In a 1970 interview, Argentinian filmmaker Fernando Solanas described his attempt to build a filmmaking career as: ‘the solution that we found was to make a few commercials in order to be able to make another cinema’ (1970: 37). Commercials allowed Solanas’s group of filmmakers to hone their filmmaking craft and earn a living, while the ‘other cinema’ was a politically charged, independent form of filmmaking. To do this, the filmmakers needed to operate outside of a highly specialized film industry:

I am convinced [...] that the possibility of making a new cinema completely outside the system depends on whether or not film-makers can transform themselves from ‘directors’ into a sort of total film-maker. And no one can become a total film-maker without being a film technician, without being capable of handling the production (Solanas 1970: 38).

This chapter pays homage to Solanas’s idea of total filmmaking. What makes a ‘director’ outside of the highly specialized global film production centres in today’s digital age? Based on in-depth interviews with 29 independent filmmakers from all ten ASEAN countries, like Camera D’Or winner Anthony Chen, Tribeca Award nominee Nia Dinata, Lao’s first female filmmaker Mattie Do and their many peers that are still unknown at the global stage, I will describe how emerging South-East Asian filmmakers ‘direct’ their careers in the 21st century screen industries. By doing so, I will argue that the resourceful 21st century ‘director’, especially outside of national or global production centres, is a multi-skilled writer-director-producer (and often more) that
takes advantage of opportunities, networks and technologies to make films, reach audiences, build their brand and, ultimately, ‘direct’ their careers. I will end the chapter by using Solana’s idea of total filmmaking to argue for a more holistic, cross-departmental, ‘total’ approach as a driving principle to film production education outside of national and global production centres.

**Film Education vs Film Industry**

For a long time, film schools thrived around centres of film production. The co-existence of industry and education created a mutually beneficial ecosystem that ensured a well-oiled cultural machine (Geuens 2000). While film schools train the talent needed to satisfy the screen industry’s perpetual thirst for people and ideas, the screen industry provides the expertise (by way of in-between or out-of job freelancers) for an industry-centred education. In a field where learning is based on mentorship and guidance, such interdependencies made perfect sense.

The close entanglement between industry and education was a feature of film schools from the start. The All-Russian State Institute of Cinema (VGIK), often referred to as the first film school in the world, was founded in 1919. Its first director was filmmaker Vladimir Gardin. Lev Kuleshov, cameraman Eduard Tisse, screenwriter Valentin Turkin and, later, Sergei Eisenstein were among the first teachers of the school (Rollberg 2016). In 1929, the University of Southern California established its production degree. With a lot of public fanfare, William Stult (1929), in the industry publication *The American Cinematographer*, immediately highlighted the connections between industry and university, so celebrating ‘[…] the lectures, which represent the combined efforts of the best brains in the industry and the University.’ Stult continued:
Of course the feature contributing the greatest popular appeal to the course, the actual presence of the lecturers - men and women who have mastered their craft, and in so doing made their names household words the world over - obviously cannot be repeated at all of the hundreds of colleges throughout the land where the course will be in demand. (Stult 1929: 29)

And so, for a long time, film schools existed exclusively in centres of film production. Mirroring the industry’s high degree of specialization, film education, too, traditionally focuses on departments – training producers, writers, directors, cinematographers, editors, sound designers or art directors ready to enter the highly complex and specialized realities of filmmaking in global and national production centres.

But the digital age brought new opportunities and challenges to film production education. Ubiquitous production equipment and distribution channels present exciting possibilities for filmmaking education – away from an exclusive focus on established production centres, giving room to voices in formerly neglected regions. A film production education centred around highly specialized departments does not reflect the realities of smaller industries. South-East Asia is a perfect example. But so are Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, rural Australia and, quite frankly, most modern film careers. Careers are becoming more holistic – with more directors also writing, producing, shooting or editing their films. This has been standard practice in non-fiction
filmmaking or corporate videos. But career-building through no-budget films, Youtube webseries or Vimeo short films has brought the multiskilled ‘total filmmaker’ into the mainstream of fiction filmmaking.

Forms of total filmmaking can, and often do, become springboards into more specialized careers in the high-end, mainstream screen industries. But before these specialized careers happen, the reality for a lot of film graduates often is a jack-of-all-trades approach of total filmmaking.

