

GEECT CONFERENCE Teaching Documentary II, ZeLIG, Bolzano, Switzerland, 26-29 April 2018

“**Teaching Documentary II - Visions of the Future**” took place in the “NOI Techpark” Bolzano and was organised by ZeLIG, School for Documentary, with the support of IDM - Film Fund & Commission of South Tyrol, the City of Bolzano, the Tourist Board of Bolzano and the Autonomous Province of Bolzano (German Culture).

The conference was accompanied by a VR exhibition (devoted to documentary) in the center of the city which was attended not only by conference participants but also by the inhabitants of the city. This created the first GEECT conference in interaction with the hosting city.

Participants from all continents arrived on **Thursday 26th**.

In the afternoon a masterclass “Impact of Distribution Strategy” by **Sarah Mosses**, CEO of Together Films, was programmed. She emphasized the importance of thinking about Audience Engagement early on. Using the case study of the recent Oscar Shortlisted documentary *Unrest*, ways in which audience aggregation had been built into the ethos of the production process by the Director Jennifer Brea, were analysed, to both critical success, awards recognition and systemic change around the issues in the film. Through a review of the key processes involved in Impact Distribution Strategy, attendees learned to prepare a distribution plan from development, embedded in the production process to lead to success. The **welcome dinner** took place in the nice Weisses Rössl / Cavallino Bianco Restaurant.

On **Friday 27th (day 1)** the Conference started with welcome words of **Heidi Gronauer** (in three languages as it is only fitting in Bozen/Bolzano: “benvenuto, willkommen, welcome”). “2018 is a very special year for ZeLIG that was born as a film collective 30 years ago, in 1988. The seeds of the documentary film school were catalysed during GEECT’s original VISIONS conference, back in 1995. ZeLIG is delighted to celebrate its birthday with colleagues from some 58 film schools and 29 countries around the world”.

Representatives of the sponsoring authorities welcomed all attendees.

GEECT **Chair Bert Beyens** said that three and a half years had passed since the first conference on the future of documentary film education, hosted in Cardiff by the University of South Wales (John Burgan) in collaboration with ZeLIG (Heidi Gronauer).

At the end of that first symposium in Wales, Bert Beyens, as arriving new GEECT Chair, said that the pace of change in Documentary is so rapid that a follow-up conference was imperative within the next four years, and concluded: “here we are, in Italy in Spring 2018!”

John Burgan, partnering again with Heidi Gronauer, then introduced the starting symposium. He said: “we feel impelled to focus in our main sessions on developments in the field of New Media with presentations on Virtual & Augmented Reality (VR/AR), Cross & Trans Media alongside perspectives on expanding markets such as Amazon and Netflix. As film teachers with roots in traditional film and television production, this world can often seem alienating and confusing, but we have to remind ourselves that it’s going to make up a major part of the universe our students will enter. Just one statistic: the global market for VR is estimated to grow to some \$110 billion by 2025: is this a phenomenon we can afford to ignore? The issues faced by documentary filmmakers are not just those of technological change. In Europe and across the globe, so much has happened in this short period since the last symposium: the refugee crisis, the resurgence of nationalism, Brexit, “fake news”, concerns about privacy and surveillance. As Chris Marker put it so succinctly: “... rarely has reality needed so much to be imagined.” Then it was time for the first **Key Note Speaker**.

William D. McMaster, born in Canada, directed over 40 VR experiences for organizations like The Economist, Doctors Without Borders (MSF), and the BBC, making him one of the most experienced VR directors in the world. His first documentary film, *Forest Man*, has been watched over 40 million times online, and earned him a Best Emerging Director award from the American Pavilion at Cannes in 2014. His experimental 360 film, *Experience Japan*, was the first 360 film available on the Oculus Rift. In 2013, William was hired as Head of VR for Visualise, a London (UK) based VR studio.

