

# MEDIA STUDIOS

## SEMESTER 1 2018

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An exploration of lighting in and for film

### MEMORY, IDENTITY AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

Representation and poetics of the neighborhoods that we live in

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# FILM LIGHT

An exploration of lighting in and for film.



*Death of a Cyclist* (1955) Dir. Juan Antonio Bardem

## STUDIO PROMPT

How should we think about light in order to use it as an expressive element in film production? What can we learn from the countless practitioners who have preceded us, and the restrictions and challenges they have faced?

## QUOTE

"Films are light."

Federico Fellini

## DESCRIPTION

This simple, three-word observation is the kind that, when de-contextualised and quoted at the start of a book or dissertation, tempts the reader to dismiss it immediately as glib, pretentious and fundamentally empty. And, indeed, it might be just that, but for two things: it was spoken by the Maestro; and it *is* absolutely, penetratingly true. Anyone who has responded to something in a film beyond its most rudimentary narrative content will have experienced the veracity of this statement; anyone who has been responsible for capturing and giving motion picture images coherency will know that to respond to light, and perhaps to control light, is central to, if not the very essence of cinematographic practice.

This studio will involve both a historical inquiry into light in the cinema, and a practical exploration of lighting for film. We will begin to consider the complex interrelationship between practice, technology and aesthetics; between necessities, tendencies, trends and expression. Our studies will involve film viewing, research and practical experimentation, but we will not be making a film. We will assist one another in that experimentation and share our ideas and discoveries.

## AIMS OF THE STUDIO

To begin to develop a critical appreciation of film lighting and an understanding of its ongoing importance.

To employ accurate terminology and practically informed understandings in order to effectively conceptualise and communicate in future practical endeavours.

To develop a preparedness to place these understandings in the service of the higher aims of a motion picture work.

## STUDIO LEADER

Robin Plunkett is a cinematographer. He has worked in all capacities in camera departments for more than 35 years. He also has experience as a producer, director (of non-fiction) and editor. For the last several years he has been teaching elements of cinematography, and film production in general, at the VCA and RMIT.

# PICTURE THIS!

Visual storytelling for screenwriters

~~The muddy girl walks in, dragging her feet  
Caked in mud, the girl enters, sullen  
CLOVER (9) enters, sulking and covered in mud  
CLOVER (9), muddied face, drags her feet inside  
CLOVER (9) mopes in, more mud than face.~~

*Image: Stacy Taylor feat. command/shift/4*

## STUDIO PROMPT

How are the words on the page translated to screen image, and what skills might a screenwriter employ so as to write as if looking through the lens?

## QUOTE

'Screenwriting is a form whose essence is to indicate a visual experience in prose' (Adam Ganz, "To make you see': Screenwriting, description and the 'lens based' tradition", Journal of Screenwriting, 2013)

## DESCRIPTION

Screenplays are a mediated form, telling a story to be interpreted as a screenwork (say, film). These documents are organised by formats that demarcate location, action, character and dialogue. Often, investigations into screenwriting are dominated by concerns of plot, and the elements of craft are only explored insofar as they serve the narrative. In this studio you will explore the art of visual storytelling, on the page and outside the context of its subservience to plot. You will then redeploy techniques - be they established or invented along the way - to bring visual storytelling back to the full range of screenplay elements to see what, if anything, has changed.

In this way, the studio will take a 'lens to pens' approach, and use audiovisual, visual and written activities to focus in on the relationship between text and screen image. You will ask yourself and each other such questions as, where does sound fit into visual storytelling? Is visual storytelling limited to the 'big print' of a screenplay, or does it also live in the dialogue? What are the differences between the 'comment', 'report' and 'description' modes of a screenplay's scene text (as identified by screenwriting scholar Claudia Sternberg, 1997)? And, crucially, if a picture paints 1000 words, how can I edit it down to 3?

You will each create and develop your own short screenplay while also engaged in others' via collaborative methods of script development. You will produce a companion audio-visual artefact (e.g. storyboard, mood board, teaser reel) that best highlights your original screenplay and the richness of its visual expression.

