
Social media as a filmmaking narrative tool

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Abstract

This research is being conducted through a practice-led documentary film project, web platform and published case study. I am primarily interested in how the new paradigm shifts in digital technology and the democratisation of the filmmaking process allow filmmakers to connect to an 'expert' global niche audience with more immediacy through the internet, engaging virtual communities, crowd funding and fan building initiatives and a variety of social media landscapes. Textural and contextual significance in sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Google+, YouTube, Wordpress and a host of other social media landscapes provide a rich source of material for a documentary filmmaker to utilise when creating a narrative. There are various important significances for utilising online text in this way that is visually, conceptually, socially, culturally and economically acceptable and unique in the storytelling medium.

In the case study, my film project entitled *What does a 21st century feminist look like?* (Nelson 2010), engages a global audience of online fans, friends and followers, asking these virtual strangers to participate in the production, creation and financing of the film. Utilising social networks, crowd funding initiatives, web blogs, viral video, virtual chat interaction and traditional modes of documentary practice, the aim is to create a documentary film that exemplifies feminism in its profoundly new image.

Key words: Feminism; documentary; film; social media; crowdfunding; virtual space; digital media

Introduction

Textural and contextual significance in sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Google+, YouTube, and Wordpress and a host of other social media landscapes provide a rich source of owned, recycled and original material for a documentary filmmaker to utilise when creating a narrative. It is now apparent there are various important significances for utilising online text and video in this way that is visually, conceptually, socially, culturally and economically acceptable and unique in the storytelling medium. With the new paradigm shifts in the film industry, cheap digital technology and the democratisation of the filmmaking process, filmmakers can now connect to an 'expert' global, niche audience with more immediacy through the internet; engage with virtual communities, utilise crowd funding support and fan-building initiatives through a variety of social media landscapes.

New practice methodologies

A traditional production methodology practically invented by the Hollywood studios, proves futile at best for small independent filmmakers to compete with. Before the age of YouTube, there were no opportunities for distribution or output without having to go through studios, production houses and sales reps: '... [W]e all have distribution. There are no gatekeepers anymore' (Villers & Sarini 2011:26). However, most

Single Girl in a Virtual World: What Does a 21st Century Feminist Look Like?

A documentary film that exemplifies feminism in its profoundly new image



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Figure 1: Filmmaker's Wordpress blog and filmcase study website, 2010. (www.21stCenturyFeminist.com).

independent filmmakers have little to no resources to execute a film like the big studios in Hollywood do; with their huge studio budgets, political backing, global media support and accounting practices, today it seems a waste to pursue an independent film production in this manner. A new media practice is finding its way through various technological means, such as database cinema, webdocs and participatory filmmaking. 'The bottom line ... is that the tools are there, the platform is there, the audience is there, they are starving for great material' (Villers & Sarini 2011:26). This method is believed to enable audiences to articulate their experiences through the author's artistic vision through participation and by using cheap digital technology and social media networks. It is also through this process that they (the audience) might possibly have just as much (or little) control as possible as the filmmaker. But, why would filmmakers want to practice film production in this way? 'Quite simply; creative control'. Henry Jenkins (2003:283) states it represents the movement toward media convergence and the 'unleashing of significant new tools that enable the grassroots archiving, annotation, appropriation, and recirculation of media content'.

According to Knudsen (2008:108), '[w]hat defines the documentary genre is also at the root of its limitations ... here, I shall call for a different perspective on documentary form: not with a view to discussing what documentary is, but to make some suggestions of what it could be'. In creating a participatory film practice, my aims are to engage multiple social media communities such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Wordpress, YouTube, Kickstarter and IndieGoGo by asking potential fans to participate in the film project itself with a sense of creative and financial input. During the production, communities are asked to read the film site's blog, watch podcasts, comment on news feeds and follow the project on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. These efforts are the practicalities necessary for audiences to participate in the film project itself. It ultimately is the creative input that provides the narrative framework for the project. This 'allows us to traverse the globe, to convene for many causes, to converse intimately ... with many persons. Yet to accomplish these interactions we must sit, solitary, at the computer keyboard, interfacing deeply not with a human other but with Windows XP' (Thorburn 2003:20).

