CINEMA OF POVERTY: INDEPENDENCE AND SIMPLICITY IN AN AGE OF ABUNDANCE AND COMPLEXITY

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Abstract: Over the past 25 years of writing, producing and directing, my aspirations as a creative artist in film have shifted from a paradigm in which the scale and scope of financial and human resources shaped not only the creative intentions of a project, but the very definition of what made something 'cinematic', to a new paradigm in which poverty - both in terms of resources and, more philosophically, in terms of artistic expression - has become one of the defining features of my artistic aspiration and my understanding of a new cinema. This development has interacted with parallel developments in technologies of production, distribution and exhibition, of a kind and scale I never envisaged when first embarking on a career in film, and has, for me, led to a kind of creative liberation which I am only now beginning to fully understand. Traditionally, human and financial resources have been considered essential for the production of quality, creative narrative films. In this article, I shall reflect on my own practice to explore how poverty can enhance the creative engagement with the medium and lead to the development of new and innovative approaches to, amongst other things, narrative imagery and, in so doing, explore how poverty can introduce new and original approaches to cinematic story-telling.

> 'The future of cinematography belongs to a group of young solitaries who will spend their last cent on making films in order to stay clear of the material routines of the trade'.
>
> Robert Bresson, 1977.

Poverty

Like many filmmakers I own several cameras. I also own several computers. Additionally, I have access to as many cameras and computers as I could ever want through my university and other sources. Every two or three years I add cameras and computers to my arsenal and effectively discard some of my equipment. I have many different types of software and regularly add software to my palette of options. I have an extensive range of software options with which I can create almost any audio visual effect I could imagine. I have hundreds of films in my personal library and have access to 10,000s of others at the click of a few buttons on my home computer. I could go on and on about all the things I have and all the things I could purchase whenever I want; and these are just things related directly to my filmmaking.

Abundance is the ether in which I live. Emerging out of this abundance, choice has become the mantra of modern commerce and politics, diversity the rallying call of those who manage our behaviour in society and absolute individualised self

determination the core around which we build our values. Young people are sold the idea that opportunities are abundant, that career options are abundant and that there is an abundant way of expressing ourselves. Digital technology and the internet is exponentially reinforcing this message. 'We're all different' is a phrase I hear everywhere I go. When therefore teaching young people in creative arts practice, for example, I am subliminally encouraged by prevailing doctrines to perpetuate paradigms of abundance in all its manifestations.

While Nature herself seems to perpetuate abundance, psychological[i] and Darwinian[ii] understandings of human behaviour seem to, paradoxically, contradict such notions as 'choice' and 'self determination'. They do so by looking at human behaviour within the context of psychological patterns of development and Darwinian evolutionary law[iii]. Sociologists, anthropologists and economists look at human behaviour and, in almost all cases, discover, or confirm, a plethora of definable patterns in this behaviour. Indeed, science and scientific theories are in themselves as abundant as they have ever been.

Abundance could well be a sign of health. It is certainly a sign of wealth - physically and metaphorically. Abundance is, by definition, somehow quantitative. In an abundant society we are rich and possess riches and we determine this in numbers: money, barrels of oil, number of art galleries, cinema attendances, number of films produced, company turnover, profit margins and so on. In all spheres, numbers have proliferated and emerging out of this is the dominance of the science of matrixes and statistics. Increasingly, in a world of abundance, we assign value through matrixes and statistical analyses[iv].

Figure 1 A storyboard page from *The Silent Accomplice (2010)*

Why should this be a problem for a filmmaker?

'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God'. (New Testament, Mark, 10:25.)

Could it be that living and working in abundance could blind us to various truths? Could it be that abundance obscures clear sightedness? Could it be that abundance encourages us to over-complicate understanding our predicaments? Could it be that abundance confuses us? Could it be that abundance of creative tools makes us less capable of articulating ourselves? Could it be that abundance distances our selves from what we feel is our true nature, as individuals and as society?

