

# **Media Studios**

## **semester 1 2016**

# The Art of Persuasion: poetics & politics in documentary

Liam Ward



*Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry*, Alison Klayman, 2012

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How do we make documentary that is both political and poetic?

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**‘The first thing to remember is that there is, or rather should be, no cinema other than agit-cinema’**

-Sergei Eisenstein, ‘The Montage of Film Attractions’ (1924)

## **description**

Grierson’s famous observation that documentary is ‘the creative treatment of actuality’ contains many contradictions, and in recent decades many documentary theorists have subjected it to sustained critique – particularly in regard to the concept of ‘actuality’.

But one element that perhaps constitutes an elephant in the room for practitioners is that the most ‘Griersonian’ of films are sometimes notably underwhelming in terms of ‘creativity’. Some might call them dull. Unfortunately such films are sometimes considered as typifying the ‘political’ documentary. By their trail of expositional voice-over and b-roll footage intercut with talking heads shall you know them.

There is a tendency to view poetics and persuasion as somehow mutually exclusive, or at least as two opposite poles on a spectrum. Bill Nichols, for example, implies such a tension in defining the ‘poetic mode’ among his documentary taxonomy:

The poetic mode is particularly adept at opening up the possibility of alternative forms of knowledge to the straightforward transfer of information, the prosecution of a particular argument or point of view, or the presentation of reasoned propositions about problems in need of solution. This mode stresses mood, tone, and affect much more than displays of knowledge or acts of persuasion. The rhetorical element remains underdeveloped. (*Introduction to Documentary*, 2001)

In this studio, you will be producing documentary pieces, fragments, sketches playing within formal constraints and exploring this apparent tension between rhetoric and aesthetics, between poetics and politics.

## **aims**

- To reconsider traditional and contemporary debates around documentary form
- To explore persuasive and rhetorical techniques in media production
- To produce documentary material that references the historical world and posits truth claims in complex and multifaceted ways

# The Digital Director

Mark Poole



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How can tomorrow's directors (i.e. you) take advantage of new possibilities in digital technologies and online media ecologies to find audiences for their productions?

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**'I don't know the future. I didn't come here to tell you how this is going to end. I came here to tell you how it's going to begin'**

-Thomas A. Anderson [Neo] in *The Matrix* (The Wachowskis, 1999)

## **description**

Digital technologies have transformed all aspects of the filmmaking process: footage is acquired via digital media; images are manipulated in post-production; viewers are engaged online before a production is made; and opportunities for different kinds of online release are becoming commonplace.

Audiences especially have been elevated front and centre in this evolving production economy, interacting with filmmakers from Day 1 to the final release and beyond.

How might directors successfully make use of social media to create and maintain a dialogue with audiences, pitch a project, raise finance via crowdfunding and create a 'buzz' for their property through a trailer that has the potential to go viral?

This studio will employ both group and individual assignments to explore the potentialities and realities of the changing role of the director (and those around them) in the contemporary film, television and online media industries. It will be a blend of theoretical and practical components, looking at convergence, social media and user-generated content, and utilising participants' particular skills and interests to influence the direction of the class.

## **aims**

- Examine the role and skill sets of the contemporary director.
- Explore the potentials and implications of digital technologies and online media spaces for the role of the director.
- Devise a project, formulate a pitch, organise a crowdfunding campaign, create a trailer, and plan an online marketing campaign.

# Finding the Ear: developing short film drama

James Thompson



*Blue Velvet* (D. Lynch, 1986)

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How can we develop dramatic, engaging stories from a single source of inspiration and use this process to explore the creative possibilities of short film narrative?

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**‘If you can tell stories, create characters, devise incidents, and have sincerity and passion, it doesn’t matter a damn how you write.’**

**-Somerset Maugham, *A Writer’s Notebook* (1949)**

## **description**

All great films begin with a single idea or inspiration. This could be an object, a location, a character, a message. For the writer, the director, the producer, the actor and for any creative person involved in the bringing together of a story for the screen, this source of inspiration is essential. It provides direction and a common vision for the collaborative process. This studio is about finding ways of navigating that core creative process.

In this studio, we will explore ways of developing story within the short film format. We will be encouraging students to push the boundaries of the form. As a group we will start from a common source of inspiration. We will construct a series of experiments aimed at developing dramatic short film concepts. These may include but are not limited to: character development, script development, directing, performance and improvisation and producing a single shot or scene. We will be on the look out for the random connections and surprising revelations that breath life into our creative endeavours.

