



Video 1 of 14, Video Journalism Workshop Transcript

INTRODUCTION

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Hi, and welcome to our Video Journalism Workshop and thank you for joining us here. This will be a very interactive event and you'll watch how we go through the whole process of video journalism, video backpack journalism, backpack video journalism. You'll see some of the participants on our class -- we normally have these events here in our home and we hope you enjoy your time with us.

Like all of these workshops, this workshop is divided into three components which are representative of the craft itself, the methodology that we employ toward our finished product -- it's pre-production, production and post-production.

The first is the planning sessions, story ideas, writing proposals, coming up with the controlling idea and the title for our pieces.

The second part is the production component when we actually take our gear out into the field and start to produce and generate the media that we are going to use to reconstruct when we get back into the workshop here.

The third component is the post-production when we return to this space and we rebuild the pieces that we shot in the field.

Once again, thanks for joining us, welcome to our home and put on your seatbelts and get ready for the ride.

Student Introduction

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): We have a wonderful group of professionals here, who you know, some of you have more experience than others, but one of the things that is really important is that there be a cross-pollination of skills. You're going to learn from each other almost as much as I hope you learn from me. So I want you to be in touch with each other and know who we are. So, let's go, let's do this--let's have a round of introduction, please.

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Kalpna, can you tell us something about yourself, what you want to do here, what you want to achieve here, please?

Kalpna: Yeah, my name is Kalpna. As far as I know, I'm a beginner, I think, in this group. I started doing documentary films and got interested with stories related to people in conflict in regions and so I thought, you know, this is my second career; I have some business background, in accounting. But I'm really interested in telling stories with the camera about people in conflict and how they deal with it, so I'm here to learn from everybody and from Bill, of course.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Okay. Chad, go ahead please.

Chad: I'm here to learn more about shooting and editing; we do political consulting, we make TV ads but we rely heavily on producers to help us do that. So you know, we have a cameraman, we have editors and people that help us but I would like to learn some of these basic tools, myself.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Okay.

Chad: The basics of shooting and the basics of editing, post-production.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Okay, you already do this; you already make ads for political campaigns, right?

Chad: Yeah, but usually on 30-second format.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Right. All right, fine. Leonard, tell us about yourself, please.

Leonard: So, I'm here on behalf of my job, looking to sort of deal deeper into journalism side of video. I come from film school and narrative-driven-thing, you know, scripted, narratives.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Okay.

Leonard: I'm trying to pull over some of the conventions from my job; they actually have a live-to-tape broadcast facility that's very news-format in it, so we're trying to strengthen our package pieces and--



Evan: Do you work for government agencies?

Leonard: Yeah, sure. I work for the TSA in their multi-media studio.

Evan: Okay.

Leonard: We do primarily employee communications; however, we also do some external facing messages, some of the higher end stuff that gets absorbed by the public, for instance, CNN Network and you know, the AirPort networks, so. Video for the government is the long and short of it.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): You know it's extraordinary how many people, how many organizations in both government and non-government, have caught on to this idea that we got to use video to get our points across, you know. And everybody -- and there are 7,000 non-profits and NGOs in the Washington area and all of them have websites and most of them want video and most of them do not know how to generate it, you know, or they don't have the muscle, they don't have the money or they don't have the wherewithall, they don't have the imagination to do a proper video, it's extraordinary. Okay, great. Steinar?

Steinar: I came all the way from Norway, just to come here and looking really forward to that. I mainly work as a TV reporter with a cameraman so I don't usually do video story myself. And I do know a little bit of that for TV-2, which is a main commercial TV channel in Norway and I'm working in the news section.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Okay. Ivan?

Ivan: My name is Ivan Mejia and I live in Los Angeles, California. I met Bill, you know, a long time ago in El Salvador. Well, the thing is that I'm working for EFE News Agency, which is the equivalent of the Associated Press in Spanish from Spain.