His Key Note **“Breaking through the hype: Will immersive technologies change film and television forever?”** was broken down in 3 parts: Past, Present, Future. William took people through his own history (past) first, about why he started making VR films in 2011, but framing that against what was happening in the industry at the time, with also examples of his own work by going over successes and failures. Then he gave a kind of state of the union on where the VR and AR industries are today (present), with the challenges that the industry currently faces, such as bulky headsets, and a lack of solid user base to sell content to. The question: is VR and AR changing the film industry? How the industry is responding to this emerging technology? The last section (future) was mostly made up of broad questions. How headset technology will evolve, leading it to become popularized? Will VR and AR films destroy the market for regular films? McMaster’s conclusion, looking at the past, present, and future, is that immersive technology will enable fantastic new kinds of experiences. This will enable new ways to tell a story.

Sarah Mosses is CEO of Together Films, an Impact Distribution Consultancy based in London. She is a leading film marketing and distribution strategist working with Producers, Directors, Festivals and Sales Agents. After her masterclass of the day before she presented a Key-note: **“A film does not exist until an audience has seen it”**. Using models from business planning theory, Sarah Mosses, delivered a keynote that focused on the anomaly of the film sector to spend more time focussing on film (product) development and not enough time on marketing and distribution strategies. There are a range of wonderful film schools across the world, developing the creative minds of the next generation of talented Directors, Cinematographers and Producers. However, there is a lack of discussion around film distribution and marketing within the majority of the film education sector.

Raimo Lang, Finland, is head of development for 500 people at public broadcasting Yle Creative Content unit, that includes genres like documentary, drama, comedy, culture, science and music. Yle is the only remaining PBS in Europe having larger national reach with its local VOD than Netflix. **“Documentary genre and digitalization – question of fate”** How documentary genre is facing digitalization is based on change on media usage habits of people under 45 years old, not technology. In this change, only the essence of it can be preserved. Is that the form and style, like 90 minutes and observing camera on the shoulder? Or the social role of the genre, like Yle Iikka Vehkalahti put it: the duty of documentary genre is to measure the temperature of the society directly from the ass? According to Raimo’s research young adults and also middle age people want someone to give them the unique experience of relevance and revelation, by any technological means possible. What skills young documentary makers would need to create a new renaissance for the genre in these generations? What kind of professional teams they would need? What is the profile of a new doc producer? Raimo tried to answer this question based on Yle successes with audiences 15-30 and 30-45.

After taking the group photo and lunch, so called **Breakout Sessions** took place. It gave all participants the opportunity to engage in talks with the Key Note Speakers who were waiting

in separate rooms. One was free to go in and out. Then it was time for the first **Best Kept Secrets** series.

Jan Vromman (RITCS) “Atelier Black Box” The student starts from the empty studio, black box, silent space. The student is forced to create out of nothing. Via the colour-key technique, the background can become a town in Afghanistan, a still, a galaxy, found footage. Still, students realize a documentary, document based, using facts, archives, testimonies. We bring people (and even insects or donkeys) in relation to the subject in the studio. We explore voice-of, voice-over, costume, accessories, actors, written-out scenes. The workshop forces the student to a mental switch. The black box allows to decode. By pulling apart elements that belong together, we suddenly 'see'. Stripped of the obvious, images and sounds suddenly become more pronounced.

Rachel Landers (AFTRS) “Hybrid Documentary”. AFTRS’ documentary had world-wide festival success through innovative approaches in teaching “Hybrid documentary”. Workshops allow students to discover hybrid techniques to create cinematic and highly collaborative solutions that respond to story in non-fiction. Students access subjects through a street casting process where we put out a broad public callout seeking individuals to come in to tell a personal life changing story. The casting day attracts dozens of radically diverse participants to the school. The students identify the subject they feel will be most responsive to the highly participatory processes of Hybrid documentary, Students then work in collaborative teams of fellow AFTRS students from Cinematography, Production Design, Editing and Screen Composition.