There will be opportunities for both collaboration and individual work throughout the semester. Our method is to engage in an ongoing process of drafting and development; the final outcome being agreed upon in consultation during the studio.

This work is essentially practical but will be underpinned with theoretical and historical research and reflective writing.

## **aims**

- To develop core creative competencies in both individual and collaborative contexts
- To develop an understanding of the filmmaking process from story conception to edit
- To explore the possibilities, constraints and challenges of short film narrative

# It's Alive

Leo Berkeley



Gary Lund, 'Modern Living' — CC Licence: Attribution-NonCommercial 2.0 Generic (CC BY-NC 2.0)

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What does live media offer as an experience that sets it apart from other media content and, from a production point of view, what are the creative possibilities and challenges involved with live media production?

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**‘The moment, inevitably, is what we remember and retain, what we possess of the screen and incorporate into ourselves and our worlds’**

**-Murray Pomerance, *The Horse Who Drank the Sky: Film Experience Beyond Narrative and Theory* (2008)**

### **description**

Live production has been a central part of the media from its beginnings. All radio and television began this way. In the 21st century, live programs are making a comeback, seen as a point of difference for a medium like television as competition from emerging media increases. From sport, news, events and disaster coverage to a range of variety, reality and talk programs, a significant proportion of all media content can be defined as live, yet it can be argued that the specific features of this form are both neglected and misunderstood. ‘Live’ itself is a contested term, with the values of immediacy and authenticity it evokes contributing to its overuse and abuse.

Through reading, viewing, discussion and practical experimentation, the studio will develop a working definition of live media that will then be applied to the more professionally-focused project work produced. Live media production often involves careful planning, considered risk-taking and particular forms of teamwork that will all be part of the studio. Both successful and unsuccessful live media examples will be analysed.

Liveness will mainly be explored in this studio through television but a range of other media will be considered, including radio, music and games. Theoretical perspectives on liveness will be examined and the knowledge gained from this will inform your practical work. There will be a range of projects produced through the studio that explore different aspects of live media production, with the multi-camera television studio being a principal focus.

### **aims**

- To investigate the appeal of ‘liveness’ as a media experience
- To experiment with both established and new ways of making live media
- To design and execute a successful live media production

# **Lentara: nonfiction design**

**Bronwyn Clarke, Seth Keen, Peter West**



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How can Media and Communication Design practices be used to co-author the creation of nonfiction artefacts for the not-for-profit sector?

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**‘The driving force for collaboration is motivation. In order for a co-creation to succeed, everyone involved needs to feel that they gain something from the collaboration or feel that they are doing a meaningful thing and working towards a valuable end result. Across disciplines this motivation becomes the enabler of innovation and transformational communications.**

**-Essi Salonen, *Designing Collaboration* (2012)**

### **description**

This mixed discipline studio will bring together media producers and communication designers to work closely with the Lentara organisation to produce nonfiction artefacts about the programs, staff and people they support.

Lentara is a not-for-profit agency and part of the large network of community care services run by the United Church. Our industry partner is looking for new ways to communicate the work they do for asylum seekers, homeless people, the unemployed and others within their diverse social justice program in Melbourne.

In this hands-on, innovative studio the key aim is to come up with creative and fresh approaches towards how Lentara communicates the work it does in the not-for-profit sector. Practical skills will be supported with theory, in regards to the integration of the design and media disciplines, and engaging in the design and production of nonfiction artefacts.