In 2008, I was told that, you know, many newspapers require some videos for some stories; at that moment, you know, I just -- I was used to write and take pictures and that's all. So, I have to learn to shoot video and all that. But since the news agency, you know, is a process in which everybody does a little part so I just do the shooting, you know, I do the cutting with the quote and that way, dispatched in both dialogues, somebody else does the narration and they are the experts, you know,



with this software for editing and all that. But I would like, I would like to learn to do the whole process.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Is that what I think is moving towards video journalism, kind of the one-man van model?

Ivan: Yeah, exactly.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Okay, like so many other organizations. I mean it's extraordinary how many of these news gathering organizations want to send one person out there as opposed to four people or even two people because it's cost-effective.

Okay, Anne?

Anne: So, I started my career with a fellowship with the ABC News in London and I wind up staying there 10 years so I was fortunate to work back in the old days when there were professional camera people, sound engineers, editors who specialized in each of those skills, so...

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): You were a correspondent?

Anne: I was a producer.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Okay.

Anne: You know, my challenge is getting past the old model and, you know, the great respect I have for the professionals that I've worked with and trying to get myself up to a standard that I can live with.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Okay, Rhett?

Rhett: My background is in imagery processing interpretation; I have taken a short course at USC Film School that was tied up about—I mean like two weeks or something. I've been interested for a long time but I haven't really shot that much video. I shot a lot of still photography, I do figurative work--

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Were you doing stories before—doing video stories?



Rhett: Trying and that's why I'm here; I've been trying to shoot protests and things like that, for move on. And I've noticed, "Gee, I've shot a lot of protest stuff and interviewed some people," and I cut it together; it's like, "Eee!" you know. I'm not sure I would watch this.

[LAUGHTER.]

Rhett: I want to get better in telling a story.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): You want to build your story, terrific. Karen?

Karen: I work at a community college, we have three campuses. And I am in mainly PR part of it.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Okay.

Karen: I brought in a videographer and I want to be able to talk with her and tell her what we're doing. I took a real short course [inaudible] at Arizona State over the summer -- it was a three-weekend-type of thing, gotten bit by the bug and I'm ready to go.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): That's fantastic.

Bruce, why don't we take this opportunity to get you up here? Bruce is a critical part of this whole workshop for a couple of reasons. Bruce, actually, was a participant in the very first of these workshops that I did in December of 2008, and we've been working together ever since.

His component is he tells people how to get their work out into, on to the internet and how to garner a community, how to grow communities, how to you know, really get your message out there. It's important that he have a sense of what you guys want to do so that he can help you get to where you want to go.

Bruce Jones: I'll just introduce myself quickly just so you have a sense. I'm Bruce Jones and I live just south of Boston and I own a graphic design business, Bruce Jones Designs; so that's what I do -- a big chunk of my time. I also produce stuff online that runs around the world that I sell online. You'll hear me talk about it on and off, I have a line of maps. I sell them for business presentations. I have authored, I have 19 books on Amazon, ranging from geography books to music books -- we can talk about that.

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Bill Gentile



I'm going to take you to the part of using the Web to distribute your products and how to get your stuff out. I've been selling online since 1996 so I've been doing it pretty successfully for a long time. I'm also an independent video producer and I work heavily with public access television--a huge supporter of public access and it's a great way to gain experience and get out in the field.

I'm in that limited time in Norwood, we have a public access to stations in New England; we produce over 250 shows a year, and I'll do everything from heart shows to public access zoning boards, town meetings, you know.

Leonard: Where is that?

Bruce Jones: Just south of Boston on 128. So what I am going to do here is helping Bill and I'm filming but on Saturday, I'll give a presentation on, "What Do You Do with Your Video, After You Have Finished Your Video?"

And I am sort of listening today, I got to figure out how to tailor how you want me to push this so I can talk about even building a presence online, how to use statistics of Google, YouTube, blogs to figure out what people are looking at; how to publish your material. So, I publish my books -- all my books are published through Amazon using "Print-on-Demand" so I don't pay anything for it. I just load stuff up, you can do with print, video or audio so it's a pretty broad world.