Utilising all platforms of new media linked to my main website (Figure 1) to produce essay films, diary films, video confessions, domestic ethnographies and blogs is 'varying the possibilities for the expression of subjectivity and the telling of life stories arise. Those variances depend, in some measure, on the medium of choice as well as the discursive conditions that prevail' (Renov 2008:39). In this context, this medium serves as a rich valley of resources that can be integrated in the film's narrative and production creativity. However, when attempting to construct a narrative thread by gathering content in this way, it does bring up many potential problems. In the case of my film project, it protects the narrative thread, but also the participants who provide sometimes intimate and personal material that the filmmaker then has to vet for many reasons other than just rich content. Rothwell (2008:155) implies that 'recording a video diary, if you don't want it to become public, is a risk; perhaps more so than a written diary, because the medium of video implies a mass audience'. Therefore, filmmakers must tread carefully when turning over creative control to a mass audience of this sort, not only for copyright reasons, but moral and ethical reasons as well. Filmmakers must maintain authenticity and certainly an air of creative authority, lest they lose control of focus, a weaving narrative thread and having a considerable amount of content to wade through. 'Visitor-generated content experienced in a variety of trajectories by users' offers a freedom of interaction with the material, but the journey is not without structure' (Pettice 2011).

However, this medium does provide exciting possibilities for filmmakers and audiences alike, despite the potential ethical pitfalls, for the creative flow of information, access to resources and sharing of content and reflective discourse that can provide information to a community of collective individuals in which to contribute. Independent filmmakers, also who are limited on

budget, time, geographic limitations and access to production technologies can gain a tremendous amount of quality production value by sourcing content in this way. Wading through recycled, or found footage, has its own challenges, but without the restraints and economic limitations filmmakers encounter when going through proper footage houses and libraries. This can be a very positive reinforcement for new forms and media aesthetics. 'Found-footage filmmaking, otherwise known as collage, montage, or archival film practice, is an aesthetic of ruins' (Russell 1999). Aesthetic ruins, perhaps, but a boon of media material available for consumption and reframing, nonetheless. Adversely, the ethics involved in this paradigm are due to the ease with which to re-frame the original content capturing from sites such as YouTube, where sharing, remixing and re-framing is the more likely outcome. This should be an exciting movement in the field of moving picture, not another hurdle for filmmakers to overcome owing to legality. However, there is a necessary 'policing' of utilisation of this content on a case-by-case basis, but that is difficult to monitor except by the case of those within the community itself. This is transparency at its best-case scenario.

By whichever way they (audiences) came into the community, the goal is to keep them there, involve them in the production efforts and keep them just as excited about the project. And to do that, there must initially be a transparency between the creator and the online community. This covers a multitude of scenarios such as copyright issues, ethical boundaries, life-rights, video-audio rights and original content ownership. However, the community is keen to forego complexities and by simply asking for permission seems to be fair. Rothwell (2008:155) states that the 'key to the success of that relationship is that it demands a responsibility for the consequences of the filmmaking that go beyond the film itself'. Filmmakers should take the same precautions

and ethical delicacies they would in a traditional filmmaking scenario. The Internet and social media protocol just makes it more immediate and public, which puts the filmmaker at risk and at the centre of its responsibility. Without governing bodies, investors or studio figureheads to police a film's substance, it is now up to the online communities to judge what is valid and acceptable.

Creating a film in an open-source and public way might possibly create fears of infringement upon creative ideas. However, sharing, commenting and creating content, which is moved virally amongst the members pervasively throughout the Internet, can certainly bring about intellectual property debates as each community, just as in live communities differ from location and status. Blagrove (2008:176) indicates that rather than imposing illegal piracy, they (filmmakers) welcome pirating and began distributing directly to the pirates themselves at production cost. There is more give and take in this new practice and this creates an element of fair use, since the community is freely giving away content. The filmmaker, however, must also make an effort to contribute in this way to encourage participation, as I discovered through my own practice. The more activity created by the creator and the more access granted to participants generates a greater amount of content creation and sharing via the social networks. It should be a win-win situation. Rather than feeling harpooned by copyright infringement, the idea is that filmmakers can feel empowered to create and share without fear of giving away their intellectual property. In an effort to make art in a truly fundamental and independent way, filmmakers are now embracing this open-source, transparent, participatory environment. Many questions did, however, arise: Who is in control? Who is the *auteur* (author) (or original author/creator) with the vision? What happens if the films' narrative thread goes off-track? Who are the performers and

what ethical considerations are at stake by utilising material shared amongst the community? 'Pragmatic interactions should not force preconceptions on others. Agreements for action should come from reaching positions of solidarity and working toward common purposes freely chosen' (Arata 2003:218). This perspective towards transparency becomes one more tool to use; another creative instrument to enhance flexibility in its practical approach.

Virtual audiences

Kirsner (2009) emphasises that 'the on-going conversation with your audience can be a source of inspiration, motivation and ideas. It's this powerful new link with the audience that the old power players don't understand'. Democracy and open source creativity has opened doors to filmmakers and storytellers alike with a multitude of technologies and affordable equipment never before seen. But it is not without legal and creative restraints that must be taken into consideration by the filmmaker and participatory audiences. Barry Stevens (2012), an Emmy-winning documentary filmmaker, says 'the documentary is defined by the frame. What you chose to leave in and what you chose to leave out determines how you build the frame'. It is not about just recording information, but rather an integration of what filmmakers want and the interaction with its subjects and what the film project gets. The film that emerges is a synthesis of this dynamic. Nyiro (2011) states '[p]articipation of the audience and interactivity is a continuously evolving phenomenon'. And during my practice, this was certainly the case. Creative, participatory production works in a much different way than in traditional autonomous practice. However, empowering the audience to become creators, also empowers the filmmaker in the truest sense. Gathering materials and

facilitating relationships becomes tools toward a new path to creation.

