STATE OF PLAY:
THE GATEKEEPING OF MICRO-DOCUMENTARIES

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by
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THE GATEKEEPING OF MICRO-DOCUMENTARIES

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DEDICATION

Thanks to my friends, Tyler and Mark, who have put up with half a colleague for a year.

Thanks to my parents, who were wise enough to support me by asking infrequently about my progress.

Most importantly, thanks to Kelsey who, despite marrying into this thesis, still gave me much love and encouragement along the way.
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STATE OF PLAY:
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Nicholas Michael

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ABSTRACT

The micro-documentary is a digital subgenre emerging from the overlap of long-form documentary film, broadcast news, home video, advertising, and photojournalism. Despite technological advancements that have made video production and publication tools more accessible and less expensive, a wide spectrum of gatekeeping forces affect micro-documentaries in a variety of production contexts, including broadcast, web journalism, agency-driven commercial work, direct-to-client commercial work, self-publishing and film festivals. Through semi-structured interviews with six micro-documentary theorists and fifteen micro-documentary producers, this study uncovered an extensive (but by no means exhaustive) catalogue of gatekeeping forces affecting micro-documentary production at five levels of analysis: individual, routine, organizational, social institutional and social systems. After the analysis of twenty-one interviews, five phenomena emerged as primary findings: the existence of unacknowledged gatekeeping forces, the erosion of the auteur mentality, the value of qualitative returns, “share-ability” as a guiding production principle, and the decorporealization of gatekeeping online. This study offers practical and theoretical value by mapping gatekeeping forces reported by micro-documentarians and examining the relevance of an established journalistic theory to an emerging subgenre. In addition, this study could also establish a foundation for future study of micro-documentaries.
EPIGRAPH

If done well, [non-fiction filmmaking] demands everything that you know about good storytelling, and it is the most emotional of all of our mediums. And if done well, it has the opportunity to touch people's hearts and change their minds.

— personal communication, April 6, 2012
INTRODUCTION

The world of short-form filmmaking is beleaguered by the popular sentiment that, given the proliferation of portable technology with built-in video capabilities, now “everyone is a filmmaker.” Indeed, the production and publication tools needed for short-form filmmaking continue to become more affordable and accessible to ever-widening socio-economic demographics, and the Internet now serves as a publication platform and distribution service for short-form films that would otherwise be venue-less. Furthermore, corporations, non-profits, journalism organizations, governments and other organizations are commissioning non-fiction, short-form video content, and a small but growing short-form film industry has emerged to meet that demand. Employing the strategies and practices of documentary film, narrative film, broadcast news, advertising, video art, and advocacy, this short-form film industry creates work that bypasses traditional gatekeepers, although those traditional gatekeepers are quickly taking note and following suit. Non-fiction short-form films, also known as micro-documentaries, are an increasingly “popular” and “important” form of communication (personal communication, February 29, 2012).

All these developments represent a lowering of significant barriers for non-fiction, short-form filmmaking. However, in light of the number and intensity of gatekeeping forces identified in this research project, the sentiment that “everyone is a filmmaker” seems a rather glib overstatement, likely fueled by the techno-romantic sentiment that conflates technology’s accessibility with users’ immediate facility. In
response to this statement, one interview subject emphasized the “rigorous thinking” required to build a compelling narrative:

Most people, when they say that everybody is a filmmaker, I think mean that with this instrument, you can make a film, and I think it's no different than walking around with a pen and never writing a publishable short-story. (personal communication, November 15, 2012)

In other words, many people cook, but few are chefs.

The chefs of short-form non-fiction filmmaking tend to draw from two institutional backgrounds: journalism or documentary filmmaking. Although both journalism and documentary film seek to inform the public through storytelling, each does so with differing levels of immediacy and depth. In its ideal form, journalism contributes balance, criticism and accountability by investigating the whos, whats, whens, wheres and whys of the world. In its ideal form, documentary film uncovers enduring tales of the human condition by delving deeply into characters, events, culture and phenomena. Despite differences in their contexts of production (deadlines, organizational structures, cost, funding models, etc.) and the final form of their messages, the audience and the interests of both journalism and documentary film have converged online. Both print and film have gone digital.

Since the late 1990s, journalists have dreamed of capturing new audiences with multimedia stories that harness the audio-visual potential of the web (McGregor, 2003). What many journalists did not anticipate was that the digital age would deliver inexpensive and high-quality production and publishing tools to both news producers and consumers, thus deconstructing a historic dichotomy. Even in the pre-Internet age, the
public response to the 1991 video of the Rodney King beating demonstrated the power of amateur film (personal communication, October 23, 2012). Still, it was the Internet that turned the exception of citizen video into a rule with which media institutions had to reckon. The former audience now had the ability to produce content by and for itself, albeit with a varying degrees of quality and public interest.

Coupled with other cultural shifts, that profusion of user-generated content has contributed to shifts in the advertising field. Companies like Toyota, Apple, Chevrolet, Whole Foods, The American Red Cross, charity: water, Toms Shoes, Duracell, Nike, Dove and many more have commissioned brand films, or documentary-style, short-form films showcasing value of their products or services. Directors of these brand films attribute the impetus for this new tactic to an increased audience resistance to brand messaging and a cultural emphasis on authenticity (personal communication, December 10, 2012; personal communication, December 18, 2012).

While news organizations invest precious resources in video and advertisers strain for authenticity, a number of organizations and individuals have emerged as creators of artful, non-fiction visual stories. Depending on their production context and publication point, such pieces are called variably “multimedia,” “long-form multimedia” (Ludtke, 2009, p. 1), “mini-documentaries” (Layton, 2008, p. 1), “short documentaries” (Short Documentaries, 2011), “op-docs” (About Op-Docs, 2011), “micro-documentaries” (Jetnikoff, 2008, p. 1; Micro-Documentaries, 2011), or brand films. Such stories allow short-form filmmakers— whether working for established news organizations, emerging storytelling agencies, or for themselves as freelance filmmakers— to combine the ethical standards and journalistic technique of reportage, the striking visuals and narrative flair
of cinema, the depth and point-of-view of documentary film, and on occasion, the brand messaging of advertising clients. Although no definitive descriptive term emerged during research, this study will use the term “micro-documentary” because the author believes it, at the time of this writing, most accurately positions the form between journalism, documentary film and advertising while emphasizing a short duration, narrative tradition and editorial integrity.

Despite their power and popularity, micro-documentaries have inherent risks: their required skill sets are rare, their audiences’ attention is divided, and unforeseen gatekeeping forces complicate production. Nonetheless, micro-documentary producers exist and even thrive in multiple sectors in the current environment, to which they can serve as both qualified critics and guides for research. Because micro-documentaries are often created by small crews or solo filmmakers, individual producers can speak to the majority of the production’s process and scope, particularly how their production choices— their agency— is “bound” or “channeled” (Vos, personal communication, February 14, 2012). In-depth interviews with such producers illuminated the gatekeeping forces they believed impacted their work.

Of the risks listed above, unforeseen gatekeeping forces affecting micro-documentaries have been paid little attention by academia or the public. In fact, producers reported overwhelming interest in the conclusions of this study because they felt underexposed to scholarship on the topic. Consequently, a study of gatekeeping forces affecting micro-documentary production holds promise for untapped practical and theoretical value. Historically the texts of films have been studied more often and more thoroughly than their production (Sperling, 2011). Beyond the application of a
cornerstone media theory to an emerging field, research on the gatekeeping forces influencing micro-documentaries can aid in sensitizing gatekeeping theory to the digital age. In addition, the research has secondary implications for citizen journalism and documentary filmmakers’ role conceptions, as well as the cultural shift from literacy to visuality, or Ong’s “secondary-.orality” (1982).

On a practical level, as micro-documentary production emerges as a viable storytelling technique and industry, this research maps hidden gatekeeping forces for practicing micro-documentarians and citizen journalists, outlines organizational production contexts, and suggests how Internet distribution might affect the producers’ articulation of visual narratives (Sperling, 2011). In addition, this study might also serve academics as a foundation for future study of the micro-documentary and practitioners as a reference point for a variety of micro-documentarians.

To serve these theoretical and practical ends, this study, using semi-structured interviews with micro-documentary producers, examines which and how gatekeeping forces affect American micro-documentary production.
LITERATURE REVIEW


While documentary popularity has boomed, newspaper circulation has declined. In addition to the consequent economic angst, many news organizations have faced an erosion of public confidence due to real or imagined corporate and political allegiances (“Press widely criticized”, 2011; “Ideological News Sources”, 2010; Gans, 2003). Despite its skepticism, the public is increasingly finding its news online (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2011). In fact, 2010 was the first year that news consumers turned more often to online sources than to newspapers (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2011). Given the multimedia potential of the web, many news organizations have increased video output to lure consumers to the news website (Layton, 2008; Watson, 2010). Many news organizations have also put pressure on print reporters to collect audio-visual material in addition to their print stories. In 2009, both CNN and
MSNBC.com reorganized their websites to emphasize video (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2011). World-class photo contests like World Press Photo and Pictures of the Year International have added multiple multimedia categories, and Pictures of the Year International has begun soliciting documentary filmmakers as multimedia judges. The New York Times has lowered its vaunted paywall for the entirety of its video content after finding itself “with more video ad demand than they have videos to sell against” (Ellis, 2013). Still, for most news organizations, video remains a costly experiment. Despite the will, there does not yet exist a codified way, and optimum multimedia production largely remains a “goal [the industry] cannot yet quite perceive or articulate” (Layton, 2008).

As newspapers have cut costs, documentary film has moved in to counterpoint (Schechter, 2005; Diaz, 2005; Greaves, 2005) or elaborate on (Kasson, 2010) stories that— under deadline and financial constraints (Shoemaker, Eicholz, Kim & Wrigley, 2001)— journalists find difficult to cover with equal depth or nuance. Feature-length documentary films such as Restrepo, Food Inc., Inside Job, Waiting for Superman, Crude and The Cove and micro-documentaries like MediaStorm’s “Intended Consequences” and Drea Cooper’s “Scrapertown” cover stories in the public interest that fall within the purview of journalism. Because these stories are produced outside of traditional news deadlines, the stories have a chance to tell deeper stories of the human condition and so earn a longer shelf life by tapping into perennial stories of struggle, character, or heroism (Ludtke, 2009). Still, feature-length documentaries are in most cases poor business models; they involve a significant risk of little to no return on an expensive project. In addition to requiring “real money” for production and marketing, long-form
documentaries must navigate a “cut-throat” gatekeeping process (personal communication, December 18, 2012). However, independent documentarians’ passion for certain stories often serves as a different kind of capital. Because there is often little money in documentary film, documentary producers are more likely to tell stories that, driven by conviction rather than market sensibilities, they feel the public “needs” rather than “wants” to know.

Journalists and documentary filmmakers share a commitment not just to storytelling but also to truth-telling (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007), although their articulation of that commitment may differ. Journalism scholar Walter Lippmann distinguished between news and truth in his 1922 book *Public Opinion* (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). The 24-hour news cycle has reinforced the distinction between news and truth in the 21st century, at times with embarrassment. Non-stop news on the Internet and cable news demands a bulk of content, and some news organizations struggle to fill the time without rushing good stories (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). Despite its historied dedication to “just the facts,” journalism in the 21st century is becoming “increasingly interpretive” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 42) as journalists attempt to help their audience sort through a glut of available information. Some journalists see this new interpretive function, or more specifically a storytelling function, as crucial to institutional journalism’s survival (personal communication, December 17, 2012). “Mere accuracy” is no longer the sole mark of credible and quality journalism (2007, p. 42).

Neither is it the mark of credible documentary film. Since *Nanook of the North*, documentary film has wrestled with two realms: “representation” and “reality” (Aufderheide, 2007, p. 10). Indeed, this struggle is reflected in John Grierson’s
foundational definition of documentary: “the creative treatment of actuality.” Given that tension between art and fact, documentary filmmakers may have historically been more aware of their epistemological boundaries (or “point of view”) than journalists. In fact, documentary film’s reputation as an un-biased corrective to mainstream media narratives is often undeserved (personal communication, February 29, 2012).

Because documentary film lacks an institutionalized ethical code to guide its practice, critics sometimes transfer their expectations of journalistic objectivity onto documentary films, criticizing them as “propaganda” (Barnouw, 1993, p. 345), by which those critics sometimes mean coverage of their interests or beliefs was unfavorable. Barnouw defends all messages as propaganda, which he defines as a message that attempts to “present evidence that may enlarge understanding and change ideas” (1993, p. 345). Thus, documentaries have no pretense of truth; they are merely a “testimony” to it (Barnouw, 1993, p. 345). Honesty is privileged over accuracy, and thus documentary film has explored more ambiguous but crucial facets of society like “race, class, reform and community” (personal communication, November 15, 2012). In addition documentary films are more likely to take liberties with temporal-spatial relationships, modes of representation, interview tactics, and emotional engagement (personal communication, October 23, 2012).

