

## TEACHING

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### Philosophy of Teaching

**My philosophy of teaching:** Introduce my students to the larger world and the role of visual communications in it. It is to help provide them the skills to navigate the complexities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, technologically, philosophically, aesthetically and intellectually.

I have been very fortunate in my life to be taught by some extraordinary mentors. As an undergraduate at Washington University (1972 – 1977) I was exposed to the arts at a time when the arts were flourishing and there was a spirit of interdisciplinary collaboration.

It was an exhilarating time to be to be a Washington University student. Edison Theater was brand new, and absolutely state of the art for the region. Those of us who were lucky enough to study with Professor Annelise Mertz had a window to the arts that few could match. Virtually every week-end during the academic year, Professor Mertz would bring in her friends and former students. They included José Lemon; Merce Cunningham; Murray Lewis and Alvin Nikolais. Her former students danced and performed with Pilobolus, MADCO, and many of the most famous contemporary dance and theater companies in the world. As her students, we were able to be involved in all aspects of the theatrical productions as well as attending master-classes. It was Annelise who plucked me out of the Art Department and got me involved with dance.

The most important thing that I retained from those heady years was Annelise's insistence on the totality of the art experience. Central to her approach to teaching, art and life, was her phrase "Where's the gestalt?" So, decades after my college graduation, I too am an artist and professor, and I am as concerned with the question "Where's the gestalt?" as my mentor was. I try to expose my students to the role of cinema/media in the totality of the art experience. I always place cinema/media in the context of the time and the environment in which it was made.

The history of cinema began in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. My approach to teaching about that period is to focus on the tremendous social, political, and artistic movements that grew up around the making of early films. My survey courses educate students about the ideas, the cultural

norms, as well as philosophical and technological influences that shaped those early works of art, those “motion pictures.”

In 1997, I discovered the work of the cinema pioneer Alice Guy. Guy is almost single handedly responsible for creating: the role of director; the first “narrative” film; use of color and sound during the period of silent film; and many other innovations that were often attributed to others (always men). Yet she is virtually unknown even in film circles. My students have been the recipients of my research on the work of Alice Guy. For over 20 years they have had a unique window on the birth of cinema, told from the perspective of a revolutionary French woman!

Only now is there some attention to Alice Guy in the form of a major documentary about her life. The film *Be Natural* was produced by Robert Redford, Jodi Foster and other Hollywood luminaries. In a trailer of the film Robert Redford states that until recently he had never heard of Alice Guy. He should have talked with my students! My research in the form of articles and festival retrospectives in the United States and Europe has helped my students and general audiences discover an important piece of overlooked cinema history. Currently, I am working on an article, short film and museum installation about Alice Guy.

I teach that nothing happens in a vacuum. I present cinema essentially as part of a fluid stream of culture that reflects (and occasionally inspires) society. In my view, the context informs the narrative, it shapes and molds the aesthetics and content. Part of striving for the “gestalt” in my teaching is made possible by the curatorial programs I have presented at film festivals. Beginning in 2004 my colleague Dr. Barbara Harbach and I have presented four retrospectives of Alice Guy’s work at the St. Louis International Film Festival (SLIFF) and at the MediaWave film festival in Hungary.

When I joined UMSL we were a Department of Communication. While I taught primarily cinema and video production, I had students who were oriented in media studies and mass communication. More than 10 of my publications, and eight of my documentaries are on the subject of media analysis. I was as comfortable assisting students who came to me with articles that were of a quantitative nature as those that were qualitative. I regularly publish in peer-review journals, often with former students who have become friends and colleagues.

In 2003, we became the Department of Theater, Dance and Media Studies, part of the College of Fine Arts and Communication. My background in the arts made me a better teacher, as more students came to us from the disciplines of theater and dance. In 2016, we became the Department of Theater and Cinema Arts.

I believe it is my multi-disciplinary training that enhances my ability to teach students in a variety of fields. As an artist and filmmaker, I provide the only instruction on the fundamentals of composition, perspective and color theory that a student from a mass communication orientation receives from our faculty. Through my research and publication in peer-review journals, I train my students in the value of analytical investigation. Additionally, in the area of film studies, my global perspective exposes students to cinema/media from many other countries and cultures. That is *my* gestalt.