Juhasz (2008:304) states that 'by empowering ordinary people to speak as experts, they question the basic assumption of dominant ideology, that only those already in power, those who have a stake in defending the status quo, are entitled to speak as if they know something'. Research shows that audience participation does, in fact, impact on both the audience and the filmmaker inherently by creating in this way. I found it can be a very positive experience for both. Instead of outsourcing functionalities to other resources in a traditional sense, filmmakers will need to become an all-encompassing expert in their respective fields and share that knowledge with the online community. Engaging online audiences, however, can blur the lines of what is and what is not a professional documentary film. YouTube provides a distribution platform, but virtual audiences do not necessarily interact in that space or seek out professional films, but rather passively view amateur content. 'Renowned digital anthropologists like Mike Wesch have analyzed YouTube for its creative and grassroots potentials, but according to the so-called "90-9-1 rule", that 90 percent of online audiences never interact, nine percent interact only occasionally, and one percent do most interacting, ordinary YouTube users hardly see themselves as part of a larger community' (Uricchio 2011:11). How can filmmakers draw an audience into the reality of the situations being dramatised, 'to *authenticate the fictionalization?* meaning to make "real" what is in fact fictionalized by the user ... what are audiences to make of films where real people apparently "play themselves" (or variations on themselves), or hybrids where a combination of actors and non-actors improvise in a documentary-like scenario?' (Ward 2008:192). What is real and what is fictionalised has blurred the lines, not only for professional

filmmaking content, but amateur fare that is rampant on sites such as YouTube. So much so that even shifts in perception of what is real and what is fiction has crossed over from traditionally defined documentary practice into the realm of fictional media. What are emerging are specific types of distribution formats and social network platforms, not YouTube, which are marketed directly to filmmakers for films, which must be carefully devised to reach the right audiences for specific film genres.

It is the creative author's role to ensure that the participatory environment also abides by the community rules of transparency, honesty and attributes of authentic form. Ward (2008:192) continues by stating that notions of documentary performance are potentially controversial because people are not actually being themselves, which can be problematic for the authentication of the documentary film itself. How can the filmmaker assert to know what is factual or fictitious without seeing these participants in person; looking them in the eye? In my practice, this is where the control or authority lies within the filmmaker to ensure the narrative thread stays on track and that participants are doing just that; 'participating' and not performing. This might, perhaps, be a valid way for a documentary film to maintain credibility and value in the marketplace—when it is authentic, especially when being created in an online environment. A virtual environment where nothing is 'real' and engaging with online audiences presents a gap in this regard to ensure that content and shared media is original and 'truthful' in its submission, integration and presentation.

There is possibly also a greater embrace of innovation and experimentation in this method, which is needed in leveraging these projects with the ability to fail without showing loss of value within the community

at large. Technological knowledge and new creative approaches to build communities, and better business models that filmmakers and artists alike are needed. It is possible, however, to achieve a quality film production with inherent value with these new tools. However, these new tools must be learned by the user and engaged in practice, which will derive new platforms and framing. By engaging in filmmaking practices in these fundamental ways, a shift of power away from the larger powers of the studios and back into the hands of the creative filmmakers and their loyal fans should be embraced, not feared. Birchall (2008:279) suggests that the question that is to be addressed is if the Internet adds any distinct or unique characteristics other than another means of distribution. However, beyond the obvious advantages of various distribution outlets, a process of creative flow with online audiences, creative execution and community outreach are necessary parts of this new practice to maintain a sense of shared community and creative flow.

Technological shift

A profound new shift in mindset is needed within the realm of a new course of practice, even though outcomes are uncertain.

First, in organizing geographically diverse individuals around a common interest in watching or making documentaries, there are new forms of community; second, new means of creation and distribution...to seek to change people's minds or reinforce a viewpoint; third, we have increased access to 'dirty reality' in the form of footage of current events and violent conflict; and fourth, video diaries and other moving images give us an increased range of intimate access to the lives of other people (Birchall 2008: 282).