This tension between art and fact traces back to the earliest documentary producers (e.g., Grierson, Flaherty and Vertov), but in some ways it is fitting that both documentary truths and documentary form exist as gray areas (Barnouw, 1993). Documentary film includes a diversity of subgenres and a spectrum of ethics. Although the variation may not be as wide, journalism does as well.
Despite their differences, journalism and documentary film share a common optimism that a reasonable public will improve its world when equipped with a “functional truth” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 42). If knowledge is power, then both journalism and documentary film are attempts to distribute that power to the decision-makers of a democracy. Accurate information is “a weapon against oppression and manipulation” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 38), and the audience is now producing and distributing its own information through citizen journalism, blogging, user-generated video and social media. Although media companies may view the audience’s productivity as erosive to their authority, many scholars believe this diffusion of voice and power is a step towards a more diverse (although cacophonous) democracy (Ludtke, 2009; Irwin, 2004).

Feature-length documentaries and micro-documentaries may share similar functions and values, but they differ in form and venue. Micro-documentaries are, intuitively, much shorter than feature length films, most often between one and ten minutes long. As a standard length for a commercial-free half-hour broadcast slot, twenty-eight minutes represents the upper length limit for micro-documentaries. Delaney argues that micro-documentaries are the “equivalent of a short story or novel” (2009), which implies artistry rather than mere surveillance. According to Delaney, a micro-documentary story should present “a sustained story or argument, both done artfully and factually and for someone’s benefit” (2009). An academic suggested that micro-documentaries would have an “authorial stamp” that “imposes meaning on reality” (personal communication, February 29, 2012). Micro-documentaries screen only in small numbers on broadcast television, in art installations, and at film festivals, and a lack of
institutional funding means most are published exclusively online (personal communication, October 23, 2012). For the sake of this study, the micro-documentary will be defined as a non-fiction video shorter than twenty-eight minutes in length that is crafted both artfully and factually and often for online publication.

Gatekeeping theory is one of the oldest in mass communication research (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim & Wrigley, 2001). Originating in the study of foodways (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009), gatekeeping theory was first applied to news production in White’s study of an editor’s selection of AP wire stories at a small daily newspaper (White, 1950). White proposed that news was included or excluded on three grounds: the editor’s inclination, lack of space, or whether a story had already run (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). Defined broadly then, gatekeeping theory is “the process by which the vast array of potential news messages are winnowed, shaped, and prodded into those few that are actually transmitted by the news media” (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim & Wrigley, 2001, p. 233). Gatekeepers are those people who “regulate the flow of information, language and knowledge” (Storm, 2007). Shoemaker and Vos maintain that media gates exist at five levels of analysis: individual, routine, organizational, social institutional, and social systems (2009). Positive and negative forces—factors that promote and impede information’s progress through a gate— influence each of these five levels (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Some forces may at first seem to act more to change the shape of a message, although this is likely a response to anticipated future gates. Historically, elites have exerted near-monolithic control over the regulation of news information, and gatekeeping theory has explained a uni-directional and hierarchical flow of information (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008).
The Internet and digital technology have undermined that hierarchy and redistributed production power to the audience. Whether through citizen journalism, user-generated video, or amateur filmmaking, audiences have become producers and publishers. Storm argues that this rise in the audience’s production power constitutes a “reversal of the gatekeeping process through a convergence of content producers” (Storm, 2007, p. 2). Other scholars point to shifts in newsgathering (e.g., crowd-sourcing, citizen journalism) and distribution (e.g., social media) as more evidence of this reversal (Bowman & Willis, 2005; Cha, 2005). Shoemaker and Vos view all news consumers as gatekeepers (2009).

However, it would be hasty to assume that the former audience’s newfound power has deftly and permanently usurped the old gatekeeping models. In reality, the old and the new models exist simultaneously. Rather than a clean reversal of the traditional gatekeeping model, Barzilai-Nahon proposes a “hybrid interpretation” called network gatekeeping that accounts for the overlap of the old and new models and the commerce of information between them (2008, p. 1495). Crucially, Barzilai-Nahon’s network gatekeeping model distinguishes markedly between gatekeepers and non-gatekeepers and offers “an analysis of the interaction between them and of gatekeeping as a whole” (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008, p. 1493).

Barzilai-Nahon believes that traffic through the gates, no matter the source, is governed by information’s salience, which is comprised in whole or part by four attributes: “(a) political power in relation to the gatekeeper, (b) information production ability, (c) relationship with the gatekeeper, and (d) alternatives in the context of gatekeeping” (2008, p. 1493). The higher the number and strength of these four
attributes, the more likely information is to pass through a gate uncontested and unchanged. Other scholars maintain that salience is composed of social significance and deviance from three factors: deviance from the average, deviance from the social status quo, and deviance from social norms (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006).

Still, Barzilai-Nahon does not argue that traditional gatekeepers’ power is undiminished, rather she suggests a circularity to the gatekeeping process in which the former audience “produces information [while] taking into consideration reactions and feedback from gatekeepers and other stakeholders” and in which “gatekeepers are affected by the information produced and, in effect, change their stances” (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008, p. 1501). Crucially, gatekeeping theory’s description of how the confluence of decisions, influences, and forces affect news sharing (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim & Wrigley, 2001) keeps the theory elastic enough to accommodate its application to online, digital media.

This reconceptualization of the gatekeeping process also applies to micro-documentary production. For decades, capital-rich corporate studios or networks served as the primary financiers and distributors of primarily long-form documentaries (Irwin, 2004). Although grant- and government-funded documentary productions existed or even thrived in some countries (i.e., Britain, Canada), in the United States prohibitive cost kept documentary production out of public hands as recently as the late 1980s (McClung, 2005), when film processing alone often cost tens of thousands of dollars (Delaney, 2009; Irwin, 2004). Additionally, the cost of insurance, broadcast or projection equipment, and distribution was staggering, and elite gatekeepers controlled each of those stages (Lohmann, 2007). Beyond financial cost, distributors today fear the cost of defending
litigation over “fair use” or subject’s representation and demand rigorous documentation of all visual, audio and representation rights, which serves as a chilling effect on films incorporating others’ intellectual property (Aufderheide & Jaszi, 2004).

In the past, short-form documentaries were even more difficult to produce because they were constricted by the similar financial concerns with few possible financial benefits. Except for limited broadcast opportunities, festivals were the only outlet for shorts, and competition was (and still is) fierce to both make the cut and match the festival’s programming (personal communication, December 18, 2012). Shorts were often created as “calling cards” for larger projects (personal communication, February 29, 2012).

Today, micro-documentaries are produced by established media, the former audience, and quasi-journalistic third parties. The web guarantees that distribution is cheap and global (Wellman, 2004; Christensen, 2007; Schwab, 2010), and inexpensive digital photo, video and editing technology (Renov, 2005; Knight, 2007; Schwab, 2010) offer democratized access to production tools. Of course this access is limited to one side of “the digital divide” (Ginsburg, 2008), which despite its philosophical baggage can begin to illustrate unequal access to digital technologies. In the United States, inexpensive production tools as well as Internet publishing technology are still most affordable and accessible for the upper and middle classes. Although the production and publication tools may not be equally available, there exists an unparalleled breadth of access to micro-documentaries and web video content of all kinds. The Internet is the fastest growing publication and distribution mechanism for video content.
Indeed, the Internet could be considered an alternative cinema, the emergence of which James Irwin (2005) gives four preconditions. First, industry standard equipment must be affordable to the general public. The introduction of digital single lens reflex (DSLR) cameras with video capabilities has made professional image quality accessible to amateur filmmakers and hobbyists. Today, hit television shows like House, Oscar-nominated documentaries like Hell and Back Again, and fourth-grade soccer games can now all be shot on the same DSLR camera body. Irwin’s second precondition is that distribution platforms must “circumvent theatrical release and broadcast television” (2005), such as Apple’s iTunes store, Vimeo, YouTube, or direct web release. Third, there must exist a “large, voracious, and unsated” audience for alternative cinema, to which the last 15 years of documentary box office sales and the popularity of user-generated online video sites attest. Lastly, niche audiences must be able to find key content. Now that producers can serve audiences directly via web distribution and audiences can locate content through web search and social media sharing (Irwin, 2004), opportunities exist to deliver content without the prohibitive resource demands often required for studio and corporate release.

Still, the gatekeeping forces affecting micro-documentaries exist in tension. Positive forces like increased audience appetite, democratized tech quality, rising visual culture and diminished publishing gatekeepers compete with negative forces like high resource investment, high signal to noise ratio, wide range and high facility skill sets, and distracted web audiences. Additionally, web publication does not guarantee visibility online (Knight, 2007; Barzilai-Nahon, 2008), and although previous distribution models involved prohibitive cost, those models could at least monetize distribution, which has
proven problematic online. Also, barriers to publication may be low, but those barriers are often set by corporations (e.g., YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook) that control the social, legal, and economic dynamics of user uploads and social sharing (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008).

Despite the techno-romantic myth of the equivalence of accessible technology and social progress, documentary filmmakers’ production choices— in other words their agency— is bound by more than equipment access. White’s original gatekeeping study (1950) examined the agency of a specific gatekeeper, and in the same way this study means to examine the influence of gatekeeping forces on a filmmaker’s agency, which can be “channeled” and “bound” by a variety of forces (Vos, personal communication, February 14, 2012). As the originator of the a micro-documentary “message,” micro-documentary filmmakers base many production choices on their perception of the gatekeeping forces ahead, as evidenced by Aufderheide’s and Jaszi’s study on the chilling effect distributors’ skepticism has on the employment of fair use (2004). Although there is little literature applying gatekeeping theory to documentary film or micro-documentary film, scholars have applied gatekeeping theory to the web 2.0 media landscape: Harrison to user-generated content at the BBC (2010) and Haiquing to Chinese blogs (2011). Aufderheide and Jaszi do not employ gatekeeping vocabulary perse, but their research addresses specific organizational gatekeeping forces and their impact on documentary film production (2004).

One key gatekeeping force at the social systems level requires theoretical grounding here. Walter J. Ong first proposed that human history can be broken down into two cultures— oral and literate— based on the primary communication media of the day (1982). Over millennia, a shift from word-of-mouth to the printed page has changed not
only how people in Western cultures communicate but also how they conceptualize thought, knowledge, experience, narrative and themselves. Briefly, oral cultures pass information—songs, stories, gossip, news—directly from person to person, and consequently extensive individual memories became enormous assets. Recipients of oral information had to be physically present, often in community. Oral cultures became adept at mnemonic cataloguing, aggregating and interacting with information (1982). On the other hand, literate cultures externalized that information on the printed page, allowing individuals to read, write and analyze in private. According to Ong, this abstraction and isolation of information propelled literate cultures towards cultural values like individualism, privacy, and analysis (1982). Writing itself was a new technology that altered the way people received, stored, and sent messages.

Inspired by electronic communication, Ong foreshadows a coming cultural shift to “secondary-orality” (1982, p. 3). Some scholars believe that Western society is currently experiencing a shift as seismic as the introduction of the mass reproducible word in the shift towards “visuality,” a post-literate, anti-linear, anti-verbal visual culture (Roth, 2010). Inarguably, the Internet has become the “site of the most pervasive system of visual, and perhaps cultural, transaction today” (Sperling, 2011, p. 28). Ong could not have foreseen the Internet’s ability to present text, audio, images and video side by side and to hyperlink those components together. However, this simultaneous presentation of multiple media suggests a layered literacy in which oral, literate and visual mingle.

Although scholars often cite the Internet as the technology that carries visual culture (Sperling, 2011), they often neglect to acknowledge that the Internet is not an exclusively visual medium. What the Internet adds to literacy is not a shift to a new
medium but a shift to a spectrum of simultaneous media: aural and visible, verbal and
virginal media all hyperlinked together. This “range of modalities” includes photos,
video, audio, and text (Duncum, 2004). The Internet does not promote the visual as much
as it, in many ways, equalizes the ease of presentation and distribution of all media. The
assumption that literate culture will be superseded by another hegemonic singular literacy
exposes a bias learned from the first two cultural periods. In fact, the Internet does not
promote merely visuality; it promotes “multiliteracy” (Duncum, 2004). If Ong’s cultural
shifts were based on how the primary medium affected human thought, then visual
culture may be more accurately classified as digital culture or more conservatively as
Ong’s original term “secondary-orality” (1982, p. 3), either of which recognize the
layered literacies inherent to the Internet.