## AIMS OF THE STUDIO

To understand the relationship between screenplay text and screen image

To explore aspects of visual storytelling, including action, description and perspective, with a view to honing our skills

To experiment with established conventions of visual storytelling so as to uncover the finer techniques and invent our own

## STUDIO LEADER

Dr Stayci Taylor is an Industry Fellow with the Media Program, and a working screenwriter, with an ongoing practice in story consultation for television, and a screenplay in development with Greenstone Pictures. She has taught screenwriting at La Trobe and here at RMIT, for both the Creative Writing and Media programs. Her PhD, for which she wrote a screenplay, explored perspectives on the screenplay page, especially in regards to female protagonists in comedies. In 2017 she co-edited a special issue of the Journal of Screenwriting, which focused on script development, and is currently co-editing a book on the same. She is widely published in journals such as Senses of Cinema and Celebrity Studies on her research into screenwriting, script development, gender and comedy. Screen credits include nine seasons of an award-winning bilingual soap and a primetime sitcom, both in New Zealand.

# MEMORY, IDENTITY AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

Representation and poetics of the neighborhoods that we live in



'The Suit Hospital' Albert Park Cardigan St, Nick Gadd, 2017



'The Dog Park View', Kim Montgomery, 2016

## STUDIO PROMPT

Why is it important to be a good observer, to collect images of the world, to make our own maps, and communicate the physical contexts that help define us?

## QUOTE

'Regular maps have few surprises: their contour lines reveal where the Andes are, and are reasonably clear. More precious, though, are the unpublished maps we make ourselves, of our city, our place, our daily world, our life; those maps of our private world we use every day...'

Alexander McCall Smith, *Love Over Scotland*, 2006

## DESCRIPTION

This studio revolves around the representation and poetics of the neighborhoods that we live in – cities, suburbs, localities that help us define who we are and who we want to be.

Through regular exercises we will craft a moving image story about the sensibilities that we attach to place imagined as a series of documentary moments collected over the span of the semester.

In this studio we will explore the neighborhoods that are meaningful to us, traversing and mapping them through a series of audio fragments, photographic images and video documentaries. Whether it is interviewing local legends, creating poetic works on the ‘feeling of Carlton on a Saturday night’, the secret history of the local nightclub, the faded glory of ghost signs, these will all be markers of significance, signposts to be captured and collected to tell a story about the neighborhood.

## AIMS OF THE STUDIO

To use documentary practices to investigate the representation of neighborhood

To experiment with a range of technologies to collect and present engaging visual memories

To provide an insight into the psychological, social or historical forces that shape contemporary life in our neighborhoods

## STUDIO LEADER

Kim Montgomery works in media education, video production and programming for television, exhibition and festivals. She was previously the Digital Programs Manager at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image and part of the team that created ACMI. At ACMI she conceived and created the Memory Grid, an interactive exhibition zone for community and student media. She was also previously the inaugural Programming Manager at Melbourne’s Community Television Station Channel 31.

Her particular interests concern the ways in which emerging technologies offer new possibilities for individuals and communities to explore memories in cultural and educational contexts.

# READY CAMERA ONE

Multi-camera studio production



Photo by Morningfrost: Production control room at SKY Sport24, PCR.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Production\\_control\\_room#/media/File:SKY\\_Sport24\\_PCR.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Production_control_room#/media/File:SKY_Sport24_PCR.jpg)

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>



Scrubs (2001-2010) "My Life in Four Cameras" s.4.e.17

## STUDIO PROMPT

What does live broadcast 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 of multi-camera television production?

## QUOTE

"It makes no sense to think of television except in relation to all the things with which it co-exists, the things whose existence give its own possibility" (Paddy Scannell, 2013)

## DESCRIPTION

Multi-camera television production is a persisting mode of television practice, which when first began, was broadcast live. A significant proportion of media content today, from sports coverage, news, special event television (such as *Eurovision*), disaster coverage, variety/late night, reality and talk programs, can still be defined as live, and a significant proportion makes use of multi-camera production practices. This means much of the 'editing' is done 'live' or in-camera. Live content is also now a ubiquitous presence on social media, with platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube offering users options for live-streaming. Television networks continue to adapt to make use of these platforms, with varying degrees of success.

