

# Content Creation and Production Choice: Film, Television and Related Production Enterprises

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The main purpose of this paper looks to examine notable inconsistencies in language and practice between production practices in film, television, Internet and related production models. The disconnect between actual production practices and how they are described is notably affected by advances in technology. Furthermore, practitioners insider language usage, and a lack of understanding between process versus exhibition contributes to the divide within theory and practice of these models. By inspecting how traditional entertainment content is physically produced, making comparisons with the most common production models, the realms of production practices and terminology bring clarity and consistency. The language distinction illuminates any production process and is certainly critical for the producer responsible for putting together an experienced crew to shoot the project and vice versa concerning anyone looking for a job in those communities. Content creation for public consumption is expensive to produce, thus requires experienced people who must perform specific tasks on time and on budget, achieving entertainment goals and bringing in a profitable return. Understanding this information about production models is vital to the student or anyone preparing to be a part of the entertainment community.

*Keywords:* film production, television production, single camera production, Internet production

## Introduction

Thanks to on-going evolutions in technology, entertainment enterprises worldwide have enjoyed improved options for how content can be created and exhibited: a daunting new age of growing complexity but not without complications for educators.

One side effect to the technology evolution phenomenon is that its history has not been chronicled with the same attentiveness as is performed in traditional academic disciplines. The recording of the facts and values of older technology and how it influenced production and post-production practices has been rudimentary at best. One possible explanation is found in the university setting where film and video production disciplines have not been considered with the same academic values as say mathematics, philosophy or the traditional arts. From the early years of film and television production, the passage of time, changing working conditions, coupled with shifts in audience tastes, the response of production personnel was practical: to simply keep up with the work demand, using the best tools available. For those folks there was no need to chronicle older technology in any formal way.

Another explanation is that technology descriptors and their relationship to practice has changed over time. In particular is the generational perspective, that current technology has affected how students today relate to

film and television production methodologies and the language used to describe them. A nuance to this circumstance is that the use of slang is abundant in the production workplace, some of it iconic. The complex nature of all entertainment production, finds the people in the work place using acronyms and other short hand language as an effective way to get their work done. It is not hard to appreciate that confusion might occur when someone outside of these communities wants to understand the lingo, particularly when talking about jobs or tasks in a film or television production. This matter is not helped when those in academics are not clear about film and television production distinctions. Such sentiments on *production meaning* are illustrated when someone announces that she was just hired to produce a “television pilot”. From a production perspective, how does this newly hired producer understand what she is tasked to manage in her project assignment, what is the actual work she must manage? (Lazarus, 1992). What might be the production model that best suites the successful completion of her tasks?

The language distinction that illuminates any production process is certainly critical to the producer responsible for putting together an experienced crew to shoot the project (Wales, 2012; Zettl, 2015). Production models used for content creation in the fields of cinema, television, or the Internet are different in some ways and similar in others, which may help explain the nomenclature challenge (Wales, 2012).

The University Film and Video Association (UFVA) has an interesting place in this discussion as it has come to represent the academic values for all things film and video. Beginning as UFPA (*University Film Producers Association*) in 1947, it evolved to becoming UFVA in 1981. This 1981 date is a good reference point from which to verify the *film* and *video* nomenclature. In 1981, under all conditions, *any* project shot on *film* was understood as a *film production*, and *anything* shot *electronically* was understood to be a *television* or *video production*. As the intent of this paper is to examine the vocabulary needed to distinguish between production model choices, we examine technology and practice and the language that best distinguishes one production model from another.

For example, when considering what is often referred to as “film production”, from its “television production” cousin, there is a reasonable question raised as to their meanings. For example, “film production” alone could refer to KODAK’s factory manufacturing *film negatives* in Rochester, New York or the latest version of the feature film, “Pirates of the Caribbean”. A “television production”, on the other hand, could refer to the Sharp Corporation’s manufacturing of *television sets* at their plant in Kameyama, Japan or the making of “The View” by NBC Television.

Outside of genre and subject matter, *how* a product is produced has significant implications to production cost and the time to exhibition: each production model having its own set of challenges, advantages and disadvantages well worth understanding which are largely prescribed by the opportunities for image capture.

### **Production Context**

Our producer friend mentioned above, hired to produce that “Television Pilot” will need command of language and process. There is a larger context of the content creation business which has some influence on how her “television pilot” product will be made.