One could never give scientifically valid answers to any of these questions. Notions such as 'truths', 'seeing', 'understanding', 'confusion', creative 'articulation' and 'feelings' are such subjective and experiential concepts that they rarely figure in debates about success. As they cannot be measured, it is hard to understand them in the context of abundance and wealth[v]. And yet, when I think of success I am very much thinking about entering that 'Kingdom' in which I can see and feel truths and have the ability to articulate myself creatively about them. And as I try to enter this 'Kingdom', I am increasingly aware of what Christ was talking about when he spoke of a camel, a rich man and the eye of a needle. Abundance and wealth are a problem in this quest. They are a problem because they distract me towards a value system of truths based, in one way or another, on material measurements. My creative impulses and decisions can become twisted by measurable parameters. At the extremes, my subject matter and narrative approaches could be shaped by attendance figures, audience surveys and focus groups; while at the more subtle end, commissioning editors in arts organisations could be concerned with ensuring that the arts they fund somehow address government targets on, for example, audience engagement[vi]. Such audience engagement is usually measured in some statistical form. Or when determining the cinematic quality of a film, I may be tempted to assign aesthetic values based on a perception of the wealth or abundance of a film: its budget. A subliminal, or even a less subliminal, engagement with the film may be based on an assessment of the wealth and abundance of art production components, special effects components, the number of stars, their imagined fees and mythologies based on the excesses involved in production. In such circumstances, the evidence of abundance of resources invested in the film drives the very definition of what makes something cinematic.

The more abundance and wealth define my reality, the more necessary poverty becomes in helping me to see, understand and express. Where once I would bemoan the lack of resources and opportunities to articulate myself through film and would shape my entire working practices around securing necessary resources, I now actively seek poverty as an essential ingredient in my practice[vii]. Where in the past I assumed more resources would help me create better work, I now ask myself: how in the midst of this abundance can I find a way of passing through the eye of the needle to a place where my work may shed a revealing light on our lives?

'Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.'
(Cohen, 2001.)

Poverty and Cinematic Practice

Poverty is not here thought of primarily as material poverty. However, a lack of material resources is a good place to start exploring the notion of poverty; for the poverty of resources can lead to a number of revealing and beneficial consequences. These consequences might include: enhanced creativity, the discovery of simplicity, the power of humility and exercising courage. They are consequences that manifest themselves in both process and form, which is significant, as process and form are inextricably linked. I have come to consider these qualities as essential to the creative practitioner. Indeed, they seem to be qualities that could be relevant to many different disciplines and applied in many different eras and contexts. Consciously, and unconsciously, they manifest themselves in the practice of my filmmaking and I shall here briefly describe some examples of how this is so in my own work[viii].

Humility

With some notable exceptions such as *Jaguar* (Rouch, 1955) many documentary films made by Europeans or Americans about sub-Saharan Africa tend to be anthropological, socio-political or cultural curiosities. Socio-political films such as *Darwin's Nightmare* (Sauper, 2004) which perpetuate the notion of Africans as helplessly exploited, or anthropological films such as *Baka: The People Of The Rain Forrest* (Agland, 1987) in which we very much look in on an 'alien' people as analytical outsiders, could be described as lacking a certain humility. (I am not suggesting that the filmmakers lack humility as individuals.) It is the perspective of the films, and the general approach to process of that perspective, that can lack humility. Relatively rich filmmakers travel to exotic countries to make films about people who are largely in a different predicament and in many ways live differently; indeed, often think and believe differently. These films are for consumption in Europe and the US and are presented as 'insights' or 'revelations' from which we in the developed world can learn about foreign cultures and predicaments[ix]. However, these works are framed within the value system of the filmmakers and their audiences and are often shaped by tastes, fashions and the agendas of people who have no interaction with, or understanding of, these cultures. A media based neo-colonialism emerges driven by the power of financial resources and the needs of consumer markets - including television - craving material that will ultimately reinforce our particular social, political and cultural values and beliefs. Driving this demand is a craving that leads to abundance and it encourages the perpetuation of a lack of humility.

> '... it is more useful to speak of what one has experienced than to pretend to a knowledge that is entirely impersonal, an observation with no observer. In fact there is no theory that is not a fragment, carefully prepared, of some autobiography.' (Valéry, 1958, p.58.)