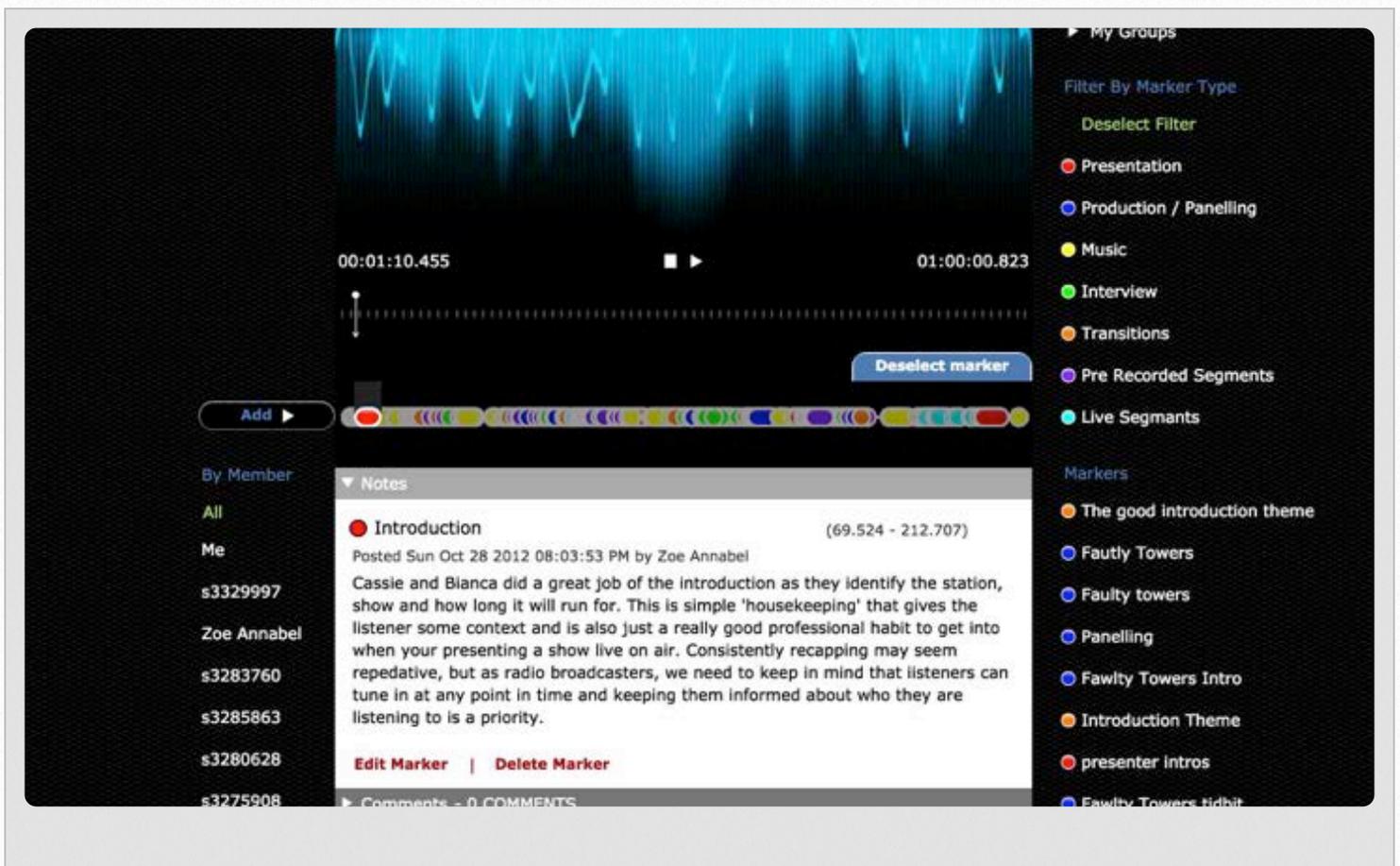
A nonfiction artefact in this studio is considered to be different types of communication strategies and media objects that refer to real life activities. Students working in mixed groups may take varying hybrid approaches that draw from graphic design, advertising, branding, film, television, radio and new media.

### **aims**

- Develop an interdisciplinary collaborative approach between Media and Design to solve real life problems.
- Utilise design methodologies to adapt to changing technologies and practices.
- Develop the design and production of nonfiction communication strategies and media objects.

# Room With a View: multi-platform radio as a site for collaborative production & distribution

Bruce Berryman



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How does radio change across multiple platforms in a period of media divergence?

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**‘Radio can be said to have certain characteristics, but the evidence suggests that radio is what history says it is: it has no essence since it has already taken, and continues to take, different forms. Radio is what it is at a given time, in a given context of use and meaningfulness’**

**-J. Tacchi, ‘The Need for Radio Theory in the Digital Age’ (2000)**

### **description**

The shift to digital modes of production and distribution and the emergence of hybrid sound-based forms has presented challenges that many believed radio would not survive. To do so, it has been forced to integrate a variety of changes from the relationship between audiences and producers, to the way radio practitioners collaborate to co-create content for multiple platforms.

Collaborative radio production or co-creation is not in itself a new concept. For ABC radio producer John Jacobs ‘the creation of media that involves a group has always had the potential to be a co-creative process’. Jacobs compares film and TV productions with their ‘higher budgets, larger editorial quality expectations and associated constraints and hierarchies of creative control’ with the ‘small teams, low budgets and fast turnaround of radio, leaving more room for flat structures and co-creative ways of working’. For Jacobs, collaborative or co-creative radio production is simply ‘good practice’.