Regardless of nomenclature, secondary-orality relates to gatekeeping theory at the
social system level of analysis and, as such, serves as a force on micro-documentary film
production. Secondary-orality is difficult to research as a measurable phenomenon but
convenient to use as a theoretical lens to view how media shapes the way people
communicate and think. Relying on speculative analysis rather than patient scholarship,
pop culture critics and some scholars are quick to herald new ages (the Television Age,
the Video Age, the Digital Age) preemptively rather than waiting for the chastened
perspectives of historical hindsight. That said, secondary-orality currently appears to be
the most convenient theoretical lens through which to view Western culture’s move from
print to pixels. The author of this study employs secondary-orality in full knowledge that
technological evolution could render the application of this theory to micro-documentary
production mere speculation.
QUESTIONS

Considering the literature reviewed above, the following research questions have theoretical and practical merit:

RQ 1: What gatekeeping forces do micro-documentarians report at the individual level of analysis?

RQ 2: What gatekeeping forces do micro-documentarians report at the routine level of analysis?

RQ 3: What gatekeeping forces do micro-documentarians report at the organizational level of analysis?

RQ 4: What gatekeeping forces do micro-documentarians report at the social institutional level of analysis?

RQ 5: What gatekeeping forces do micro-documentarians report at the social systems level of analysis?
METHODS

These questions were investigated through two phases of semi-structured interviews with micro-documentary film theorists and practitioners. The first round of exploratory, semi-structured interviews was conducted with six purposively sampled academics and curators who provided a theoretical and atmospheric view of the micro-documentary landscape. Fortified with context gleaned from the exploratory interviews, the second round of semi-structured interviews investigated the gatekeeping forces reported by fifteen micro-documentary directors. Second-round interviewees were also purposively sampled to maximize differentiation within a typology based on the following institutional production contexts: journalism, commercial (agency), commercial (direct-to-client), broadcast, long-form, and self-publishing. A few interviewees were selected using snowball sampling based on the recommendations of exploratory interviewees. Silverman attests to the credibility of typological approach, as well as purposive and snowball sampling (2010).

Importantly, few micro-documentarians fit cleanly in a single institutional context, whether because they have held multiple jobs, their current institutional context overlaps multiple categories, or they work for clients in a variety of organizational contexts. Additionally, some of the exploratory interviewees were able to speak to particular organizational contexts. Interviewees currently have or have had significant experience (whether a full-time job or a significant client) in the following organizational contexts: eight in journalism, six in direct-to-client commercial work, five in academia,
four in long-form filmmaking, four in self-publishing, three in agency-driven commercial work, three in broadcast, and three in curatorial capacities.

All interviews were recorded over the phone or in person with a tabletop voice recorder, and each interview session lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, depending on the interviewee’s availability. After the conclusion of all interviews, each interview was transcribed, and the transcripts coded for discrete phenomena according to grounded theory, as described by Corbin and Strauss (1990). However, this study employed grounded theory only in the process of uncovering concepts. These concepts were grouped into gatekeeping forces, and those forces were organized based on Shoemaker’s and Vos’ five levels of gatekeeping analysis. Theories or primary findings were then produced based on interpretation of these concepts and categories. The analysis section includes concepts deemed significant because of repeated presence in the coding. The conclusion includes concepts that micro-documentary theorists supplied but were “significantly absent” in interviews with practitioners (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 7). The analysis section includes all significant concepts and categories reported by one or more interviewees. Although this research project cannot provide an exhaustive taxonomy of all relevant gatekeeping forces, it can provide an extensive sampling and interpretation of the gatekeeping forces perceived by micro-documentary practitioners.

Johnson and Weller suggest that this approach—asking filmmakers to provide commentary on their unique production contexts—can provide actionable data, despite the filmmaker’s diverse technical, creative and cultural perspectives. Because documentary production itself is a qualitative process and the micro-documentary form is especially nascent, surveys or even structured interviews could pass over critical nuances
in definition and process (Johnson and Weller, 2001). Additionally, because professional relationships, filmmakers’ influences, artistic process, and relevant paradigms are complex, semi-structured interviews were employed to better aid the researcher in probing for nuance and elaboration (Whyte, 1989). A question list (Appendix A) was used as a template to guide each interview, and this template was adjusted for each interviewee’s production context, past work, and time available before each interview. As recommended by Corbin and Strauss, interview questions also shifted based responses in previous interviews (1990). Interviewees were informed at the outset that their contributions would be included in research findings anonymously in an effort to encourage candor, particularly with professional relationships, personal opinions, trade secrets or legal topics (Whyte, 1989). Consent was secured from each interviewee using the form in Appendix B. Care has been taken to scrub all references and quotes of identifying details, and this study will allude to interviewees using anonymized monikers, as expounded in Appendix C. Appendix D lists all reported gatekeeping forces in an outline format.

When possible, the researcher translated interview questions from academic jargon to more conversational, practical terms. Additionally, the researcher is an emerging professional in the micro-documentary landscape, and he was able to draw on his professional experience for identification with and questioning of interviewees.

Although ethnographic observation would eliminate the epistemological issues with self-reporting, micro-documentary production timelines often extend months or years and on-site observation would require a prohibitive amount of time and travel cost. Additionally, because gatekeeping forces bind agency whether they are real or perceived,
filmmaker’s self-reporting in fact enhances research goals by allowing the researcher access to filmmaker’s perceptions. Furthermore, the use of in-depth interviews to research production contexts is not without precedent. In a similar fashion, Sumpter (2000) critiqued previous newsroom studies of editors’ routines by conducting in-depth interviews with the editors themselves rather than merely analyzing news messages or observing reporter behavior. Aufderheide and Jaszi (2004) also used in-depth interviews to investigate documentary filmmakers’ approach to fair use.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) list four evaluative criteria for the trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. This study’s credibility is bolstered by an interested thesis committee who served as guides and (fittingly) gatekeepers. In addition, the diversification of sources (journalism, commercial (agency), commercial (direct-to-client), broadcast, long-form, and self-publishing) contributes additional credibility. Transferability is be buttressed through a thick description of interviewees’ commentary on gatekeeping forces. Dependability is evidenced by a thorough presentation of the work done to uncover gatekeeping forces through in-depth interviews rather than rummaging for the confirmation of preconceptions. Additionally, the study cites interview data with respect to context, rather than selecting isolated phrases and concepts as dependable data. Interview transcriptions will provide auditable paper trails and consequently confirmability.
ANALYSIS

“There is no gatekeeper” is an anthem common in the digital age. In fact, it was popular among this project’s interviewees. Nine interviewees stated, more or less explicitly, that they believe there are no gatekeepers. Eight interviewees believed that gatekeepers still exist but that they are changing. Four reported that everyone is now a gatekeeper.

This breakdown illustrates the power of an interview-based research method to capture qualified answers. Although nine interviewees believe that no gatekeepers exist, all twenty-one provided a long list of “influences,” “pressures,” “requirements,” “restrictions,” “frustrations,” “difficulties,” “boundaries,” and “possibilities” that affected their productions. Few of these are attached to gatekeepers, but all bind and channel the agency of micro-documentarians, thus qualifying as gatekeeping forces.

Often interviewees equated embodied gatekeepers with “old media,” meaning pre-Internet institutions where vested individuals shaped and approved messages for publication (personal communication, December 9, 2012; personal communication, December 13, 2012; personal communication, December 17, 2012). Many of these old-media institutions have—with enthusiasm or reluctance—developed properties that publish online content. Calling these formerly print and broadcast organizations “old media” is of course a misnomer, given their online publication points. However, many of these online versions operate with similar editorial workflow to old media models, where a hierarchy of content producers and editors craft and queue messages for publication. Thus it is more appropriate to call these “gated” publications (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008).
Because these gated publications publish on the Internet, they exist alongside “gate-less” self-published content on platforms like YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook, Wordpress, Tumblr, Twitter, Instagram, etc. Consequently, old media have “lost their total domination of the field” (personal communication, December 13, 2012) and must compete shoulder-to-shoulder with content the former audience produces by and for itself. In effect, the Internet is a space where two gatekeeping models operate simultaneously: the new self-publishing model in which only gatekeeping forces (no embodied gatekeepers) positively and negatively affect a message’s online visibility and an old “gated” model in which those same forces apply with the addition of one or more embodied gatekeepers. It would be convenient but inaccurate to call the self-publishing models “gate-less” for reasons this study will explore below.

These two gatekeeping models are true for multiple media genres, including micro-documentary production. Indeed under the new model, creating and sharing a micro-documentary has never been easier. A veteran long-form producer said: “The fact of the matter is it's no longer difficult to become a documentarian. The barriers to entry used to be very high: [production required] lots of expensive equipment [and you] couldn't do it on your own. Now anybody can pick up a camera” (personal communication, April 6, 2012). Among interviewees there existed a widespread understanding that the production tools (like smartphones, tablets, and digital single lens reflex (DSLR) cameras) and the publication platforms (like YouTube, Vimeo and others) have made micro-documentary production more affordable and accessible for a widening socio-economic bracket (personal communication, December 13, 2012; personal communication, December 11, 2012; personal communication, November 15, 2012; personal communication, preamble, November 11, 2012; personal communication, December 13, 2012).
personal communication, February 1, 2013; personal communication, December 7, 2012; personal communication, December 18, 2012). Commenting on the relative ease of production and publication, an Emmy-winning journalist and professor said: “It's hard for me to understand people … who see a hurdle in terms of getting their work out there. I just don't see any barriers. I haven't seen a single barrier” (personal communication, December 7, 2012).

The removal of those barriers has created a soup of undifferentiated content divorced from any single organizational production context. Consequently, these self-published films and video clips are distributed digitally without the “editorial checks on ethics” or “accuracy” typical of journalism and some types of filmmaking (personal communication, December 9, 2012). Additionally, these self-published films lack a built-in audience that content published by established “old-media” organizations might enjoy (personal communication, December 13, 2012; personal communication, January 21, 2013; personal communication, February 1, 2013). Authors of self-published content often must depend on other entities for visibility. In other words: “The thing that comes with traditional gatekeeper is that they're obvious already. So if you get past the gatekeeper, you have their audience. … But if you do it for yourself on Vimeo, you publish it. You're done, but you don’t have an audience” (personal communication, January 21, 2013). It’s always easy to publish, but it’s often hard to be seen.

The competition to be seen is fierce. At the time of this writing, over 100 hours of video is uploaded to YouTube every minute (“Statistics,” 2013). Of course, only a small number of these uploads qualify as micro-documentaries. Still, this explosion of video content has led to another common cliché: that “everyone is a filmmaker.” Interviewees
acknowledged that this statement is true in that filmmaking tools have been
“democratized” (personal communication, December 10, 2012), but understandably,
many interviewees believed filmmaking requires more than access to tools. Chief among
those concerns is, in the words of a magazine videojournalist, that simply “it’s hard to
create compelling stuff” (personal communication, January 21, 2013).

The remainder of this study, and in fact its central aim, is an exploration of the
gatekeeping forces that make it “hard to create compelling stuff.” All forces listed were
supplied in one form or another by interviewees, and all are organized based on
Shoemaker’s and Vos’ five levels of gatekeeping analysis: the individual, communication
routines, organization, social institution, and social system (2009). This study will
employ these levels of analysis as a framework for structuring gatekeeping forces
reported by micro-documentarians; however, these levels of analysis require some brief
contextualization.

- **Individual** gatekeeping forces—perhaps the most basic and accessible—
include “the characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of individual
people,” in this case micro-documentary filmmakers (Shoemaker & Vos,
2009, p. 33).

- **Routine** gatekeeping forces bear some similarities to individual forces, but
crucially, they remain consistent across multiple producers as “industry
standard” or common practice (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 51). Routine
gatekeeping forces include “the journalists’ orientation to the consuming
audience the external source upon which journalists rely for news, and the
organizational culture and context in which news is crafted” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 52).

- **Organizational** forces are those that would differ between organizational production contexts (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 62). These would include “filtering and preselection systems” (p. 63) in which production stages are distributed among an organization’s role players; “organizational characteristics” (p. 63) like management style, corporate goals, organization size, and organization culture; “organizational boundary roles” (p. 68) in which an individual “selects and rejects input message” (p. 69) from outside the organization; and “organizational socialization” (p. 71) which includes brand-awareness and groupthink.