This is not to say that filmmakers should not make films whose physical subject matter lies outside their own direct experience. The inner motivations of the filmmaker are at the heart of the relationship between filmmaker and subject and, where this relationship is healthy, there will be no judgements made and an element of gullibility will lie at the heart of this relationship. Judgements include such apparently innocuous assumptions about what a filmmaker thinks a subject is imagining and what is real, analysing observed behaviour in accordance with some scientific or psychological pre-concepts or

making assumptions about a subject's aspirations, for example in response to an economic plight. These assumptions all involve judgements based on values.

Gullibility is often associated with a character flaw. However, gullibility suggests an open, non-judgemental mind. It suggests a mind willing to initially accept things at face value, a willingness to consider possibilities and notions that at first glance the rational or conditioned mind has dismissed as unreal, unfeasible, fantastical or plain ridiculous. Like a child's mind, the gullible mind is willing to listen to people's stories without making judgement, will recognise feelings without dismissing them out of hand and, above all, will be willing to try and make playful connections between phenomena and elements our schooling and rational constructs have long dismissed. A sceptical mind is a closed mind, one that is suspicious, one that is more likely to make judgements and one that is more likely to be arrogant and, consequently, less likely to see beyond what it can rationally define according to its own value system.

With these considerations in mind, I seek the humility that will allow me to accept 'impossible' notions, contemplate 'ridiculous' ideas and embrace 'fantastical' postulations. Characters emerge in my imagination, and I let them be as they are. Subjects tell me strange and impossible stories, and I accept them. I have experiences and do not separate the imagined from the real. In this mindless manner, I try to rid myself of the wealth and abundance of scientific, cultural and social influences that might make me judge before I have had a chance to see. This for me is one consequence of poverty.

'When your daemon is in charge, do not think consciously. Drift, wait, obey'. (Kipling quoted in Burnshaw, 1970, p 53.)

Figure 2 Kwasi Akufo in *Heart of Gold* (2006)

This notion of poverty was very much on my mind when I set out to make Heart of Gold (Knudsen, 2006). Heart of Gold was a documentary project which took me back to my country of birth, Ghana, to explore how traditional story-telling may help to shape a new approach to documentary forms. The resulting documentary film revolved around the changing relationship local people have to the precious and mystical metal,

gold. Traditionally considered to possess a spirit like any other sentient being, gold has played an important part in the history and mythology of Ghana. This is still evident today, though this relationship is rapidly changing, as gold becomes a crucial part of the Ghanaian economy, controlled almost exclusively by multi-national companies. By treating the mythology as equally factual as the observed empirical world, Heart of Gold is built on stories told by various people in the Akim Abuakwa region and these stories are woven together by an over-arching story of a young boy who finds a lump of gold in the river Brim and wonders what to do with it. This quest leads him to meet a number of people and have a number of experiences, which enlighten us to the spiritual relationship that people still have to gold. By exploring this changing relationship, the aim was to discover what kind of stories are told about gold, and how these stories are told, and how these stories and their mode of delivery may help me, the filmmaker, create documentary narrative approaches which can encompass both realism and mysticism as inseparable equals.

In African and Latin American literature, we often hear commentators from the developed world using terminology such as 'magical realism' to describe this seamless blending of realism, mysticism, magic, fact, history, politics and morality in the creation of cultural product[x]. For the traditional African, there is no distinction between these phenomena. They are all fact. What defines the documentary genre is also at the root of its limitations; an epistemology which ties it to the factual or empirical experience of life. There is therefore an inherent danger that the filmmaker from the developed world will enter into an African situation and 'read' this situation with tools that make judgements in order to separate out fact from fiction, mythology from history, the real from the imaginary. Heart of Gold set out to introduce humility and gullibility into its creative form by making no judgements or distinction between what is factual and what is real, what is history and what is mythology, or what is imagined and what is real. I sought to move away from the notion of looking anthropologically at a distant people, or engaging feelings of socio-political injustice, or exoticising cultural heritage. What I hoped for was a poverty of preconceptions, a poverty of assumptions, a poverty of pre-determined knowledge that would enable me to, first, engage with subjects in a different way; second, to create a narrative which looked at Africa and Africans in a different way; and third, to help evolve documentary forms in ways in which they would be able to deal with fact and mysticism as equally real[xi].