Differences in workflow patterns, multiple means of gathering content, technical limitations in design and marketing, and a new creative approach while aiming for high production value, are all for consideration. Each one of these variations can compromise what is possible. Thousands of textural entries, news feed comments, tweets, sharing of videos and user-generated content (UGC) from YouTube and other rich video sites by community members can potentially fill the coffers of narrative possibilities. But it is then the challenge of the filmmaker to gather that content and create a narrative thread which may have taken on another form altogether during the production process. This was the case in my practice. Starting with a loosely based narrative theme, I then proceeded to gather materials that fit within the scheme of the film's message and in post determined which were valid and necessary to the storytelling process. A story the filmmaker is still in charge of making.

To achieve a truly mobile production, it is believed that filmmakers must utilise numerous cheap digital technologies to produce the film. In my practice, I used equipment such as a flip camera, mobile video camera, DSLRs (Digital Single Lens Reflex camera) and Skype to capture original, captured and recycled content. This allowed flexible access to subjects uniquely qualified. This material captured was, however, outside the realm of online activity found in blogs, newsfeeds, tweets, web videos, stills and music clips.

The difficult decision a filmmaker utilising these types of technologies and online content materials and integrating them into the creative structure – with little to no crew, sound or lighting technicians – has to decide is if the story is more important than the aesthetic value of the film. Would the film's outcome be any different with a full crew and top production equipment? How does the process differ with a single person and one



Figure 2: Filmmaker's Facebook community member post on Facebook, 2010. (www.facebook.com/groups/singlegirlvirtualworld/).

camera that can fit into a handbag? In my practice, I found some liberation in this practice of wielding cheap technology and utilising found media. However, there is a collective experience when working with a talented crew of filmmakers that add to the aesthetic value of a film's intended outcome. There is liberation in both forms of practice. I believe the narrative thread or form of production determines the tools utilised.

In this case, social media sites such as a Facebook group (Figure 2) are used to provide a foundation for collecting textural, aural and visual material that would otherwise have taken significantly longer to collect in traditional practices. Documentary practice in this way becomes a way of working in a space in which all forms are subjective and in a constant state of flux. This space and textural language, together create inseparability from the media content, which are not merely captured media on the screen, but rather become multi-layered forms of technology, archived databases, curated social media sites and deep knowledge based blogs.

Bill Nichols (Hight 2008:205) recognised a need for a three-part definition of documentary '... because [of] the slippage which occurs between the levels of production, transmission and reception within media practice'. Experiences with different modes of engagement with an online audience are also experienced differently from a traditional production standpoint. This can be as simple as gathering media material in non-traditional ways. Because of these new modes of practice and new forms of representation being experienced by both the creator and the viewer, what is the social role of documentary and how does it fit into our modern digital society? Does it re-frame the truth because of its new production paradigms? Henon (Joye 2009) states that '[i]n order to regain the audience's attention, you need to be creative and look for alternative ways to communicate your message, next to the traditional news media'.

Collecting data via social networks can also provide a rich source of material that can be utilised in the traditional narrative fold. Text captured in running news feed conversations via Facebook and Twitter, for example, provide comments from the community that can be used in voice over, title cards and/or associated with archival footage in the editing process. Videos from YouTube, Vimeo and other video rich sites can also provide valuable footage (found footage or recycled media) created by amateur users, yet still providing unique vantage points into a never-ending amount of valuable subject matter. Utilising this content in an ethical and constructive way, without re-framing its meaning is ultimately the responsibility of the filmmaker. 'The complex relation to the real that unfolds in found-footage filmmaking lies somewhere between documentary and fictional modes of representation, opening up a very different means of representing culture' (Russell 1999).

UGC is another source that has become the most pervasive amount of content, shared and streamed by community members so others can comment, share and view within the framework of the community. Birchall (2008: 280) notes that 'by contrast, the easy availability of material to work with online is matched by the ease of remixing and redistributing'. This can aid the filmmakers who need open-source, archival clips in order to create a film narrative. Even though the found footage is not technically claimed as archival footage, or perhaps even original footage, the important aspect to the filmmaker is that it can provide rich content that is necessary in aiding the narrative thread. The question, of course, is does this delineate the value of the overall film? Or is UGC seen as valuable to the filmmaker and the community in the face of high license fees, royalty payments and huge academic fees for archival library access? Or does this even matter to the audiences? Although representational challenges are implicit in found footage to the sacrifices of aesthetics of individual authorship, creating a film in this new methodology allows filmmakers a greater freedom and perhaps a more personal satisfaction in the developing relationships between filmmaker and fans that might not be sustained in a traditional filmmaking-distribution methodology.

It is also important to note that just because technology is cheap, social media pervasive and artistic democracy entering the creative fold, it does not mean the value of the art or the filmmaker behind its creation should be valued any less. The reality of the new entrepreneurial filmmaker is not only making just a film project but also, rather, building a community of like-minded people who can support a film project and future projects – in essence, building a sustainable brand. This takes an inordinate amount of time, effort, management and technical trouble-shooting. Not to mention the technological knowledge and implementation necessary



Figure 3: Filmmaker's weekly video podcast on YouTube, 2010. (www.youtube.com/21stcenturyfeminist).

to connect all of these networks in a functional and significant way. Once they are functional and put into motion they should ideally self-perpetuate. However, it should be noted this is an on-going resource of time and labour that must be considered outside of creative production.

