

Manifesto against Flatpack degrees (and for self-directed learning)

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*Are you a lucky person?
If you are, go straight into the industry,
because it's all about determination. If you're not,
film school fills that gap.*

Mamoun Hassan (2008), former Head of producing, editing and directing at the NFTS

Through my practice as film producer, I have learned that well-reflected viewing experiences play an essential role for media professionals. They form the basis for evaluation of movies as well as other media texts and are actively used to develop, decide and articulate the aims, structure, characterisation and style of one's own films.

Addressing much wider concerns, Umberto Eco pointed to the double-edged nature of media communication when he wrote that "a democratic civilisation will save itself only if it makes the language of the image into a stimulus for reflection, and not an invitation for hypnosis" (1979). Applying the reflective approaches I learned as filmmaker in the context of the complex and increasingly iterative relationship between filmmakers and audience, my approach aims to support this shift from mass media "hypnosis" and towards a more critical reflection of all media content, and thus towards reconciling practical with theoretical approaches in the teaching of film and associated media.

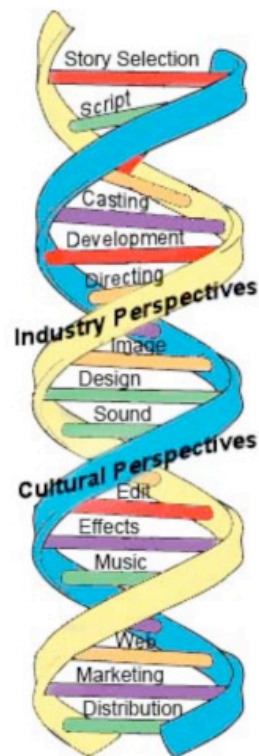
Students are given opportunities to acquire the skills that enable them to take responsibility for their own learning materials. The resulting awareness of their individual relationship to cinematic, artistic or theoretical traditions enhances not just their voices as emerging filmmakers, but the increased environment awareness allows them to adapt their skills to a great variety of media and industry contexts.

Therefore, I hereby swear to submit to the following set of rules

1. View all films, TV shows, DVDs, streams and Quicktime movies we used to watch for pleasure as homework. We ask: Why do we laugh? Why are we scared? Why are we moved? Why are we not engaged? Which techniques did the filmmakers use to achieve these effects? How can we apply their solutions to our problems when making a film? Why are some stories getting production finance while others cannot? Which films are being seen? Why are which audiences watching what films? How do films resonate with them? The learning process is about becoming a participant in creative, technical, economic and social relationships of both film industry and culture, or as one of my students called it in her research thesis: "To demystify our fascination."
2. Evolve, as teachers, into annoying 3 year olds who never stop enquiring to satisfy their endless curiosity. Such educational minimalism relies on the power of the Socratic 'Why'? Students learn to use other filmmaker's work to improve their own, just as Scorsese admits: *'I am often asked by younger filmmakers: why do I need to look at old movies? The only response I can give them is: I still consider myself a student ... The more pictures I make the more I realise I don't know. I'm always looking for something or someone I can learn from.'* (1999)
3. Move from the usual curricular canon of films accepted for study to develop individual student playlists. Take students' interests seriously. Excellence will take care of itself. Ultimately students discover 'quality', part of the quest in

Higher Education is the learning how to define it for themselves and demonstrate it in their own work.

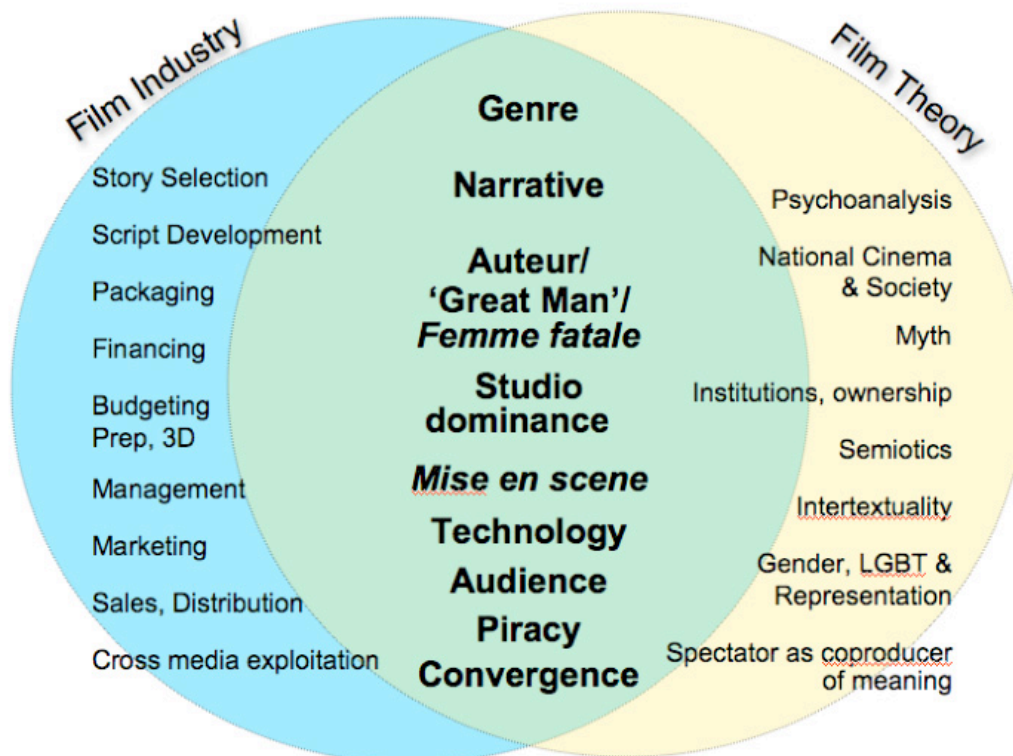
4. Do a Morpheus (when he says in *The Matrix*, 1999) to clarify responsibility for learning: *"I'm trying to free your mind, Neo. But I can only show you the door. You're the one that has to walk through it."*
5. Revise classes with a discussion on how course content has been applied in films and TV programmes students have seen outside the classroom. Besides reworking curricular content, this allows to articulate spontaneous assessments of new work and current industry affairs, just as industry professionals do when getting to know each other. To paraphrase Renoir, leave the door to the lecture hall open.
6. Encourage individual case study choices and idiosyncratic responses to film texts in blogs and class.
7. Understand filmmaking as a process that begins in the mind. Michelangelo emphasizes the need to train the imagination *"In every block of marble I see a statue as plain as though it stood before me, shaped and perfect in attitude and action. I have only to hew away the rough walls that imprison the lovely apparition to reveal it to the other eyes as mine see it."* It is still about making films, even if there is no camera in the classroom, there are no colourful editing keyboard buttons to press, or even if a film is not being screened but instead we are discussing a book, an article or interview. Aside from exercising creativity, this process also prepares emerging filmmakers for the months and sometimes years' development they may face in industry practice.
8. Select and design academic study materials towards getting a job, make a film, make a better film, or define what a better film is: "The end aimed at is not knowledge but action" (Aristotle).



