

## The Emerging Filmmaking Methodologies in Virtual Space

### *Sanal Alemde Yeni Oluşmakta Olan Film Yapımı Yöntemleri*

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**Abstract:** With the pervasiveness of the Internet pulsing through our everyday lives; one has to wonder what the word ‘privacy’ entails. As filmmakers, what benefits or repercussions do we face with so much free access to ‘private’ information out on the web for the world to see? And how can we justify a ‘truth’ when there is no governing body to say so? While trying to find answers to these questions, I narrate my experiences as a filmmaker who makes use of participatory filmmaking methods through what might be called a case study. I articulate that the reality of the new entrepreneurial filmmaker is not only making just a film project, but rather building a community of like-minded people who support a film project by participating in its production and delivery.

**Keywords:** Social media, film making, digital technology, documentary film, online communities, ethics

**Özet:** İnternetin günlük yaşamımızda edindiği geniş yeri düşündüğümüzde “gizlilik” ilkesinin ne anlama geldiğini de yeniden düşünür olduk. Dünyanın gözlerinin önüne serilmiş ve erişime açık bulunan bu kadar çok sayıda özel hayatla ilgili bilgi ve görüntülerin biz film yapımcılarına getirdiği zorluk ve yararların neler olduğunu da düşünür olduk. Buna ek olarak, “gerçek” dediğimiz şeyi yargılayacak bir otorite yokken onu nasıl algılayabiliriz? Bu sorulara yanıt ararken katılımcı film yapma yöntemleriyle film yaptığım süreçlerde yaşadığım deneyimleri bir vaka çalışması şeklinde aktarmaktayım. Özellikle altını çizdiğim husus yeni girişimci filmciliğin gerçekliği bir film projesini gerçekleştirmekten çok o filmin hazırlanma sürecine katılan ve bir topluluk oluşturan benzer görüşlerdeki insanları bir araya getirmek etrafında şekillenmektedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Toplumsal medya, film yapımı, dijital teknoloji, belgesel film, sanal topluluk, etik

*Every time a film is shot, privacy is violated.*  
(Jean Rouch, 1975 [2003])

With the pervasiveness of the Internet pulsing through our everyday lives; one has to wonder what the word ‘privacy’ even means anymore. As filmmakers, what benefits or repercussions do we face with so much free access to ‘private’ information out on the web for the world to see? And how can we justify a ‘truth’ when there is no governing body to say so? Take Wikipedia for example, which has replaced the use of the Encyclopedia Britannica, as an authoritative source of information and resources used to verify the ‘truth’; which can now be changed intermittently, at will by virtual strangers from anywhere around the world.

This change reminds us that ‘in late capitalism, the promise of access to the private is a currency, the trade in which is central to all media forms, from YouTube to Heat magazine to docu-soap’ (Rothwell, 2008, 155). With the new paradigm shifts in the film industry, cheap digital technology and the democratization of the filmmaking process, filmmakers now can

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connect to an *'expert'* global, niche audience with more immediacy through the Internet; engaging virtual communities, utilizing crowd funding support and fan-building initiatives through a variety of social media landscapes.

My own work has revolved around two kinds of practice; the first, a traditional methodology invented by the Hollywood studios, which, from a small independent filmmaker's standpoint proved futile at best. With little to no resources to pull off a production like the big studios do, with their huge studio budgets, political backing, global media support and accounting practices, it seems absolutely ridiculous at this time to pursue independent film production in this manner. The second practice is participatory filmmaking in which my role is as the filmmaker. This method enables others to articulate their experiences through my artistic vision. Through this process, they have just as much (or as little) control as the filmmaker. Although, ultimately control rests in the hands of the filmmaker, as in the post-production processes it is the filmmaker who has the last word.

This is the production methodology which I want to discuss here, as it provides a rich environment for research, practice and debate amongst scholars and the filmmaking community. *'What defines the documentary genre is also at the root of its limitations...here, I shall call for a different perspective on the documentary form: not with a view to discussing what documentary is, but to make some suggestions as the what it could be'* (Knudsen, 2008, 109).

In creating the film project and case study entitled: *'Single Girl in a Virtual World: What does a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Feminist Look Like?'* (SGVW), my practice aims to engage multiple social media communities such as; Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Wordpress, YouTube, Kickstarter and IndieGoGo and ask people to participate in the film project itself with a sense of a creative input. During production, I asked the communities to read the film site's blog, watch its podcasts, comment on the news feed and follow me on Twitter. These efforts are the practicalities necessary for them to participate in the film project itself – either creatively, financially or both. The film's goal, besides the research practice, is seeking to create a passionate discourse amongst fellow feminist activists and social media users in this virtual environment and to create and build a community of like-minded individuals, who collectively enable the film project to become reality.