The potential benefits in making art in this way possibly far exceed the benefits, weighed against the immense amount of time and effort it takes to build an online brand and identity. Audiences can be fickle, but entrepreneurial filmmakers can have a distinct advantage over the big studios by creating art that is meaningful, economically sustainable and creatively autonomous, while building a loyal fan base (Figure 3). Challenges abound in measurable changes in these types of production practices and must be adhered to by utilising these online tools and cheaper production technology. How might this change the storytelling process when technological considerations must be made for a lack of financing and a large crew? The filmmaker is now essentially a 'one person crew' where every single shot, direction, post-production/editing, writing, producing, marketing and digital online development and

management are be achieved with the sole artist. Even though aesthetic compromises are also at stake, it is worth noting that with small cinema, mobile and online video distribution choices growing every day, there are many outlets of distribution that do not require a 35mm or HD production aesthetic to tell a story. Ultimately, the script is still at the heart of every film – it is only the methodology and system of delivery that has changed. Ted Hope (2010b) states, from his blog, that ‘the film business remains a single product industry. The product may be available on many different platforms, but it is still the same thing’. When audiences view in different mediums – such as on a computer, mobile phone, web or iPad – they have varied and different modes of engagement by the very nature of their special, mobile and technological impact on the viewer. So filmmakers must think carefully about choosing a good topic. ‘First comes the topic, then design’ (Knetig 2011:38).

A community of friends, fans, followers

Engaging virtual online audiences and exposing them to the filmmaker’s daily life, seems synonymous nowadays with making a film in this way. In making a production in this new way, however, it can be like killing two birds with one stone. Building a loyal following, while making a film, becomes synonymous with the potential success (or failure) of its release and visibility. Utilising social media to reach out to new fans can enable filmmakers to ask for a broader range of support, not just financially, but creatively and resourcefully. Accessing new resources in this way does have the added element of having to expose the filmmaker’s personal daily life (in some respects) in order to communicate with the community. There appears to be a sort of give and take, information sharing and feedback

(whether warranted or not) that informs the artist during the process of making art.

Although the Internet is wide and vast, the small cinema can provide a unique intimacy; a personal sharing and collective understanding amongst different classes that cannot perhaps be as easily shared outside the realm of traditional practice and cinema viewing habits. Today access to video blogs, web videos and textual content shared by people all over the world, sharing new perspectives, input and discussions, are open, democratic, liberating, but also potentially dangerous – not only to a creative author, but to the audiences and participants involved. This is why it is important for authors to stick as close to the truth, through their own mirror, which then provides a unique perspective to viewers of other groups. ‘The various stylistic techniques used within different types of documentary, such as the interview, eye witness testimony, caught-on-camera footage, and reconstructions, also add to the ambiguity associated with documentary’ (Hill 2008:217). As noted earlier, through my practice, I discovered the importance of establishing a transparent relationship early on with the online community to embrace a growing number of loyal followers. This ethical practice is adhered to in live societies and communities as part of on-going ethnographic practice and methods, and should act no differently in the online sphere.

The goal in building an online audience is to have them participate and visit – often as referenced here in my Twitter feed (Figure 4). If there is not something ‘in it for them’, they become apathetic and more difficult to bring back. Filmmakers are keen to embrace the unique and complex modes of interaction on social networks as a direct link to fans. Beginning with one social network, the likelihood of eventually branching out to other sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, Linked In, Wordpress and beyond will establish a large coverage

