Submission by: Joe Steele

Project Title: Film/Work (*f/w*)

Abstract

The following is a proposal for Film/Work (*f/w*), a series of lectures and workshops given by artists- and filmmakers-in-residence. It is a pilot project, with the long-term goal of creating a free film school for adults. The program will be located in a gentrified/gentrifying neighborhood in Boston (where I currently live) ideally in a street level storefront, to encourage pollination with the neighborhood. (Zukin, 2010) The pedagogical ethos of Film/Work would spurn traditional hierarchy where the teacher confers knowledge to the students. The teacher adopts the role of facilitator—creating space for horizontal learning and allowing students to assume the role of instructor over the course of the workshop, that they may teach it in the future. It would follow the model of The Public School [Telic Arts Exchange in LA]—loosely based on the appreciative model of adult learning, but sharing some qualities of a skill share. Another similar program is the Brooklyn Filmmakers Collective.

Detailed project description

> *We need Cinema in order to create the total art towards which all the others, since the beginning, have tended.*
> - Ricciotto Canudo, "La theorie des septs arts" (Penley, 1989)

The first phase of the project will be one or two pilot lectures, to generate interest in the program and allow the candidates for volunteers and visiting artist/filmmakers to see the concept as a prototype. This will be a crucial networking and resource sharing opportunity as information about other projects and programs could be used as case studies, especially when planning budget, gauging perceived interest, compiling grant and other development documents, and lessons learned documentation.

During the academic year, there are fall and spring semesters. The second phase will be to launch the first fall semester modules, which will each consist of an artist-practitioner giving a lecture/screening, then having a series of labs on production topics and participating in a critique of student work. Artists would be in residence for two weeks and receive a small stipend. Examples of courses would include The Bachelor Machines, Invisible Cities-Documentary and Emergent Media, Topics in Cinematic Storytelling, Writing your Manifesto and Intro to DV Editing. There will be ongoing labs/studios where students are free to work on their post-production and shooting.

The fall semester will culminate in a mini-film-festival, where students show their work in progress and the holiday fundraiser would take place. Once spring semester begins, the same cycle of visiting artists will begin again, with some tinkering if needed, based on the first semester. At the end of the academic year, there will be another exposition (screening or gallery show/installation) and then lessons learned, developing and marketing, and curriculum planning would occur over the summer. I would like to enhance opportunities available in an open course/MOOC format for the self-directed learners of *f/w* by incorporating lessons from online environments and reformatting them for a short form workshop. The students would become teachers of the course once the course is completed

and there would be exit interviews, data, and lessons learned for edification of the pedagogical model.

Context, Influences

In Anne Balsamo's 'Designing Learning' chapter of *Designing Culture*, she outlines ways in which organizations create both real and virtual 'affinity spaces', or spaces of learning. (Balsamo, 2011) A couple of examples that encapsulate this concept are the Youth Media Makers (The New School) and The Maysles Documentary Center. Some other examples that come to mind from my research include 826 National, the Public School (TELIC Arts Exchange) in LA, a number of the Teen and Adult programs and workshops at Eyebeam in NYC, the Center for Urban Pedagogy NYC, and Urbano and Artists for Humanity in Boston. These organizations seek to bolster the four key literacies pertaining to media production, identified by Dr. Nichole Pinkard, of the 21st Century—graphical, musical, cinematic, and interactive. (Pinkard, 2013)

In terms of how my past work influences this project, I have been a practicing artist and filmmaker for the past ten years and I have seven years of teaching experience. One of my long-term research interests is collaboration. The way in which *f/w* is pertinent in this investigation is in the intersection of pedagogy with the city as a site for cultural innovation, and the way that experimental film/video and documentary can help build bridges between individuals and cultures. I subscribe to many of the views set forth by Paulo Freire in his call for a move from the banking model of pedagogy to the approach that encourages participation and experience in forming meaningful collaboration and learning. (Freire, 1970)

Originality of form and content

Although I identify as an artist and filmmaker, my primary mode of art is through social sculpture, by way of pedagogy of art and technology. The nexus of art, culture, and technology is where I operate in my filmmaking practice. This semester, I began graduate studies in NYC at the New School, MA in Media Studies. I live in Boston, so I am currently studying online. Much of this desire to create an affinity space arose from the fact that there are libraries, institutions, and 'third places' where you can work on coursework and do research, but they are not entirely dedicated to film or documentary. Having affinity spaces on the web (as blogs, message boards, social, etc.) are great, but there must also be a space in the built environment where students have a space to work, to think—a lab that serves as a microcosm that allows them to test things before going to the macrocosm of the city.

Impact

The background of this project comes from my belief in free education and equal access to education—theorists, including Jenkins, Balsamo, and Pinkard have all identified this disparity in education, the so-called digital divide. This concern speaks to affordance and the possibilities versus the reality of access to media. One assumes that 'digital natives' are equally literate in media. (Balsamo) It turns out that most kids are literate consumers of media, but those with limited means (this too often falls along racial and income lines) and without access to a computer or broadband do not share the same literacy in the production of media as their more fortunate counterparts. (Pinkard) There is also a well-known gender inequity in the field of art and technology that *f/w* will seek to test out and challenge. By giving these affinity

spaces to communities that traditionally do not have access, we are putting the tools of production back in the hands of the people. This project will afford those without the opportunity to attend institutions of higher education access to many of the same resources—in terms of community, labs, equipment, and knowledge and skill sharing.

Personal artistic development

As the pilot and initial year of the program are successful, I will stay on as Founder and Artistic Director at *f/w*, and scope out the potential for scaling up the model and open new chapters. Much of my career has led up to this point. Most importantly, I will have contributed to the bodies of knowledge of media literacy, documentary filmmaking, and new pedagogical models. The school also brings a critical dialogue about film and documentary, as I have things I personally want to focus on, and other volunteers and visiting artist will have their own ideas that may conflict with my own ideas or those of the students. This will be a great turning point in my career as a filmmaker because I can shoot footage of the entire process of setting up the lecture series, the school, and the more 'meta' or behind-the-scenes of making an educational space. This will serve as an ethnography of the people involved, as well as a piece reflecting on the implications of this pedagogical model in the future of education.

Partnerships sought

I will seek out partnerships with Urbano in Boston, the Boston Neighborhood Network (a local community access station), the Lucy Parsons Center, Eyebeam's residency program, and MIT's program in Art Culture + Technology and Open Documentary Lab.

Bibliography

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