**Filmmaker vs Director**

I hold that the term ‘director’, in its industrialized meaning, is often too specialized and therefore limiting in the many emerging film industries around the globe. I prefer the term ‘filmmaker’, as multiskilled creator, who ‘directs’ the story of her own career as maverick of screen media storytelling, by doing what it takes to make films and get them seen. They may work in teams, co-ops, production companies or alone. But they are always multiskilled ‘filmmakers’.

Through this distinction, I also reject the dichotomy of creativity and commerce, of director and producer. In his book on the intersections between culture and commerce, Khaire (2017) celebrates cultural entrepreneurship as an important element in creating markets for new cultural goods. He calls those who create these markets ‘producers’ and names examples such as auction houses, distributors or publishers. Thus, Khaire describes a highly structured world that is ordered by intermediaries and leaves the commerce out of the hands of the creators. Market creation is left to intermediaries. This disempowering view separates creators from producers, the creatives from the business that is done with their works.
And even in the world of the creators, we often distinguish between creative minds and business minds. In his directing textbook, Michael Rabiger acknowledges the importance of entrepreneurial producing and the ‘triangular relationship’ (2003: xi) between writer, director and producer. But he still separates the three roles. The aspects that finance screen products, build an audience and get them seen (central aspects of career building for every filmmaker) are typically left to producing textbooks such as Lee and Holt’s *Producer’s Business Handbook* (2006). Neither the dichotomy between creativity and commerce, nor the trifecta of writer, producer and director reflect the realities of many modern filmmaking careers. They are artificial creations derived from the dominant global production centres that are too limiting in understanding career realities in more peripheral industries or emerging markets.

**A Typology of South-East Asian Filmmaking Careers**

Career building, as a filmmaker-centred activity, remains one of the big mysteries in the global screen industries of the 21st century. Digital technologies and networked media challenge the dominance of traditional production centres, democratize access to global markets, help establish new national cinemas and empower traditionally marginalized voices. But lower entry barriers also mean an overabundance of cultural products and increased global competition. In this world of new opportunities and challenges, thinking about career building often remains surprisingly limited to the industry mythos of ‘patience, persistence and perseverance’. Filmmakers in South-East Asia cannot rely on extensive public funding or established screen industries to support their work and establish their careers. At the same time, the region’s film industries’ explosive growth is testament to the power of digital technologies.
In the summer of 2017, I had the chance to interview 29 South-East Asian filmmakers in all ten South-East Asian capital cities about their career-building journeys. These interviews offered a fascinating view into one of the world’s most exciting filmmaking regions and the everyday life of the filmmakers living and working here. What emerged were 29 very individual stories, suggesting that to establish a career in the screen industries, ideas, creativity and talent often seem of secondary importance to seeing and grabbing opportunities. Directing careers outweighs directing individual films.

The title of this section is, of course, provocative. There is no such thing as a typology of South-East Asian filmmaking careers. Every career, every life, is unique in the way it seeks opportunities, circumvents difficulty and experiences growth. The following list of eight filmmaking careers, by what we would widely call South-East Asian film directors, is meant to illustrate the many different paths into a filmmaking career. The different types of careers described here are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive. But for the sake of the argument of this chapter, an overview of filmmaking careers that is guided by a typology appears useful.

I will make ample use of direct quotes from the interviews in an attempt to allow the filmmakers to speak for themselves as much as possible.

*Anthony Chen (Singapore): The Global Festival Hit*

As one of South-East Asia’s most celebrated filmmakers, Anthony Chen built his career almost exclusively on the back of his success on the international festival circuit. His graduation short film *G-23* played at 70 festivals across the globe. Throughout his
twenties, he made six short films, earning him a Golden Bear nomination in Berlin (for Haze) as well as a Palme d’Or nomination and a Special Mention at Cannes (for Ah Ma). The income he made from prize money was reinvested into more short films. The success of his first feature film, Ilo Ilo, winning the Camera d’Or at Cannes in 2013, finally catapulted him into Variety’s annual list of ten directors to watch (Simon 2013).

Everyone else would graduate and feel there’s a real need to start looking for work. I know friends that were PAs or they were interns or production runners at TV stations, for broadcasters, for production companies. But I just wanted to make another short. So I spent a few years of my life literally just sort of squandering my savings on shorts.