Through reading, viewing, discussion and practice, this studio will explore the creative possibilities and challenges of a multi-camera television production in a studio environment. Through a combination of live and 'live-to-tape' production exercises, you will examine the notion of 'liveness' and related concepts such as authenticity, the performative, and the unexpected. There will be a range of projects produced in the studio that explore different possibilities and forms of multi-camera production, such as news, the sit-com, and game shows. We will explore the ways in which television broadcast is adapting to new and emerging media contexts, and how we can adapt the multi-camera environment to suit these contexts.

## AIMS OF THE STUDIO

To investigate the different ways in which the multi-camera studio can be used as a production mode

To experiment with both established and new ways of using the multi-camera mode of production

To investigate the changing nature of television broadcast in a 'live' context

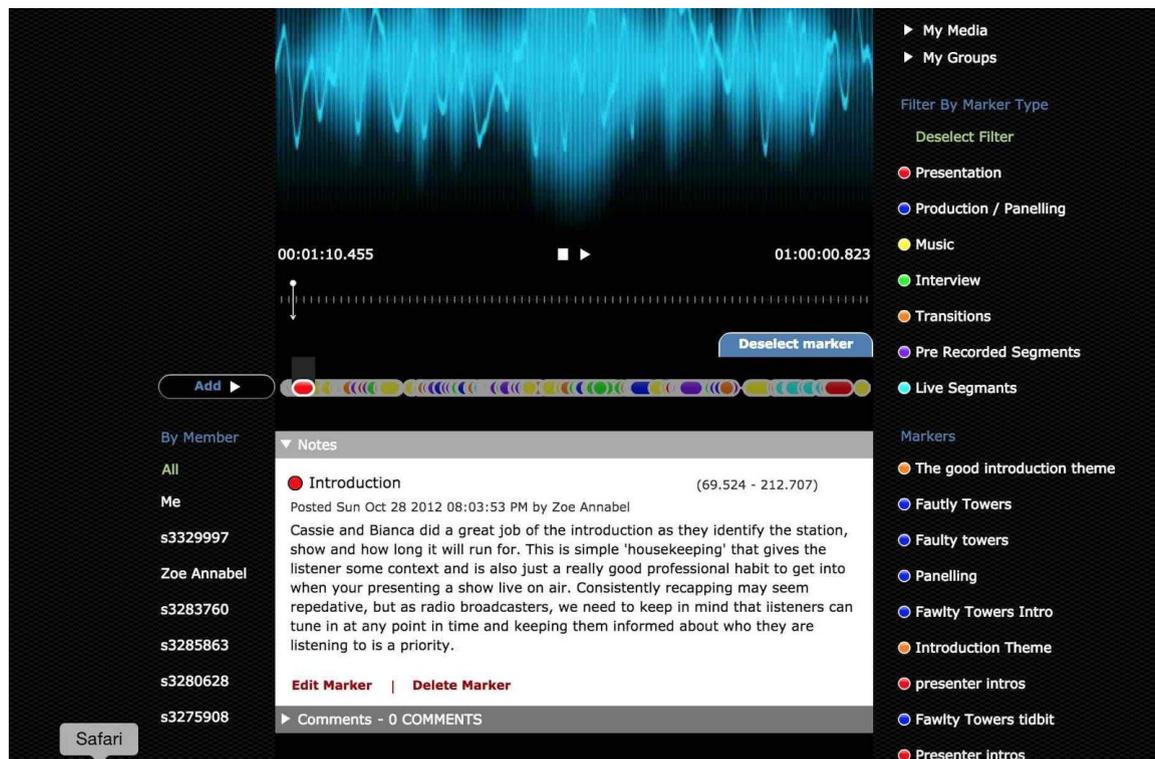
## STUDIO LEADER

Ruth Richards is a PhD Candidate in the School of Media and Communication with research interests spanning across areas of animation, cinema, and television theory, including current modes of television production.