The Entertainment Business is a competitive and risky endeavor so having a grip on how to make interesting product affordably is critical to our producer’s success. In the vast enterprises of film, television and Internet, when considering which production model is best for producing a specific product, it is important to understand *how* and *why* each model works best, including all possible exhibition destinations. This fact brings

up two important issues that frame the how and why questions:

- All major film and television studios are owned by six (6) multinational entertainment corporations, each of whom has divisions for film and television as well as radio, music, publishing and Internet presence.<sup>1</sup> Thus, a corporate point of view on entertainment is not singular; and rather complex. In order to be competitive, these corporations do an immense amount of research and are made up of departments for program development, audience analysis, legal departments, departments for production oversight; and more (Levy, 2000; Uribe, 2016; Eastman, 2013; Perebinosoff, 2013). Each of these divisions has its way of using language that best serve the their job assignments—which may suggest one explanation for the nomenclature question on what distinguishes film production from a television production, that the language used within a corporation can be different from that of a production team. Whatever content a studio choose to produce, that decision then informs the choice of a production process.

- In almost any instance, to produce content that satisfies programming strategies that *content* must: (1) be well worth watching; (2) it must satisfy the appetites of multiple audiences; and (3) it must meet a variety of exhibition requirements. In almost every case, *content creation* is expensive to produce and requires smart production practices with experienced talent to not only meet audience expectations but also to achieve a profitable return.

Even though the exhibition space for any and all products has expanded with the advent of Cable TV, DVDs, the Internet, the methods for producing content have remained much the same, and for very practical reasons. The nomenclature used when discussing production model distinctions is worth exploring so as to not make the mistake of calling apples oranges.

### Common Production Goals

Before exploring the nuances of the film and television production models it is useful to note what those models share in common. All production models share the same *production charge*: 1) make a smart plan for shooting the project within the limits of time and money available, 2) to execute that plan on time and on budget, and 3) meeting all delivery requirements.

Each production's work flow is similar in that it involves: 1) a creation or development stage; and when fully developed, sold and "green lit", it is 2) launch into the *pre-production*, *production* and *post-production* phases; and 3) when finished readied for distribution and exhibition.

These practical functions become remarkably different when applied to different production circumstance or strategies because of: 1) the time limitations under which each production model must shoot, edit and be distributed; 2) the amount of *money* available to shoot and edit, 3) the *skills* required for the live vs. a non-linear shooting process, and 4) cost implications of one production model over the other to achieve *viewing success* and bring a *profitable return*.

### Production Comparisons

Then as now, when walking onto either a film studio stage or a television studio stage one can clearly see two very distinct production methodologies at work. These two disciplines are the primary production strategies for image capture, with other production models falling somewhere in between.

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<sup>1</sup> "Entertainment monolithic corporations". Retrieved August 15, 2016.

### Film Production

The invention of film and film cameras came with a limit to how much raw stock a camera could hold and shoot at any one time. [10 minutes for 35mm] However the camera was light and portable, providing flexible options for where and how it could be used. These two capacities prescribed the parameters for how a film production team would learn to operate. Right from the start filmmakers learned that they could get improved performance from an actor or camera because 1) they could repeat shots over, 2) that they could shoot different angles (wide and close shots) for dramatic effect, 3) that they could get the best look using a *single* camera lighting set up and most important, 4) that production costs would be greatly reduced if they shot the script out of order. Thus the non-linear single camera production model of “*filmmaking*” was born. Also at play was the preference for content that favored storytelling. This of course means that *filmmaking*, by virtue of these circumstances, is an expensive enterprise requiring expertise challenged to not only create interesting content but also to work within a prescribed structure. The language of *filmmaking* grew out of this paradigm.

The opportunity to shoot *film style* finds this production model linked with four features: 1) a collaborative working context for its non-linear shooting process, 2) required skills imbedded with hierarchies and protocols, 3) a film’s ability to entertain in the most cost efficient manner, and 4) the task of meeting all delivery requirements; all of this activity accomplished on time and on budget (Bordwell, 2008; Leipzig, 2016).

One important facet in the evolution of the film production model was that the final form of any film could not exist unless it was put together through editing. Therefore, as the production team worked, it was obliged to keep the needs of editing in mind. Editing of a film (film editing) is for this reason considered non-linear editing, requiring an editor to manage a cacophony of images and sounds; carefully bringing them into order, shaping and molding them into a powerful story (Ascher, 2013; Dancyger, 2002). Time for reflection proving to be an important asset to the process.