If you have interest in things you want to know, let me know so I can kind of tailor that presentation. It's also my intent to go live, we'll do a live global broadcast on Saturday from here to show you how easy it is to do it, how you can take your message and spread it anywhere and you can do it instantaneously, you know, because we're live, so I can kind of walk you through that. Make sure you let me know what you want to do and I'll kind of tailor myself with what the group's interests are.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Any questions about where we are right now? Let's proceed then, okay.

This workshop is you'll see, as it unfolds, as you'll see, in "The Field Manual" – which you all should have a copy of, now. It's broken down into three components just like the real world of documentary production or

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video production. It's broken down into its pre-production, which we are in now.

Production begins when you actually pick up your gear and head off to the field and start to, you know, document whatever your subject matter is. And post-production of course, is when we get back in here, you open up your computers and start to edit the work that you've done in the field.

By Sunday evening, our objective here is that you guys have pieces, three to five-minute-pieces that you post online, okay. We'll show them here Sunday night, after you're finished editing them, after you're finished narrating them, after you're finished writing the scripts and so forth. We're going to take you through the entire filmmaking process, the entire documentary-making process, okay.

But the objective here and it's a long way from here until Sunday evening, is you guys will have your own three to five-minute pieces done exclusively by yourselves, all right?

The program is pretty much this -- you'll shoot today and Friday from around noon until around 5:00 PM, you know. We'll go through these discussion periods, presentation periods in the morning; you'll go out and do your production in the afternoon, so you'll do that today and on Friday.

On Saturday, if you absolutely have to go out and shoot again, okay. But you know, I'd like to preserve Saturday and Sunday for the post-production period which is, you'll be writing your scripts, you'll be writing your treatment, you'll be narrating your pieces and you'll sit down to edit the piece. And that process, it sounds like it's a fairly quick shot, it's not.

You know, after I come back from the field and after I write up all--transcribe all my interviews, and all those kinds of stuff that I've shot in real time. And after I write the scripts, I budget in an entire eight-hour day for every minute of finished video; that's a long time. One eight-hour day for every minute of finished video; so if you have a three-minute-piece, you're going to need, you're going to have, you're going to need about three days to just edit that piece, okay. So, it's very, very time-consuming; post-production is a black hole in terms of time.

If you have to go out and shoot on Saturday, we can make that happen. I prefer that you didn't though, because we have so much to do in the post-



production stage and we'll finish doing all the rest of the stuff on Sunday, okay.

"Defining Backpack Video Journalism"

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): You know I have to tell you, I really believe in this methodology. I mean, I worked for the first company in the country, this company, Video News International based in Philadelphia. It was the first company in the country to understand that this, you know, that this technological revolution could take us where it is today.

I mean, when I was working in Central America, for example, in the 1980s, and you can ask Ivan about this because we worked together covering a couple of locations. You know, the cameraman had, you know, \$40,000, \$50,000 Betacams at that time. The sound was hooked together, hooked up with the soundman who carried a separate sound apparatus. So the cameraman and the sound person were hooked together physically by a wire, right. And the cameraman was the technician because the cameras were so complex and the soundman was the technician because, you know, that stuff was so complex as well.

So, the journalists, never actually touched any of this gear -- so there was this big separation between the journalism and the technology used to produce the final product. Now, and this is what my former employer understood and in the '90s, years ago, they understood this technology was going to change everything.

Now, guys like me who are not very technically savvy, to be honest with you -- I was a still photographer at that time and a writer, and a radio correspondent, but you know, I didn't understand the technology that these guys were carrying around.

Now, even I can take these things, you know, get a decent digital camera, you know, acquire perfectly good sound with one of those directional mics and a wireless mike and I can go anywhere in the world with the stuff in my backpack and come home with material that I can shape into a documentary that is broadcast quality anywhere on the planet. This has never happened before, okay.