Creativity

Poverty and creativity are very closely linked. One of the great threats to the creative mind is the development of patterns of thinking - indeed, rational thinking itself. Routines of practice, routines of thought associations, routines of thought reasoning all lead to repetitive habits and the eventual deadening of the mind. Socialisation and education are all geared to shaping our thoughts and behaviour into patterns governed by social and personal needs. We do need these patterns and consistent references for the sake of stability and yet if the human mind were not able to be creative, our consequent inability to solve problems would ensure that we would die.

Creativity is therefore a critical function and is not just something confined to the arts. The creative act is about being able to break patterns of thinking and patterns of actions by combining actions and thoughts we would not normally combine or actions

and thoughts we associate as not belonging together. Archimedes making a connection between the mathematical problem of the volume of a gold crown to the grease marks in his bath - what does having a bath have to do with the volume of a gold crown? - or Godard asking why he could not cut a section out of a continuous action in a shot (the jump cut) - for how can one cut time in this fashion when it doesn't happen like this in real life? - are creative acts. The creative poet plays with words in ways the habits of colloquial language does not. The creative filmmaker combines formal elements from different genres to create new ways of seeing. The creative scientist asks questions that question the assumptions of his or her peers. Like a child, the creative person 'plays' with combining notions, thoughts, associations and activities that involve the breaking of patterns long impregnated into us by habits, fears, socialisation and schooling.

The most compelling reason to create is that there is a problem. A physical problem. A mental problem. A problem of articulation. A problem of understanding. Whatever the problem is, our patterns of thinking, our patterns of understanding or our patterns of associating are failing to solve the problem. Clichés and habits, repetition and regurgitation, are deadening our abilities to discover and see. Abundance and wealth can exacerbate this problem and no where is this more relevant than in filmmaking.

I have found poverty of material resources a powerful incentive to question assumptions about process and form. In the past I caught myself assuming that if I had money to have a larger more experienced crew, I would be able to solve certain problems. Or if I had more money to spend on production design, I would be able to solve some narrative problems. Or if I had more money to spend on special effects, or on travel and accommodation, I would be able to do this or that. When I reflect on what I would have done with more money, I realise that I would have used that money to perpetuate dominant practices in process and form. When thinking that more money would solve my problems, I was in fact basing these solutions on things I had seen before and practices that were the norm.
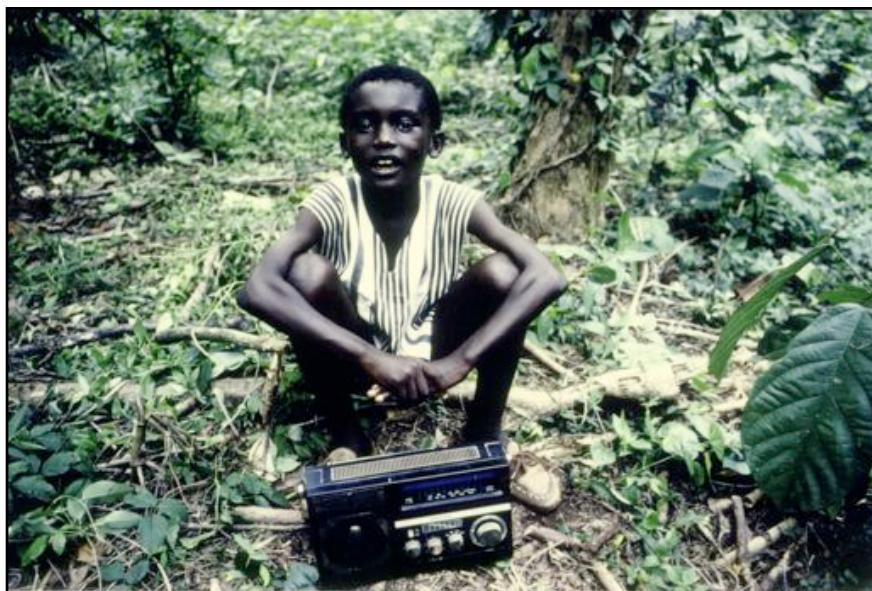