Linda Sternö & Klara Björk (Göteborg University Valand Academy) presented their **“Reversing and returning the gaze; a strategy to de-colonize curriculum?”** Through experiments together with the teachers and students in the exchange program from Valand Academy with Wits University, Johannesburg, South Africa, an alternative method of teaching documentary film making is evolving. The method is built on the simple principle of introducing the camera as a tool to people who are visually represented but do not have “control” over those representations and images. Film students build self-awareness of their own modes of seeing and in turn develop critical thinking (and practice) in image making. The reflexive approach allows for a reassessment of the conventions of image making, as well as addressing the normative and colonial world-view that images reproduce.

Bertrand Bacqué, (HEAD): “The cinematographic essay: from researches to practical pedagogical issue”. Little by little, the notion of the cinematographic essay, as a hybrid between fiction and documentary and as reflexive form that questions our being in the world (Marker, Farocki, Godard ...), became one of the foundations of the identity of the Geneva Cinema Department / cinéma du reel, HEAD, in theory as well as in practice.

On **Saturday 28th (day 2)** a representative of the IDM - Film Fund & Commission of South Tyrol, which is one of the biggest film funds in Italy, with a major interest in financing documentary highlighted how you can apply for funding, even if not being based in South Tyrol.

Jean Perret was in charge of the documentary section at the Festival of Locarno, after which, in 1995, he became the Director of the International Film Festival of Nyon (Switzerland), "Visions du Réel". In 2010, he moved to Geneva University of Art and Design, where he is in charge of the Film Department/cinéma du reel (HEAD). He presented the Key Note **“New media for the continuous enlargement of a unique global market?”** What if these new storytelling strategies (new VR and AR images legitimised by their transmedia circulation) were mostly the audio-visual industry’s response to the needs of a globalised economy committed to winning over citizens to the entrancing mirrors of the global market? So, are the

tools for world domination those that create added value nowadays, i.e. artefacts that perfect the illusion of seeing everything at all times, in a continuous spectacle? The entertainment industry, which is systematically engaged in colonising new territories, including the most intimate, is compelled to generate new images and narratives. Reality is no longer enough. Inflation does its job. Reality must be virtual or augmented. How does one remain healthy in mind and soul in these newly-textured realms? Documentary cinema? Shouldn't the documentary cinema archaeology be entirely reassessed?

Mike Robbins, (regularly visiting teacher FABW), producer and partner at Helios Design Labs, collaborated with award-winning interactive documentaries such as Quipu Project, Digital Me, After the Storm, Highrise, Offshore. Key Note presentation **“Death of the Expert: Cross-media as a business survival mechanism”**: there has been much to learn from working on interactive documentary projects, from 2012's Highrise series with the National Film Board of Canada and Kat Cizek, to a project currently in production with Berlin's gebrueder beetz. Even in the six or so years that we have been building these projects, technologies, audience expectations and funding models have changed radically. With such volatility, we see the “expert” as an endangered species. As a form of risk management, we try to blur the lines between more structured roles within project teams, less separation and more transparency between the creative, technical, and administrative parts of a project. A coder who is a storyteller still has a role to play if their technology becomes obsolescent, a filmmaker can remain relevant when funding bodies change what they see as relevant, and so on and so forth.

Linda Bath trains producers in the areas of finance, co-production and new industry business models and revenue streams for EAVE, MAIA and other Creative Europe MEDIA programmes. Her Key Note was **“The Digital Single Market: Believe in Tomorrow”**. The distribution of documentaries used to be restricted to multinational television showings, some were lucky enough to do well in cinemas in their own country and others, and there was a viable DVD market. Over the past 10 years, documentaries lead the way in embracing internet distribution. Their creators and producers were particularly innovative in transmedia marketing and cross-platform engagement. So, what do the economics look like now? How and when can this innovation and audience enthusiasm translate to larger numbers of viewers, of amounts of money for production and real revenue sources for documentary producers?

After another **Breakout Sessions** opportunity for open conversation and discussion with the Key Note Speakers, a 2nd **Best Kept Secrets** series of presentations followed.

