The artistic, technological, social, and cultural aspects of film, television & video point directly to an inherent pedagogic crisis in our universities today. Put simply, an increasing number of students are gaining knowledge and experience through the visual media, particularly through television. They are spending nearly twice as much time in front of a television set as they are in school classrooms. This is not a negative development; on the contrary, it is a positive and not in any negative sense. Their knowing of the world, and, hence, their being in it, is less dependent upon the written and printed text than any previous recent generation. I do not find this nearly so disconcerting as do many of my university colleagues, remembering that print is only a technology that enables expression and communication, and, as such, carries no inherent superiority to any other technology of expression and communication.

Today’s university students are demonstrably no less bright nor informed nor able than their predecessors of thirty years ago who were drawn to universities ostensibly in pursuit of a higher education. Yet, they appear to lack the same passion and commitment that their predecessors showed, perhaps because of the changing global economy in which a transformation is occurring to “post-industrial” enterprise in developed nations, and a more amorphous—yet undeniable—thrust toward a vastly expanded political and cultural democratization of society. With regard to these developments, our university curriculum—especially the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts—lags woefully behind.

Expectations and Standards

During the last two decades the faculty’s response, in essence, has amounted to defensiveness and a decline in standards. Simultaneously, the pressure of increased numbers of students from diverse backgrounds and formal educational training, has led to a deterioration of standards (grade inflation in the U.S.; declining examination criteria in Germany), and to a pompous posturing on behalf of academia’s claims vis-à-vis its value to society. In good faith, perhaps, and, at least, with good intentions, faculty have responded to increasing numbers of students by steadily decreasing the quality of their teaching, and, as such, carries no inherent superiority to any other technology of expression and communication. Today’s university students are demonstrably no less bright nor informed nor able than their predecessors of thirty years ago who were drawn ostensibly to pursue higher education. Yet, they appear to lack the same passion and commitment that their predecessors showed, perhaps because of the changing global economy in which a transformation is occurring to “post-industrial” enterprise in developed nations, and a more amorphous—yet undeniable—thrust toward a vastly expanded political and cultural democratization of society. With regard to these developments, our university curriculum—especially the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts—lags woefully behind. Expectations and Standards

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Since Plato a debate continues in western civilization as to what to teach to whom, and when and how to teach it. I would argue, however, that this issue has become increasingly widespread in importance, and increasingly contentious, in the last twenty years. In this brief article, I intend to address the question of educational practices and possibilities at the university level, focusing on issues in the field in which I teach, research, write, create, and produce—namely, film, television, and video.

Only for a Written World?

Higher Education in The Newer Media

By Paul Monaco
Paul Monaco, Professor für Cineematography / Video an der Montana State University und Leiter des dortigen Department of Media & Theatre Arts.

spread student disillusionment with much that goes on in our universities.

That disillusionment is being fueled, too, by the excessive claims of many academics that the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts, as taught in our universities, provide some kind of moral high road for masses of students. What is the proof to support such posturing? If one assesses the horribly destructive phases of European fascism and communism since the First World War, there is plenty of evidence that the learned and the well-read supported these movements - and even participated in their barbarism - as much, or maybe more so, than the uneducated and the semi-literate. In fact, it appears that everywhere peasants, workers, and "simple folk" provided more resistance qualitatively to Hitlerism and Stalinism than did the professoriat.

The Single-Minded University

In the mid-1960s the communications theorist Marshall McLuhan predicted, perhaps somewhat peevishly, that by the year 2000 all books would be in museums. That won’t be literally true, of course. But with the increased use of computer screen “electronic printing”, a certainty of the 1990s, the prediction will be yet a step closer to having been realized. Still, this hardly means that writing and literature is about to disappear from our civilization, but only that they will continue to have to share increasingly with other forms and modes of expression and communication the realm of our public discourse. Everywhere else, not only in western civilization, but throughout the world, this is already the case, everywhere, that is, except in our universities.

Our universities remain so single-minded in their commitment to privileging the written word, that I can only label this determination as “dogged”. We are spending billions upon billions, year-after-year, to teach people how to write better and how to tell good literature from bad. We spend next to nothing, by contrast, on education in film, television & video which are the pervasive forms of expression of communication with people under the age of thirty.

But let me make one thing clear. My argument has nothing to do with a plea to vastly increase spending on the newer media. This won’t happen; the problem with which I am concerned is going to have to be solved within the context of decreasing - not increasing - finances for higher education, which is essentially the fiscal trend for the foreseeable future. I would argue in favor of some modest adjustments within already existing budgets within the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts to replace some faculty positions (which become open through attrition) with persons in the newer media, as well as endorsing modest redistribution of resources within existing budgets toward these media.