9. Replace curricular paradigms and frameworks with a need-to-know methodology playlist. Abstract concepts need to support the process of

making sense of an abundance of data, analysis and theories. For emerging filmmakers theories may be limited to those that can be used in real time and real conditions. As one of my students put it in her thesis on film education: 'By concentrating upon film theory, we can end up losing sight of the cinematic practice that we are studying.'

10. Explore with students the ethic spectrum of their own education within their individual contexts, their emerging voices as artists and unfolding career goals: "*Socrates taught me that knowledge would set me free; Peter Mandelson tells me that its modern function is to make employers rich*" (Coffield 2001)
11. Recognise that whatever we do (writing, shooting, distributing, watching or teaching films), we are part of a tradition. The exiting journey is about discovering the various approaches and communities of filmmaking practice, how they originate and how we can explore and challenge them to participate in their further technical, business and creative development.
12. Acknowledge lousy films as a great teaching resource: As Fritz Lang shows us: *When I looked at the good films [...] I lived with the film. I enjoyed it. It was an adventure. My interest was so full in the film that when I saw a lousy film which I didn't like, there was something that made me say, 'wait a moment, this is not good, this I would have done differently.'* (quoted in Sherman 1976)
13. Develop and apply critical thinking as resource for curiosity, the artistic voice and truly creative work in film and TV. As Ricky Gervais admits: *That's what you do as an artist, really, even if it's such a lowly art as TV, you've got to get stuff off your chest, because that's what makes something different and original, your particular take on stuff. [...] It's a dig at easy comedy, it's a dig at compromise, it's a dig at fame, it's a dig at the press – it's a dig.*" (quoted in Gordon 2007)
14. Examine **all** the different stages of filmmaking, the procedures and responsibilities and how they help to determine the audience experience: scriptwriting, production, distribution, marketing (creative, technical, social, economical, political, psychological factors).
15. Allow constructivism to happen. Make time for students talking about current film industry and cultural issues: How do we tell a story that is fresh and surprising, but can be understood in the context of expectations that rely on sediment built up from thousands of other stories? How can I make a film in the face of Hollywood competition? What is a good film? What is a film? Where does it happen?
16. Learn how to analyse, and speak about, the quality and the shortcomings of your own work. It's the hardest task even for experienced filmmakers, but it is at the heart of the creative process.
17. Try to square the circle: Master the contradiction of talking about the pre-verbal nature of cinema.



18. Prepare to learn at least until I stop working. Part of the influence of digital technology on filmmaking and life beyond is that we work in an ever-changing environment. A degree qualification is only the beginning...
19. Foster self-directed learning. By far most of the learning in the film industry does not happen in the classroom, lecture theatre or seminar, but is self-directed (Mackendrick 2004, Skillset 2008). My teaching is about building procedures to act on this responsibility.
20. Make myself superfluous: try not to teach my own, my films', or my institution's, own importance. Increase opportunities for off-campus credits where students get the opportunity to immerse themselves in the professional communities they seek to join.
21. Prepare for a future that is same yet strange. Self-directed learning in conjunction with a much expanded availability of films and texts through online collections, and accessibility of experts, learning networks, communities of practice as well as audiences through social networking, is rapidly changing the way education is being delivered. My heart swelled with pride when I had the opportunity to screen my graduation film at a film festival 20 years ago and thus double its total lifetime audience. Last year one of my students achieved 20,000 views for his short film over a month, and developed a series for which he claims a million views. In this context, student curiosity becomes the main driver towards learners taking a role in the moving images of the future.

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