Figure 3 Shadruk Offei Nyarko in *One Day Tafo* (1991)

Instead, poverty has made me question assumptions about crewing, production processes[xii] and the narrative language itself. In particular, I shall focus here on my discovery of sound as a narrative element that goes beyond the role of cementing the verisimilitude of the image. While well aware of sound as a powerful force in fictional cinematic narrative[xiii], it tended to remain theoretical until poverty forced me to think practically about it in my own early documentary practice. Most documentaries tend to use direct sound as one of the elements of verisimilitude in a film, but in One Day Tafo (Knudsen, 1991), poverty forced me to look to creatively deploy sound to solve a number of problems.

Conceptually, the film started as a traditional documentary about my returning to Ghana for the fist time since my childhood. Being half Danish and Half Ghanaian, the film was initially funded by the Danish Film Institute[xiv] and the purpose was to make a film about the connection between the two peoples, cultures and histories, as seen through my personal circumstances. A number of problems led to my abandoning the 'traditional documentary' approach in favour of an unusual blending of fiction, fact, personal memories, my father's archive footage from Ghana in the 1950s and various West African mythologies.

One of my problems was how to deal with the issue of slavery. Slave trading has a long standing historical connection between Denmark and Ghana, but I did not have the budget to allow me to travel to a number of archives in order to gather potential visual materials or to interview various experts on the matter or, indeed, to recreate epic scenes. Conventional documentary making demands this kind of rigour of research and suggests that we present these facts in a form befitting our notions of reality. All I had was access to a ruined former slave castle slowly crumbling into the sea.

> 'Things are beautiful where they are inevitable, that is, when they are free exhibitions of a spirit. There is no violence here, no murdering, no twisting-about, no copying-after, but a free, unrestrained, yet self-governing display of movement - which constitutes the principle of beauty. The muscles are conscious of drawing a line, making a dot, but behind them there is an unconsciousness. By this unconsciousness nature writes out her destiny: by this unconsciousness the artist creates his work of art. A baby smiles and the whole crowd is transported, because it is genuinely inevitable, coming out of the Unconscious'. (Suzuki, 1996, p.)

Standing in the ruins of Keta castle on the Ghana coast, I looked at the crumbling walls and asked myself: how am I going to get across anything about the slavery connection between Denmark and Ghana and how am I going to do it in a way that will make viewers look at this well trodden subject afresh? A very powerful feeling, a feeling of a presence, overwhelmed me. What was this presence and where was it? It was in the crumbling stonewalls. The walls themselves had absorbed the voices of the past, had held onto them for hundreds of years, and as I stood there the walls were letting these sounds seep out for me to hear... I let my imagination loose. I played with this notion and mingled it with my feelings. While convention was telling me that I should be making a documentary - with its associated patterns of codes - poverty was forcing me

to take drastic action to solve my narrative problem. I asked myself, why should I not simply tell it as it was, tell the audience what I imagined while standing in this castle?

> 'My ideas come as they will, I don't know how.' (Mozart quoted in Burnshaw, 1970, p 53.)

What emerged was a sequence telling the journey of the slaves from inland forests to the slave castle, encountering Danish slave traders, the sufferings, the forcible removals to the waiting ships and so on - all using only images of the ruined castle and sounds of local actors performing a sound track of what I imagined emerging from these walls[xv]. This proved to be a defining moment for me in terms of understanding the importance of poverty in creative filmmaking. I finally understood what one of my professors at York University in Toronto once told me: 'a good filmmaker can make a good film based around a door nob'. I was beginning to realise that poverty was my creative friend, not my enemy. It would bring the best out of me, shake me out of complacency and challenge me to question my assumptions about the language of filmmaking.