Throughout the past incarnations of the *It's Alive* and *The News is a Joke* media studios she has developed an interest in the evolving nature of liveness in the 'post-broadcast' era, as well as historical forms of live television broadcast. Ruth has crewed on a variety of live and pre-recorded multi-camera productions through RMITV and C31, including *31 Questions*, *Studio A*, and *Live on Bowen*. She has also crewed on a number of short and indie feature productions, as well as providing film criticism as part of live radio broadcasts for ABC Perth.

# ROOM WITH A VIEW

Live to air radio as a site for collaborative production and distribution



## STUDIO PROMPT

How is the ephemeral quality of live radio impacted by multiple platform production and distribution?

## QUOTE

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. (Tacchi, 2000, 292)

## 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'.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup>Jacob's comments on co-creative radio making may be found on Jonathan Hutchinson's blog <http://jonathonhutchinson.com/2012/01/20/behind-the-scenes-at-abc-radio-national-cocreativefeaturemaking/#comment-248>

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 work in small groups to produce radio for different distribution platforms.

You will produce:

- live radio, the medium's most visceral form, though the program Room With A View with our project partner 3RRR.
- content for online distribution across multiple platforms
- 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 OF THE STUDIO

Collaborate effectively in the production of radio content across multiple platforms

Experience live to radio production

Create ancillary online content to extend the narrative

#### STUDIO LEADER

Bruce is a Melbourne based media producer and academic. Prior to working at RMIT University, Bruce was Senior Producer at 3RRR fm where he worked in programming and program development. He is a former director of Melbourne Fringe Festival, 3RRRfm and the Ranters Theatre. Recent publications include articles on Digital Media for the Australian Film Commission, The Radio Journal, Communications Law Centre, Media Information Australia and the Key Centre for Media and Cultural Policy. He is an organiser of The Radio Conference, an international biennial gathering of radio academics and practitioners. He is on the editorial board of 3CMedia and the Journal of Radio and Audio Media. His current research interests focus on collaborative networked media production.

# SACRED PLACE

Exploring creative media practice, from the secluded to the social.



Image Left - Clare Rae, Climbing walls and other actions, 2009 Right - National Gallery of Victoria

## STUDIO PROMPT

How can media explore the notion of sacredness in connection to place?

## QUOTE

“To have a sacred place is an absolute necessity for anybody today. You must have a room or a certain hour of the day or so, where you do not know who your friends are, you don’t know what you owe anybody or what they owe you. This is a place where you can simply experience and bring forth what you are and what you might be... This is the place of creative incubation. At first, you may find nothing happens there. But, if you have a sacred place and use it, take advantage of it, something will happen.” – Joseph Campbell

## DESCRIPTION

We cherish our solitude, personal spaces and secret places as they allow us to retract from the public realm. From here we consider what is unique to our identity and perspective of the world. The notion of 'sacredness' that begins within these deeply personal realms extends out into the world to define places for which communities gather and have gathered. This studio aims to explore the notion of 'sacredness' from the private to the public. Researched through observational practice with media gathered through direct experience this studio's aim is explore the many layers of a place or space, challenging our biases and understanding the deeper meaning from what may possibly be seen as mundane.

This studio begins with each student's own perspective of their sacred place. Extending from this, this studio will explore the notion of sacred places in the public realm. Through explorative media investigations, this studio will challenge students to look closer and further than the 'surface'.

## AIMS OF THE STUDIO

To observe closely and capture unique perspectives.

To experiment with media types and process. Sound, video, photography, text etc.

