



Video 10 of 14, Video Journalism Workshop Transcription

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): So, we are halfway there and there is actually still quite a bit away and I wanted like take the opportunity now to thank you guys once again for coming. This is a great group and I love you guys and I really want you to be successful with this thing and learning this craft and walking away with the tools you need to practice in the future.

A quick review, we have covered an awful amount of territory in what seems like more than two days but it's only been two days that we've been together here and we have talked about the craft. We talked about the three stages -- the pre-production, production and post-production. We've discussed definition of backpack video journalism. We discussed the project that I've started in the American University. We saw a Chain Gang. We discussed the progression from clip to story and we went over the alphabet that you are learning now, the part of this new language. We discussed the Six-Shot System which is a very, very useful tool designed to help you guys get the information that you need, the visual and audio information that you need. We went over composition in the manual that I handed out to you. There is a list of shooting tips, before shooting and a list of tips for doing interviews, both formal and informal. You guys had been out to the field a couple of times. We saw "Echoes of War." We discussed how we use characters to address broader issues. Yesterday, we went over this whole idea of character-driven documentary. Once again we discussed dramatic arc and character transformation and we defined a documentary as the creative treatment of reality and we went over the process of formal sit-down interview. From what went over in the first few days, what is resonating with you guys? I want to know what is sticking with you and what you're taking away from these. If you have the list, you know the most important thing? Anne, what is really—what are you taking away from these first few days?

Ann: Thinking about the chart that you drew yesterday where different characters or different opportunities come up as the story builds and then they all resolved in the end by the end.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentiles): Okay, we were discussing about that architectural drawing is behind the screen. You know, the structure is behind here and

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I want you guys to beware of them. I mean, a lot of times our attention is deflected by what we see here and what we are hear coming out in this thing. But the key here is to understand what is really behind here to be able to deconstruct that so that you can with stuff that you regenerate in the field and reconstruct it on your computers and then work here. You got to be able to see that drawing right there.

Ann: And how to figure out, how to make the transitions so that you can do that. You know, so it is not too abrupt. You introduce a lot of different characters and situations but it didn't ever seem abrupt. So, I think trying to figure out how you did that and kind of transitions that you made...

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Yeah.

Ann: ...to change gears in a longer piece.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): And a lot of that, we will discuss this thing, my whole idea of definition of "three-dimensional chess." You guys are familiar with this from watching Star Trek, I think—we are all do. Remember those guys, they had a chess board that was not only this way and this way and but you also have layers on. This is the analogy that I use to explain in this craft. We got the images which are driving forces, one dimension of this and we have the sounds on tape or on the computer chip that you are using in your camera. But we also have a narration that connects those dots. It provides the conceptual links between one component of piece and another component of the piece, one character, and another character, one is seen and the other is unseen. Kalpana? What resonates with you?

Kalpana: I think the realization that every, I mean whenever we are looking at life there all these again, similar to what Ann was saying, that there is multiple journeys and that some are really important and some are not.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Okay.

Kalpana: And then how do you really identify and really hone in on that really important story in that particular context and to be able to filter out all the peripherals and everything else and to identify that and tell that story as this whole journey of that moment.



Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Okay.

Kalpana: And that whole distilling process. Not only capturing it, I mean conceptualizing it but also capturing it in very powerful visuals. I mean you, as David was asking me, what is that one image that really tells that story and that one or two or five images. Not the whole bunch of images those very few images and I think it is as whole thing of how the need to develop the skill to be able to identify that.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): And I think this ties in directly in one of the discussions of yesterday about this controlling idea. Getting the thing up there and say “Okay, what is the controlling idea, my documentary shows, or my documentary explores.” You have to keep going back to that. This is the platform. This is the core of what you are doing here and everything, everything you shoot and all the questions you asked and everything that you do in the process of this documentary support that controlling idea. So, if you keep going back to that; that is your primary thesis, that is the thread that keeps the pearls together, your controlling idea. That is your focus. You got to keep going back to that. Chad? Sorry?