Historically, film production has created products not only for the cinema, but also helped fill television’s ravines broadcast programming appetite including such film products as Movies for Television (MOW), procedural episodic dramas or episodic TV, and television commercials (McDougal, 2001). We should include educational and documentary films which could end up on television’s broadcasting schedule. The fundamental difference between film products produced for the cinema and film products produced for television or Internet is the amount of time and money available to shoot each page of the script; otherwise the *production process* is the same. The injection of commercials into a final product is first indicated at the script stage, but it is in the editing where the final decision will rest which is many times different from the script. Of course when a project has aired and repurposed for DVD consumption, the commercial space is eliminated.

As *film production* is also used in the making of music videos, Internet Web series, and online gaming products that use a narrative structure familiar in film form: brings up an interesting question with regards to the distribution and exhibition of all such works. The cinema experience of the movie theater is more of a special entertainment event for the audience, a dedicated moment for them to leave home and enter the large controlled space of a theater to collectively watch a film uninterrupted. It is a “bigger than life” viewing experience. However, those same feature films must also be prepared for television broadcast, DVD distribution, the Internet, and other exhibition venues which are often smaller than life [*Conversely, it is noteworthy to mention that cinema theaters today occasional exhibition the big screen special events not made film style such as live or prerecorded operas, concerts or sports events, concluding that it is not where a*

*product is exhibited that best defines how it was produced*].

### Television Production

From its beginnings, Television's studio or video productions had very different advantages and challenges from that of a theater bound film. The invention of electronic broadcast signals created a new market for exhibition which had distinct advantages over film in that 1) there was no limit to how long the camera could shoot and 2) the content could almost immediately be viewed by an audience anxiously waiting at home. The first important use of these signals was in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. The opportunity of *unlimited shooting* and its *immediate viewing* helped frame and define the *livelinear* television production process and at that time was referred to as "television production". However, the process did come with heavy awkward cameras that were tethered by electrical cords. Television broadcasters also discovered that they could make better product if they used *multiple cameras* and switched live between them as a program was captured and broadcast.

Television broadcasters were challenged in several ways different than film:

- Of particular note, on the viewing side of a broadcast was the potential that a diverse television audience could have their TV sets running 24 hours a day, creating a significant immediate demand for a variety of content.<sup>2</sup>
- Further, there was also a good chance that a highly diverse television audience, would be distracted—doing other things while the TV was playing—so that part of the Broadcaster's program strategy had to accommodate interruptions, such as advertisements, or that the viewers might be simultaneously engaged in family conversations, or "surfing the Internet" or on the phone.
- There is also a competition factor in that the television programming not only competes—in real time—for viewer attention with other broadcast companies, it now competes with Cable TV, and the Internet; Netflix, Amazon Prime etc.

The important advantage of a television broadcast was and is in its immediacy, seeing as it were "current events live", in the moment. The added advantage was that they were less expensive to produce. TV's electronic production model produces such diverse television program formats as news, soap operas, sitcoms, talk shows, variety shows, children's shows, and sports programs, all designed to be entertaining, competitive, economically smart and ready for immediate broadcast; advantage as less-expensive ventures, producing entertainment content faster and cheaper.

### Other Production Models

A middle ground using variations on these two basic production strategies, with equal history and practice, is illustrated in the five following production examples. They generally fall under the category of single camera productions, even though at times they use more than one camera at a time (Musburger, 2010). These production units are similar to film production but have much smaller production budgets and teams (Bordwell, 2008). Much of the content put up on the Internet uses a simplified version of the *single camera* model.

#### Documentary Field Work

Beginning in the 1920's, found documentary filmmakers taking their cameras out into the field recording the history around them: in the mid 1900's providing news reel content for theaters documenting accounts of

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<sup>2</sup> "TV History". Archive of American Television. Retrieved July 30, 2016.

what was happening during World War II.

Documentary production does not always start with an exact narrative script as does film; it can be scripted or non-scripted. When non-scripted it usually works with a thematic outline in mind to guide the shooting process (Renov, 1993; Rabiger, 2009). Budgets for documentary films are typically small as are the returns on investment. Thus, the markets for exhibition are limited. Documentary crews are typically small and very mobile. There are times when documentarians have only one opportunity for shooting, particularly with interviews or live action, requiring that they shoot as much as they can afford knowing that the content choices will be figured out later in the editing. At other times, where there is more money, time and creative liberty, they can produce dramatic recreation scenes to make their points more entertaining, as seen in the documentary works of Ken Burns or Mark Harris.

### **Field Production Work (News)**

A TV news van traveling to remote locations is the classic example of one such application of *single camera field work*, a process which was initially referred to as electronic field production, capturing current events for immediate news broadcast, an obvious adaptation of early news gathering (Compesi, 1985). Given the instinctive nature of this *single camera* application, it is typically non-scripted: a spontaneous catch-as-catch-can shooting opportunity. Cell phone videos, which immediately go up on the Internet, should be included in this category.