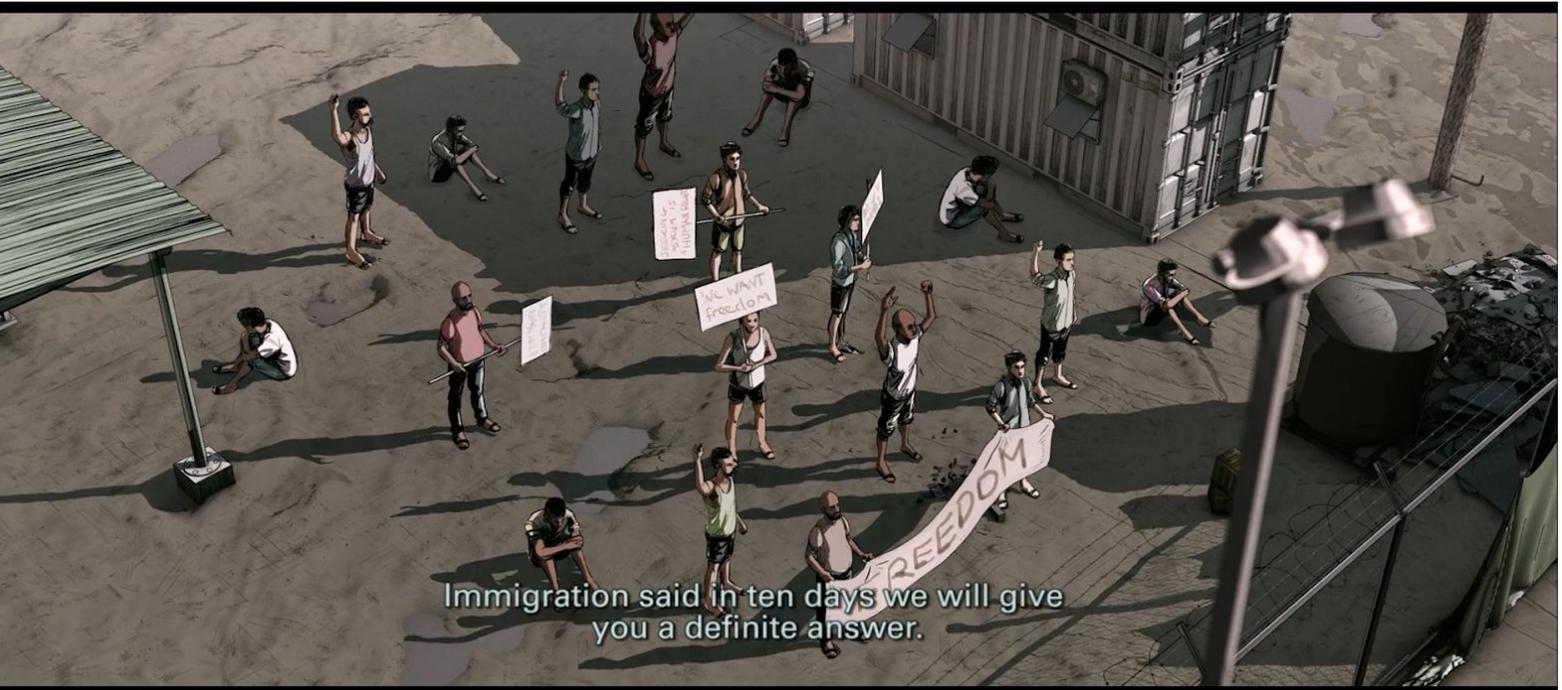
To develop media artefacts both that are experienced through exhibition both informal (Group dynamic engagements) and formal (Exhibition)

## STUDIO LEADER

Robbie Rowlands is a multi media artist working across sculpture, sound and video. Through his practice he utilises retired objects and structures to create site-specific artworks that define and redefine history exposing tensions and fragility. He has taught in both the RMIT fine arts department and Media and Communication and is currently undertaking Masters in the school of art.

# THE ART OF PERSUASION

Poetics & politics in documentary



Lukas Schrank, *Nowhere Line: Voices from Manus Island*, 2016,  
<https://vimeo.com/152158702>

## STUDIO PROMPT

How do we make short documentaries that are political and poetic, and which explore the overlap of radical content and radical form?