I just want to read to you something here; a couple of years ago, the Harvard Club asked me to come to New York and to deliver an address

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Bill Gentile



on, this methodology, video journalism or backpack journalism, and this is part of what I said to them and I have to tell you that I really with all my heart, believe in what I said then and I believe in what I'm telling you now and this is part of what I said, this was in 2009, three years ago.

"We are right now, at an extraordinary juncture in the history of mankind, technology and communication. Even more important than the Gutenberg Press, the advances in digital cameras and the internet provide us unprecedented opportunity. Ordinary citizens of the world now wield extraordinary power; we wield the power to communicate instantly, globally and in a language, the visual language which supersedes both the written and spoken word.

"This visual language knows no frontiers, it needs no translation; it is contingent on no corporate support, it is one of the most powerful tools of our time. And backpack video journalism is the embodiment of this visual language. Unfortunately, this model, too often is used merely to reduce the cost of news gathering, as opposed to delivering a more effective brand of journalism. The real promise of this model is that it represents a viable alternative for gathering and disseminating information critical to our democratic system. No matter what the new media landscape looks like after the current upheaval, backpack video journalism will be an important part of it."

You know, I said this three years ago; I really believe it today. That's what we are today and I think, I think you all have an understanding that this is the case, that's why you're here, I think. Because you understand that now we can do this stuff, things that we couldn't do recently, just a few years ago, okay.

Two years ago, at American University, I founded the Backpack Journalism Project and it's all about what we're learning here; and I have backpack journalism classes and I teach the craft at over, you know, 15-week semesters.

When we founded the project, we had a guy come in, Tom Kennedy, who for years, was one of the photo editors of National Geographic. So, many of us started off in still photography, some of you here did because in still photography you really learn about composition, you will learn how light works. And light--is really the primary raw material that all of us use to

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Bill Gentile



practice our craft. It's light, and how light plays on form, and the absence of light, shadow -- this is our raw material.

If we were painters, our raw material would be paint but we're not; we're communicators, we're visual communicators, we're backpack journalists, we're video journalists and our primary raw material is light -- that's what we use; that's our paint.

Tom Kennedy came in, we asked him to write a white paper for us and the guy is also a visionary, as well. And this is what he wrote, this is how he defined the craft then:

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

"Using multiple media tools, a backpack journalist creates content that engages the audience's intellect and emotion simultaneously. The fruits of the approach occur because the journalist is being given the tools, the time -- and this is critical -- and the freedom to assume the responsibilities of personal authorship; to craft the story with value to an audience. Personal authorship is rooted in intimate connection with the story's subjects that, in turn, permits extended periods of observation that get to the heart of the story.

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

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): A couple of things that I think, that we would want to remember here about the methodology that we're studying these next four days. You know, from this definition and from Tom's assessment of what backpack video journalism is, the concept of "properly trained" is key. But it's one of the problems, you know, with this new technology. It's a kind of double-edged sword of this technology. Because on one hand, now,

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Bill Gentile



people like us, normal people -- I consider myself pretty normal -- have access to the tools of television production, which is terrific.

I mean, it never happened before; this is the first time in the history of mankind that we can communicate instantly, globally and in a language that everybody can understand -- the visual language. If you know how to speak this language, you can communicate with people in China without speaking Chinese. You can communicate with people in Saudi Arabia without speaking in Arabic. You can communicate with people in Africa without speaking in Swahili because the visual language is universal, it's universal. This has never happened before, I can't overemphasize, you know, this point.

But there's another side to this sword though; on one hand, we have access to these tools now, they're all over the place and the internet, we have floating around this house. But the flipside of that is, precisely that we all have access to the tools for production, so you see a lot of people out there supposedly practicing the craft but who really don't have a clear understanding of what the visual language is all about.