Ann: Sorry. It seems like you also to constantly recalibrate because...

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Absolutely.

Ann: ...we can only make plans so much. And then there are the unplanned, the serendipity and things would happen or don't happen and so recalibrating and stepping back as you've had us do periodically.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): As we saw with this piece of “Echoes of War.” You know, I went down to Nicaragua to do this piece that I thought I was going to do, and guess what? You know, it changed. So, you have to shift gears. But if you are prepared, if you kind of pre-visualized like Ansel Adams used to do when he went out and made this fantastic pictures of the countryside. I mean the guy didn't jump into his jeep and drive around looking for nice pictures. He knew that there was going to be a full moon out or half-moon or quarter moon. He knew that the rivers were going to be high because of the rain or low because of drought. He knew that if the flowers are going to be in bloom or not. He had a really, really firm idea and what he wanted to achieve before he powered on into his car and run

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it on to make pictures. When he got there, invariably something is different, something changed or something is unexpected but if you have a plan, if you have a road map, you can adjust quickly and you don't burn up all of your time, you know trying to catch up to your mistakes or trying to catch up to the unexpected. So, that is the key.

If you have that controlling idea, if you have done your research, you can have a lot more productive time in the field as if you know. Chad?

Chad: You know, I come back to something you said earlier and it keeps sticking with me that less is more like a lot of things in communication but you know the answer usually is not more copy and more quotes and more interview. It is more about being a reductionist and really digging into, you know, what you have and focusing it around that controlling idea.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Yeah.

Chad: And you know at some level, it all boils down to the story.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Yeah.

Chad: And I think that, the hard part in learning these pieces is that is a little bit like a jigsaw puzzle and that you know that it's the audio, the editing, the shooting, the different angles of shooting, and it is a lot to put together.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Yeah.

Chad: But I think that the clearer, you know that you are about the story the easier it is to get there.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Okay, before we moved on. It is really critical that I want this to be a two-way street. We are here, I am here to like you to satisfy you guys of your needs, what you want to learn from this process but you have to articulate that. If you feel that you are not getting something that you want. You know just tell us. For example, Bruce is going to get a presentation today, you know I think he has done a really good job of trying to size up what you guys need from this body knowledge. You know what you guys want from his body of knowledge and same goes to me. If you are not getting something that you think you came here for, tell

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me and like you did. You needed some other capacity here, and we will make that happen. Okay? Karen?

Karen: I think where I have come to the conclusion of that this morning. It's like, I feel like I am driving in car. I am 16 and re-learning. So, I am so wrapped around the mechanics of how to I do this, or how do I do that. I know the landscape, I know whose stories are out there but you got so much to try to absorb and try to make it all matched together but it goes back to again as we discussed for several times that controlling idea. You have done the research, and you have really good sense of where you want it go. You are going to have a couple of cliffs and detours along the way. I am getting what I need here because I am understanding what my staff will be doing much more. I am at much greater appreciation for you know for what they are going to be encountering in the field and how can we get pass that. Okay? "You didn't get it?"—and I am here to do that here even now. "Okay, you know a little bit more video, right? I will go with you. Let us work that through". And so it really isn't just all critiquing that we help each other. That really has very been valuable, being able to balance those things—"Does this make sense? Is this valid? Where I wanted this?"

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Right, this collaborative component of this workshop is really critical because it gives you guys the sense on what an audience is, how they are going to react to what you are doing. You know, if, like Chad, you need to me go out in the field with you again, like I hope to do with you this afternoon if you need it. I will do everything I can do that. Okay? Evan?

Ivan: What I had been learning, you know, is the character-driven, you know story.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Right.

Ivan: Because what I am used to do is news, you know concepts.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Right.

Ivan: In this particular workshop, I am learning to do that you know, because that means that I have to re-orient, you know.



Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): It is a completely different approach isn't it? I mean it is a totally different approach. If you got that, that is wonderful. If you have come away nothing else but that, that is really critical because you know, it is difference between using the visuals as wallpaper behind the correspondent or as filler between talking heads. There is difference between that and doing like "Chain Gang" or "Echoes or War" where you have real people and you tell the stories through characters. Dude, if you learn just that on this workshop, I am happy.

Ivan: Yeah, but you know the Six Shot-System, you know as I told you that it makes sense and even, you know it helps to save time.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Yeah, yeah.

Ivan: Because if you already know what you are going to shoot, you know, so you just look for those shot, you have advanced a lot of work you know.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Yeah, when that systems works, it works wonderfully. Sometimes it just doesn't work and you have to forget about it and move on and just follow action. Anna, you have a hand up?

Ann: I wonder if you could talk a little bit about view point because it seems you know, I have had similar thoughts, you know coming from news that some executives more than others would really drill it in to your head that you had to give all views. You know so, they would always make us rip up our pieces like if we had turn something and like the Chain Gang, where is your [recidivism](#) expert, you know who can explain what the data shows whether or not this is likely the work or not.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Right.

Ann: And that is a completely different thing but you save that the view point of what was happening and this one location and this one sort of slice of life. Some of us, you know, work for the government, and some work, would be doing advocacy films or marketing films or whatever. So, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about view point and how that impacts what stories you tell, what characters you choose, what you include and what you don't include.



Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): I think that documentary is a really peculiar animal and it is different from...so-called “fair and balanced.” You know our intention is not to generate equal time for both sides of the story because to me that is actually misleading. It is unfair and too often you hear you see the stories that get equal time to both this side and that side and at the end of the story, you can tell who is lying or who is not lying, who is telling the truth or something, you know, what are we doing here? We give ourselves the liberty of being informed. We have an obligation to be fair but we don't have an obligation...to dupe the audience. We had an attitude, we had an opinion and we try to be balanced but not untruthful. Does that kind of answer your question?

Ann: Sure.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): I mean our intent is not to give you know equal treatment to both sides of the story. That is not what we do. Leonard?

Leonard: I am out at the visibility, I been an absentee student here. I am envious of basically everybody in the room because it seems like everybody is able find that creative niche that thing that they bring on a story and to your point, a lot of what I do professionally, it is never my story. It is never through the filter of me. It is usually, I'll hack something together and somebody will have hacked that up and then I will take them and reactivate. There is a lot of hacking going on.

So, the idea of finding that controlling idea and staying true to that or at least true to yourself to that idea. It is really exciting and when we saw that short, the footage of the gentleman who is at the soup kitchen...

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Oh my God.

Leonard: I was like, I am watching that and reflecting on my piece which is very clearly like a government piece. It is like, let us promote a program and I am watching that and I realized one thing. I am not a journalist because I don't in real-life I find it pressing, I like telling stories but I want to make them up and but you've watched that and you just completely captivated and there is a story that is worth telling and worth watching and it's exciting.



Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): I tell you what? You wait until you see the stuff that he did. I'm not sure if he saw the later stuff when he went to this hospital. And these people? You know, the women is opening up this little bar so they keep you know things from the child and says, "You can't watch it." It is hard to watch. It is unbelievable.

Leonard: I don't know if you knew...

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): And you have a five-month old daughter?

Leonard: Yeah.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): You can relate to this, I mean it's really, it's really powerful.

Leonard: Yeah, I don't if he knew going into it, if that was the scenario that his daughter just passed away.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): I don't think, I don't think he did.

Leonard: That is being in the middle of it, that you just find yourself in.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): But I tell you, this contact with life. This contact with the stories is to me it is so compelling. I mean, this is why I keep doing this stuff. I mean, you know, I started stuff about 35 years ago when I was a still photographer. When I looked through the view-finder of my camera, I see beauty evolving or something very powerful. I get goose bumps and today, 35 years later when I looked through my view finder and see something of beauty or power developing, I get goose bumps. I love this stuff and it is the contact, the human contact that keeps me at least getting up at 5:30 in the morning and going back to the craft. It is great. It is great.