## QUOTE

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

“Persuasion, far from being opposed to aesthetics, depends on expressivity for its instantiation... aesthetic innovation can induce heightened audience response.” Michael Renov, 2011, pp.23–24

Grierson’s early description of documentary as “the creative treatment of actuality” was always contradictory. Certainly, in recent decades many documentary theorists have subjected it to sustained critique – particularly in regard to the question of ‘actuality’. Unfortunately, when it comes to expressly political documentaries, the more significant problem tends to be the issue of “creative treatment”. In short, the category is today marked by a lack of formal experimentation, and a privileging of talking heads and b-roll sequences. This reflects 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.”

Bill Nichols, 2001, p.103

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

#### References:

Michael Renov, ‘Teaching documentary: toward a goal-centered pedagogy of the documentary film’, *Significação: Journal of Audiovisual Culture*, v. 38, n. 35, p. 9-30, June 2011

Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2001

#### AIMS OF THE STUDIO

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

#### STUDIO LEADER

Liam Ward is a lecturer, a film-maker, and an activist. His recently completed PhD involved the production of a semi-fictional, part-autobiographical, opinionated, but historically accurate archival documentary, about Chinese furniture-makers in Melbourne at the turn of the 20th century. He is neither a Chinese furniture-maker nor 120-something years old. That apparently contradictory synopsis gives a good indication of Liam’s curiosity and research interests, and the sorts of documentary ideas you might play with in this studio.

# THEY FILM PEOPLE, DON'T THEY?

## Ethics and the Documentary Interview



Screen Capture *ALL THE WAY THROUGH EVENING* (dir. Rohan Spong, 2012)

### STUDIO PROMPT

What types of ethical issues arise when we turn the camera on documentary participants, and, from a production standpoint, what creative and technical challenges arise whilst filming and editing interviews?

### QUOTE

“At the heart of documentary production is the relationship between filmmaker and subjects--not often an equal balance of power. And for the most part, it is the filmmaker who determines how that will be managed.”

- Wanda Bershen, *Documentary Magazine* Fall Issue, 2010.

## DESCRIPTION

From the outset of filming any non-fiction work, media practitioners are presented with a series of ethical and creative challenges. Debates around issues such as informed consent, fair usage of materials and the ethical code of documentarians, have swirled around the genre in both mainstream media reporting and scholarly research. In *They Film People, Don't They?* students will be engaged in a variety of studio activities (including screenings, discussion, practical exercises, reflective tasks and media production) which explore the ethical minefields of recording real people and communicating their lives.

The first half of the semester finds students researching and reflecting on various ethical practices utilised in documentary production. Students will consider the ethos of practitioners such as Errol Morris, Werner Herzog and Molly Dineen in a series of in class exercises, before generating a folio of filmed interviews and accompanying reflections. In preparing for these interviews, students will be encouraged to evaluate and improve their media production skills.

The second half of the semester finds students working in small groups to produce, film and edit a major work of 5 minutes duration. Whilst the studio content and class exercises will focus on non fiction video production, there is scope within the unit to create a radio/audio documentary.

Students are encouraged to bring a laptop to all classes with video editing software they feel comfortable using. Closed ear headphones are also recommended for the second half of semester.

## AIMS OF THE STUDIO

To hone media production skills relevant to non fiction storytelling, such as recording interviews and observational filming.

To engage with the various ethical considerations pertaining to documentary filmmaking.

To develop a reflective practice that responds to your own and other's work.