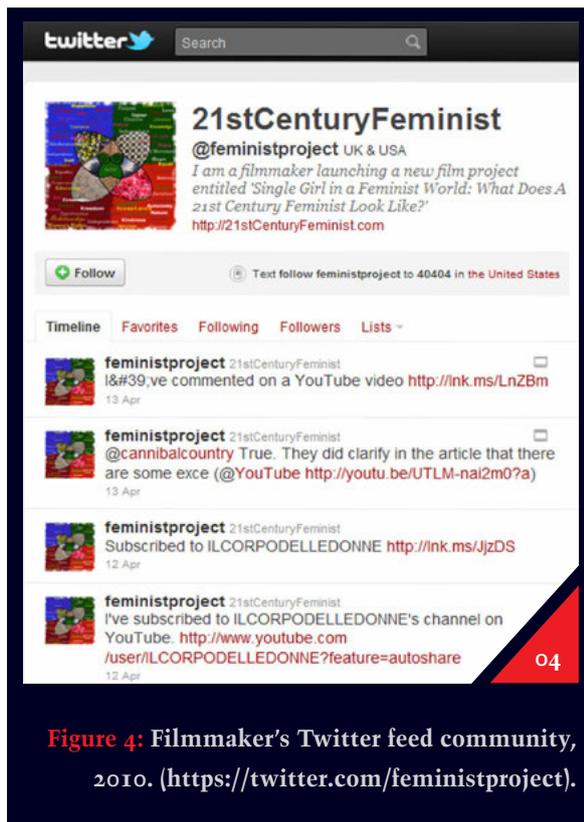


Figure 4: Filmmaker’s Twitter feed community, 2010. (<https://twitter.com/feministproject>).

which will further expand the community. This is time consuming work, as filmmakers need to ensure to answer every follower request, comment, post, podcast, newsfeed and tweet. This must be a calculated move on the part of the filmmaker and time consideration – just as with outlining a production plan – because in order to build an audience, two-way communication is necessary. And to be successful at it filmmakers have to be online constantly, engaging the community, commenting on ideas and posts as well.

Participation between audience and filmmaker enables each to develop a relationship that goes deeper than merely one from a consumer or isolated artist’s point of view. ‘Scholarly study of the social consequences of new media technology has frequently centred on the question of the potential fragmentation of society’ (Pavlik 1998). The (participatory) platform allows audience members to engage deeper than merely being a subject on the other end of the camera. It becomes a multi-way process, although the filmmaker as the *auteur* (author) and creator of the project should be driving the subject matter, its pacing and thematic criteria, which will yield an overall control and direction for the project.

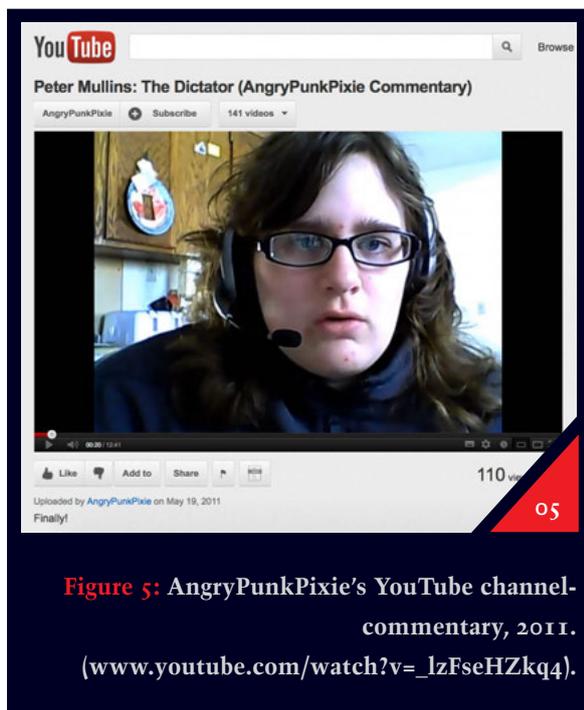
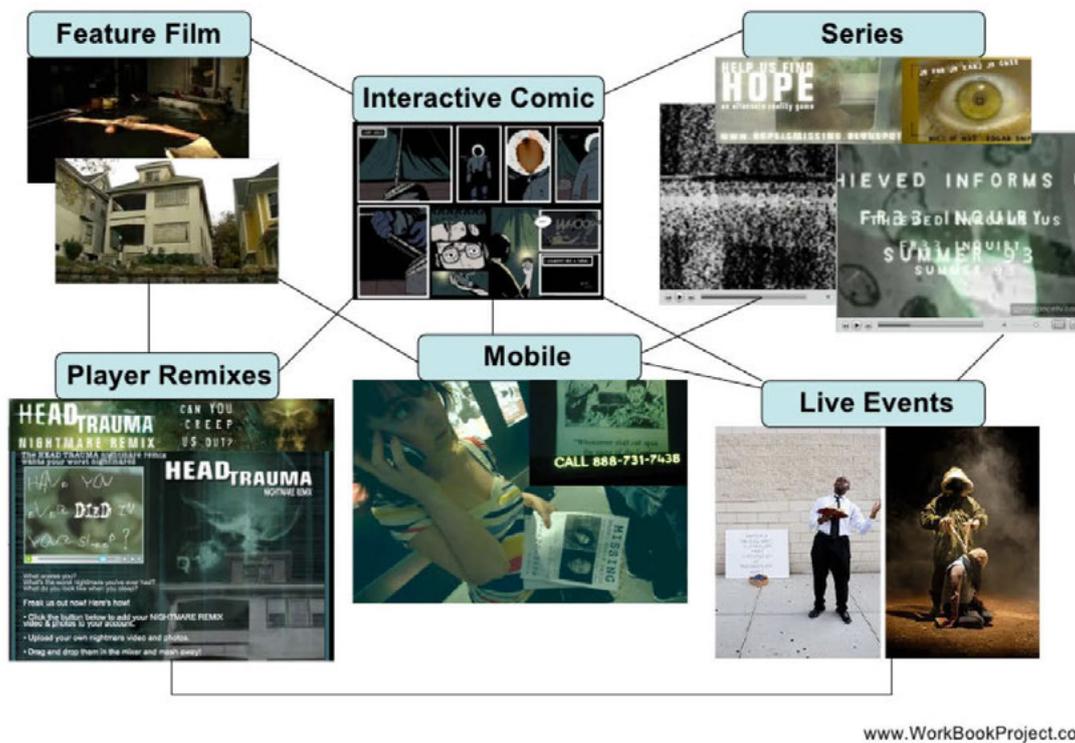


