Screen Production in the 21ˢᵗ Century

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So what I' m going to talk about is "Film Production in the 21st Century" or what I tend to refer to more these days as "Screen Production" and "Screen Education" that we provide here in the School of Film and Television in The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts.

So what I've done here on the first slide is I'm giving a bit of an overview of what I'm going to cover in this short presentation today. I'm going to start up with a couple of questions.

1)   Why should you encourage your students and your parents that maybe an education, a screen education, or an education in film or media production might be something that is useful for them and it might be something that could lead to a career in the future?

So that's a question I'm going to throw out. Then I'm going to throw out another question as well, something to do with virtual reality – you might have heard about virtual reality.

2)   Is virtual reality going to replace cinema?

So I'll get to deal with that at a little bit later in the presentation.

Question #1 Viability of the Industry

So we've got the pandemic at the moment. During the past year or two, some quite profound things had started to happen in the screen industry internationally. In the past year, we've probably noticed that the film industry in China has probably become the leading film industry in the world. It's probably, definitely, overtaken the Bollywood, the Indian film industry and probably the Hollywood film industry as well. What I've been doing is I've been gathering some information, some statistical information, over the past couple of days that pretty clearly indicates that this is happening. However, statistics are always problematic and particularly at this moment when we have got the pandemic operating around the globe, and not all industries are operating on the same level, (same) playing field. So the statistics, I may be a little bit wary of, but it seems to be fairly indicative that the China film industry is now the major film industry on this planet.

What we do at the School of Film and Television is we deal with mainstream cinema and art cinema. We also deal with documentaries; we deal with screenwriting; we deal with series and we deal a lot with short film making. So we teach the students to make short films. Process in the School of Film and Television is very much experiential. So we are very production-driven. We want the students to make things; to work; to use tools; to come up with ideas; to work out how to get their ideas; to transfer their ideas from in their head onto a screen for an audience, for a particular audience, for a target audience.

I want to look at a little bit of this – see if we could go to the next slide please, oh, which I'm going to do this myself. I've just grabbed some of these quotations from various sources over the last couple of weekends. So what we're looking at here is that the film and television industry is really being led these days by the games industry, by the video games industry. The games industry is a huge industry and a lot of the innovations have happened in terms of communicating with the audiences and telling stories. (Screen production) is being developed and driven (led) by the games industry and then fed down to television and drama production and even documentary production and mainstream cinema production. So the games industry is the big driver, the big motivator, in the whole media space.

Out of that you'll see that, despite the pandemic, the US box office has been fairly healthy – 5.6 billion in March 2021. The box office, in spite of the pandemic when a lot of the cinemas closed down, we're seeing a lot of box office happening... (Switching into hand-held microphone) Thankyou, I'll hold this microphone as well. So they are saying that a lot of the box offices are still strong in the US. But we are seeing the Chinese box office is being particularly strong. I've pulled out some of the figures, not from last weekend (18-19 April) that just passed but the weekend before this (11-12 April) and the three highest grossing films, mainstream cinema films, in the world, globally, were a film called "Hi mom," a film called "Chinatown Detective III," and then a film called "Kong versus Godzilla," or was it "Godzilla versus Kong?" But anyway, those are the three highest grossing films in the world, and the first two of those are all China, Mainland productions. So, the box office success right at the moment, right up to date, right as of now, is being driven by films that are made in China, producing the greatest amount of income; the greatest amount of people looking at the screen in mainstream cinema is happening in China. So this is the snapshot of some of the information I've pulled together.

To summarise some of this information – you can see that I've put a slide there, basically summarizing what we're talking about here – the real takeaway from this is that the China box office is something that's really surging ahead. So to answer to that question about "Are there viable careers?" "Is screen education, is screen production, is film production across all of its different types of genres – is it something that' s going to be a viable industry for students to start studying now and looking ahead across the next 10 years, 20 years, 30 years?" And I think, fairly clearly, the answer is "Yes." We've seen that in Hong Kong – Hong Kong is a city that has a rich tradition, a very proud tradition of filmmaking – and that tradition is still putting Hong Kong in a great position to be able to produce various filmmakers, various cinematographers, directors, post-production, visual effects and animators that can all feed into the wider boom in film production that's happening right across China.

So this is a pretty remarkable situation. It's a great opportunity and a great time if you're a young student, if you are interested in telling stories in visual storytelling and in using sound and images and music and indeed performing arts to contribute toward screen production. Then this is great moment to be in Hong Kong and to be learning these kinds of skills because it is absolutely, definitely, there is a booming industry that's developing right around Hong Kong. There is no reason that the people receiving the education in Hong Kong can't go on and do very well in the future. So I think that particular question is pretty easy to wrap up.

Question #2 Virtual Reality

Our experiential teaching and curriculum focus, a production-driven focus, in the School of Film and Television is something that we've been looking at carefully recently; and we've done a very thorough curriculum review within the Academy. We've just come up with a major external review and we have designed some new aspects of our curriculum. And one of the outcomes of that is something that we called the "Screen Production and Research Centre." We call that "SPaRC." All new first year students will be learning animation, will be learning digital media, and will be learning things like virtual reality in the first year when they arrive at the School; and they'll be working within the SPaRC Centre, within the Wanchai campus. So we want all students – all new students will be getting a thorough grounding in all of the new, innovative digital media tools; and virtual reality will be at the centerpiece of that, particularly in the Academy for Performing Arts.

We are very interested in virtual reality because virtual reality is something that's been very interesting for five or six years and remains something very interesting. But the area that is of the greatest interests to us in the School of Film and Television is that virtual reality provides neither a stage nor a screen. It's entirely a new space providing new opportunities to create and recreate new aesthetics, new ways of telling stories, and new ways of interacting with an audience. And that's why virtual reality is something that we're paying close attention to right from the very beginning so that all new students will start to become familiar with how they can work with virtual reality.