### **Music Video Production**

The production approach for shooting a music video is guided by the narrative interest of the music's lyrics, which can be interpreted literally or poetically, and, which can be shot in either a linear (if it is a concert) or non-linear fashion.<sup>3</sup> Music lyrics function as the script to help define a visual concept and narrative order. Even though music structure is time based, having a sequential order to its auditory form (whose integrity must be maintained), it can be shot in a *film style* approach, moving the camera set-ups as needed and repeating the shots as often as needed and shooting out of order as needed, primarily because the opportunity allows for it and because of the intent to edit later. The choice to capture images with an artistic flair supported with flexibility in editing style, music videos often lean towards the poetic sensibilities of art films whose experimental tendencies were influenced by the early cinema montage theories of Eisenstein and Pudovkin as well as Surrealism and Surrealist Cinema. Perhaps the first music video was the documentary film "*Man with the Movie Camera*" (1929 experimental film) by Dziga Vertov and Elizabeth Svilova.

### **Reality Shows**

Reality television's content tends to be a mix between melodrama and a competitive sports event. However it should include educational shows such as "Martha Stewart, Food and Cooking" or "West Coast Customs". They all play out under the illusion of being live and personal. Productions like "Big Brother" tend to shoot scenes sequentially in a linear fashion, sometimes using the multi-camera approach to image capture. Since they don't usually have a precisely scripted plan for the shots needed to make a good show, they work from an outline, shooting broadly, knowing that they will build the show later during the editing process, intercutting melodrama and action. The dramatic choices between thematic action and melodrama make the editing approach similar to editing a documentary (Hampe, 2007). The last few TV presentations of the

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<sup>3</sup> "Studying Music Video". Slide Share. Retrieved July 29, 2016; "Music Video - a brief history". Slide Share. Retrieved July 29, 2016.

Olympics used the technique of cutting away between live action events and dropping in B-Roll with personal insights into the private lives of competitors, to make the spectacle more personal for the audience.

### **Animation and Video Game Production**

Animation and gaming on line productions are mentioned together, as the creative mindset for content creation in both these genres tends to use a film style look. Both tend to model their forms similar to the cinematic narrative (Gossman, 2016). The building of animated or gaming sequences not only follows a storyline intended for dramatic effect, it also makes use of different camera angles and compositions that mimic the look of a film, and using such compositions for similar reasons, they create images that present a story experience for emotional effect. They make full use of film grammar (Dirks, 2016; Block, 2008; Arijon, 1991).

### **Post-production Options**

For the purpose of this paper, the notion to separate out post-production work from the production that precedes is important because there are occasions when non-linear editing is used in the service of live shot shows, projects which were shot live all at one time but not aired immediately. Obviously technology has affected post-production workflows: offering a choice which is also affected by the linear or non-linear opportunity.

The post-production for any production model has two fundamental objectives: 1) to finish with a product that an audience will want to watch, and 2) to prepare a final product in a way that meets all distribution and exhibition requirements in a timely and cost effective manner.

If a show must air immediately, as in NBC's 2016 Olympics or the election debates of that same time period, the program is for the most part edited in a control booth as it is shot. This *immediate linear post-production* opportunity must satisfy all broadcasting delivery requirements—in real time. However, if a live production is shot early enough or has a planned broadcast delay, as are most talk shows, then it will likely be formatted and finished shortly thereafter in an *on-line* editing session. If a live show is shot before its air date, and if there is a proper post-production budget, as in the CBS Reality Show, “Big Brother” or the NBC variety show “The Voice”, the editing process could follow non-linear editing protocol (*Because of the inherent volume of footage shot, this would require a much larger editing staff than would a film project, causing post-production costs to go up*). With this said, the entertainment value found in *non-linear* editing is being appreciated more and used in many *live captured* projects, like reality shows and sitcoms, simply because where there is time to reflect and experiment, a better product can be created (Murch, 2005; Kauffmann, 2012; Hollyn, 2010).

In the *non-linear* editing process there are several finishing options with slightly different formatting required for the various exhibition possibilities: film initially intended for the silver screen being prepared for foreign distribution, television broadcast, and the Internet (and airplanes) (Film distribution and television formatting).

### **Social Strata in Film and Television Production Process that Affects Language and Process**

From a production perspective, another influence on content creation which has impact on process and language relates to the social strata found in the business. The most obvious social differentiation is the “above-the-line”/“below-the-line” demarcation.