I am very thankful that I did that, because in 2013 when I made Ilo Ilo it won the Camera d’Or in Cannes and at the end of the year it was nominated for the Golden Horse awards in Taiwan. It was nominated for six awards. The jury president that year was Ang Lee and the film eventually won best picture and best film. Ang Lee said to me, ‘You are so young, you are like what 29? Where did you learn all this? The film feels so mature. It doesn’t feel like it’s a first feature from someone of your age’. And I told him, ‘Well, I’ve been making short films for ten years, and I started very early’.

Potentially, Chen’s career is a blueprint for most film school graduates. An auteur, who writes and directs all of his films and has success at the most prestigious film festivals in
the world with very personal work. But even he produced his debut feature film and some of his short films, made commercials for some years and recently started working as a creative producer, developing other South-East Asian filmmaking talents.

_Mattie Do (Laos): The Niche First_

When Anthony Chen’s career path appears very structured, Mattie Do rather stumbled into filmmaking. A daughter to Lao immigrants, she grew up in California, worked in the performing arts and beauty salons across the USA and in Italy. When her father remarried in Laos after her mother’s death, Mattie and her partner, Chris, decided to move to Laos and look after her father. Because Chris is a scriptwriter, both decided to explore filmmaking in Laos.

Making horror films was a very strategic decision. They are just very accessible. Comedies do not translate into other cultures. I also find that romances are not really universal. But creepiness and horror and thrill and fright is universally accessible.

Arriving in Laos, Mattie and Chris strategically reached out to Lao Art Media, one of the few established film production companies in the country. The generation of filmmakers they connected with was nearing retirement and was interested in supporting young Lao film. Mattie made her first feature film, _Chanthaly_, in 2012:
The budget for *Chanthaly* was USD 5,000 - actually, USD 4,500, USD 500 was paid in beer. Namkhong Beer funded the film. Lao Art Media fed us. We had no money for food. We were five people making a film. This was our first film. I did not know what I was doing. We were ultra inefficient.

Mattie and Chris built Mattie’s career in a highly strategic way. They did not compete on the rather saturated arthouse festival circuit but instead focused on making genre films. And they exploited a lot of ‘firsts’ in their marketing:

We knew that *Chanthaly* would play festivals - it is the first Lao horror film, the first Lao film directed by a woman. It was the first Lao film that ever played outside of Asia. It premiered at Fantastic Fest in Austin, Texas. One of the most well-known genre festivals in America. They like strange films.

Since then, Mattie has made two further feature films, steadily growing her career, now working with European co-producers and financiers. Mattie Do might come the closest to a traditional director on this list. But even she co-produces her own films as well as other filmmaker’s works, and is credited as Sound Editor (in her debut *Chanthaly*) and Makeup Artist (*Chanthaly* and *Dearest Sister*).
Juan Mayo (Indonesia): The Accidental Internet Success

Juan Mayo is an Indonesian animator/filmmaker. After graduating from a graphic design course, he worked at an advertising agency. After 18 months, he quit and started a film production company with two friends. For over ten years, he survived by making company profiles, short film assignments for students and wedding videos. When the company ran out of money, Mayo began experimenting with animation. He started putting his cinemagraphs on Tumblr as well as HitRecord, a California-based global animation community. Only then, after over ten years of trial and error, his work gained traction:

In the beginning, in 2013, it was hard because no one seemed to notice the cinemagraphs. I only worked with one of my friends, a photographer. We tried to introduce this to people through workshops and sharing a lot of my cinemagraphs on social media like Tumblr, Facebook and Instagram.

Bunga Citra Lestari was one of the celebrities who approached me. She had a concert in February. This was one of my first paid cinemagraph projects. She approached me in December and wanted the project completed by January. After that I have had nine or ten projects. She puts it on her social media, so she kind of discovered me and now other people see it.
I also joined the New York agency Come Alive Images. They want me to license my work and then sometimes they give me a project to work on. I think the owner Joe found me on Tumblr and approached me to join his stock agency.

Juan Mayo is a true total filmmaker. When he started his production company, he had to identify and connect to clients, and he also produced, directed, shot and edited his work. Once he started making cinemagraphs, he also had to learn how to promote his work through social media, workshops and online communities.