Simplicity

Perhaps, above all, poverty encourages simplicity. In simplicity I see truth and I see beauty. Something is beautiful because it rings true. When something is true, it strikes me as beautiful. Invariably, this truth and this beauty is simple and in that simplicity there is an inherent poverty. These inextricable qualities are at the heart of what I try to achieve in my art[xvi], not least because they are the qualities that move me in the work of others.

Bread Day (Dvortsevoy, 2002) is a good example in documentary in which poverty is at the heart of its beauty, which in turn is its truth. There are no complex character or narrative explanations or contextualisations, but a raw observation of the simple and mundane things in daily life. The poverty of narrative expression, the poverty of technique, the poverty of character motivation and the poverty of imagery creates a beautiful simplicity in which a truth about life in the remote Siberian village becomes strikingly apparent. The lingering lengthy shots sparingly populated by apparently simple random actions and the sparse soundscape drifting in and out on the wind combine to create an evocatively simple work rooted in humility.

Figure 4 Javier Casanova in *Vainilla Chip* (2009)

I sought such simplicity through poverty in the documentary, Vainilla Chip (Knudsen, 2009[xvii]). Set in the small Cuban town of San Antonio de los Baños, just outside Havana, Vainilla Chip tells the story of an ordinary day for an elderly ice cream maker, Javier Casanova. An ordinary day, which, like all the other ordinary days, has become painfully pierced by an acute sense of longing for his deceased wife. This film is an intimate portrait of a hardworking man in a contemporary Cuba far removed from clichés of The Revolution and romanticised memories of Cuban music. There are no spoken words in the film, no establishing of back-stories or articulating socio-political contexts. Instead we have a very simple structure based on a one day slice of Javier's life. Mundane daily chores and activities are observed and seen together start to take on a different significance. They become simple reflections of a changing state of mind, an inner predicament. A predicament that can only be revealed through poverty of expression, poverty of narrative intervention, and the poverty of imagery. Lingering observations of these simple, mundane daily chores are interrupted by a new daily activity - the daily tears for his deceased wife, the daily purchasing of flowers, the daily visits to the cemetery. Using an opaque transcendental structure[xviii], I sought not to express Javier's predicament to an audience, but to invite them into his predicament through the poverty of the spaces in the imagery and narrative. In a sense, I sought a beauty which only simplicity could achieve, a truth only poverty could have revealed.

Courage

'At each touch I risk my life'[xix].

To successfully implement the attributes of poverty through humility, gullibility, creativity and simplicity requires courage. Courage to challenge one's own preconceptions and habits, courage to challenge the dominant norms of a genre and form, courage to stand alone in the face of ridicule and criticism, courage to listen and take criticism when relevant, courage to listen to what the rational mind says is a crazy idea and play with it. In other words, as a creative practitioner I must take risks and have the courage to do so.

In my forthcoming feature film, The Silent Accomplice (Knudsen, 2010), I seek to further challenge my own preconceptions and assumptions through poverty. Though there are 58 characters in the film there is not a word of dialogue or voice over. Apart from a few incidental exceptions, there are no spoken words in the film whatsoever. Set in contemporary Britain, it is a story seen through the perspective of water that flows from a spring to the sea. This ever-present silent protagonist engages with people in often intimate moments in their lives, giving us an unusual and intimate snap shot of contemporary living. Episodic and peripatetic in construction, and poetically blending fiction and documentary, the narrative weaves its way in and out of specific people's lives to reveal a Britain with hidden and unspoken disparities and aspirations.

Figure 5 Daniel Bath in *The Silent Accomplice* (2010)

It is a film where I have actively sought poverty in all the ways discussed here, and more[xx].To actively seek poverty may to some seem like a strange, if not deranged, approach, but the risk-taking that this involves may, in itself, be of benefit in creating quality, innovative work. With poverty, one is exposed to the elements, exposed to criticism and ridicule. But perhaps like the best wines being produced from vines growing at the climatic extremes of what they can cope with, endangered by poverty of water or heat, so the filmmaker may produce their best work when exposed to the equivalent poverty and potential failure.