- “Below-the-line” personnel generally include all crafts people (the labor) who perform the physical task of shooting AND EDITING and are generally represented by union contracts. In union film productions these folks are represented by I.A.T.S.E., the parent union under which the skill set unions reside. In television’s live production world the skilled personal are generally represented by the I.B.E.W. or N.A.B.E.T.
- “Above-the-line”, people include producers, writers, directors, and lead actors which are generally represented in both film and television productions by independent unions like the PGA, WGA, DGA, and SAG.

One social stratum relates to those filmmaking personnel who work primarily in features verses those who primarily work making film products for television or Internet broadcast. The line between the two is less sever today than it was in the 1950s through the 1980s. It was not uncommon then to hear said that, “if you *work in television* you will not be able to *work in features* so choose wisely”. Fortunately, today many actors, directors, producers, cinematographers and editors etc., crisscross the line between the two film units regularly. However, it not uncommon to hear folks making films for television often say that they work in television, another explanation for nomenclature confusion.

Another, less important social differentiationis sometimes noticed with folks who work on the east coast from those working in Hollywood.

### Opportunity and Choice

Since the entertainment industry’s investment in content creation is intended to make them a profit, that profit goal requires accomplishing two things: 1) that the product is well worth watching, and 2) that it can be produced efficiently on time and on budget. Both criteria determine which production model best serves these goals.

To appreciate the language needed by our “Television Pilot” Producer with her production model choice, there are two considerations that matter to the language she uses.

#### First, Opportunity Matters

It is not *the tools* used for image capture or *exhibition space* where the product will end up, but rather what the production’s *circumstance* or *opportunity to shoot* offers and requires. Is it a one chance, one shot, live/linear choice to shoot or not? The physical opportunities or limitations for shooting a project have practical ramifications that define and drive process. In this regard, the linear/non-linear distinction is perhaps the most helpful for understanding the difference between what is meant as a *film* or a *TV production* process.

#### Second, Language Matters

By itself, the term *production* refers to a general process or method used to transform materials and ideas into goods and services. As a noun, it could refer to any number of commodities: cars, toothpaste or music and therefore the specific meaning for a particular kind of production requires a qualifier and/or context. This of course is why the “film production” and “television production” terms are grouped and descriptors.

Beginning with their origins, the “film” and “television” or “video” nouns were literal representing: 1) the actual technology used for shooting and 2) what each technologies application allowed, and remained so until the introduction of digital media at which time both *film* and *electronic video* cameras were replaced with digital equivalents (Cook, 2016; Stevens, 2016). The effect of technology advancement on language was that the *film/television* or *film/video* terms evolved to serve as attributive nouns representing the two production



disciplines; both terms now having added value as *literal* or *figurative* meaning (Lewis, 2008; Mamer, 2006; Arijon, 1991). This is explained by the fact that even though camera (and sound) technology changed the production process for image capture did not. Therefore, to appreciate the value of the language needed to describe entertainment production models, added modifiers were adapted: as in *film production* or *television production*. However, as *film production*, *video production*, *single camera production* or *Internet production* nomenclature can also have more than one meaning, additional qualifiers are also needed to best appreciate each production. For example:

- (1) The Simpsons = *an Animation Production made for Television*
- (2) N.C.I.S. = *a Film Production made for Television*
- (3) 2016 Summer Olympics = *a Live Sports Television Broadcast Production*
- (4) The Voice = *a Variety Show Television Production* or *a multi-camera television production*
- (5) Civil War = *a Documentary Film Production made for PBS*

### Technology's Influence

We have noted the direct relation of early technologies influence on the formation of production practices. Today, digital cameras and sound recording equipment seem to be the preference for most producers; however, their applications or effect on production practice has not changed how each model works, except perhaps to help make the process easier. As the camera and sound technology changed, the production practices for how they were use has not.

### Conclusion

Today there is no blur between the actual production practices in use, except perhaps how the language might be cavalierly or conveniently used. What matters in describing production models is not *the tools* used for image capture or the intended exhibition space, but rather what the production's *circumstance* or *opportunity for shooting* offers and requires? Is it a one chance, one shot, live/linear choice to shoot or not? This choice has practical ramifications that *define* and *drive* process. In this important regard, the linear/non-linear distinction is the best indicator for differentiating between what is meant as a *film* or a *TV production* (Ascher, 2013).

In whatever way *entertainment content* may be created, the production model used to shoot it *must* perform its tasks and on time on budget, meeting all delivery requirements, achieving its entertainment goals and a profitable return.

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