In this studio you will produce a) live radio, the medium’s most visceral form, though the program Room With A View with our project partner 3RRR; b) content for online distribution across multiple platforms; and c) interviews and features.

Through these activities you will use technologies that enable co-located and distributed production to gain industry relevant skills in research, interviewing and narrative. Working with others on these projects will provide opportunities to develop understandings of the individual within the group and enablers in collaborative production.

### **aims**

- Collaborate effectively in the production of radio content across multiple platforms
- Experience live-to-air radio production
- Create ancillary online content to extend the narrative

# The Scene in Cinema

Robin Plunkett



*Red Desert* (M. Antonioni, 1964)

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How is a drama scene constructed; and what are the theoretical traditions, functional imperatives, and expressive possibilities associated with the terms, “coverage” and “decoupage”?

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**‘Through segmentation, the script or the written assemblage of visual ideas ceases to be literature and becomes cinema.’**

-Louis Bunuel, ‘Decoupage, or Cinematic Segmentation’ (1928)

### **description**

The term “coverage” has, at the very least, two distinct meanings, with significantly divergent qualitative connotations. The first relates to the practice of capturing a dramatic scene as scripted: “Is the scene covered?”; “Do we have sufficient coverage?” This usage alludes to functionality and industrial efficiency, and is closely associated with the notion of the supremacy of a script, or text, as blueprint. The other (often parallel) meaning is more to do with the expressive potential, and uniquely cinematic application and effects of the process of segmentation.

Research and practical investigation in this Studio will revolve around the broadest possible understanding of the word “coverage” in relation to the cinema: the planned spatial and/or temporal fragmentation of a cinematic action or event (a scene) in relation to camera position, camera angle, choice of focal length, image size and camera movement, with a view to its (re)construction in post production; this, together with its implications for performance, lighting, production design and audio; and all these elements’ potential influence upon *it*. It should be acknowledged also, that the process of *decoupage* conceivably begins with the overall structuring of a script or working text, as well as being planned and executed by a director and cinematographer, in concert with all on-set personnel.

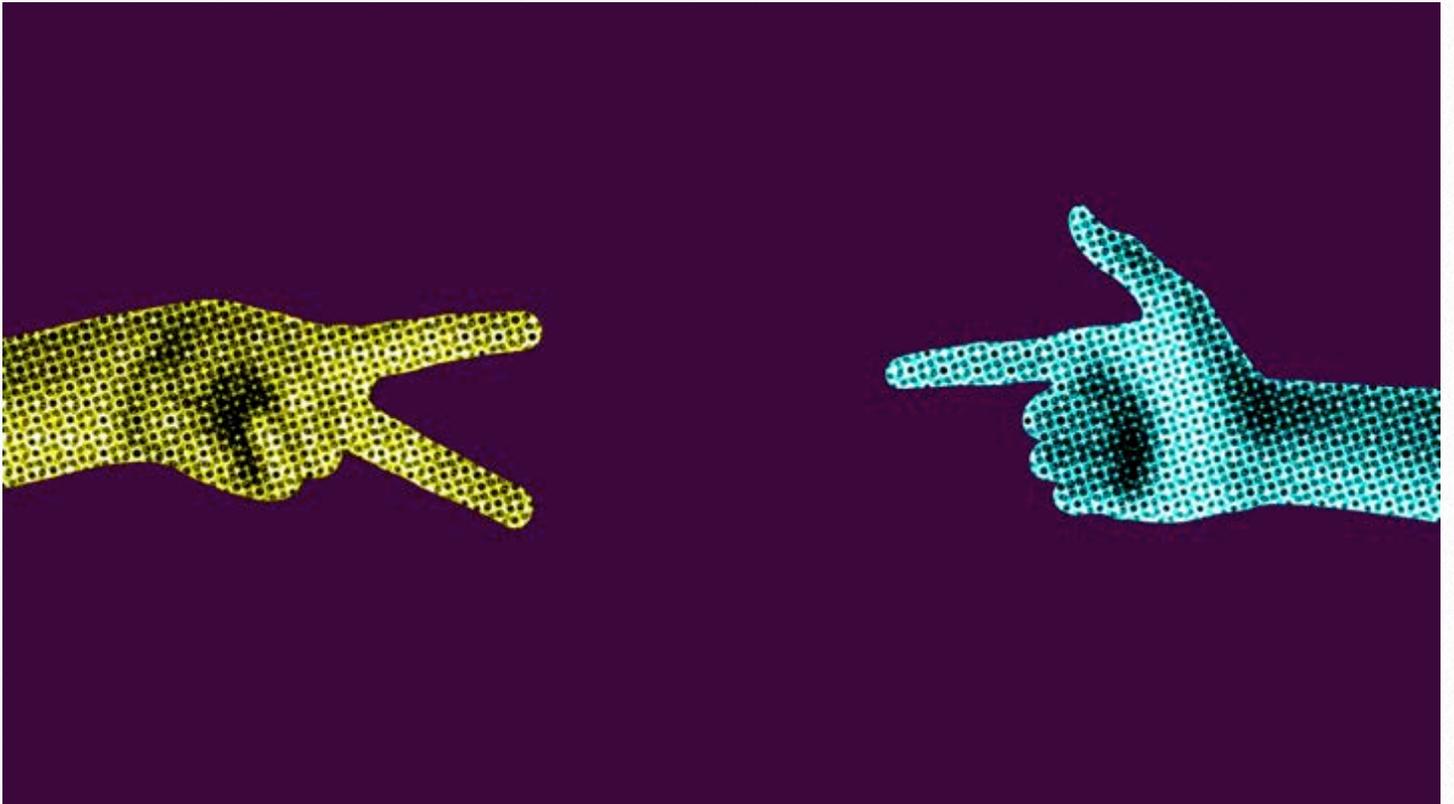
This studio will investigate *coverage / scene construction / decoupage*, from both an academic, theoretical perspective, and a practical one. Outcomes have the potential to contribute to a specific dimension in film appreciation and future academic research, together with a better informed approach to the problems of practical filmmaking.