Poverty and Digital Technology
Ironically, some aspects of abundance are very beneficial and conducive to the search for poverty. Digital technologies' inroads into the world of filmmaking have had a significant impact on the possibilities of building one's work around notions of poverty. And nothing is more symptomatic of abundance and wealth than digital technology.

In 2005, some 206,000 book titles were published in the UK[xxi]. Between 2003 and 2008 six billion songs were downloaded from the iTunes store alone[xxii], representing 10,000s of artists. In 2006, some 13,000 feature films were shown at US film festivals[xxiii]. What started in book publishing with the Guttenberg press in the 1450s has culminated in the notion of unlimited supply that the digital era offers in terms of arts content. First, more people learned to read and write and the Guttenberg press allowed for more diverse voices to emerge. We are now in a situation where, from a mobile phone, anyone can shoot and edit a film and distribute it to the world for thousands, if not millions, to see. In a shoulder bag, I could have the necessary equipment to produce, post-produce, project, make distributable disc media and distribute across the world a cinema quality film. Abundance of cheap accessible digitally based technology is creating unlimited demand[xxiv] and a lot of that demand is being met by a new breed of consumer-producer, whose ultimate goal is not to build traditional business models, but whose ultimate goal, perhaps, is simply to be heard.

One consequence is that the nature of gatekeepers and gatekeeping to arts content is rapidly changing, as are models of income generation and consequent business models. How many of the 206,000 books published in the UK in 2005

generated enough income for the authors to make a living? Clearly, not everyone writing and publishing a book is doing so to make a living out of it, yet these books will contribute to individuals, the culture, the economy of an industry and the economy of a nation. The internet is ensuring that the boundaries between the 'professional' practitioner and the 'amateur' practitioner are more blurred than ever. Indeed, these definitions are becoming problematic. In the past, if not clearly an 'amateur', I would be an aspirant seeking to be part of the film and television business or already involved in the film and television business[xxv]. Access to these sectors was severely restricted, or built largely on nepotism. If I was not one of the select few receiving public arts funding, I would be deriving a living directly from the profitability of my practice work. This meant working directly to the demands of the few gatekeepers who, because of limitations of technologies, would control the direct access to the audience[xxvi].

Digital technologies and the internet, accelerated by broadband capacity expansion, are challenging the established institutions and order of the moving image sector. The Guttenberg press played a direct role in the proliferation of new ideas across Europe, as the phonogram helped diversify and engage broader musical tastes. Then video technology, now superseded by digital technology, started doing similar things to the moving image. Digital technology, as the music industry has recently experienced, is seriously challenging the old order of institutions as they lose their monopoly on access to audiences. The key consequence, as it relates to my discussion of poverty, is that independent producers motivated by more complex motivators than profit can find a context in which they can sustain production and distribution. Notions, which had become ingrained in our thinking about sustainability in filmmaking - such as notions that one had to reach mass audiences - need to be questioned. These were notions built around models of limited supply and narrow distribution bottlenecks. Long tail business models[xxvii] are able to satisfy sophisticated consumer aspirations by responding to consumers' more complex tastes. The technology is now able to supply a more diverse palette of products in more fragmented patterns. Consumers who once only had the choice of consuming what was a mass distributed product, now have the opportunity to satisfy their specialist interests, their moral concerns or their plain eccentricities.

> 'Here's the data for music. Offline, in bricks and mortar retailers, the top 1000 albums make up nearly 80 percent of the total market. (Indeed, in a typical big box retailer, which carries just a fraction of CDs, the top 100 albums can account for more than 90 percent of sales.) By contrast, online that same top 1000 accounts for less than a third of the market. Seen another way, a full half of the online market is made up of albums *beyond* the top 5000.' (Anderson, 2006, p. 137.)

For the filmmaker seeking poverty, the abundance of digital technologies, and the consequent fragmentation of distribution patterns, allows for more independence: independence to break with the 'material routines' of the trade; independence to question the values and tastes of institutional gatekeepers; independence to question creative assumptions; independence to challenge working practices; independence to speak of things less spoken about... independence to pursue poverty.