- **Social institutional** forces are exerted by markets (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 76), audience (p. 78), advertisers (p. 80), financial markets (p. 83), sources (p. 84), public relations (p. 86), government (p. 88), interest groups (p. 91), other media organizations (p. 92), and in this study, Internet culture.

- **Social systems** forces result from “the organizing philosophy of a society” (p. 98), social structure (p. 99), ideology or worldview (p. 101), and culture (p. 104), which might include national tendencies, common social practice and shared values. Importantly, the social systems level—or more particularly “culture”—should not be understood as a solely emergent force; it can be shaped and bridled by “political entrepreneurs,” who enforce hegemonic political and corporate interests through “appeals to culture” (Laitin, 1986, p. 11).
Admittedly, many gatekeeping forces bleed across level of analysis and are difficult to categorize given their interdependence on other forces. Additionally, the context of micro-documentary production creates variation across some of these levels of analysis, especially the individual, organizational, and institutional. Within each section, care will be taken where necessary to clarify the production context.

**Individual Forces**

Forces that micro-documentarians reported at the individual level included the difficulty of professional categorization, the density of the required skillset, personal motivations, professional goals, and desired lifestyle.

*Professional categorization.* Most micro-documentarians reported they had difficulty categorizing themselves as part of any single organizational context, such as journalist, filmmaker, artist, activist, advertisers or a hybrid of those options. When asked how she described her job, a magazine videojournalist said, “I think I defy categorization only in the sense that I have to respond to that [question] in paragraph form, whereas more people tend to have a one word answer” (personal communication, January 21, 2013). An optimistic ex-journalist said, “I’ve always had a hard time fitting in. I say that because I don’t think it’s a unique thing. I think a lot of creators these days are having a hard time fitting in” (personal communication, December 7, 2012). Generally, interviewees were hesitant to define themselves by any single organizational context, often distinguishing between their background and their current job or between their professional title and their product. One arts videojournalist said “I call myself a video producer. I don't call [what I do] filmmaking. I consider it journalism, and I consider my
background to be journalism, but I don't call it that. …. I guess I call them mini-documentaries” (personal communication, December 18, 2012). Another self-publishing filmmaker believed that documentary film and journalism were linked in ethical practice: “Our initial interests were film, like we wanted to make cinema, and documentary is a cheaper way to make cinema. Once you start making documentaries, you tend to wade into journalism ethics” (personal communication, December 9, 2012). A journalist-turned-filmmaker who now works full-time for a non-profit said that he considers himself a “non-fiction storyteller” because he had shed his “journalistic balance” in the name of better storytelling (personal communication, December 17, 2012). Finally, one commercial non-fiction director said:

When we have to put it in a category like non-fiction or fiction or art or journalism, it's really difficult because I don't feel like connected strongly of any of those disciplines. … We are pretty clear about the work we make and why we make it. It's just not easy to label. (personal communication, February 1, 2013)

Although clean professional categorization proved difficult for most micro-documentarians, many settled for “filmmaker” because they thought it best defined the scope and form of their work and was most easily understood by the public. An ex-nonprofit filmmaker said she varies what she calls herself situationally, but she tends towards “filmmaking” because there are fewer assumptions associated with filmmaker than journalist (personal communication, December 10, 2012). Also, she felt comfortable describing her work as journalism only when it was published in a journalistic venue. A newspaper videojournalist who had previously produced micro-documentaries for non-profits agreed: “With my job at [a national newspaper], I call it journalism, but in the
past, I think I would have reluctantly called it short-form filmmaking, just for lack of a better term” (personal communication, December 20, 2012). A micro-documentary studio owner said she and her partner describe their work as “filmmaking,” despite their background in journalism (personal communication, December 13, 2012).

A few interviewees categorized themselves without hesitation. Two of these—an ex-broadcast director of photography (DP) and a commercial director—though of themselves as filmmakers, and another commercial director called himself “a human being slash storyteller,” which might be more concretely termed an artist. Notably, all three of these interviewees have more established careers than other respondents. Two work in the commercial space with agencies and another left a successful career as a freelance director of photography to produce direct-to-client micro-documentaries.

Notably, a number of interviewees connected their micro-documentary work with photojournalism (personal communication, December 7, 2012), and a smaller number studied photojournalism in undergraduate or graduate school. An optimistic journalist said that he still considers journalistic video photojournalism (personal communication, December 7, 2012). He also clarified that the skillsets required by still and moving images were different, emphasizing the ability to capture singular moments and build continuous scenes respectively. Another interviewee saw his self-published vérité short-documentary series as a natural evolution of the photo essay (personal communication, December 7, 2012).

These categorization difficulties serve as a gatekeeping force by complicating how micro-documentarians identify with institutionalized practice, ethics and traditions; how they brand themselves both in interpersonal conversation and to potential clients and
employers; and how and where they publish their work online. Micro-documentarians producing in hybrid genres or organizational contexts spend valuable time articulating their profession to themselves. A magazine journalist noted that “trying to figure out how to tell my own story, whatever that is, while at the same time trying to figure out how other people's stories” (personal communication, January 21, 2013).

**Skillset.** Because of organizational forces discussed later in the study, micro-documentary production requires an increasingly wide range of skills for production and publication, especially for those micro-documentarians working alone (personal communication, December 13, 2012; personal communication, December 6, 2012; personal communication, November 15, 2012). At the most demanding extreme, a single director might be charged with creative and technical tasks including bidding on a client project, organizing pre-production, writing and negotiating contracts, capturing clean audio, capturing well-composed and thoughtful video, conducting an interview, managing a crew, protecting subject’s interests, transcoding footage, navigating the technicalities of editing software, constructing a narrative arc, balancing conflicting stakeholder interests, uploading content, writing metadata and captions, connecting the piece with a network of gated publications, managing business financials, establishing a personal brand, and cultivating an audience. Each of these tasks could be further broken down into component skills. Of course, only a few “elite super-scope” producers enjoy such a wide skillset (personal communication, December 6, 2012), and fortunately, only a few production contexts actually require all of these skills. Producers are often able to choose certain areas to handle personally and others to outsource to specialists. However,
some producers are forced to exercise the majority of these skills themselves when organizational resources or a project budget cannot support the necessary collaborators.

For micro-documentarians who operate in the client-direct commercial space, small business skills like estimates, accounting, billing, project management, scoping competition, etc. have become increasingly important. Many interviewees reported they felt they lacked some of these essential business skills. “We don’t have insurance,” said one self-publishing filmmaker. “There's all sorts of legal and also just business-financials… I don't even know what the right terminology would be” (personal communication, December 9, 2012). One ex-nonprofit filmmaker said, “I don’t like asking for money, even though it’s [essential]” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). A micro-documentary studio owner said she is confident she regularly under-bills her clients (personal communication, December 13 2012), and a magazine journalist, currently between jobs, was hesitant to begin freelancing because she felt her journalism career had not prepared her for job as structure-less and unpredictable as freelance filmmaking (personal communication, January 21, 2013). An ex-broadcast DP said he could not identify his competition, which is a fundamental business skill (personal communication, December 11, 2012).

The strategy for the majority of direct-to-client micro-documentarians is to keep overhead low by exercising most required skills themselves, limiting the scope of their services, working with a network of freelancers rather than employees, investing only in production and editing equipment, and operating out of home offices. In fact, seven out of nine interviewees asked had access only to a home office. Four interviewees had not
insured their equipment, and one of those had been declined insurance because his work did not fit existing coverage categories.

Despite their minimal business experience, these client-direct directors believed their business savvy was growing, mostly by trial and error. One ex-nonprofit filmmaker said she believed she was slowly pricing her contracts more fairly, and an ex-broadcast DP said he had instituted a five-figure minimum for certain project types to weed out uncommitted clients (personal communication, December 11, 2012). One micro-documentary studio owner believed she could rent a production office if she spent less time on personal projects and “chased the money more” (personal communication, December 13 2012).

Notably, no commercial directors working with agencies mentioned wide skillsets, possibly because these directors are more likely to have achieved financial stability, more likely to have a support staff of specialized sub-contractors, or less likely to exercise so broad a skillset.

Although the breadth and depth of skills required of micro-documentary production vary by organizational context, the pool of relevant skills remains consistent for all producers. The more skills required of a micro-documentary filmmaker, the thinner that filmmaker must spread him or herself across the production. Additionally, such a wide required skillset functions as a negative gatekeeping force by discouraging or eliminating new directors from the field.

**Personal motivations.** Interviewees articulated a number of soft skills that described their interest in and motivations for micro-documentary work. With a few
exceptions, these personal motivations acted as positive gatekeeping forces by spurring work ethic and artistry.

As one interviewee noted, soft skills can be more important than technical ones: “You don't need so much knowledge really, but to have the confidence that you can screw it up, and it'll be okay” (personal communication, February 29, 2012). Although few interviewees mentioned it specifically, their confidence to enter an emerging profession is self-evident. One ex-nonprofit filmmaker drew confidence from the internships and professional experience she garnered in a non-profit media department (personal communication, December 10, 2012), and she believes her confidence in her craft inspires client’s trust.

Many micro-documentarians mentioned personal standards and ambition as gatekeeping forces. “The ambitious me is like I want to do all these projects, and they are gatekeeper-less,” one ex-nonprofit filmmaker said before admitting that she had started more work than she had time to finish (personal communication, December 10, 2012). A micro-documentary studio owner believed that a desire “not to settle” was a driving force for her work (personal communication, February 1, 2012). Another interviewee attributed his high personal standards to time spent in photojournalism school:

A lot of the people that are working in multimedia journalism are trained in photojournalism schools, … and so we come at it with a very high-minded artistic sensibility, where we want everything to be exquisite and beautiful and painstakingly crafted. (personal communication, December 20, 2012)

Of course personal standards act as a positive and negative force: they increase the quality of the final message but they extend and complicate production, potentially
restricting the publication of work deemed sub-par. Indeed, that same videojournalist said he thinks his “life would be a lot easier if I were okay with mediocrity” (personal communication, December 20, 2012). Another producer agreed that ever-higher personal standards made producing work more difficult (personal communication, December 9, 2012). Still, some micro-documentarians must publish work they feel is inferior because of organizational pressures and obligations. Despite his work not meeting his personal standards, a commercial director working with advertising agencies felt conflicted about his published work. “I hate most of the stuff I do,” he said. “I just unfortunately have this idea that it could be a lot better. … [My work is] much more my dirty sketchbook that I'm scared to show people” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). Conversely, realized ambition can exert a negative gatekeeping force on micro-documentary work. One newspaper videojournalist noted that highly-desired jobs might blunt personal ambition:

> People who are really hungry and willing to take risks, and once you get to [one of two major newspapers] … you tend to be more conservative because you've arrived at this special place, and you don't want to jeopardize that. (personal communication, December 20, 2012)

Particularly for professionals working in artistic capacities, mood and disposition also act as gatekeeping forces. One ex-journalist noted that he occasionally experienced a “pleasurable curiosity” that compels him to tell a story (personal communication, December 7, 2012). Two interviewees believed that a story was most compelling when it “chooses me” (personal communication, December 10, 2012; personal communication, December 13, 2012). One of those micro-documentarians felt compelled to continue
producing work because her craft is “noble” (personal communication, December 13, 2012), while the other connected his own personal development to the stories he produces. “I approach a story because of the season that I'm in emotionally,” he said. “I will attach myself to a project as a catalyst or as a cathartic experience to heal me” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). For that reason, this commercial director will sometimes turn down projects because he has already produced a similar story. Finally, an ex-journalist noted that she is “trying to figure out how to tell [her] own story” while “trying to figure out how to tell other people’s stories” (personal communication, January 21, 2013). Storytelling then is both an internal and external affair.

**Professional goals.** Although surely many more exist, a handful of professional goals surfaced in interviews. One goal, perhaps the most basic, went unacknowledged in all but one interview. When asked about his professional goals, a commercial director said: “I would say survival. I wish it was more profound than that. … I'm just trying to make something beautiful out of the dirt underneath my feet at the time” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). Although unstated, assumedly every other interviewee shared that goal.

Another fundamental goal is to share an important story with an audience. The “old way” is to share that message with “the widest audience possible” (personal communication, December 17, 2012), but a new mentality is to target that message to an “engaged audience,” who might respond to a story in a variety of ways (personal communication, December 7, 2012). To produce a micro-documentary is to declare that you and your subjects have something to say. Thus sharing a meaningful story with an
a primary goal of micro-documentarians. An arts journalist reported that
telling good stories is her ultimate goal (personal communication, December 18, 2012).