Moreover, readjustments are definitely called for with regard to how “communications studies” are pursued. In both the United States and Germany this field has become widely characterized by markedly bad attempts at dubious social science in pursuit of strikingly marginal questions.

The Necessity of Field Work

The humanities, the social sciences, and the arts in our universities have been suffering from their attempt to ape the natural sciences. Investigation and inquiry in these fields have lost almost all sight of relating research to synthesis by way of wide-reaching and overarching insights. This is not a problem so frequently described as research flourishing always at the cost of teaching. Quite to the contrary, I’ve never seen someone who teaches effectively
over the long haul who is not deeply committed to vigorous inquiry and investigation of fundamental issues in his or her field. But, then, we may disagree in our evaluation of effective teaching.

The changing environment in which we live demands that university teaching increasingly make as its goal the compelling synthesis of major, fundamental issues and questions in one's field. To produce insightful syntheses for both framing and answering fundamental questions.

Efficiency is a word for which many academics appear to hold scant regard. Nonetheless, it is a keyword for curricular revision, improved teaching, and better use of curricular and instructional resources. It is not by propelling most phenomena of inherent interest in the direction of some narrow and myopic analysis of them.

Understanding The "Time" Arts

The future doesn't belong to those who can understand and use only written language, though often our universities seem to be teaching as if our faculties believed it were. In some universities in the U.S. public speaking is required - and admirably so - in a manner that integrates the theory of oral communication with practical speech making for all films and television & video students and instructors. The newest media of film and television nowhere enjoy even the limited - and sometimes contested - recognition and curricular presence of speech communication. Their presence in the university - even in the United States where they are developed professionally at an extraordinarily advanced level of international influence and impact - remains marginal.

For the past seven years I have taught at Montana State University, located in a small town not far from Yellowstone National Park. Our department enrolls approximately 224 full-time students in Motion Pictures and Video Production. For the past several years I have devoted much of my energy to developing and teaching a basic course called "Understanding Movies, Television & Video" in which both majors (students enrolled to study in the department) as well as non-majors (who have not yet selected an area of study, or who are studying in another field) attend. The entire course is based upon an extensive introduction to the theory, history, and practices of film and video, and in the production of a short (five-minute) film.

I am convinced that this integrated approach to learning in this medium is vital to understanding its essence and its nature. The course itself (which meets three hours a week) consists of:

- lectures which present theory, as well as an historical outline of the development of film, television & video,
- the screening and discussion of film and video works,
- required writing in the form of journals kept by all students in which they may discuss film or video materials seen by the class, and, as mentioned above, production of a film, in groups of five students each.

In the integrated approach to a basic course in film, television & video that I am describing, I note these advantages:

- Students are forced to inquire theoretically into the nature of a medium under the conditions of its actual production. They can learn theory while testing it, and they become aware that theory - especially in a field that is quite new to academic study - develops not on the basis of tradition and reference to prior scholarly authority, but rather by a give-and-take, a summarizing-and-catching, if you will, between the thing itself (Ding an sich), its essence (Wesen), and its making (Produktion).
- Furthermore, the students learn that the process of making (Produktion) itself initiates the learner closer to a "scientific process" (than is normally the case in our studies in the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts).
- Students must work collectively. A significant change in this process is to understand the importance of group psychology and collective problem-solving in the making of contemporary film and video. The system of collaborative work establishes a framework of mutual responsibility - a vital enough undertaking in almost all human undertakings. And may it be noted, again, this process resembles inquiry in the natural sciences more closely than is often the case in the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts.
- Students are held to a wide range of expectations, and to high standards of performance. The change in this process is vital - a vital enough undertaking in almost all human undertakings. And may it be noted, again, this process resembles inquiry in the natural sciences more closely than is often the case in the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts.
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Towards Integrated Approaches

Where I teach in Montana (U.S.A.), we have a unique situation. Within the university structure itself a station of the Public Broadcasting System is operating, partially staffed by university faculty, and extensively staffed by students enrolled in Motion Picture or Video Production. For students who continue on in the study of these media the opportunity for working cooperatively with faculty on productions is extremely important. Still our success in Montana is only partial. We are constantly aware that university faculties in the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts, while quite often thorough in criticizing the inconsistencies, the inaccuracies, and the inadequacies of other institutions in society, are not nearly so adept at criticizing their own shortcomings which have largely grown out of the fact that today's university curricula were remain bound, for example, to the worn idea that the only worthwhile unit of university learning occurs across a specific numbers of weeks, normally equaling what we have chosen to call a "semester." In many ways, of course, we'd be better served by great flexibility in scheduling. Universities could utilize outside specialists (often practitioners in the field) for special short courses and intensive courses, rather than just special lectures and events which are not nearly always tangential to the curriculum proper. Why can't we offer weekend courses (four Saturdays and Sundays intensively), or evening courses (four hours per week for one night, Monday through Friday) to students? Our universities sorely need greater flexibility, not less, in the shaping of the students' lives - and greater flexibility for making their engagement "count" in the mechanism of how such activities are valued and credited.