So you see, their methodology is what we call, "Spray and Pray," you know. You put a wide-angle lens on the camera and blast everything in sight, and then go back to the editing room and pray that something came up that you could use and cut together that make sense. We've all seen this stuff. I just watched this thing for, you know, 20 minutes. What the hell is this all about? I don't know. There's no connectivity, there's no dramatic arc, there's no thread, there's no controlling idea, there's no--it's just pieces of visual and audio material that's not connected at all by a common thread. So let's not omit the language, you know. I think the vast majority of the stuff that we see on television and especially on the internet, there's no sign that the practitioners have any proper training at all on how to speak this language so "properly trained" is the key to this whole methodology.

Another key to this methodology is the concept of "character-driven." The pieces that we're going to do -- I keep asking you guys, we've had telephone conversations with everybody in this room about what you're doing. And you know, for me and for many storytellers, the best way to tell an effective story is through the prism of one person's experience. Be it one teacher, you know; one football player, one soldier. Think of Oliver Stone's film, "Platoon," I mean from the experience of the small group of

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Bill Gentile



guys and especially his main character, he told the story very well, I think, of the entire era of struggle in Vietnam by American forces. So, the best stories are always told through the prism of the one person's experience.

And then Bruce, this light back there is reflecting too much, you can kill that main light. I don't think that anybody would really mind it.

Keep in mind the idea surrounding, "intimate and immediate," and we'll discuss shooting techniques and so forth; to make your work more powerful. Close-ups are a big part of that.

"Time-consuming," as I said, especially with the editing process, the post-production phase, this methodology is very, very time-consuming. Time also allows you to really get to the heart of the story by getting to know the characters that you are using to tell the story.

This methodology does not work in all situations, okay, especially when you are doing thematic pieces for which there are no real characters that you have time to spend with. You know, this is not the six o'clock news done by one person. I know that a lot of outlets are moving towards this methodology because they figure, "Why should we send two or three people out now when we can just send one person out?"

But you know what, you can't cover all stories with one person particularly with quickly breaking stories that need different components and different story-tellers engaged in the same process; it's just not the six o'clock news done by one person, it doesn't work.

"Engaging audience intellect and emotion." This is key in the world, we live in, the world of 500 channels and an internet now and if you don't engage somebody, if you don't engage an audience in the first -- studies show, like the first eight seconds, maybe you have 15 seconds -- if you don't do it by then, guess what? They're gone, they're going somewhere else, they're going to another channel, they're going to another website. If you lose them in 15 seconds, they're gone forever, okay.

And Bruce will talk with you about Google analytics; he will be able to tell you how long people are looking at your site and how long they are looking at you know, one piece or another and what you're doing wrong perhaps, in trying to engage an audience. The whole thing here, I think, the key to what we're doing -- one of the keys, is the fact that you people

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want to communicate to a certain community and you do that by telling stories. You do that by telling stories and they're character driven, compelling, visually interesting stories.

The "sense of personal authorship" has always been very, very important to me. One of the reasons why in the early days of my career I kind of shifted away from being a correspondent with UPI, United Press International and toward being a photographer for first, United Press International and then Newsweek Magazine, is because you couldn't change my photographs as opposed to being a print reporter -- you have resident geniuses in New York or Washington who always wanted to, you know, to put their personal brand on your work.

But you know what, with photographs, you can't do that. You either use them or you don't use them but it's hard to change the essence of photographs. Why? You know, I really love this issue on personal authorship and I love the fact that I can control every component of what I do. When I'm working on this methodology and the final touch, and the final brand of personal authorship is the narration. You put your voice on it and you own it, you own it; and I really enjoy that. I really like that.

"Documentary-style narrative journalism," is another identifying characteristic of this methodology. That's where we are, that's what we're doing. This methodology is built upon the shoulders of what I used to do for Newsweek Magazine, not just covering breaking news but they gave me the luxury of going up into the mountains of Central America, running around you know, the back streets of El Salvador for weeks at a time, and I would go out there to look for stories. I would go out there to look for people; I would go out there and look for characters and I had the luxury of time and I had, you know, the luxury of logistics and so forth, to go out there and do documentary-style photojournalism. That's what's this methodology was built upon.

[END]