Beyond survival and sharing stories, micro-documentarians pursue a complex
network of quantitative and qualitative returns on their work. Many of those returns serve
as professional goals, and they will be examined later in the social institutional forces
section. Additionally, as with any artist working in an emerging field, micro-
documentarians indicated doing “good work” as a measure of professional success.

Preferred lifestyle. A few interviewees mentioned lifestyle as a gatekeeping
force. Calling the lifestyle “more precarious” than a desk job, a veteran videojournalist
noted that most micro-documentarians are “not 9-to-5 kind of folks” (personal
communication, December 13, 2012). However, an ex-broadcast DP quit taking freelance
work after he got married because he “just wanted more control” over his schedule
(personal communication, December 11, 2012). He now manages a boutique micro-
documentary outfit aimed at foundations, a job which makes his work more predictable.
One interviewee who co-runs a small micro-documentary studio noted that her
professional flexibility would be restricted considerably if she ever were married or had
children (personal communication, December 13 2012).

These lifestyle preferences affect micro-documentary content by limiting the time
and energy a director will spend on making work. Commitments to family or a desire to
stay rooted in a particular community could prevent micro-documentarians from taking
jobs that require significant travel. Additionally, many micro-documentarians work as
both artists and entrepreneurs, a combination that often requires them to work outside of
conventional business hours. Conversely, that combination also allows them control over their work schedule.

**Routine Forces**

Routine forces reported by micro-documentarians can be grouped into five categories: technology, form, practice, relationships, and conceptions of audience. As routine forces, these elements emerged as industry standards or common practice, with minor exceptions, across a range of micro-documentarians. Admittedly, the micro-documentary is an emerging sub-genre, and as such, it and its gatekeeping forces at the routine level will evolve.

**Technology.** Simply put, the “tools have become cheaper” (personal communication, February 1, 2013). Cheaper, more accessible, and easier-to-use production equipment is the most commonly reported gatekeeping force among interviewees. A veteran video-journalist noted that, compared with the video gear of the 1980s, today’s production equipment is lighter, more compact, more mobile, requires fewer technical skills, and requires a smaller team to operate (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Beyond that, shooting in a digital format allows producers to file stories from the field using wireless or satellite connectivity (personal communication, December 13, 2012). An ex-photojournalist noted that, when he first started experimenting with video, the equipment was cost-prohibitive, and the workflow was unstandardized (personal communication, December 7, 2012). Today, many micro-documentarians shoot video on DSLR cameras, which have become popular in the last few years due to their portability, relatively high image quality, and comparatively low
cost. A working journalist believed that her production equipment is a relatively small investment for her employer, and she also noted that some of her productions, especially the more unpredictable ones, would not be possible with more cumbersome equipment (personal communication, December 18, 2012). Still, production is not an entirely smooth process. Interviewees noted pain points with footage transcoding (personal communication, December 20, 2012), equipment setup and take down (personal communication, December 20, 2012), and storage space issues given increasing image file sizes (personal communication, December 7, 2012).

In addition to the production tools, editing software and video publication tools have become more accessible and less expensive (if not free). Although non-linear, non-destructive editing systems have been commercially available since the 1990s, “prosumer” and consumer versions have become widespread (personal communication, December 6, 2012), and editing software packages come pre-installed on some desktops and laptops. Computer companies, as if driven by Moore’s Law, continue increase hard drive and RAM capacities, thus creating devices that can store and process video material with increasing speed (personal communication, December 6, 2012). One journalist-turned-filmmaker reinforced that speed was a crucial for production ease (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Additionally, laptops enable directors to edit on the road if necessary, rather than returning to a central office (personal communication, December 18, 2012). Beyond the speed of editing, one interviewee noted the speed of establishing credibility with clients and subjects through sharing an online portfolio (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Indeed, on the Internet, micro-
documentarians can publish content of any length quickly (personal communication, December 7, 2012).

The speed of technological advancement also serves as a negative gatekeeping force. Micro-documentarians must keep up with changes in equipment and protect compatibility between production tools that are constantly updated or replaced. One journalist-turned-filmmaker said, “I'm always trying to predict the next thing, which is very hard and very time-consuming. It means generally … looking around the Internet for what's coming or new tools that I can use” (personal communication, December 7, 2012). As creators who are asked to exercise an already wide skillset, micro-documentarians might find it difficult to muster the time required to research new developments that could disrupt proven production workflows. In the words of one interviewee, filmmakers must “always be learning” (personal communication, December 7, 2012). Another micro-documentarian noted that he and his partner prioritize “results” from their current equipment over constantly updating equipment or waiting for experimental tools to become commercially accessible. “We'll move when the time's right,” he said (personal communication, December 7, 2012).

Beyond production tools, mobile and tablet devices have radically expanded possible viewing venues for video content. Millions of people now carry smartphones, giving them near-constant Internet access. Two micro-documentary filmmakers were particularly confident that tablets represented “the future” for micro-documentaries. A newspaper videojournalist noted that his organization’s web metrics had shown that both play count and play-through rates were significantly higher on tablets than personal computers or mobile phones (personal communication, December 20, 2012). An
optimistic ex-journalist believed the “touch and swipe and pinch and swirl” would open new possibilities for interactive stories as tablets become more common (personal communication, December 7, 2012).

As a vehicle for media, technology is often a driver of changes in storytelling. Lower costs, more ready access, and more user-friendly interfaces certainly expand the realm of possible storytellers. Although it is too often equated with aptitude, accessible technology is certainly one of the most significant gates lowered and consequently one of the largest contributing factors to the emergence of the micro-documentary.

**Form.** Every medium exhibits qualities and tendencies that seem to emerge from the medium itself. As one interviewee emphasized, good communicators have always matched a message’s style, tone, length and more to its medium (personal communication, December 9, 2012). If the medium is not message, at the very least it establishes parameters for the success of the message.

In contrast with past modes of video messages, the micro-documentary format is comparatively low cost and low risk. One commercial director said:

> What's great about short format and the online landscape is that it's not crazy to go out and make a short film, whether it's a documentary or a narrative, whatever it is, and put it out there and show it to people. It's feasible. (personal communication, December 18, 2012)

Likewise, another micro-documentarian believes that her video business is substantially lower risk than other business ventures: “Opening a bakery is a lot more expensive than opening a production shop like ours. You don’t have to have a storefront. We don’t have to have flour and eggs” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). The relatively
low investment required proves to be a blessing and curse for the micro-documentary market. Low risk means most people inclined to micro-documentaries can dabble, but low risk also floods the lower end of the micro-documentary market with amateurs.

Still, despite the low risk associated with the medium, video is a time-, skill, and resource-intensive medium. For this reason, a magazine journalist described video as “a heavy medium” (personal communication, January 21, 2013). One interviewee remembered a magazine that had to shutter its video department because an executive with a background in print reporting had underestimated the resources required to produce competitive content (personal communication, January 21, 2013). Similarly, a video tech theorist framed this “heaviness” as an unnecessary consequence of current video technology:

Let's say you wanted to use [a clip you found online] in a compositional way.

What you have to do is record the digital copy, or find a digital copy …, open it in a video editing program, cut the part that I want, bring it into a new composition, compose it, flatten it, render it, encode it, upload it and then link it, right? So the degree of friction to be able to do that kind of thing is so high. We've got to build tools that make it really fast and really easy. (personal communication, December 6, 2012)

Although technological barriers have been lowered significantly in the past decade, “feasible” may be the best word to describe the ease of micro-documentary production. Indeed, the time, resources and skills required make micro-documentary production feasible for a wider swath of the public, but by no means have technological
advancements made video production and publication as “frictionless” as other media like writing or even still photography.


Despite these varied sub-genres, interviewees described a few elements they felt were common to most micro-documentary productions. One filmmaker suggested that shorts lend themselves to “portraiture,” while long form requires a sustaining narrative (personal communication, October 23, 2012). A veteran video-journalist lamented that shorts, which can “pack a tremendous amount of punch into five minutes,” tend to focus on only one subject, which hampers in-depth reporting using multiple sources (personal communication, December 13, 2012). A commercial director agreed that adding additional characters requires more time than an Internet audience might be willing to give a story, and he indicated that he looks for stories that can quickly reveal a character’s “heart” (personal communication, December 18, 2012). Other factors include
how “interesting” and “visual” a story is; children, animals and cinematic stunts particularly fit those criteria, according to a commercial director (personal communication, December 18, 2012).

The timing and duration of the story covered are also critical criteria. A micro-doc studio owner mentioned that she and her partner prefer to shoot “unfolding action,” which requires the bulk of the visible story to happen in the near future (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Additionally, since micro-documentaries often rely on a character’s voice as a narrative spine, characters must be an “on-camera person” and should be able to tell their own story in a “compelling” way (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Finally, a micro-documentary should cover a story that “goes beyond your kitchen table,” and this requires that filmmakers “make [an audience] ask questions that they’re going to want to have an answer to” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). This posed question hooks a viewer, persuading them to stick with a story, especially online.

One of the most debated micro-documentary form restrictions is length. Multiple interviewees expressed relief that the Internet has freed them from “the rigor of the clock” required by broadcast slots (personal communication, April 6, 2012). As an MFA program director noted, “There are a lot of stories that don't need 30 to 60 minutes to tell” (personal communication, November 15, 2012). However, many interviewees alluded to a clichéd three-minute rule, a common bit of folk wisdom that has emerged as an unofficial “rigor of the clock” online. A newspaper videojournalist believed this “mantra” had been repeated so often that filmmakers began to believe its truth (personal communication, December 20, 2012).
Two interviewees who had attended graduate school for journalism said the three-minute rule was an “ingrained instinct” (personal communication, December 18, 2012), one that they had “learned in all our classes” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). A multimedia studio owner had also learned about video hooks: “If you don’t grab them in the first fifteen seconds, fifty percent of the people are gone” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Persuaded by those rules, she published an eight-minute piece in three serialized chapters (personal communication, December 13, 2012).

In contrast, an arts videojournalist said that, after working as a professional for a few years, her “judgment of what [length] feels right is probably shorter [now] than it was coming out of school” (personal communication, December 18, 2012). A magazine videojournalist said different lengths should feel right for different stories; some should run longer than three minutes, others should be shorter (personal communication, January 21, 2013). A journalist-turned-filmmaker agreed that there is no “magic number” for video length: “What I found was that as long as … you hook them quickly and you tell somebody a really good story, they’ll stick around” (personal communication, December 17, 2012). A commercial director whose micro-documentary side project has hundreds of thousands of views said: “We've had success with five minute films, and we've had tons of success with twelve minute films. I think it comes down to story. … It doesn't matter what you're making. Story trumps all” (personal communication, December 18, 2012).

Although shorter pieces may require shorter productions, an ex-broadcast DP said that, counter-intuitively, shorter pieces are sometimes harder to edit. “It’s hard enough to make a documentary that people emotionally connect with that’s 90 or 60 minutes [long],” he said. “But to do that in anything under 10 minutes is incredibly difficult”
(personal communication, December 11, 2012). A long-form executive producer agreed: “The discipline of trimming and focusing a film is what makes a film really good. So what you learn in short-form is how to tell the same kind of story in a very, very, very small environment” (personal communication, April 6, 2012). Ironically, debates over the proper length of the form created an artificial time limit on a platform with no innate time limits. Consensus emerged among interviewees that rather than subscribing to any set length as a gatekeeping force, directors should rely on their sense of pacing, hooks and story to shape micro-documentaries.

Another key component of micro-documentary form is the topic. Many filmmakers have learned the hard way that audiences will not watch something just because it is video. Obvious though it may seem, audiences watch videos on topics that interest them (personal communication, January 21, 2013). Thus, topics with wide appeal, whether across society or within subcultures, tend to get more views. To boost the mass appeal of one of his pieces, a self-publishing filmmaker created an opening chapter that connected an existing work to current news pegs (personal communication, December 9, 2012), thus widening the appeal of his video, earning more views, and consequently more advertising revenue. Like the general public, client organizations are also interested in particular topics. An ex-nonprofit filmmaker noted that some commercial clients, especially non-profits, are interested only in stories that align explicitly with their humanitarian services (personal communication, December 10, 2012). A commercial filmmaker/consultant found that, after he made a promotional documentary for a niche group, opportunities arose to tell similar stories with comparable
organizations (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Coverage of certain topics can act as a positive gatekeeping force that create opportunities to tell similar stories. Topics covered can also close doors too. An MFA program director told a story about a student who produced a piece on sex workers and subsequently “lost some opportunities” because the work was featured prominently on her online portfolio (personal communication, November 15, 2012). Thus, coverage of taboo topics could serve as a negative gatekeeping force by endangering personal and professional possibilities.