In summary, I would like to express the following recommendations:

- film, television & video are pervasive media of expression and communication in society today and need to be recognized as such by faculty and students. In the integrated approach the teaching of film and video is an integral part of the curricula of the social sciences, and the arts.
- develop policies and practices for recruiting and retaining full-time faculty who are committed to such
an integrated approach; develop contacts with practicing profession-
as in the field, and integrate them into the academic program as much as possible.
• stimulate all aspects of an academic program that challenges both
students and faculty constantly.
• proceed with the basic philosophy that we can be doing much more in an
efficient manner, and that synthes-
sing complex theoretical and his-
torical material is a fundamental ex-
pectation for good teaching.
• Students, no matter what their
posture, are insecure rather than
looking for explanations of why
something can’t be produced, take
the position that it is primarily an
issue of figuring out a strategy by
which it can be produced.
• develop contacts with “the profes-
sion”, and convey to students a bal-
anced, realistic assessment of that
profession as it is being practiced; encourage students to reflect
seriously upon whether the proc-
esses of working and producing in a
particular profession fit their own
intellect and temperament.

And there is a last point, you
should always keep in mind: we all
learn by making mistakes; “failed”
projects may often be highly valu-
able. So take it easy.

Zusammenfassung
In den letzten 20 Jahren hat sich das
Lernverhalten von Schülern undStudierenden grundlegend verän-
dert. Was sich hingegen nicht verän-
dert hat, sind die... erhaltenwir durch die Medien Film, Fernse-
hen und Video. Wer aus dieser Ent-
wicklung den Schluß zieht, die heu-

tigen Studierenden seien aufgrund
dieser Tatsache weniger informiert
oder intelligent als ihre Kommitte-

nen vor 30 Jahren, irr. Es ist eher
das Gegenteil der Fall: Die Geistes-
wissenschaften, die Sozialwissen-
schaften und die sogenannten ange-
wandten Wissenschaften bleiben
gleich weit hinter diesem Wandel
zurück. Gerade so als wollte man die
Zeit anhalten, wird an Büchern als
dem eiszig denkbaren Lernmittel
gestiegen.

Hinzu kommt, daß die anstei-
genden Studentenzahlen zu einer
defensiven Haltung seitens der Uni-

versitäten und zum Absinken der
Lehrstandards geführt haben. In

vermutlich guter Absicht wurden
die Anforderungen mit Zunahme
der Studentenzahlen stetig herabge-

schrägt. Die Studierenden sehen
dies in der Regel jedoch nicht als
Geschenk an; auch sie sind an einer
Ausbildung interessiert, die ihnen
dchauffieren” Chancen eröffnet. Da die
finanziellen Mittel immer weiter
gekürzt werden, sollte es zumindest
zu einer gerechteren Verteilung in

nerhalb der Ausbildung für kommu-

nikative Berufe kommen - zwischen

den traditionellen Schriftmedien und
den „neuen“ audiovisuellen Medien.

Die Zukunft gehört nicht mehr al-
lein denjenigen, die mit geschriebe-
nen Sprache kompetent umgehen
können, sondern zunehmend den
Studierenden, die es gelernt haben, ge-
sprochene Sprache zu verstehen.

An der Montana State University

geben es aus diesem Grund seit eini-
genen Jahren den Grundkurs Unter-

standing Movies, Television & Video,
bei dem es um die Integration von
Theorie, Geschichte und Praxis geht.

Ziel ist es, alle Studierenden in

Produktion eines Kurzfilms (von

ein bis fünf Minuten) mit einzubeste-

hen. Hier können alle Studierenden

erkennen, wie Theorie und Praxis

zusammenwirken. Sie lernen in

Gruppen zu arbeiten und sich ge-

genseitig zu unterstützen - der ge-

meinsam produzierte Film wird

auch gemeinsam benotet. Sie entstel-

len nicht nur Teile, sondern sind

verantwortlich für den gesamten

Prozeß der Produktion. Da Prakti-

kter von außerhalb dabei ihre Er-

fahrungen an die Studierenden ver-

mitteln, bekommen sie realistische

Einsichten in mögliche, zukünftige

Tätigkeiten. Unserer Erfahrung

lauten jedenfalls erkennen, daß die

Integration von Medientheorie, Med-

diengeschichte und Medienpraxis im

Studium eine wesentliche Voraus-
setzung für eine gute und zukunft-

sichere Ausbildung der Studenten

ist.

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Literatur:


„Interface“ von Frank Georg Lucas