visiting lecturers. These were however very fruitful since they had 35 hours in five days to conduct their workshop, far more than you'd have in the normal documentary course work. These work-

shops introduced various forms of documentary filmmaking, but their impact was very limited to a few interested students. I'm not saying here that documentary was not taken seriously at NAFTI. It has always been, but the fact that the curriculum gave it less prominence, coupled with its traditional mode of teaching placed it at a level where student's interest were sporadic. Documentaries were to be used to give the audience a basis for participating actively in national development. The student could not afford the luxury of vain imagination. It is however encouraging to note that the few students who ventured into it excelled. Most of NAFTI's international film awards have been documentaries. There is obviously an indication here that if documentary making was structured as a complete specialization course and given the necessary boost NAFTI will be changing an age-old tradition for the better. Given this background I resolved to make this change take place.

So when I returned to Ghana I had a very fruitful discussion with my Director, Martin Loh, who has always been very supportive of my interest in documentary. He readily accepted my proposal to make documentary a specialization course. That meant that students specializing in documentary could now have about two years of documentary classes. When that was done, I quickly suggested that we could start a separate course in story development, which in fact was a model I adapted from Michael Rabiger's class THEME & IDEATION. We suddenly had a good start to inculcate in students the idea of synthesizing the creative aesthetics of both fiction and non-fiction from the idea stage. Though a good start, implementation was the next task.

The use of dramatic forms in the organization of non-fiction films is easier said than done, more so to teach it. I was suddenly confronted with how I was going to get this thing done without confusing the students or myself. Though the real world presents great possibilities for story development, the dramatic conventions used must be done intelligently to conform to the documentary genre in order not to confuse the audience. Another problem that confronted this change in trend was the lack of infrastructure to get the change going. NAFTI certainly did not have the means to do anything -- all the ancient equipment were failing, cameras had to be rented, practical schedules had to be postponed -- but we still tried.

This new development has just been a semester and a half old and the results are not quite noticeable, but it wasn't easy trying to get students to understand that it was very necessary to think about character development, conflict, cause and effect and other dramatic elements while doing documentary. To them documentary was the easy way out of a difficult fiction script. However, we all know that

making a documentary is a tough job, it carries along with it a serious burden of credibility, ethical issues and responsibility. You can make all your pictures in a day and spend a lifetime trying to put it together. I quite remember a notation that Michael Rabiger made on a proposal of mine, 'there is virtually no action for a long time in this piece. People mainly talk about what has passed, or what should happen.' How true that critique was.

I was part of a team to make a documentary on the environmental impact of surface mining in certain communities in Ghana. In our pre-production process we collected lots of interviews and made videos of some of the environmental atrocities committed by the mining companies. We reviewed the material over and over again and I realized that despite the emotional stories we heard, the land degradation we saw, the injustice of the mining companies in dealing with compensations and so forth, there was no action, everything was in the past, things that had already happened or likely to happen to the inhabitants. How do we deal with this situation, and how could we evoke feeling without the real drama. We began to think about how we could come out with a good story. I don't know whether we stopped once to find out whether we were thinking fiction or non-fiction. I don't know whether I'm right to think that way, but I believe that my years of exposure in the States have re-shaped my thinking on this issue to try to always develop a good story, be it fiction or documentary. I believe such an approach could yield fruitful results. Some light years ago when we were first introduced to documentary, we were taught the differences between fiction and non-fiction. Now the trend is changing, we teach them the differences all right, but we disprove them at the end.

At the moment I'm not teaching fiction, but I will recommend students to take up documentary seriously even if they are into fiction. The Documentary genre has a way of keeping you on your feet, thinking, organizing thoughts and restructuring your project as you go along. The spur of the moment forces you to make instant decisions and choices. This kind of thing helps you develop your ability to discern good stuff. I have always told my students to

As teachers we sometimes try to limit the creative adrenaline of our students. We want to remind them that we have more pertinent problems to contend with such as fighting the problems of underdevelopment, building national consciousness and curving for ourselves an identifiable cultural identity. Our financial predicament vis-à-vis the basic fight for survival cannot afford us the luxury of wild imaginations- so we try to guide them making sure that we don't push them overboard. And that is difficult.