*Nia Dinata (Indonesia): The Producer-Director-Writer*

Under the Suharto regime in Indonesia, filmmakers had to be licensed. A license would usually require filmmaking experience, which made it difficult for fresh graduates to venture into feature filmmaking. Hence, like most of her contemporaries, Nia Dinata started her career as Assistant Director and later Director for TV commercials. In the 1990s, when MTV came to Indonesia, Dinata produced and directed video clips, PSAs and bumpers for MTV: ‘I was frustrated at first when I graduated because I didn’t know what I would do.’

After the reformation, Dinata produced, wrote and directed her debut feature *Ca-bau-kan:*
I independently produced the film. I met the writer in Bandung, West Java, when I was 28. I explained the reason I wanted to make the film and he gave me the rights for free. He explained because I really know the story, not just a foreign filmmaker who wanted to make this film because it’s simply an Indonesian story. The film got funded for 5 billion Rupiah, around USD 350,000 and half of this is mainly self-funded. I sold the rights to the biggest TV channel in Indonesia and after my theatrical release window was finished, they bought it and put it on during Chinese New Year. I did some crowdfunding as well with friends and family. That took me around two years.

When I interviewed Nia Dinata, she was on set for a webseries she produces and directs. Dinata is an example of the opportunity seeking, multi-skilled, total filmmaker:

At the moment, I work for my own film foundation, do workshops and acting training, guest lecturing as well as making some small films. I do branded content and commercials as well.

_Thaiddhi (Myanmar): The Festival Organiser_

Thaiddhi is a camera operator by training. He was educated at Yangon Film School, FAMU in Prague and through a series of internationally organized, often illegal,
filmmaking workshops in Myanmar. Thaiddhi shot a number of documentaries and had a very short stint as a camera operator in Myanmar’s television industry. But already during his studies, Thaiddhi and his wife Thu Thu Shein (who also went to Yangon Film School and FAMU) started Wathann Film Festival, Myanmar’s first film festival. Thaiddhi and Thu Thu are still making small films. But their main career has become that of festival organizers, educators, international ambassadors of Burmese film and culture, owners of a small production company, fundraisers, and programmers:

It’s hard to keep a short film festival going, and we want to keep it for as long as possible - for the Myanmar filmmakers. Our hope is to become a new wave in Myanmar. We provide a platform to showcase the films of independent filmmakers, and we offer workshops to train the young filmmakers for the independent scene. And then we build the audience through the festival. That’s why we are not only showing the films at the festival, but we try to organize regular screenings in galleries and spaces like this. And we travel to other ethnic areas after the festival. We try to help young filmmakers who want to show their films at our festival and try to assist them in making their first feature film. We have equipment, which they can take for free, and then sometimes we produce it. Thu Thu helps out as a producer to get some grant money, and then I do mostly shooting for free for them as a cameraman.
Siti Kamaluddin (Brunei): The Service Provider

Siti is Brunei’s first female director and director of her country’s first international feature film, Yasmin. Her first endeavour into the screen industries was when she became a TV host for reality television in Brunei. Eventually, she started writing, then moved into documentaries and commercials. Currently, Siti owns a production company for commercials, an artist management, a production company for feature films, and she established Brunei’s first film school:

My life is like a series of accidents - I always get thrown into it. For example, with the TV hosting when I was younger, I was hired whilst I was still teaching chemistry. The producers said, ‘We’re looking for a host. You seem like a perfect candidate.’ And then I went off to London after I did the test pilot episode. After I came back they said, ‘Hey we got signed up so we’ve got to shoot 13 of these.’ [...] I was hosting a reality singing show called Passport to Fame, which is like American Idol, but Brunei version. The winner was my friend and he needed management so I set up a company to help manage artists. I helped him and got an album for him, we also did a label, and had lots of music things going. Then I made my first music video. Then everybody started to ask me to make documentaries and commercials, which is how I got into advertising. The first people who hired me was Royal Brunei Airlines, who are pretty big. We had an idea and we just pitched it and got it. It was as simple as that.
Siti is another example of a total filmmaker, producing, directing and writing while managing artists, hosting television shows and continuously seeking new opportunities. Siti never went to film school, but studied chemistry in the UK. Her film school was the set. She built an extensive network of filmmaking friends in other South-East Asian countries and spent three years working as production assistant or continuity on different film shoots in Kuala Lumpur before she made *Yasmin*.