**Practice.** Because of micro-documentary’s status as an evolving sub-genre, only two common elements of micro-documentary practice emerged: crew size and travel.

Although past technological demands often prevented filmmakers from working alone (personal communication, April 6, 2012), current technology makes working solo feasible. Notwithstanding technological advancements, many micro-documentarians preferred to work with a crew. After all, filmmaking is a famously collaborative enterprise. “The best stories are never the ones you do by yourself,” said an ex-nonprofit filmmaker. “It's always better to have someone else, [even an] assistant just sitting there getting the shot from another angle” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). Crucially on client-based projects, budgets must support additional crew members, who become exceedingly expensive if the project requires travel (personal communication, December 10, 2012).

Other micro-documentarians have formed partnerships for similar reasons. “We felt like we needed somebody to bounce ideas off of,” said a multimedia studio owner who co-owns the practice with a partner. “We wanted to continue to push ourselves and not just work by ourselves and have someone to critique our work or push back”
An ex-broadcast DP noted that a production team has more credibility with clients than a solo filmmaker, so much so that he has listed non-employee collaborators on a “Team” page of his website. These listed collaborators chip in only occasionally on projects, but as he said, “you can’t have a website and say you’re a company with a straight face if you don’t have a bunch of people on your website” (personal communication, December 11, 2012). While explaining his eagerness to participate in this study, he noted a disadvantage of working along: “I never get a chance to talk about this stuff” (personal communication, December 11, 2012).

Despite the improved production quality a crew can offer, one ex-nonprofit filmmaker noted that it is often difficult to delegate crucial tasks and that crew selection is critical to protecting the quality of the final product (personal communication, December 10, 2012). A commercial director said the larger crew required for advertising work increases the difficulty of managing “so many cooks in the kitchen,” lessens the intimacy of a shoot, and makes the final product feel less “authentic” and more “commercial” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). Another commercial director who prefers small crews said that “usually the people that we end up working with … end up making the commercial harder” (personal communication, February 1, 2013). More crews members or client representatives complicate communication and coordination. The ex-broadcast DP agreed, saying of crew, clients and subjects: “[Personalities] are always the hardest thing to manage anywhere” (personal communication, December 11, 2012). As a gatekeeping force, larger crews allows micro-
documentary directors to exercise their unique skillsets more efficiently, while smaller crew sizes protect intimacy with subjects and give the director more editorial control.

**Conceptions of audience.** One of the most critical gatekeeping forces affecting micro-documentary filmmakers is conceptions of audience, which affects story selection, construction and distribution. Although most interviewees said they rarely think about audience during production, many expressed definite opinions about what audiences are looking for in micro-documentaries. Crucially, because there is little institutional funding or distribution for short-form, most short-form docs are seen by online audiences, and thus when asked about audience, most interviewees responded primarily based on their conception of an Internet audience (personal communication, October 23, 2012).

One universal perception is an attention-deficit audience. Many interviewees believed that audiences online were more attention deficit than past audiences (personal communication, November 15, 2012; personal communication, December 6, 2012; personal communication, December 9, 2012). Some believed online attention spans continue to shrink (personal communication, December 10, 2012; personal communication, December 18, 2012; personal communication, February 1, 2013). A veteran videojournalist connected short attention spans to individuals watching micro-documentaries “on the run” on mobile and tablet devices (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Many interviewees connected short attention spans to the abundance of online media and the multiplicity of digital connections an individual audience member has at any given time. Describing how her conception of audience affects her editing, a micro-documentary studio owner said:
[When you’re editing] you have this little bird on your shoulder telling you, "They're going to click on Facebook if you don't make this more interesting." I think in that way, it actually pushes you to be more conscious of how engaging and how strong of a story it is that you're telling because you know at any moment that somebody could leave you. (personal communication, December 13, 2012)

Interviewees believed that audiences were not only attention-deficit but also distracted. In the words of one commercial director, “We’re connected to so many different places that, yes, attention is a commodity. … It’s becoming a rarer [one]” (personal communication, December 18, 2012). Like a journalist-turned-filmmaker, some interviewees believed that “good stories” could persuade an audience to stay with a piece (personal communication, December 17, 2012). As a gatekeeping force, this conception of an attention-deficit audience might lead micro-documentary filmmakers to reconsider the length of their pieces, the topics they choose to cover, the organization of their edits (adding “hooks” to the opening), and the amount of time they spend finessing a final edit.

Beyond the audience’s attention span, interviewees also reported difficulty predicting which pieces an audience would receive well or share widely (personal communication, March 20, 2012; personal communication, April 6, 2012; personal communication, December 18, 2012). One self-publishing filmmaker recounted a video he uploaded for an audience of friends that was, to his surprise, picked up by the Huffington Post and Reddit and consequently received over one million views in a few days (personal communication, December 9, 2012). Few interviewees had experienced that kind of virality with a video of their own. Interviewees working in an organization
reported experiencing some level of insulation from the public reception of their work. One said a supervisor delivered audience metrics to him. Another said that a colleague handled the social media sharing of her work and that she found it “really hard to understand … what gets shared” (personal communication, December 18, 2012).

Many interviewees spoke of themselves as a kind of first audience for their work, meaning they used their own attraction to the topic and construction of a story as an indicator of likely wider appeal (personal communication, December 10, 2012; personal communication, December 18, 2012; personal communication, February 1, 2012; personal communication, January 21, 2013; personal communication, December 11, 2012). An ex-broadcast DP said he rarely thinks about an audience in the field, but rather he focuses on capturing “anything that will connect with [Americans] culturally: relationships, dreams, hopes, victories, failures, loss” (personal communication, December 11, 2012). A commercial director said that when he starts worrying about audience reception is “when my work suffers” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). Another commercial director summed up this method well: “If we're interested in it, perhaps a 100 million other people are interested in it. If it holds our attention, perhaps it will hold 100 million other people's attention. That's the hope” (personal communication, February 1, 2012).

Despite the audience’s unpredictability, many interviewees spoke of “share-ability” as a guiding force for their productions. Speaking generally about the pieces she and her partner produce, a micro-documentary studio owner said, “Our main strategy I guess is to make [them] as shareable as possible” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Typically, the impulse to create share-able stories is connected to social media
sharing as a necessary component to widening a story’s audience. An optimistic ex-journalist said, “Ultimately, it's about the share-ability of whatever it is. … I mean we're all trying to get a message out. In the general sense, it's all about sharing story” (personal communication, December 7, 2012). Statements like this connect the producer’s judgment of the value and public interest of a story with the public’s need to see it. In essence, micro-documentarians are making predictions about which stories an unpredictable audience wants or needs to see, and some expect social media to organically connect particular stories with interested audiences. Crucially, a newspaper videojournalist distinguished share-ability from “a grandiose vision of creating virality,” saying that his supervisor believes “that the goal is to create stuff that people want to share” (personal communication, December 20, 2012). For this journalist, that means stories that are “unexpected” and that would be “shared on Facebook or emailed to a friend” (personal communication, December 20, 2012). A self-publishing filmmaker noted that share-ability was critical because “the way we fund our operation is by making sure that our videos get seen,” generating advertising revenue as well as audience donations (personal communication, December 9, 2012). This same filmmaker criticized share-ability as a sole guiding force for micro-documentaries:

It just seems that from the conception of your content you have to consider: will this be shareable or will it not? Not is this true? Is this corrupt? Or does this reveal something? Or would this be useful for people to know? That's not the question. No, it's will this be shareable? (personal communication, December 9, 2012)

Indeed, as elaborated later in the study, a filmmaker’s over-emphasis on share-ability places significant boundaries on the tone, length and topic of micro-documentaries.
Catering a message to a mass, attention-deficit and distracted audience would likely produce a micro-documentary that differs substantially from the personal standards filmmakers reported. As a gatekeeping force, “share-ability” operates in tension with filmmakers’ visions of their best work. In striking any balance between the two, they acknowledge key gatekeeping forces.

**Relationships.** Two relationships associated with gatekeeping forces proved common among micro-documentarians: relationships with their industry and relationships with their subjects. Other key relationships— with supervisors, online gatekeepers, and colleagues— are specific to organizational context and consequently will be discussed later in the study.

An optimistic ex-journalist noted that, after leaving a journalism organization, he found unexpected value in communities like National Press Photographers Association, Online News Association, online workshops and conferences (personal communication, December 7, 2012). Highlighting another industry relationship, a filmmaker/consultant noted the importance of setting up screenings so that audiences and peers can provide feedback (personal communication, December 13, 2012). A veteran videojournalist indicated that he has been able to solicit feedback and take the industry’s pulse through his own social media platforms (personal communication, December 13, 2012). A micro-documentary studio owner, who lives in the same town in which she attended graduate school, reported valuable connections with her graduate class, current students, as well as documentarians who visit the school (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Peers encountered in these contexts may specifically help shape documentary drafts.
through revision feedback, and broadly communication across these relationships contribute to the formation of common practice among micro-documentary filmmakers.

A few micro-documentarians believed that industry awards impacted their ability to win new client-work or create political capital within an organization. The optimistic ex-journalist, who won an Emmy, said the award has earned him many new work opportunities, and he advised that micro-documentarians enter “every contest you can because we still live in a culture … that values getting validation by outside sources” (personal communication, December 7, 2012). An arts videojournalist who worked with colleagues who had won an Emmy for a year-long project said:

It was certainly a lot of expensive time to get a 30-minute documentary done, but it won an Emmy. And that shit has a lot of sway in other ways in the building: to get some sort of respect for the multimedia and video team. (personal communication, December 18, 2012)

As this study will later address, these types of qualitative returns on micro-documentary production are common motivators for time and money investment. Thus, as gatekeeping forces, relationships within the industry might move micro-documentary practice towards industry standards and undoubtedly create political capital that give directors agency inside and outside organizations.

In addition to relationships with the industry, relationships with and a resulting responsibility to micro-documentary subjects surfaced as important considerations in multiple interviews across organizational contexts. Interviewees in journalism, commercial and self-publishing environments understood that when they told “real stories,” they were “at the mercy of real people” (personal communication, December 18,
2012). Often, micro-documentary subjects do not understand the process, demands, needs, or scale of micro-documentary productions. A commercial director noted that some subjects are more predisposed to “open up their lives to you or their connections or their insight,” while others “want nothing to do with a stranger” (personal communication, February 1, 2013), and this director advised against forcing relationships with the latter. In addition, except in certain non-profit or commercial productions, micro-documentary subjects are not often paid, and consequently, the limits of their donated time can restrict their availability (personal communication, December 18, 2012). A commercial director described the opportunity to cross ethical boundaries with a willing subject; he noted that it can be easy to “take advantage of [subjects] a little bit more than what you think is okay, because they really help you” (personal communication, February 1, 2013). Another commercial director said he sometimes feels uncomfortable about the way “I’m excelling and making money in the commercial space because of the way I’ve exploited this story or the way I’ve captured something in someone’s personal life” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). This relationship between a director’s livelihood and a subject’s story seems unique to directors working for clients. Journalists reported no similar ethical qualms.

As a counter to fears of subjects’ exploitation, other interviewees noted that micro-documentary work rarely portrays subjects in a negative light. Commercially, many stories are uplifting, and in journalism, in-depth interviews require a level of access that subjects are unlikely to grant to a filmmaker whom they do not trust. A direct cinema filmmaker said:
Our type of storytelling gives the point of view of our subjects, so we've never had a subject who has been displeased with how they're portrayed in our videos. And we're not trying to necessarily portray them nicely. It's more like we're trying to portray them honestly. (personal communication, December 7, 2012)

A micro-documentary studio owner felt similarly:

Not often do our subject have secrets that we’re trying to uncover. We try to be really open with our subjects about the process and about what their concerns might be. … We want our subject to be really comfortable with the way that they’re portrayed. (personal communication, December 13, 2012)

Indeed, consensus emerged among micro-documentary producers that they, as the more knowledgeable party, should help educate and even protect their subjects from unexpected elements of micro-documentary production. An ex-broadcast DP tries to take such precautions: “You want to be sure you’re not doing anything irresponsible, that everybody’s treated well or taken care of” (personal communication, December 11, 2012). An ex-nonprofit filmmaker explained that she tries not to work with crew or clients she thinks might be “disrespectful to [subjects] or to their lifestyle,” and she believes that micro-documentary producers working for nonprofits have a particular “obligation to be very respectful of the entire socio-economic spheres that we're not a part of” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). In addition, she often delivers an “up-and-down” in a preproduction meeting with clients in an attempt to set a tone of ethical subject relationships on the front end.