Chris Morris SoFT **“Fairy tales; a documentary workshop”**. In the fairy tale workshop, students analyse why and how stories work. Fairy tales are not owned but reimagined for new generations, so they also engage with ideas of story ownership and story evolution. In these sessions they are also as much audience members as story makers and so crucially, they ‘physically’ get to understand the needs and desires of an audience - who are sitting right in front of them! No cameras, no laptops, no electricity, no software!

Gesa Marten FBKW **“Editing Slam on Ethics”** When the subject or protagonist represented is real/actual, as in documentary filmmaking, a host of ethical considerations arise. How, formally and/or narratively, is the filmmakers’ (editors’) position (political, ideological, social or ethical) reflected in the film? How is the subjectivity of the narrator constructed?

Which/who’s truth/reality is described? How is empathy constructed? What is the responsibility of the filmmaker towards the protagonists, the audience or other parties?

Claudio Cipelletti MCSC **“How to turn a toy into an innovative tool for storytelling”**.

The challenge we took five years ago with the new multimedia documentary course for new digital media such as VR, AR, 360 video and video-mapping, was to use these tools to tell

more complex stories while testing to which extent this could work. How can we drive the viewer's gaze in immersive video? Does editing still exist? Is it possible to tell a single story through multiple media? What happened to audience? Directing and technology interact step by step producing a continuous exchange of problems and solutions between departments that were traditionally organised in a vertical hierarchy.

Rob Rombout LUCA: “Sound before Image”. In a documentary teachers and students often start with the visual approach but in this exercise, Sound precedes the use of Image, diametrically opposite to the observational approach, finishing the soundtrack before even thinking about image. Students start the production of this exercise with their voice in their own (mother-tongue) language, in their own accent. By starting with the sound, students re-discover the impact of the image. We use the richness of the DocNomads “student population” as we have over 20 nationalities and +/- the same number of languages

That was **the end** of a very inspiring Conference that continued with a wonderful Closing dinner at Weisse Traube/Uva Bianca Resaturant. On Sunday optional cultural activities were offered for attendees who wanted to stay a bit longer in beautiful South Tyrol.



Alfred Diebold MARUBI, Albania GEECT; Rachel Landers AFTRS, Australia CAPA-CILECT; Nicollette Freeman VCA, Australia CAPA-CILECT; Shannon Owen VCA, Australia CAPA-CILECT; Michael Hudecek Filmakademie Wien, Austria GEECT; Elias Grootaers KASK, Belgium GEECT; Hannes Vanhoustraete KASK, Belgium GEECT; Daphné Pascual LUCA, Belgium GEECT; Rob Rombout LUCA, Belgium GEECT; Marc Van De Walle LUCA, Belgium GEECT; Bert Beyens RITCS, Belgium GEECT; Patrick Geeraerts RITCS, Belgium GEECT; Jan Vromman RITCS, Belgium GEECT; Stanislav Semerdjiev Ex. Dir. CILECT, Bulgaria; Mike Robbins Helios Design Labs, Canada (expert); Barbara Evans York University, Canada CNA-CILECT; Goran Dévic ADU, Croatia GEECT; Martin Reznicek FAMU, Czech Republic GEECT; Pavla Waitova FAMU, Czech Republic GEECT; Lucie Kralova FAMU, Czech Republic GEECT; Arne Bro National Filmschool, Denmark GEECT; Riho Vastrik Tallinn University BFM, Estonia GEECT; Renita Lintrop Tallinn University BFM, Estonia GEECT; Raimo Lang Yle Creative Content, Finland (expert); Renaud Personnaz Ateliers VARAN, France GEECT; Vincent Lowy ENSLL, France GEECT; Dominique Gratiot INA, France GEECT; Christine Ghazarian, LA FEMIS, France GEECT; Fosco Dubini FHD, Germany GEECT; Sandra Hacker FHD, Germany

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