_Dao Thanh Hung (Vietnam): The Local TV & International Co-Producer_

Hung’s career journey is a great example of a career built through television.

I was lucky to graduate with the highest score with my graduate project being awarded Best Film. A director of a production company watched my film and offered me a job. I worked there for a year but that company didn’t make the kind of film that I wanted so I stopped to pursue further education.

After furthering his education through short courses organized by the TPD Centre in Hanoi and funded by the Ford Foundation, Hung went back into television - this time, after the digital revolution brought many more television stations with a thirst for content to Vietnam:
Vietnam also saw an outbreak of many more television companies; especially during the beginning of digital age. This had brought in a lot of work and many channels for us to work. Young people like myself had more opportunities during that time. We were working a lot. I started out with documentaries, live shows, news reports, music videos, and many other types. These works had helped me understand better the work in television. I have done hundreds of live shows as director of photography.

After five years of working full-time and freelance for television, Hung started his own production company, still making programs for local television. After another workshop brought him to summer school at the University of Southern California, Hung reflected:

Before [this experience] we used to think that we were living [in] outer space. We were alien to the way the world was making films. And now I understood that the world was making films in the same way we did. So I decided to merge with the world by finding international co-producers.

For the past eight years, Hung has slowly developed from making sitcoms for local television to making documentaries for international broadcasters, like NHK or the ABC, with co-producers in Taiwan and Korea, for NGOs and international festivals.
Hung left film school as a short film director. He worked in television as producer and cinematographer. When he started his own company, he directed, produced and shot his projects. But he also learned the intricacies of international co-productions, labour law, financing and distribution, all while training young filmmakers in his company to perform their roles at an international standard.

**Neang Kavich (Cambodia): The Mentee**

Without a film school in Cambodia, Kavich had to learn on the job. When he graduated from high school, he did an internship with Cambodian Living Arts, an NGO founded by musician and genocide survivor Arn Chorn-Pond, for which Kavich archived and documented traditional Cambodian artists and art practices that survived the Khmer Rouge. Later, he was involved in a workshop by Davy Chou (while Chou researched his own documentary Golden Slumbers), and took part in another workshop organized by the Cambodian Film Commission, led by Rithy Panh, during which he made his first short documentary:

I finished the film and travelled to film festivals. I then applied for international film workshops in Busan, Locarno, Singapore, Indonesia. I got into all of these. So I think that’s how I began working on my own projects.
Maybe most importantly, Kavich became friends with Davy Chou and started a production company with him. Davy acts as Kavich’s mentor and producer. One positive aspect of such mentorship, of course, is the network the mentor brings:

For three years I did crowdfunding [for my current project]. Davy has a big following as a successful documentary filmmaker and came up with the crowdfunding idea. He posted my story online and shared it with his friends and had Mary, a Cambodian-French producer with her own company in France, share it too. We asked for USD 2,000 to put aside and then USD 4,000 for the studio work, which we shared with my friends that were originally going to work for free. I think most of the money came from outside Cambodia. Between us, we have friends from America, Europe, you know. I met a lot of them through working with the NGO - sometimes being an assistant for foreign filmmakers, helping them, and later on becoming friends.

Network building is one of the central aspects for Kavich’s career:

When I worked on my own documentaries, I shot and edited by myself. But when I shoot fictional works, I have friends who help me. One is Korean-American. He has a Taiwanese friend who he met in America.
When they came to Cambodia looking for local crews, we met and all offered to help each other for future projects. I met another person in Busan in 2013. Just like the others, I asked if we might work together in the future. And two years later, something happened and he flew over for us. We just paid for his ticket and a hotel. I try to build a network. Sometimes it happens like that when you travel but most of my connections come from foreigners working in my own country.

Kavich is another total filmmaker that produces, directs, writes, shoots and edits. But more importantly, Kavich has excellent skills in applying for international filmmaking workshops, development funding and film festivals. He also has a natural talent for networking. Both abilities, grant writing and networking, are the main pillars of his early career successes. Kavich instinctively knows how to seek opportunities, get himself and his work recognized and nurture the relationships he has formed. All of these are vital skills for any filmmaker.