### **aims**

- For students, engaged in practical work, to pursue original research with a view to developing an appreciation of film craft in cinema history and an informed theoretical perspective.
- For theory and aspiration to be tempered and informed by practical experience.
- For film craft itself to provide the tools and impetus for theoretical, and practical, investigation and development.

# The Shot vs The Cut

Nick Moore



N.Moore, 2015

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What is the relationship between shooting and editing?

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**‘The content of the shots in itself is not so important...’**

-Lev Kuleshov, *Lev Kulshov on Film* (1974)

**‘[E]diting... seems to me incompatible with the nature of cinema...’**

-Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time* (1987)

## **description**

Despite the claims of partisan experts, The Shot needs a cut and The Cut needs a shot. They might develop through independent production processes, but they are inextricably intertwined in a finished moving image work. In this studio, you will investigate this intertwining of Shot and Cut. You will design and perform exercises with camera and editing software that test specific mechanisms assumed to be at play within the moving image.

Throughout the literature of film production, there is no shortage of shot and editing conventions couched as rules; Headroom, Look-space, the Rule of Thirds, Hitchcock’s Rule of Composition, Murch’s Rule of Six, and many others.

Perhaps the most frequently referred to of these types of cinematic conventions are the 180° Rule and the Kuleshov Effect. What makes them different is that it is possible to test them under experimental conditions that attempt to gauge the audience’s response: it is simply a matter of shooting and cutting.

So, why not test the veracity of some of those other film school truisms using the same shoot and cut methodology? And what about further mechanisms that govern the impact of the moving image that might be hidden in the literature or have not yet been hypothesised?

You will perform weekly shoot and cut exercises testing theories connected with action, dialogue, interview, montage, comedy, compression and expansion of time, fragmentation of space, insert and axial editing and others. You will also screen selected exercises before test audiences, reflecting upon the results and, in some cases, creating video essays to present your individual findings to a general and an academic audience.

## **aims**

- Investigate the complex relationship of Cut and Shot.
- Develop our moving image storytelling skills through practical exercises.
- Create valid moving image experiments and present them in a stand-alone form.

# The Story Lab

Daniel Binns



Clockwise from top left: *Pride & Prejudice* (BBC TV, 1995); *Agent Carter* (Marvel, 2015-); *Hamlet* (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2008); *The Matrix* (Warner Bros., 1999)

**‘All stories are lies. But good stories are lies made from light and fire. And they lift our hearts out of the dust, and out of the grave’**

**-Mike Carey (and illustrators), *Lucifer, Vol. 11: Evensong* (2007)**

## **description**

Storytelling isn't what it used to be. In fact, stories themselves aren't what they used to be. The stories we tell seem to have similar characteristics: a list of main characters, conflict, a beginning, middle, and end, but the way we tell those stories has changed significantly. We change up the structure, the register, the point of view. The advent of transmedia storytelling, as seen in the *Matrix* and *Marvel* franchises, is perhaps the greatest threat to traditional story. But does a change within a *platform* – or a switch to *multiple platforms* – necessitate a change in the narrative itself? What makes a story work? What makes it fail? Is transmedia *really* threatening traditional, linear stories? Are we beyond story altogether? These are some of the questions we'll be exploring – and trying to answer – in **The Story Lab**. Stories old and new will be examined and analysed; the practice of storytelling, and methodologies of transmedia production, will be uncovered and evaluated. Students will create their own media objects, playing within media, and moving across digital and non-digital platforms. The Story Lab is a place to try out new storytelling methods, and work together to push the limits of what narrative is, and to explore what it might be.