Since coming to the Pierre Laclède Honors College in fall 2019, my teaching philosophy remains largely the same. However, this time my students are primarily science majors. This is a new experience for me. It was difficult at first but the challenge has made me a better teacher. I can now embrace the diversity and get much gratification from opening my student's eyes to an entirely new world altogether. Their writing skills are excellent and their desire to learn very gratifying.

I discovered that in the Honors College most of my students are science majors. It creates an interesting learning experience for me since I have been teaching art and mass communication majors for 30 years. My approach has been to incorporate their backgrounds into the material for the class. For example, last semester the final assignment was to write a paper instead of an exam. They were required to watch my film *Made in Auschwitz: The Untold Story of Block 10*, then to use their particular discipline to conduct an analysis of the film. One biology student looked at the pharmaceutical companies (among them: Bayer, Siemens and Schering) and their role in the drugs supplied to Dr. Clauberg for his experiments in Auschwitz.

**My contributions to teaching:** I have been teaching cinema for over 40 years. It is both a passion for the subject and an understanding of the power of the medium that has inspired me to enter the teaching profession. My goals have always been to be an artist, a filmmaker, a published researcher and university professor.

The relationship I have with my students is a wonderful part of what I do at UMSL. I am the product of a cradle to grave private education. I went to a private high school, Washington University for my under-graduate degrees, and Harvard University for my masters and doctorate. However, my greatest accomplishment and the thing that brings me the most pride, is when one of my students is the first in their family to graduate from college. In those instances, I share a sense of tremendous accomplishment, knowing that my mentorship may have made a real difference in the life of that student, and their family.

**Materials related to teaching:** As a documentary filmmaker in an academic setting my films are the equivalent of a major publication or book. The films *Virtual Objectivity; Who's Minding the Media; Searching for Home; and Made in Auschwitz* have been sold to hundreds of university libraries throughout the United States and globally, and are regularly used for classroom instruction. For some context, Filmmakers Library/Alexander Press is a leading educational video publisher and distributor. My films are accepted into a curated imprint, which reviews hundreds of submissions annually and only accepts approximately 50 films each year. The standards for licensing films into that imprint were high. Both in terms of production quality, academic value and in meeting their mission statement of "making silent voices heard." My documentaries meet those high standards.

My films are both sold on DVD and included in streaming video databases, sold into academic libraries and used by faculty and students. Judging by the number of educational institutions globally purchasing my documentaries for active classroom use, my films are valued by teaching and research faculty around the world.

**Activities related to teaching:** The activities I create that relate to teaching are most often connected to the [St. Louis International Film Festival \(SLIFF\)](#). I regularly give credit to students who volunteer during the festival. Also, I create extra-credit options and assign papers/essays if they attend the festival, screen films, and write about them.

I consider this a very important aspect of my teaching. My association with SLIFF goes back to the very beginning, to its founding in the mid-1990s. SLIFF has an excellent reputation as a major second tier American festival. I consider it an important asset to the cultural life of the city and a rich resource for furthering visual education. That is why I integrate the festival into my classes and stress the importance of this cultural gem to my students.

My Honors College students were particularly responsive to the film festival option. Perhaps it was because as science majors they had never considered attending SLIFF, or had never heard about it. Also, the fact that my film was screened allowed them to feel a personal connection with the event. I was proud to see many of them at the screening and participating in the question and answer session that followed.

The day after the screening at Plaza Frontenac my colleague Sonya Winterberg a producer/director of *Made in Auschwitz: The Untold Story of Block 10* came to UMSL and discussed the film with my classes. Sonya is an internationally known director whose work focuses on women and children survivors of war and other trauma. She is also a journalist and author of several books on human rights in the middle east, human trafficking in Europe and the war in Bosnia Herzegovina. She commented to me afterwards how insightful and perceptive my students were. Their questions were awesome.