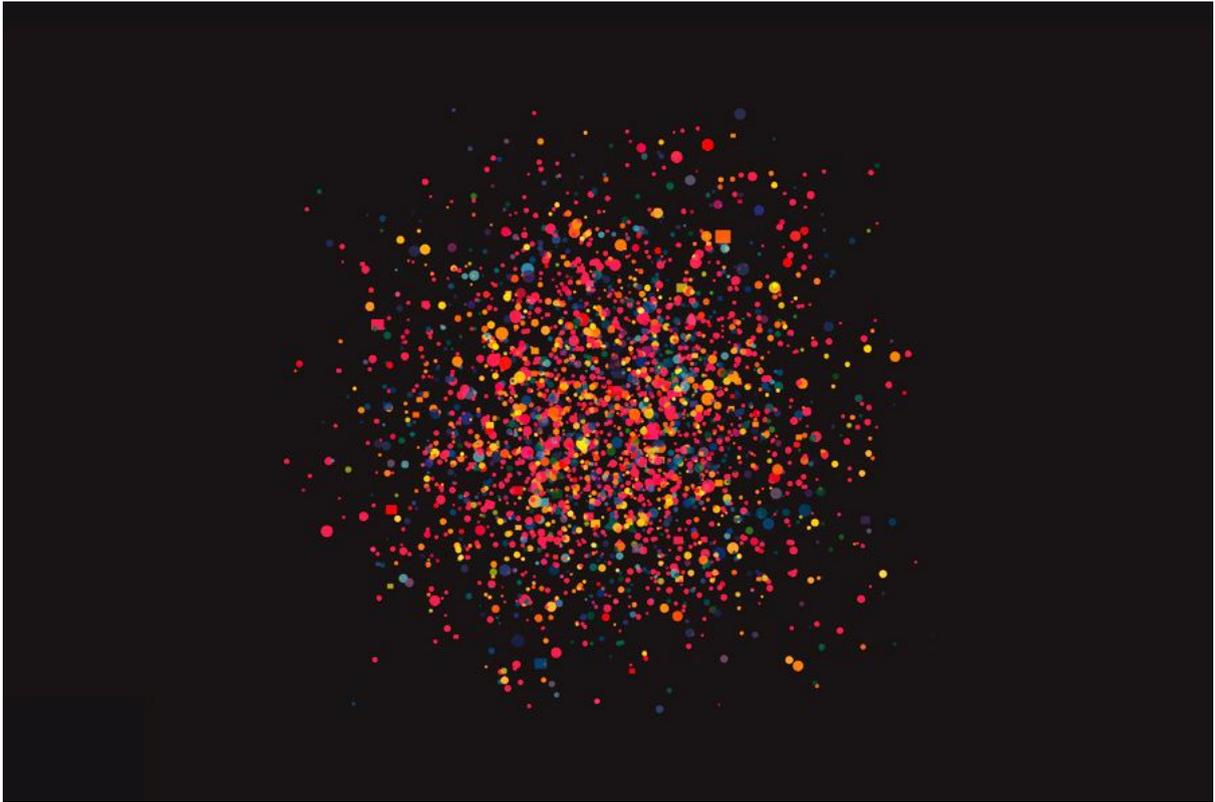
## STUDIO LEADER

Rohan Spong has worked as a sessional academic at RMIT for over seven years across a range of diverse classes including music video production, broadcast media, and documentary studies. When not feverishly drawing diagrams on the campus' whiteboards, Rohan has shot and directed three feature length documentary films: *Winter at Westbeth* (2016) and *All The Way Through Evening* (2012) and *T is for Teacher* (2009). His film work has screened theatrically in cinemas in Australia, New Zealand and the USA, been broadcast on ABC and STUDIO, and appeared at MIFF, Sydney Film Festival, DOC NYC and at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. *All The Way Through Evening* has also just been programmed at ACMI as part of their curated matinee series during November and December.

# THINKING IN FRAGMENTS

Screen production for online spaces

## Key Image



Jonathan Harris & Sep Kamvar, We Feel Fine, <http://number27.org/wefeelfine>

## STUDIO PROMPT

How is the thinking around and making of screen media changed by online spaces?

## QUOTE

“Perhaps mainstream audiences are finally ready to adventure beyond the familiarity of linear stories”

- Sarah Burke, Is Steven Soderbergh's New App the Future of TV?, 2017

## DESCRIPTION

A cinema screen requires us to order footage one shot after another, in a linear sequence, with a beginning, middle and end. In the edit suite we snip, join and manipulate our footage, providing a single pathway for audiences to navigate our work. In November this year Soderbergh and HBO are releasing an interactive crime narrative app called Mosaics. In WIRED, Sarah Burke proposes Mosaics as an “early iteration of a form about to take off,” as audiences, studios and networks have a “newfound interest in different, and especially interactive, forms of storytelling.” The online space opens opportunities for interactive, immersive, evolving, participatory and interactive projects to be made. How can we think about and make screen media for online spaces?