Awindor

keep journals (one of the things I learnt from Columbia College) to write down things they see or hear that is interesting or unusual, descriptions of places and characters they come across with, for these are the materials for real stories.

To conclude, teaching for me is a difficult thing to do, even more so when you are caught up in the middle of diverse influences of political, social and cultural consciousness. What is right, functional or conventional might be relative to an emerging issue. As teachers we sometimes try to limit the creative adrenaline of our students. We want to remind them that we have more pertinent problems to contend with such as fighting the problems of underdevelopment, building national consciousness and curving for ourselves an identifiable cultural identity. Our financial predicament vis-à-vis the basic fight for survival cannot afford us the luxury of wild imaginations- so we try to guide them making sure that we don't push them overboard. And that is difficult.

I will quote a concern by the Ghanaian writer, Ayi Kwei Armah, about an African communicator in his book, *Two Thousand Seasons*:

"You hearers, seers, imaginers, thinkers, rememberers, you communicate truths of the living way to a people fascinated unto death...communicators doomed to pass on truths of our origins to a people rushing deathward, grown contemptuous in our source, prejudiced against our own survival.

How can your vocation's utterance be heard?"

Q and A

Q. Alan Rosenthal

I would like to see film schools getting away from the teaching of the either/or of documentary, fiction, docudrama. I really think it's terrible, I was thinking of England, and I came up with Peter Watkins, Ken Loach, Michael Apted, Ken Russell, Jack Gold, John Schlesinger, all whom went back

and forth, fiction, nonfiction, documentary, feature, back to documentary. We should be able to tell the students, that yes, you could go either way, and it's all right and it works. The second thing that has come up today is style. We often talk about styles, and it seems evident that fiction people learned from documentary style, as one can see in all of Peter Watkins' film work.

Something that I don't see in any film school is the blend of documentary and fiction in what I and a few out there call "docudrama." I was looking around at what was popular in this last month, and we've got "Black Hawk Down", "Beautiful Mind", "Ali", "Behind Enemy Lines", "Malcolm X", "In the Name of the Father", "Perfect Storm", in which people have been looking for documentary stories and they realize that the truth is a fantastic story here, but they want to blend it with actors. Sometimes, there have been situations where the documentary story had to be reconstructed which resulted in a wonderful blend of documentary and docudrama.

Comment. Don Staples

Alan Rosenthal is on one end of the spectrum, and I am on the other, and when Alan he made his statement he knew that I had to respond and say that I think docudrama is the worst name for anything. Please don't use it in your classes and with your students. Why do I say that? Alan has, of course, written cogently about docudrama, but in the United States, docudrama means the cheapest, sleaziest, made-for-TV junk, with commercial interruptions and it looks horrible. When the O. J. Simpson trial was going on, docudramas were being made before the trial was over. To me, this is at the level of those magazines published by media moguls obsessed with making money in the sleaziest possible ways. So please don't use that. There's an old term that is worth reviving, the semi-documentary. I have written about the semi-documentary, and it is very different. Please stay away from docudrama.

A. Doe Mayer

I teach in a program that is both, where we teach documentary and fiction film in a way so that the students can go back and forth a lot which, it would appear, others think a good idea. I must say that to me, there's tremendous strength in a program that allow students to go back and forth between documentary and fiction film within the context of their education. I think it does encourage them to look at this much more broadly.

The part that I find most difficult as a person who teaches documentary is the difficulty in getting the students to "get

out of the car," as a colleague of mine puts it, to actually get out into the world. I deal with a lot of very bright and well-educated students who are perfectly comfortable sitting in their heads and going to the library to do research. The idea of actually getting out of the car, going into strange communities, really getting to know people, observing them, and not just interviewing them but being with them, is a very difficult and tricky job. I think there is a difference between the really wonderful students who take these skills and can use them both in fiction and nonfiction and those who can't. I don't know if others have had that problem, but to me it's a source of frustration, and then great joy when they actually get out and they resonate with the reality that is so much more interesting than anything in their imaginations.

A.

Yes, people think that directing is acting upon the situation. Often, directing is being acted upon and using what you feel and what you see as part of your decision making process.

The End

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