**Career-Building as Total Filmmaking**

Most readers will be aware that the career paths described above are not exclusive to South-East Asia or other emerging screen industries, but rather the norm for film production graduates around the world. We all know how difficult it is to start a filmmaking career. We all know that careers in the screen industries never fall neatly into a predefined trajectory. This is especially true for graduates outside of national or
global production centres. We are not surprised that all the careers described in this chapter require multiple skills. Writer-directors are rare. Most often, producing and even technical skills are required too. Writer-directors sometimes live in the creative bubble of their stories, while the producing skill adds some form of reality to a filmmaking career and technical skills mean employability or more independence in personal projects.

The career narratives above are examples of filmmakers that are known internationally as directors. But the fact of the matter is that outside of a few national and global production centres, it is much more essential to develop the skills that allow us to make and share films rather than to fit into an industrial model that distinguishes between directors, producers and other production roles.

If a lot of the filmmakers above have technical skills and if most of them are writer-director-producers, then an early department-based specialization in film production education does not reflect career-building realities and, therefore, is less than optimal learning. A more holistic graduate, a total filmmaker, would be preferable. This would include skills and knowledge in networking, grant writing, international co-productions, accounting, labour and contract law, as well as distribution, to name but a few.

So how do we deal with this? In the absence of a definitive concluding argument, I want to share two thoughts that I started to develop in my own curriculum design work:

A view against the Banking Model of a Director-Producer Dichotomy
In his seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1970) criticizes the predominant model of education as a banking model; with teachers as narrators that provide empty student shells with information that are completely disconnected from the students’ lives and experiences, and students being rewarded for remembering and recalling this information. Critical thinking is almost impossible in the banking model. Instead, the banking model oppresses learning. Freire describes a form of surface learning that was alreadycriticized by John Dewey (1897) and stands in stark contrast to deep learning (Hermida, 2015).

Freire himself suggested a pedagogical model he called Problem-Posing Education, in which students and teachers enter a dialog and learn through working on problems in relation to the students’ lives and experiences. While the banking model simply transfers information, problem-posing empowers the learner, who comes ‘to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation’ (Freire 1970: 83) and starts to perceive their own place in this world.

Like Freire half a century earlier, UNESCO’s Global Citizenship Education aims to empower learners. Published in 2014, the report identifies the goal to equip learners with ‘competencies to deal with the dynamic and interdependent world of the twenty-first century’. Specifically, education must support ‘multiple levels of identity’ and the development of cognitive skills for ‘adopting a multi-perspective approach that recognizes the different dimensions, perspectives and angles of issues’ (UNESCO 2014: 9).

Wagner (2008) strikes a similar cord by identifying seven key skills to prepare learners for work and life in the 21st century:
• Critical thinking and problem solving
• Collaboration and leadership
• Agility and adaptability
• Initiative and entrepreneurialism
• Effective oral and written communication
• Accessing and analysing information
• Curiosity and imagination

A siloed approach to film production education, one that compartmentalizes individual disciplines, neither provides the multiple perspectives the UNESCO favours, nor does it create the critical, engaged and ultimately empowered learner Freire argues for. We force our students into production specializations at an age when most of them are often legally not allowed to vote, own a car or drink alcohol. This is not empowering education of agility and adaptability, but a banking model of education that gives learners an industrial label (director, producer, writer, etc.) and fills their empty shells with predefined sets of knowledge and skills. Careers, not only in the screen industries, are no longer linear (Baruch, 2004). They are unpredictable. It should be our duty to provide students with a broad education that does not train them for specific specialist roles which the top end of the screen industries requires, but prepares them for the ever shifting realities of work in the 21st century and provides them with the adaptability to find their own place in the screen industries (if they wish to use their learned skills, knowledge and attributes for a career in the media) and, ideally, influence and drive change in society.
In medical schools around the world, students become medical practitioners before they specialize after multiple years of general training. The same is true for law school. Even most journalism schools train generalists not radio, television, online or print journalists. Yet film schools, in an arguably less specialized field, are often built around an industrial model of specialization when most of the work for our graduates is in SMEs or entrepreneurial roles within the screen industries.