In this studio we will focus on how the online space offers new ways of thinking about screen media. Through the making of several projects, you will work individually and collaboratively to create and recreate a fiction or nonfiction idea in a variety of online forms. These forms will span from linear works seen on YouTube and Vimeo to more interactive and participatory forms using social media and Korsakow. By researching, designing and making online screen media, you will ask what are the production skills needed to make work for this space? And what does making screen media in this way offer you as a media practitioner? In this studio you will develop unfamiliar ways of making media beyond the linear approaches you are used to.

## AIMS OF THE STUDIO

- To investigate how the online space offers new modes of making screen media
- To make screen media for the online space
- To explore nonlinear ways of making media

## STUDIO LEADER

Hannah Brasier is in the final stages of completing a project-led PhD in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University. She is interested in how listening to notice the unseen sees the world as fragmented and relational. Hannah makes online interactive nonfiction which is about noticing everyday rhythms of the surrounding world. Hannah’s body of films can be found at [hannahbrasier.com/creative](http://hannahbrasier.com/creative).

Hannah co-runs Docuverse, an ongoing bimonthly forum for expanded documentary projects, is part of the non/fictionLab and has presented her work nationally and internationally at screen production and documentary conferences.

# USES OF PHOTOGRAPHY V2.0

Rethinking visual literacies through photographic practice



Brian Morris, 2017

## STUDIO PROMPT

How do practical and conceptual 'uses of photography' matter to us as contemporary media practitioners?

## QUOTE

'A knowledge of photography is just as important as that of the alphabet. The illiterate of the future will be ignorant of the use of the camera and pen alike.'

-László Moholy-Nagy. 'From Pigment to Light', *Telebar* Vol.1-2, 1923

## DESCRIPTION

What is a photograph now? What are some of the diverse uses to which photographs are put by both professional and non-professional image-makers in our visually-saturated cultures? How might reflexive literacies around the still image be useful for your media practice regardless of whether you aspire to be a film and television maker, social media producer, cultural critic or radio practitioner?

This studio explores these questions through repeated cycles of making, looking at, reading, thinking and talking about a range of different kinds of photography that might include portraiture, street photography, social media forms, production stills, photo books, studio-based, ethnography/documentary, expanded photography and fine art. 'Photography'

here is used as a descriptor for diverse technologies and practices based around communicating with light. It's a prism for interrogating the role of visual culture in our lives. It is also a practice that *changes* things in the world: be it perceptions, attitudes, social relations or everyday activities.

Moholy-Nagy's observation about the importance of photographic literacy still holds water 80 years after it was made - but it needs re-examining in the radically different context of digital and distributed online media. Today, influential pre-digital ideas about how we 'read' and culturally incorporate photography in our lives jostle alongside newer theories that have emerged in the internet era. Contemporary photography needs to take account of fundamental changes in technologies, practices and contexts that have destabilized the very idea of 'the photograph' and photography as a practice. That uncertainty figures as a lament for some and a creative opportunity for others.

So what professional, popular and academic literacies inform your uses of photography and how might these be expanded in order to enhance your broader media practice?

[Note - the studio is flexible in terms of what cameras and software can be used]

#### AIMS OF THE STUDIO

To improve and develop your production and post-production photography skills

To expand your literacy around photography as a practice and form that has been reshaped in the digital era

To investigate the usefulness of photography in enhancing your own visual media practice

#### STUDIO LEADER

Brian Morris has taught and researched media at a University-level for almost twenty-five years. He has stayed in the job because he still enjoys the challenge of trying to find out *why* things in the world are; going through the demanding process of making media that communicates complex ideas and emotions well; and working alongside students.