Figure 5: AngryPunkPixie’s YouTube channel-commentary, 2011. (www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lzFseHZkq4).

Ultimately, through this creative process, filmmakers should realise there is only a certain degree of ‘control’ the community wants to be responsible for when creating a project. They will support the project and want to participate, but they want to be guided. It is up to the filmmaker’s discretion to keep them engaged and stay in the community to help it grow. There are so many modes of practice given the technology platforms provided, on which creator’s content is placed, shared and executed. Ultimately, the question lies in the perspective of truth, which now shifts once again in an online participatory audience. It is now thousands, perhaps millions of perceptions of the truth the filmmaker seeks to collaborate.

of online space and potential viewers and participants for creative endeavours. Creating the aim of an integrated network of fans should proliferate the film’s intended goal of being seen. Audiences will (hopefully) share content within their own unique networks,

To Extend: story, characters, themes, experiences



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Figure 6: Transmedia model by the Workbook Project, 2009. (www.slideshare.net/lanceweiler/social-media-for-storytellers).

Petitto (Marmino 2011) states '[a]n important aspect in using new media is not only related to a matter of increasing membership ... rather it deals with the opportunity of amplifying the message towards the entire civil society, creating a deeper awareness of issues related to ecology and environment'. People are not just passively watching content; they are 'like-ing' it, commenting on it and sharing it through their own networks. By encouraging such activity through either specific calls to action or using advanced features like YouTube 'Annotations', filmmakers are able to potentially increase their chances of content being shared and discovered by a wider audience. Another YouTube tool is the 'Subscription' feature. By asking viewers to subscribe, filmmakers can potentially convert many subscribers into

repeat viewers and guaranteed audiences for future videos.

It is in this way, asking for fans to participate, to *do something* (to actually propagate content on a creative project) that excites them and gives them a voice, which can effectively convert fans into a mobilised marketing team (Figure 5). Reward them by letting their voice be heard and include them in the film project creatively and, in turn, they (the audience) will potentially advocate on the filmmaker's behalf. Pappas (2010) agrees when he states 'to that end, no marketing dollar spent can match the value of personal endorsements and word of mouth from your biggest fans'.

What will be interesting for filmmakers at the early stages is attempting to engage a niche audience to join the Facebook page or Twitter feed. Choosing a topic or subject, then engaging a certain niche group of people with similar likenesses, will usually yield a strong following. Optimising content by creating smart titles, descriptions and tagging with relevant keywords was the key to automate this process, as these steps will also help viewers find content in online searches. Fans will likely flock to content that is creative, visually stunning, technologically accessible and uniquely framed towards their likenesses. Filmmakers will also find that each social media site has a unique audience reach. By strategically planning and implementing a digital campaign and utilising the technology available, filmmakers will be able to create an online brand, which will become the foundation for the participatory filmmaking methodology. That, in turn, will manifest an interactive database for which the foundation of the film project lies and fans can accumulate. Provided with on-going content (by the fans), filmmakers will also be rewarded with personal, direct accessibility to fans of the virtual communities. This, in turn, provides a valuable source of feedback during the production process. It also provides a multitude of content that can be re-purposed through other media outlets. 'The strength of this new style of popular culture is that it enables multiple points of entry into the consumption process' (Jenkins 2003:284).

The 'fans' can be rich with stories and contributions, readily available resources, providing UGC, crowd funding opportunities and are willing participants; allowing filmmakers to create art that is viable, relevant and most of all cheap, free and viral. Having the film aimed specifically towards a key, niche audience, is also important. Audiences can be keen to be involved and stay invested in the filmmaker for future projects for the long haul, if proper investment of time, energy and creativity from the filmmaker is maintained. For once

the filmmaker is successful with one project and moves onto another, it can possibly risk losing the audience over content or lack of interest. The use of transmedia (Figure 6) or cross-media content can also let the audience know there is something in it for them, besides just the co-creation element of the film.