## **aims**

- Learn methods of storytelling and models of transmedia narrative.
- Activate this learning by working in teams to develop their own experimental transmedia narratives across semester.
- Contribute to research on the changing nature of storytelling, through analysis of existing narratives, and through reflecting on the process of creating.

# The Story, the Source and the Documentary

Lisa Horler



David Johns, Promotional still for *Sperm Donors Anonymous* (Sensible Films & Licketty Split, 2015)

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How do  
documentarians create  
meaningful stories  
from the dynamic  
intersection of  
character, event, and  
source materials?

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## ‘But what’s the story?’

-Attributed to numerous commissioning editors

### **description**

This studio is for students interested in developing creative skills in documentary research, writing, storytelling and production. The major outcome of the studio is the production of individual short video documentaries with associated assets (synopsis, short trailer, key image, director’s statement). These documentaries will tell stories inspired by a source document or event - archival letter, an object, the re-telling of an event, archive footage or photo, a location –something small that heralds a compelling story leading the filmmaker to document.

This studio will suit those with a strong curiosity in the potential of the documentary form and a willingness to explore various methodologies throughout production. We will look at and try traditional documentary practices (e.g. interview, narration, cutaways, observational, archive) in the context of individual ideas, and embrace the diverse documentary techniques that can be used to create work.

Students will be required to research potential documentary subjects with stories that genuinely deserve a documentary treatment and where access is easily negotiated. Students will be expected to present their story ideas in development and contribute to critiques of peer story ideas before taking the next steps in to production.

But what’s the story? This question is often the bane of a documentary filmmakers life as it reduces a rich concept into the bare bones of beginning, middle and end. We will investigate the potential of creative stories in the documentary form and re-define story in terms of layered, nuanced moments strung with meaning.

### **aims**

- to research, write and create a high quality short documentary
- to explore and expand your notions of story in documentary
- to develop abilities in working with “sources” to create works

# Ways of Making: an alternative approach to film production

Paul Ritchard



*D'est* (Chantal Akerman, 1993)



*Hanyo* (Ki-young Kim, 1960)

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How might your filmmaking practice be driven by the core materials and creative concept rather than relying on conventional industrial models and processes?

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**1895: Lumière refuses to sell his invention to Méliès, so Méliès proceeds to build his own.**

**‘Every bad film starts with a scenario and ends with a copy of the scenario’**

-Jean-Luc Godard, *The Future(s) of Film* (2002)

### **description**

Methods of film production (and, therefore, *film substance*) are predetermined by the choice to make either documentary or drama. These methods have their own practicalities, logic and industrial efficiencies. A film project invariably requires a commitment to a particular form and its methods of production.

But does this limit the film’s expressive potential?

*Ways of Making* proposes a new approach to the conception, development and production of short film projects. Work in this studio will not start with the premise that you are making drama or documentary. It will start with the notion that the form and substance of your work will be determined by a combination of your creative vision and a respect for the subject matter as an active agent shaping the final form.

By exploring traditional filmmaking protocols and techniques, and through a series of practical exercises and ongoing reflection, you will develop the technical competency and confidence to produce a series of film works. Our key objective is to discover a more flexible and potentially creative approach to the production of fiction and nonfiction.

Specific skills developed in this course include: producing, project management and directing skills; professional production skills in audio recording and post production; lighting - analysis, planning and setting; camera operation - exposure, focus pulling, camera movement, framing; and post production - editing, grading and title sequences.

### **aims**

- To be able to critically analyse - through filmmaking - traditional and industrial production methods.
- To explore the possibilities associated with applying techniques and practices not typically used in the creation of the form being pursued.
- To develop competency in production techniques and to think more expansively in relation to ongoing projects.

NOTE: Students who have already taken the studio *Film 3 (I or II)* in 2015 are not eligible to select *Ways of Making* as it is a new iteration of that past offering.