Leonard: But, yeah, this is the workshop on as a whole creatively is very exciting.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): All right, you know, I love the mix that we have here. Because we have people who worked for the institutions like you do, people who run freelance and then create their own presence on the internet. People who have institutional support already but want to create



a parallel presence and a line of producing and so forth and so it is a great blend of folks.

By the way, you came in late, I am not sure if you met Sarah Gulick. She is a masters student in American University and extraordinarily talented and wonderful filmmaker and she is going to be with us.

Sarah: And I worked for the government.

Leonard: What agency?

Sarah: I worked at the Park Service.

Leonard: How nice.

Sarah: ...which is a great agency to work for.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): You are going to show all of us not just Leonard that last piece that you just had. She is in my class right now, my backpack documentary class at American University and you did a wonderful piece about the trail. So we will show it while you are here. Okay?

Rhett: Well, I got a lot of it. I mean, you know I have zero background in kind of writing, you know short stories and something like that.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Right.

Rhett: And literature. So, I think, kind of even thinking in a form a story arc is new to me so, and I think it is something missing from pieces that I've shot so that's when it went powerful.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Good.

Rhett: The other way of shooting, the six-shot thing, I think that's great and but even concept of a motion camera as a still camera.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): Good.

Rhett: It is like go pose like what goes in a still camera.

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Rhett: I get that you know, I have done that a lot, how things walked in and walked out on a frame, but don't be constantly moving the camera. So, that's all great and then actually your colleague there, I like his idea about constantly keeping the audio running because I think it is fine occasionally missed a shot but if you got audio, you probably got something, you know, you've got all the shots that you can have anyway.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): You know, audio is really, it is a heartbeat of these pieces that we do. You know?

Rhett: You got gun shots occasionally or whatever. [Laughs]

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): That is right. If you go to page 78 on your video journalism manual, you will see a script for piece that I did for "Now on PBS". This is a couple of years ago and I think it is instructed to look at this, how this thing has built which can be a very, very effective tool for you as you go about writing the script and the treatment and building your own video piece for yourself.

You know, I talked before about this whole idea of three-dimensional chess. You know, the images being the most important, the most powerful dimension, the natural sound that you have on the tape be it interviews, formal or informal interviews and ambient sound being second the dimension. The third dimension being the narration that you write that provides the conceptual links between those bits of visual and audio information. Okay? And the way it is built is very much like you see right here.

[Showing powerpoint display]

On the left hand side, you've got what we see here in your script and on the right hand side, we have what you hear. "SOT" means sound on tape. "You have four and half minutes, I'm looking for air on Target. One...so and so forth." This is what one of the characters in the film is saying this "V.O" here which is in all capitals, these are pretty standard form that you can hand this script to just about any professional editor who works the craft and here she will be able to follow this thing again. It is kind of like a paint by numbers drawing. You know, all the number 6's are blue, all the number 4's are white, all the 7's are green whenever. Here, she can fill in those dots and at least get the basics of what you want down here. The

10

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best editors will take the raw information that you provide him or here and they'll turn to magic. There will do wonderful things with the stuff and suggests you, "you know this doesn't work here," "The shot doesn't work here." "This blacken information doesn't work there, I don't understand the narration here," he or she will suggests or make changes that will better your raw material. Not very good editors will take brilliant material and they'll turn them into slush, okay? But either way, what you want to do? You want to hand someone a coherent version, that roadmap of where you want to go and that is called your script.

Your treatment is very, very different. This is the part, that we talked about this document progression, this written progression from proposal which is a very, very visual statement of intent, what you intend to do like I showed you yesterday with the Nicaragua piece. The script is a very, very detailed version of what you planned to do with what you've already generated in the field and treatment is something that you hand the executive producer. It doesn't have the structure. The treatment is much like the proposal. It is a very, very visual treatment of what you have. Okay? I come back from the field, I write a treatment. The executive producer looks at it and says, "You know what? I really don't really like this, I don't understand this." The executive producer does not want to see this because he or she doesn't care which tape or which batch the information comes from. He or she doesn't care about this structure. He or she cares about what he or she is going to see or hear in the piece. The beauty of this thing that I am handling you now I think is that you can actually go here.