Crowd funding participation

A brief mention of crowdfunding initiatives, which are also key tools the filmmaker can embrace, with making a film in a participatory nature. This can be a key factor in the filmmaker's legitimacy of creating a film project in this capacity. The community does, in fact, communicate amongst themselves and will certainly 'police' any activity that does not acquiesce within the group. This 'policing' by the community assures transparency, trust, authenticity and protection against spam and unwanted advantages a filmmaker, other community members or outsiders may seek to squeeze information and/or money out of its community for personal gain. Birchall (2008:280) states 'authenticity is highly prized by audiences'. These new online forms should not be mistaken for lack of mediation simply because of technical constraints. Does the audience participating in the early stages of a creation raise expectations for the audience? What about for the filmmaker? Does it impact the artist's methodology of creation itself? Can projects of this nature be achieved without sufficient funding? A resounding yes is possible. But filmmakers must be flexible and creative and willing to jump over challenging hurdles in the process. In my practice case, I utilised Kickstarter to fund its campaign, without any success. In the early stages of this company, there were no written rules or successful case studies. It has only been within the past six months (to date) where new case studies and 'rules' of how to create a successful campaign can come about on this platform. It has been due to the

frustration of this limited resource, however, that other like-platforms have spawned with less imposed restrictions for fund raising and, therefore, levelling the playing field for creative producers of content.

With the attraction of crowd funding sites such as Kickstarter and IndieGoGo, financial resources are now available for filmmakers who do not have access to rich uncles, mix with the Hollywood investor crowd, or can fund their projects across a mass of credit cards. Hope (2010a) mentions that expectations between buyers and sellers have changed considerably; this now includes audiences who are crowdfunding films as well as in the traditional sense. Hope (2010a) continues by stating that '[p]roducts are valued at different levels. We live in a new world. Our strategies must change with it'. The production and fundraising of a film in this participatory style is beginning to produce a more valuable, sustainable, niche-market product and is changing the traditional market structure of distribution and delivery for independent filmmakers outside of the Hollywood system. Even those working within the Hollywood system are engaging in these platforms to make 'passion projects' outside of traditional means. It is also providing a platform for artists in countries without the support of film communities, government subsidies or fundraising activities. This enables a global access to films and stories that might otherwise have never be told.

Still, further questions for scholarly and industry debates continue. Will participatory films be profitable? How can a filmmaker, who makes a film online for free, ever hope to see a profit, much less sustainability? Some filmmakers are willing to give away their films for free to gain publicity. Parks (2009) states that she has a problem with the free strategy, which is giving the film away for free, in essence, to gain numbers, eyeballs or promotional value: 'The film business is already risky,

and this adds on a whole other layer of risk. What if you give the film away and nobody cares?' After a filmmaker engages in this strategy with no sales, the film has been exposed and it will be difficult to find a buyer/distributor to start charging people for the content that has already been offered for free. Where is the inherent value in this scenario? There can be a multitude of opportunities within this strategy, however, it has to be carefully calculated by the filmmakers, community and policy makers.

Conclusion

If participatory filmmaking is to be profitable, how will this change the open democracy of the 'Wild West' we see now in this new trend? Will it continue to be available and 'free' to all or be monopolised, packaged and sold as IPO (Initial Public Offering) to the highest bidder forcing filmmakers to go through yet another middleman to make their films? Will these online, participatory, transmedia interactions incentivise the audience to buy the finished product and any subsequent ancillary products associated with the creative product? What about future projects the filmmaker produces? Can there be added sustainability in this model? These questions and more that arise will continue to merit further questioning and research. With arts funding continuing to dwindle, like the reduction in grants and lottery funding, filmmakers have turned to crowd funding to finance their livelihoods – but will the audiences enable that to become a reality, or will the studio systems in place prevail? Hope (2010a) summarises it on his blog post *38 Reasons the Film Industry is Failing Today*:

Creators, Distributors, and Marketers have accepted a dividing line between art and commerce, between content and marketing. By not engaging the filmmakers in how to use marketing tools within their narrative and how to bring

narrative techniques to the marketing, we diminish the discovery and promotional potential of each film.

For this very reason filmmakers must embrace the new technology and its participatory practices. Engaging social media and relishing in its deep well of potential, content consumption will potentially allow new avenues for creativity, profit and sustainability. It must be harnessed on the filmmaker's own terms, however, or it will be found to be no different than 'working' for another production entity with expectations far beyond the filmmaker's reach. It is becoming more and more a predominant way to make a film. However, filmmakers now have to presume they must be more than just the storytellers on many levels and become all encompassing creators, marketers and sellers. On a larger scale, projects in this realm will hopefully emerge, answering the question of how this new methodology of filmmaking relates to a wider economic, cultural, environmental and social scale.

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