The project's content has begun to emerge and appears in its raw shape as a video diary of sorts, with participants weighing in on the topic of the week, freely giving their insights, thoughts and feedback through multiple social networks – either in video, text or both. For the filmmaker, this serves as a rich valley of resources that can be integrated in the film's narrative. However, when attempting to construct a narrative thread by gathering content in this way, there are many potential problems. *'Recording a video diary, if you don't want it to become public, is a risk; perhaps more so than a written diary, because the medium of video implies a mass audience'* (Rothwell, 2008, 154).

One of the exciting things about these new possibilities for filmmakers and audiences alike, despite the potential ethical pitfalls, is the creative flow of information, access to resources and sharing of content. Independent filmmakers who are limited in budget, time and production technologies can gain a tremendous amount of quality production value by sourcing content in this way.

There are many ethical issues to consider and trust has to be built in creating in this way. I have found that most people in the virtual communities are there by choice. Either they were *'friended'* by me, or came of their own free-will through word of mouth, or through connections from their own friend's *'like'* pages. However they came to the community, the goal is to keep them there, involve them in the production efforts and keep them just as excited as you are about the project. And to do that, there must be a transparency between the creator and the fan-

Further research warranted certain questions, since the methodology itself is created in a new way. Does the 'audience' (virtual community members/fans/friends) participating in the early stages of a creation raise expectations for the audience? What about for the filmmaker? Does it impact upon the artist's methodology of creation itself?

In my experience, participation between audience and filmmaker enables each to develop a relationship that goes deeper than merely from a consumer or isolated artist's point of view. It becomes a two-way process, although as the filmmaker in this case, being positioned as the auteur and the creator of the project, driving the subject matter, its pacing and criteria provided an overall control and direction for the project. It is important to note, that its subject or method itself wasn't diminished in value, nor did it have the perception of being an amateur product. In fact, it's been the opposite, which emphasized stronger value for both the filmmaker and the project being created with the audience. The process has allowed a more authentic, accessible and transparent relationship to develop amongst the community, which makes the film's subject, and experience, more tangible.

Does the filmmaker have more or less of a perceived value in the marketplace among industry peers and audiences in this emerging participatory trend? Specifically, is the artist or the work created 'demystified' in this sense within open-source accessibility?

Having the film aimed specifically towards a key, niche audience, they are keen to be involved and stay invested in the filmmaker for future projects and for the long haul. This depends solely upon the film project itself, for once the filmmaker is successful with one product and moves onto another, you risk losing your audience over a change in content or through lack of interest. Therefore, the use of transmedia content lets the audience know there's something in it for them, besides just the co-creation element.

The use of cheap technologies and online tools can help or hinder the filmmaker in their quest to tell authentic stories, but the script or narrative and production value must be the best possible so there is a perception of professionalism throughout the production. The community does, in fact, communicate amongst themselves and will certainly 'police' any activity that does not acquiesce within the group. This 'policing' by the community assures transparency, trust, authenticity and protection against spam and unwanted advantages a filmmaker or other community member may seek to squeeze information and/or money out of its community for personal gain. *'The immediacy of new online forms should not be mistaken for a lack of mediation: they are as deliberately constructed as any existing documentary forms, if not more, because of technical constraints...authenticity is highly prized by audiences'* (Birchall, 2008, 282-283).

There are certain sacrifices that must be made, which I have undertaken as additional learning curves in engagement in crowd sourcing campaigns, technologies and social media functionalities that are traditionally hired out (i.e. media partners, technology programmers, sales/fulfillment houses, marketing firms). However, these new technologies and online tools have enabled a cheaper, faster delivery of the product and the creation of a uniquely intimate brand; artistically, emotionally; delivered frequently and directly to niche audiences; not through a third party source. Through this practice, I have been able to provide a higher value in the overall creation process and the ongoing development of the relationship amongst the community members. There are many perceived benefits, as well as challenges in this new era of digital technology and social marketing tools that are advantageous for both the filmmaker and their audiences.

Measurable changes in production practices must also be adhered to by utilizing these online tools and cheaper production technology. How does this change the storytelling process? Without a doubt, technological considerations must be made for the lack of financing and of a large crew. The entrepreneurial filmmaker, is now essentially a 'one-(wo)man-band' where every single shot, direction, post-production/editing, writing, producing, marketing and digital online

On a larger scale, projects in this realm will emerge answering the question of how this new methodology of filmmaking relates to a wider economic, cultural, environmental and social scale. As Hope (2011) states, creators, distributors, and marketers have already accepted a dividing line between art and commerce and as well as between content and marketing. Hence, by not engaging the filmmakers in how to use marketing tools within their narrative and how to bring narrative techniques to marketing, we also diminish the discovery and promotional potential of all films.

Hopefully, through research and continued practice, and the great many other filmmakers who are engaging audiences with participatory filmmaking methods, will be seen at least to make a significant impact in any particular way through new creation practices, through the use of new technologies and delivery channels available outside the traditional distribution and delivery channels. Fortunately, there is evidence to suggest it's a new world order for filmmakers and for audiences.

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