(VIDEO FEED STARTS)

Male: What is going on in Afghanistan is pretty ugly. Taliban forces had made a broad comeback and casualties are way up for the U.S and its allies. The challenge is that.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): And you can see the correlation.

(Crosstalk)

Narrator: ...along the Afghan-Pakistan territory control but..

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Army Officer: I am going to make this a trap. I am going to put quarter pound air bursts over the truck.

Narrator: The 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit has come to a tough neighborhood. Territory controlled by the Taliban near the border with Pakistan.

Army Officer: Thought you already run first and second pass in the war zone.

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): So you can watch this thing online and you can go this and see how this works with the script. “The 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit has come to a tough neighborhood, territory controlled by Taliban near the border with Pakistan.” This what I am saying, this is my voice over, this is what we are seeing over here.

What I do is, when I come back from the field with my raw material. I transcribed everything. Every interview that I did, all of the stuff that have said, all the interviews that I have done and I started to build this. It is like kind of a three-component operation. I am looking at the raw material. I’ve got final Cut Pro open or whatever the editing program is. I start to lay stuff over the timeline. I know this is going to be the first scene because it is critical. It is pretty much chronological the way I did this piece. I put this stuff somewhere at the beginning. I kind of know what the last thing is going to be. I throw it at the end just the pieces of the clips of information and in between there as I go through the stuff and transcribe things and then I look at the stuff and the material. I put things in the approximate location where I think they are going to be. At the same time, I’ve got this document open and I am writing the script as well. And I am actually writing the treatment, and the treatment, there is copy of that in your manuals as well.

There is a piece that is actually a page or two of a treatment that I wrote for another piece from Afghanistan, I think. So, you know everybody has his/her own system. Everybody develops their own way of doing things. This is the way I do it. I looked through the raw material, I start documenting what I have. I still like think, “I know,” this is going to be for example with Nicole, we watched the nurses piece. I know that this is going to be the opening scene of the piece so that I put that on the timeline and right that into the piece. I urged you. I can’t tell you, I can’t

12

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emphasize how the important the script is because nothing can take the place of this written document that you can go through here and looked at what these people are saying. This original paragraph when these marines were talking to field is much longer than this. What I did was, I went through with the thing and I had it transcribed, you know. I looked at this and said “Well, I don’t need this sentence here; that is redundant. This one doesn’t make sense. This is a partial sentence.” I take off the things that I don’t need and I use only the voice or rather their voices that I think are most impactful.

With my own narration, I can go on page two and say, “Wait a minute? I say this later on page six.” “Why am I saying these two times?” So I take one out. Okay? Nothing takes the place of a written script, so I would urge you to start building this document as you build the visual piece that you are working on now.

Are there any questions about these? This is where, this production is where you take the hard work that you’ve done in the field, the media that you’ve generated and start to build that into something that you see as the final product. Again, we go back to the creative treatment of reality. Yes?

Bruce Jones: Do you put it up on the wall like maybe you have 20 pages of material that you have done to use so that you can get the big picture and put it up all on board or something?

Speaker (Prof. Bill Gentile): We have graphs that we’ve built and we put stickies up on the wall and we do all of these different things to say “Okay, this is coming first,” and we are going to have this person’s dramatic arc just like we did the piece from Burundi, Studio Ijambo, you know where Alexi comes up and then the two girls come up and Bryan Rich actually goes out in the scene.

Everybody has their own system, sometime we use stickies. Sometimes, we use big charts like this. Okay? It is up to you. You develop your own system but again, I really, really encourage you to start building this now, while you are building visual pieces? Any questions before I let you go? Because what is going to happen now is I really want you to focus on putting these pieces together, writing out this scripts and by seven o’clock tonight, I would like to start taping the narration, by seven o’clock, which is just short of six hours from now.

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[End]