Perhaps also, ironically, as our systems, technologies and socio-cultural interactions are subsumed in a wealth of complexity, simplicity and poverty become qualities actively sought not only by the odd artist, but by viewers and audiences. The development of entire sub genres based on material poverty, which in turn spawn institutional frameworks, emerge as a direct consequence of technological abundance[xxviii]. Though it may remain to be proven, I suspect that abundance, wealth and the consequent complexity contributes to obscuring knowledge and understanding. Being able to understand and use poverty could well become more important to us if we really want to successfully pursue new knowledge and understanding. And cinematic narratives are, of course, part of this pursuit.

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Notes:

[i] See Morris, 2005.

[ii] See Dawkins, 1978.

[iii] What started for Darwin as a proposition of a theory has become a law in the sense that it is taught in schools now as an absolute truth.

[iv] See, for example, the UK Film Council's considerable emphasis on statistics in measuring its impact at http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/research.

[v] An example being the European Union's efforts to 'measure happiness'. See http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef0591.htm.

[vi] Look at how impact assessment is becoming an increasingly important aspect of the application process for creative practitioners applying to organisations like the Arts Council or Research Councils, such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council. These organisations are desperate to find ways of measuring impact in order to justify their spending to government.

[vii] This includes using abundance to seek poverty, as we shall discuss when we look at technology and poverty.

[viii] All examples being quoted are available from http://www.onedayfilms.com, from where extended trailers can also be viewed.

[ix] One could argue that the cultural elite making films about the poor and disadvantaged within their own country, or the culturally marginalised, reflects a similar pattern.

[x] See Bowers, 2004.

[xi] A scene from this film can be seen at http://www.onedayfilms.com/heartofgold.html or on the ScreenWork Vol. 1 DVD (Intellect, 2007).

[xii] The evolution of digital technology has played a role in breaking down assumptions about crewing and production processes, which I shall return to a little later.

[xiii] Most powerfully brought home to me when I first saw the opening scene of Pickpocket (Bresson, 1959) in which the pickpocketing action is exclusively in closeups and the setting of the horse race track is entirely created in the soundscape. Whether through actual financial restraint or imposed restraint, the poverty of the scene gives it a special creative power. Bresson, of course, was a master of poverty in cinema. Look, for example, at the final murder scene in L"Argent, in which we do not see any of the action of the murders themselves.

[xiv] With the later involvement of Channel Four Television.

[xv] This sequence can be seen at http://www.onedayfilms.com/onedaytafo.html.

[xvi] From Plato to Goethe, Da Vinci to Einstein, there has been an enduring exploration of the relationship between simplicity, beauty and truth. This is not just a concern for poets and artists. In Science, too, beauty and truth are extensively explored. See, for example, Chandrasekhar, 1987.

[xvii] See http://www.onedayfilms.com

[xviii] From normality to disparity and back to normality/transcendence. See Knudsen, 2008.

[xix] Cézanne talking about his approach to painting, quoted in Bresson, 1977.

[xx] This includes a decision to not seek financing or funding for the film.

[xxi] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Books_published_per_country_per_year.

[xxii] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ITunes.

[xxiii] See Anderson, 2006.

[xxiv] See Anderson, 2006.

[xxv] Anecdotally, I have noticed more diversity in the motivation of students coming to study on postgraduate production programmes. Where in the past there was a clear dominance of people wishing to enter the television business, the picture is more varied now as students think of a mixed sector engagement, such as independent internet sectors to non governmental organisations inspired work.

[xxvi] It is worth remembering that in 1980, a documentary filmmaking wanting to reach a British audience across a network or the airwaves could only do so through 3 TV channels, whose programming was ultimately decided by a handful of people.

[xxvii] See Anderson, 2006.

[xxviii] US 'Indie' films such as Clerks (1993), El Mariachi (2003) and Blair Witch Project (1999) are examples of a genre of indie films built specifically around an aesthetic of material poverty that has emerged as a response to abundance of production means. The Sundance festival, likewise, was inspired by material poverty in films in response to an environment of abundance in Hollywood production budgets.

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