What is more, keeping directing and producing as two separate tasks at film school distinguishes creative vision from execution. But if an artwork is not seen, does it really exist? Producers at film school are often relegated to production managers that serve the creative vision of the director. This cannot be further from the reality in the screen industries. What if we combined creative vision (writing and directing) with execution (producing) into a single role of a filmmaker? What if we would no longer write or direct in isolation but had to put our vision into reality? Are we doing our directors a favour by separating between art and commerce? Are we making them less adaptable, less entrepreneurial, less able to solve problems?

**Authentic Learning through Client-based Work**

Authentic learning through client-based work is one possible way to support holistic, cross-departmental, multi-skilled film production education. While education must always be a safe space for learning, experimentation and failure, client-based work provides an authentic learning experience and reflects the world of a great number of graduates in the screen industries.
Holistic design is the opposite of atomistic design where complex contents and tasks are usually reduced to their simplest or smallest elements. This reduction is such that contents and tasks are continually reduced to a level where they can easily be transferred to learners through a combination of presentation (i.e., expository teaching) and practice. This approach works very well if there are few interactions between those elements, but often fails when the elements are closely interrelated because here the whole is much more than the sum of its separate parts. Holistic design approaches to learning deal with complexity without losing sight of the separate elements and the interconnections between them. (Kirschner and Merrienboer 2008: 245)

Authentic learning uses learning tasks of ‘real-world relevance and utility’ (Jonassen 1992: 140) that are necessarily whole tasks and avoid three common problems in education: (1) compartmentalization of skill, knowledge and attitude by artificially separating complex tasks into distinct parts that do not exist in real life; (2) fragmentation of complex tasks into small, incomplete, isolated atomistic parts that are only brought together late in the learning process; and (3) the transfer paradox: if a complex task is learned in a compartmentalized and fragmented way, it is often difficult to later perform it as a whole task, because it is precisely the integration of the separate parts that make complex tasks complex and where learning needs to occur. In other
words, a complex skill is more than just the sum of its individual aspects and the difficulty usually comes with the complexity, not the individual parts:

[A]uthentic learning tasks [...] are instrumental in helping learners to integrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes (often referred to as competences), stimulate the coordination of skills constituent to solving problems or carrying out tasks, and facilitate the transfer of what has been learned to new and often unique tasks and problem situations. (Kirschner and Merrienboer 2008: 245)

This might not be the clearest argument for a “total filmmaker” approach to film production education, especially since directing in itself is a complex task that requires learning in cognitive, affective and psychomotor areas. But separating directing from other elements of the filmmaking process creates fragmentation and therefore a transfer paradox that hinders the director from being a filmmaker, who directs not in isolation but makes a film for an audience, a client, with a co-producer, within an available budget, as part of a career goal etc.

Universities started to recognize the trend of authentic, real-life learning and client-based assignments. Stanford University’s Design for Extreme Affordability challenges students to prototype products and services that positively impact the lives of people in poverty. Many of the ideas developed through the course have been successfully taken to market. Aalto University’s School of Arts, Design and Architecture uses
Collaborative Study Projects across all of its programs, allowing industry partners to pose real-life challenges to students. At Griffith Film School, we are exposing students to client-based work through our production arm, LiveLab, as well as the second year core course Industry Engagement, in which students create screen-based narrative works for local clients.

Client-based work is by default authentic, problem-based learning that uses complex, real-world learning tasks instead of atomistic instructional design. And, just as importantly, client-based work gives students a taste of the world they will enter after graduating.

**In Defence of the Total Filmmaker**

What we can learn from the South-East Asian filmmakers briefly described in this chapter is that, akin to Solana’s group of total filmmakers, the 21st century director, especially outside of national or global production centres, must be a multi-skilled writer-director-producer (and often more), an opportunity-seeking, niche-finding, network-building screen production maverick, who is well-versed in different aspects of filmmaking as well as marketing, brand building, international co-productions, grant application writing, entertainment law, accounting, and working for clients in order to ‘direct’ their own careers in the ever changing global screen industries. A highly specialized, departmental focus to film production education does not reflect the reality most film school graduates will enter, especially if they live outside of the few dominant national and global production centres.
In a world that becomes increasingly unpredictable and uncertain, where careers and lives are constantly changing, the total filmmaker Fernando Solanas described almost 50 years ago has the adaptability and entrepreneurial skill set to thrive.

References