Although many interviewees expressed desires to be “respectful” and “responsible,” few concrete examples of ethical practice surfaced in interviews. In fact,
no codified body of ethics currently exists for micro-documentary production, so it seems practitioners borrow elements from other industries, most commonly journalism. A direct cinema filmmaker noted that he and his partner “definitely consider” the “obvious ethics” of photojournalism (personal communication, December 7, 2012), and a self-publishing filmmaker noted that “once you start making documentaries, you tend to wade into journalism ethics” (personal communication, December 9, 2012). Yet another interview said she and her partner “come from a journalism background, so in terms of the ethics of storytelling, we definitely lean on journalism more than sometimes documentarians do” (personal communication, December 13, 2012).

At times, interviewees distinguished their ethical practice from journalism, specifically with an eye to their treatment of subjects. A filmmaker/consultant acknowledged that, unlike journalism, no institutionalized ethical standards exist (personal communication, December 13, 2012), and although he has a journalism background, he feels he breaches journalistic ethics when he shares production photos and video with subjects to “build rapport” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). The same micro-documentary studio owner who “leans on” journalism’s ethics also distinguished her practice from journalism because she and her partner are so thorough in ensuring their subjects are “really comfortable with the way that they’re being portrayed” (personal communication, December 13, 2012).

A caveat should be issued here. As an academic noted, journalistic organizations, especially those controlled by large corporations, have respected or disregarded journalistic ethics as has made commercial sense. In addition, journalistic ethics are shifting in the digital age, away from objectivity and “in the direction of transparency”
(personal communication, February 29, 2012). Interestingly, this de-emphasis of objectivity would move journalism’s ethics closer to documentary film’s by enabling more interpretive narrative functions.

Despite a lack of institutionalized ethics, micro-documentary filmmakers seem on the whole aware of an ethical dimension to their relationship with subjects. They are concerned with issues of representation because of both an ethical relationship with subjects and possibly a financial relationship with a client. Micro-documentary producers are aware that, in some ways, subjects give more to the production than the director or client. As a gatekeeping force, ethical relationships with subjects restrict a filmmaker’s agency by limiting what a filmmaker might ask of a subject, but compared with institutionalized ethical codes, micro-documentarians feel free to assemble their own ethical boundaries as the project, subject and client require.

**Organizational Forces**

Organizational gatekeeping forces revealed themselves through differences in production and distribution mechanisms between organizational contexts. Critically, these differences are attributable to the organizational locus of production rather than idiosyncrasies of individual producers. Although this project divided interviewees into eight typological categories for sampling purposes, there were only five organizational contexts for practitioners that emerged during research: broadcast, web journalism, commercial (agency), commercial (client-direct), and self-publishing. Because directors cannot produce a film specifically for a film festival, film festivals serve as a distribution rather than a production context. The organizational context bears significantly on the
gatekeeping forces affecting production, but given the popularity of online publication, gatekeeping forces are more consistent across distribution mechanisms. Thus, gatekeeping forces affecting production are broken into discrete sections by organizational context, and gatekeeping forces affecting distribution are grouped together.

**Soft subgenre boundaries.** Before describing differences between organizational contexts, this study should first indicate the permeability of subgenre boundaries separating the micro-documentaries produced in those organizational contexts. A number of interviewees, particularly micro-documentary theorists, noted that soft subgenre boundaries contributed to mobility between jobs and sub-genres. In fact, all sixteen of the practitioners interviewed had worked in or produced for more than one organizational context. One commercial director felt like he was caught in between all these contexts: “When we have to put it in a category like non-fiction or fiction or art or journalism, it's really difficult because I don't, I don't feel like connected strongly of any of those disciplines” (personal communication, February 1, 2013). Another interviewee, a filmmaker/consultant, noted the ease of migration from documentary to commercial work: “[There are] a lot of [people] who plug in as DP for a documentary, and then they transition into making ads, but they still shoot in totally documentary form” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Micro-documentary theorists spoke more explicitly about the permeability of sub-genre boundaries and careers. An MFA program director believed these soft subgenre boundaries are both “perilous” and “a great advantage” because micro-documentary producers must choose between multiple educational tracks but they can then move fluidly between jobs (personal communication, November 15,
2012). An academic predicted that future technological developments could make video production even more accessible, so much so that video will be “as diverse as text documents are now” (personal communication, February 29, 2012). Developments of this kind would further blur subgenre boundaries.

A curator noted his surprise that these soft subgenre boundaries sometimes confused audiences. In reference to a recent viral film blurring the lines between advocacy and documentary called "Kony 2012," he said:

People are talking about it as a documentary. Whatever its merits or lack thereof, I wouldn't view it as a documentary. Or you know people are talking about the David Guggenheim Obama piece. Some people are talking about it as a commercial. Some people are talking about it as a film. Some people are talking about it as a documentary. … So but I think the Kony film is… I think there's probably a long tradition of pamphleteers. Hundreds of years ago up through this, it probably fits squarely in that tradition of activist, reductive, action-oriented propaganda. (personal communication, March 20, 2012)

It should be noted that, although the "Kony 2012" film exceeds this study’s maximum length for micro-documentaries, it operates under the same gatekeeping forces. Its length is, at the time of this writing, an anomaly among online documentaries. As Barnouw notes, all messages are propaganda to some degree because they “present evidence that may enlarge understand and change ideas” (1993, p. 345). Still, soft subgenre boundaries present Internet audiences with a soup of undifferentiated content: some journalism, some advertising, some advocacy, and some art. Indeed, micro-documentaries may undertake a diversity of agendas, and current audiences may not have yet developed the sophisticated
literacies necessary to identify or resist those agendas. In fact, as this study will discuss later, many advertisers depend on these lowered resistances to micro-documentary messages to distribute their brand films online.

**Broadcast production.** Although there are “very few outlets” that broadcast micro-documentaries (personal communication, March 20, 2012), the context of broadcast production provides a counterpoint to the Internet’s “clockless-ness,” its loose rights considerations, and radically low editorial thresholds. In the United States, PBS’s POV and The Documentary Channel are the two major outlets for broadcasting short, non-fiction films. Both broadcasters use shorts to round out a broadcast slot for odd-length feature documentaries, and POV will occasionally run a 60-minute block of shorts.

One of the most restrictive gatekeeping forces for broadcast is the time slot. As an MFA program director remembered, “when I first started making films, because it was public television, you either made 27- or 28-minute films or you made 60-minute films” (personal communication, November 15, 2012). He also noted the artificiality of fitting a story into a predetermined length. Likewise, a journalist-turned-filmmaker said it was “liberating” that he was no longer “locked into a PBS hour at 56 minutes” (personal communication, December 17, 2012). A commercial director said he felt like before the Internet there was no place for odd-length films (personal communication, December 18, 2012). Noting the benefits of working within a time slot, a long-form executive producer believed that the “rigor of the clock” often forced long-form documentarians, whose work she believed is often too long, to “trim” and “focus” a film (personal communication, April 6, 2012). She also believed short-form was valuable precisely because filmmakers must “tell the same kind of story in a very, very, very small
environment (personal communication, April 6, 2012). The broadcast slot functions as a monumental gatekeeping force by requiring filmmakers, particularly longer-form filmmakers, to build a story around a film length rather than vice versa. In contrast with broadcast time slots, the Internet is enormously permissive of a variety of film lengths.

Rights acquisition also functions very differently in the broadcast space. Many broadcast organizations require filmmakers to sign liability contracts stating that they have licenses for all audio-visual material and releases for all identifiable subjects in the film. Some broadcasters waive the errors and omissions insurance policy for short films—although it is required for long-form—because insurance premiums are prohibitively expensive: the same for a 3-minute film as a 90-minute film (personal communication, March 20, 2012). Additionally, licensing barriers complicate online streaming rights for long-form films, which in addition to their length, make them difficult to share. Because “there’s less commercially at stake” for filmmakers, licensing rights for shorts are often more comprehensive than those for long-form films, and this makes them much easier to publish, embed, and share socially online (personal communication, March 20, 2012). Importantly, both short and long-form filmmakers must transfer the image rights of their subjects by either turning in on camera release forms for identifiable subjects or signing legal documents affirming that they have such releases.

A few editorial concerns emerged for broadcast. Foremost is that, compared with the Internet, limited slots exist for publication, and thus it is publication not distribution that is competitive. Thus, traditional gatekeeping theories are more aptly applied to the broadcast context than to the Internet. For PBS in particular, barriers exist for long and
short-form documentarians who do not meet PBS’s Red Book, which sets technical and editorial standards for licensed programming. A journalist-turned-filmmaker, who now works for an environmental nonprofit, reported that “two of the distribution arms that were bringing us into the network would not work with us because they saw us as more of an advocacy organization” (personal communication, December 17, 2012).

Furthermore, because broadcasters most often pay for a finished short-form piece, it is rare that they exert editorial influence on a short film. Micro-documentaries either do or do not fit the broadcasters programming parameters. However, this practice means filmmakers must invest in their film before knowing whether they will create a marketable product for broadcast.

As a further counterpoint to Internet distribution, a long-form executive producer with experience developing non-fiction content for a cable channel explained the editorial controls exacted on non-fiction cable programming. In her experience, that programming is developed and bought for the sole purpose of delivering a specific audience demographic to advertiser: “There’s no other consideration than will this turn into the show that I need to attract this particular audience at that hour every Tuesday night” (personal communication, April 6, 2012). If during development there are indications a show might not deliver its promised demographics, “it’s not tweaked. It’s major, major surgery. … You [as the show’s creator] no longer have control over exactly how it’s going to be changed” (personal communication, April 6, 2012). She also indicated that this emphasis on audience demographics encourages cable broadcasters to program series rather than films:
It's like making a product. Everybody has their dance that needs to be done, and you just do it again. You don't have to have this very complex negotiation-argument-discussion-creative conversation about where something's going to go and how something's going to come together every single time. (personal communication, April 6, 2012)

Even this brief glimpse into the gatekeeping forces associated with broadcast, micro-documentarian’s attraction to publishing on the Internet becomes immediately understandable. Although less so for public television than cable, broadcast distribution is a highly regulated platform that requires specific lengths, rights management, and commitments to either advertisers or editorial standards.

**Web journalism production.** Web journalism here refers to organizations publishing short-form documentaries through their websites, although these organizations may have once had journalistic presences in other pre-Internet media (print, radio, broadcast). Of course these web journalism organizations differ from their pre-Internet incarnations, but they bear close resemblance today in staff hierarchies, story-gathering methodologies, financial models, organizational resources, divisions of labor, and more. Consequently, traditional gatekeeping theories can explain much of the micro-documentary production context in web journalism organizations, although gatekeeping forces affecting micro-documentary distribution have changed dramatically.

As current employees of organizations publishing web journalism, two interviewees became primary voices for that organizational context. A newspaper videojournalist expressed considerable surprise at the respect and resources allotted to video inside his organization (personal communication, December 20, 2012). Despite his employer’s print
reporting tradition, he described a “reverence” among award-winning print reporters for the staff videojournalists. Jokingly, he wondered if before his arrival there was a staff meeting in which “I don’t know, like they sacrificed a goat, and then the head of the [newspaper] said that video was the future” (personal communication, December 20, 2012). He seemed genuinely confused by his employer’s faith in video as a future, core medium for the organization. The arts videojournalist reported deference of a different kind in her organization. She reported that her supervisors used her videos in “brand-defining” capacities for internal and external audiences (personal communication, December 18, 2012). Notably, video consumption can be communal in a way that written stories cannot. This deference to video described by both videojournalists operates as a gatekeeping force by raising their political capital within their respective organizations.

Despite that deference, both journalists reported having little influence over which stories they produce. The arts videojournalist deferred to the written arts journalists for story direction because they were often more current on sector news, were already in communication with subjects for written stories, and were considered the “taste-makers” in the organization (personal communication, December 18, 2012). Beyond story choice itself, she believed that she “had agency to suggest” possible stories as well as having control over the visual direction for all stories she produced (personal communication, December 18, 2012). Similarly, the newspaper videojournalist said that, although he has generated a few micro-documentaries himself, stories are assigned to him “nine times out of ten” (personal communication, December 20, 2012). “The truth is I’ll work on whatever is interesting,” he said. “More true is I’ll work on whatever my boss thinks is interesting” (personal communication, December 20, 2012). He noted that compared with
the staff of print reporters, he and his fellow videojournalists are “vastly outnumbered” (personal communication, December 20, 2012). Additionally, videos are often produced as complements to written stories, and this practice challenges this newspaper videojournalist to create a micro-documentary on a subject that has been “conceptualized primarily as a written story,” while ensuring his piece is different enough from the written story not to be “redundant” (personal communication, December 20, 2012). He attributes this practice to the fact that the organization is still primarily a newspaper. The newspaper videojournalist believed that “the glory for [my boss] is making a written piece look really good,” and that his boss is not “incentivized to create compelling, standalone multimedia content” (personal communication, December 20, 2012). This newspaper videojournalist believed that a print-driven newsroom also hindered his ability to pitched video-driven stories.

