

My personal quest to become a media scholar/practitioner began as a child. I was born in 1963 and grew up on an era-appropriate pop-media-rich diet. I was teathed on the rock & roll music and cult classic television of the 1960s and 70s. Watching TV on afternoons and late-night weekends, my parents taught me about the movies of their childhood, the films of the Classic Hollywood era of the 1940s and 50s. On summer nights, drive-in theaters were our family picnic/interactive movie experience. I am, at heart, a genre geek. I love science fiction, fantasy, classic monster and kaiju movies, and animation. The themes, epic quests, and heroes that drive these narratives have always inspired me and fed my imagination. I am, first, foremost, and always, a fan.

A defining moment for me as a child was seeing the French film *Le Rivière du Hibou* (*The Owl River*), 1961, based on the short story *Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* by Ambrose Bierce, and directed by Robert Enrico. It was shown to us in school, projected from a 16mm film print. In the film, a prisoner is hanged from a bridge over a river by soldiers, but the rope breaks. He struggles out of the ropes that bind him, swims to freedom, climbs ashore, and finds himself home. He runs to embrace his wife, and as he falls into her arms, the filmmakers cut back to him being hanged on the bridge as he drops, his neck breaks, and he dies. We realize that his escape has been a fantasy. I was stunned. This was the first time that I clearly understood that someone had crafted this film with intent and taken me on an emotional journey as a viewer. It was a deeply profound realization for me. My imagination was ignited! I wanted to do *that*, even if I didn't quite know what *that* meant! I was eight years old.

Unsurprisingly, I pursued an undergraduate education in film and media studies. We watched movies and analyzed them through the multiple lenses of history, theory,

and criticism, and we made short films and learned to critique them. I was introduced to the idea of *Media* as both a scholarly pursuit and an art form. My nascent film studies instilled in me a deep love of early historical and international cinema. It was here that I began my life-long quest to become a media scholar/practitioner in earnest, transcending mere fandom.

My media studies academic résumé includes a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Film & Television Production from the University of Arizona and a Master of Fine Arts in Editing from the American Film Institute. I have also pursued graduate-level courses in media history, theory, and criticism through The New School Media Studies Program, as well as various workflow, software, and hardware-specific technical training seminars and coursework. As a media scholar, I am fascinated with how the development of new technologies have driven new production techniques, which in turn continually push the boundaries of aesthetic expression in practical application in the film and television industry (for example, the transitions from silent films to talkies and from traditional film and tape production and post-production workflows to digital cameras and editing, and the development of computer generated visual effects, 3D imaging, and more recently, virtual production and artificial intelligence).

My professional résumé reflects a dual career in editorial/post-production and education/teaching. This dual trajectory has allowed me to bring real-world industry experience directly into the classroom, enriching my teaching with practical insights. At the same time, my engagement with educational settings has deepened my understanding of media theory and pedagogy, ultimately enhancing my editorial practice.

As an undergraduate film student, I learned to edit my own movies on Super 8mm

and 16mm film using splicing blocks, razor blades, and tape on an upright Moviola and a flat-bed Steenbeck. My first editorial PA and apprentice editor jobs were on indie features editing on film workprint, just as digital editing and computer-generated visual effects were beginning to change the post-production landscape forever. I have since grown into a post-production supervisor, digital post-production workflow specialist, and an Emmy Award-winning professional editor (*Days of our Lives* – 2013, 2015, 2018).

Editing and the post-production process in its entirety, with all its inherent creative, technical, and logistical challenges, can be very stressful. Yet, there is something indescribably, utterly exhilarating and soul-satisfying about being part of an editorial/post-production team as a film or episodic series show is successfully finished and delivered!

In addition to my media studies and professional experience in editorial, I am an educator, instructional designer, and an Avid Certified Instructor. I hold a Master of Science in Education from Full Sail University, where my studies included pedagogy, instructional design, best practices for using media technology to teach, and learning management systems such as *Moodle*, *Blackboard*, and *Canvas*. I have developed and taught media studies educational content for in-person and online courses across multiple venues (academic, vocational, corporate). My areas of expertise are non-linear digital editing, post-production, digital film and video workflows, and editing aesthetics. I have also mentored students working on their short films as an adjunct faculty member both at California State University, Northridge, in Cinema & Television Studies, and at the American Film Institute in the Editing Discipline.

I believe wholeheartedly that the most vital skills teachers can impart to their

students are critical thinking and problem-solving. These are the foundations for all other learning. I also believe that mindfulness, emotional intelligence, compassion, and openness to learning are as key to becoming a good teacher as is a deep understanding of pedagogy and mastery of subject matter and course material. I continually strive to become a good teacher.

Today, we live in a world where an incessant proliferation of media is available to us in our pockets all the time. Yet, our media literacy skills, our ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media, are often uneven and unequal at best. It is now easier for most people to access and create than to analyze and evaluate media. This phenomenon has had dire social consequences, recently illustrated by the dissemination of public health misinformation and the increasingly polarized political landscape. Simultaneously, online education, on-demand training, and YouTube how-to videos now augment, and sometimes compete with, traditional academic institutions of higher learning for students' attention. However, YouTube doesn't usually provide context, deep learning, or thoughtful and informed dialogue. Providing high-quality media education across multiple modalities to engage students has become even more crucial for developing effective media literacy, which is now synonymous with literacy itself.

In today's media industry, game engines like *Unreal Engine* are used for narrative and interactive world building, virtual production, in-camera visual effects, virtual reality, and augmented reality, and the use of artificial intelligence as part of the creative process is becoming ubiquitous. The possibilities seem endless. I am passionate about exploring how these new technologies intersect, or sometimes collide with, how we think and talk about, practice, and teach media arts now and in the future. I believe that how we move

forward through the coming years of rapid technological innovation is at the core of media scholarship, practice, and education. I am committed to being at the forefront of developing critical media scholarship, practical applications in creating media narratives, and best teaching practices in media studies in this brave new media world. The USC School of Cinematic Arts Media Arts + Practice PhD program, with its dual focus of media scholarship and practice and interdisciplinary nature, is uniquely situated to help me achieve these goals.

As my hybrid scholarly/creative thesis project, I propose building an interactive *Virtual School of Cinematic Arts Experience* in Fortnite's game environment, using *Unreal Engine* for worldbuilding, 3D modeling software to create custom assets, and a *Moodle* Learning Management System portal to facilitate course resource management. My design goal is to bring the critical media school experience to today's students where they live: online and in-game.

Virtual game worlds can enrich learning for all media students, but they are especially vital for non-traditional learners and those with disabilities and other barriers to traditional education. I understand first-hand how difficult it can be to overcome obstacles to learning; I am a non-traditional student myself. I left school at thirteen after completing the eighth grade, later taking a G.E.D to attend film school. Additionally, I have epilepsy and have struggled with numerous challenges throughout my life related to my disability. My experience drives my commitment to inclusive learning spaces.

The pinnacle of my lifelong quest as a media scholar/practitioner is to give back to the media industry through meaningful research and storytelling, and nurturing diverse future generations of media scholars and practitioners.