The arts videojournalist reported having to negotiate other gatekeeping forces with colleagues. She reported that “bureaucracy” was an occasional but significant obstacle for her productions, saying “Before we can even get our foot in the door to anywhere that we're going to be shooting or set out on anything, there's just so many meetings about it” (personal communication, December 20, 2012). Beyond its demands on her time, she felt that this practice brought too many voices to the table: “I think when you bring in that many people and parties, ... it can sometimes dilute the product, because everybody's got an angle or an interest” (personal communication, December 18, 2012). The need to coordinate with so many colleagues, most of whom do not work in video, made it difficult for her to express and ensure her needs as a visual storyteller. Although she was positive about the work she and her colleagues produced, she lamented that the
small size of their team sometimes required print journalists to interview her micro-
documentary subjects, and she sometimes had to add additional questions to the end of
the interview to support the visual story (personal communication, December 18, 2012).

Both journalists reported that the professional support their colleagues provided
was a positive influence on their work. The arts videojournalist said that mentorship,
critique, and positive reinforcement from two supervisors had been “immensely
valuable” to her growth as a director (personal communication, December 18, 2012). The
newspaper videojournalist recounted a time his editor had stayed up all night with him to
offer encouragement and critical feedback on an edit.

In terms of deadlines, the newspaper videojournalist reported that his deadlines
were dictated less by an arbitrary publication date or even a story’s timeliness and than
by a need to keep up with the large volume of stories required of him. “Not having time
to catch my breath” between stories is an issue, he said (personal communication,
December 20, 2012). This production pace also prevented him from working on visual
stories that would take months to produce. He also mentioned that although he could
delay his deadlines in order to polish a story, eventually there came a time he had to
publish and move on to the next story. This ability to publish under flexible deadlines
online allows videojournalists to spend time finessing a story, although a large volume of
stories could restrict their ability to satisfy aesthetic and editorial standards.

Both micro-documentarians reported that departmental divides limited their
connection to and collaboration with colleagues. The newspaper videojournalist noted
that the photojournalists and videojournalists were “silo-ed”:
They’re kept in a totally different department. They have a boss, and that boss has a boss, and that boss answers to a boss… It’s like another branch of the family tree comes down to us. We just don’t interact with that side of the family very often. (personal communication, December 20, 2012)

The arts videojournalists said she was interested in creating more interactive projects, but that departmental divisions meant she would have to “wrangle” an inter-departmental team herself, an enterprise that might take more time than she could spare given her workload (personal communication, December 18, 2012). The newspaper videojournalist also felt “silo-ed” departments prevented him from collaborating on more interactive video projects as well, despite the fact that he felt interactive storytelling represents “the power of the web” (personal communication, December 20, 2012). Still, these same departmental divides allowed each producer to focus more on production than distribution. The arts videojournalist confirmed that she did not have to promote her own work via social media because her organization employed a dedicated social media specialist (personal communication, December 18, 2012).

In comparison to their experience, self-employed micro-documentarians highlighted the benefits of working for an established organization, like legal support, gear and liability insurance, improved credibility and access with subjects, and daily “structure” (personal communication, January 21, 2013). Other benefits like salary, accounting, professional credibility, paid vacation, and other benefits are obvious but were unmentioned.

The arts videojournalist reported brand particularities, sector differentiation and grant funding as forces that affected the subject and shape of her work. She reported that
she felt a certain permission to take unconventional liberties with her edits, specifically scene-setting and slow pacing, in the name of her employer’s brand (personal communication, December 18, 2012). She also noted that her employer wanted to present a diversity of cultural offerings in an attempt to appeal to a broad audience (personal communication, December 18, 2012). Furthermore, she noted her employer does not “want to do what everyone else is doing,” and she wants to produce work that “will really set us apart in some way” (personal communication, December 18, 2012). This impulse to diversify coverage has implications for choice of story topics, and thus a good story might be passed over for one that is different. The arts videojournalist also mentioned that her employer had received grants for specific coverage areas. Without the grants, her employer might not have devoted so many resources to those particular topics (personal communication, December 18, 2012).

**Agency-driven commercial production.** The fundamental difference between micro-documentary production contexts for web journalism and advertising are the funding mechanisms and the locus of editorial control. In the advertising space, clients provide the funding and thus have the final say. One paradox of the commercial micro-documentary world is that commercial directors are master artisans, yet given the restrictions and agendas at play, their agency is often severely restricted in the name of brand promotion. A commercial director said:

“The whole commercial space is one that has very strong rules and guidelines. So I wish I could say that in the commercial space I have a stronger creative muscle to flex, but that’s, you know, the way the … junk goes down.” (personal communication, December 10, 2012)
Still, he reported his control over a story’s final edit varied considerably depending on the production and more crucially the client. Sometimes clients “allow [him] the space,” while other times they give him “a box to check to make sure that the production is legal with the VGA” (personal communication, December 10, 2012).

Most often, these commercial directors are hired by advertising agencies that have been hired by corporate clients to create advertising campaigns that involve brand films. Adding to the organizational chain, some directors are represented by production companies, which may retain a stable of directors (personal communication, February 1, 2013). According to interviewees, the process of winning work typically begins with a corporation hiring an advertising agency. That advertising agency approaches multiple production companies (most often three in a practice known as “triple-bidding”) asking for treatments. Directors develop treatments detailing visual concept and production cost and then submit those treatments to the advertising agency, which in turn passes them on to the corporate client. The corporate client reviews the treatments and may speak directly with directors to further investigate particular treatment elements. Then “if the idea and the money align” (personal communication, December 18, 2012), the corporate client hires a particular director through the agency to produce his or her proposed treatment. Occasionally, a client or agency knows from the outset which director they want to hire, but they will call for additional treatments as a show of due diligence (personal communication, December 18, 2012). The level of an agency’s or client’s involvement in choosing story arcs or characters varies, and occasionally directors and clients negotiate compromises for the inclusion of respective favorite story elements or characters (personal communication, December 18, 2012). In terms of gatekeeping
forces, clients set a story’s general direction by selecting a treatment, but the particulars of that treatment can be negotiated by the hired director. Clients and directors do not always agree on a story’s final edit. As an illustration of a director’s goals, one commercial director believed that his job was to “take and idea and actually help flesh it out and bring it to life” (personal communication, December 18, 2012). He noted that when advertising agencies or clients force their own ideas on directors, the final product often feels “stilted or not quite right” because directors have had little creative stake in the final product.

A relatively new development in advertising, brand films are short-films that showcase the value of the products or services of a particular client. Companies like Toyota, Apple, Chevrolet, Whole Foods, The American Red Cross, charity: water, Toms Shoes, Duracell, Nike, Dove and many more have commissioned brand films. Some of these brand films are documentary in nature and focus on customer experience or the client’s employees. Describing the nature of brand films, one commercial director said that his work “is more or less documentary storytelling for the most part,” but he both understands and laments that “at the end of the day, there are special interests” (personal communication, December 18, 2012). Those special interests most often involve ensuring an audience’s positive impression of a brand and the inclusion of the brand’s product or logo. Many times, these interests require that “some of the best material gets removed and gets replaced with a product or some reference to a product” (personal communication, December 18, 2012). Another commercial director agreed that brand interests often overruled an “authentic” story:
It's hard to give a blanket statement, but I would say that in the commercial space, because there's so much money involved or there's different interests, many times a story is diluted or it's manipulated in a way that I think changes the way it resonates. (personal communication, December 10, 2012)

Two directors tied this seemingly paradoxical desire for both authenticity and brand placement to shifts in cultural values, which this study will explore later in the social systems section.

Further complicating the director’s agency over a story’s final edit is an organizational hierarchy that situates an advertising agency between a commercial director and the corporate client. Thus, directors are often distanced from their ultimate client, and this disconnection prevents direct communication in which a director could defend his or her needs and visual expertise. Not all commercial directors mind that distance. One director thought that, as evidenced by advertising agencies’ experience, direct contact with a corporate marketing department would likely prove fruitless because of differing, if not opposing, measures of success:

The problem is that as savvy as advertising has become and as exciting as the advertising agency may want the ad to be, at the end of the day, they're dealing with a client whose marketing department is trained differently. This is a big disjunction in corporate advertising: that corporation's marketing departments are trained in business and they're trained in numbers, whereas ad agencies are trained to make emotional work, so they can connect to people. That's why they hired directors: to make interesting, emotional work. But then the ad agency [takes a brand film edit] back to their client, and the client goes, "Well, what the hell?"
Where's my shoe? Where's my car?" And they go, "No really, you don't get it. It's about a feeling." And [the client] is like, "Oh, I don't give a shit about your feeling. I want my car in the shot." … We [, the commercial directors,] don't want to sell a person's story short for the sake of a shoe. (personal communication, December 18, 2012)

This tradeoff between “emotional work” and product placement is perhaps the best illustration of the editorial conflicts that arise due to organizational gatekeeping forces among agency-driven commercial work. In fact, one director reported he knew filmmakers who could not “transition” from producing independent documentaries to working with agencies because they could not stomach “working for the man,” which implies both a loss of editorial control and a breach of conscience (personal communication, December 18, 2012).

A few less potent gatekeeping forces come to bear on agency-driven commercial work, namely talent agencies and crew size. One director noted that he would prefer to work with a talent agency who could scout and book projects for him. He felt a talent agency could extend the reach of his past and future work. However, he reported that talent agents have minimum quotas for online views and online subscribers or followers that even he, as a successful commercial director, could not meet. He described the problem as “chicken and egg,” because the same organization he wanted to hire to expand his audience would not take him on until he had expanded his audience (personal communication, December 18, 2012).

Directors also reported that the number of people on set affected the story. Although there are exceptions, each stakeholder in a brand film often wants one or more
representatives present at the production location. These representatives, plus the crew customary for high-end productions, create a crowd that could erode the intimacy needed for “emotional” or “authentic” work (personal communication, December 10, 2012). One director agreed: “Usually the people that we end up working with, I guess commercially, end up making the commercial harder” (personal communication, February 1, 2013).

Another commercial director recounted a particularly large production in which the client sent multiple representatives, the agency sent “probably 10 people,” and his crew numbered sixteen or seventeen. “I would prefer space to craft and to do the work,” he said. “Many times it's difficult because there are so many cooks in the kitchen” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). Occasionally, he gets that luxury. For one commercial production he was able to interview the main subject alone. “It was just me and him, sitting across a table,” he said. “So it was definitely a candid [conversation] between two human beings” (personal communication, December 10, 2012).

One director suggested that the reason he works with agencies rather than directly with client is that direct-to-client work requires organizational “architecture” that would be practical only if he were producing commercials full time (personal communication, February 1, 2013).

Agency-driven commercial micro-documentaries are dominated by gatekeeping forces created by three primary entities: an advertising agency, a commercial client and a director. These entities often entertain different success measures for the final product, but financial interdependence creates enough common interest to inspire work. Perhaps the newest gatekeeping force in this organizational space is a cultural desire for authenticity, which prompts clients to hire micro-documentary filmmakers to create real
stories about real people using their real products. However, no matter how polite creative discussion may be, the client’s desires are the ultimate gatekeeping force.

**Direct-to-client commercial production.** Other micro-documentarians work directly with clients, rather than through advertising agencies. Most often, these clients are smaller companies and nonprofits that cannot or prefer not to hire an advertising agency. In effect, this makes working for larger clients unlikely for these micro-documentarians. As an illustration, one ex-broadcast DP tried unsuccessfully for months to connect with the “communications people” at “big NGOs” before realizing that those large organizations are “going to go to an ad agency, deal with concept, hire a crew and hire a boutique production company to go do this thing” (personal communication, December 11, 2012).

Many direct-to-client documentarians are self-employed, which means they often lack the tangible and intangible benefits of working for an organization (name recognition, access, salary, legal support, accounting, etc.). General lack of name recognition means these filmmakers must sell their services in other ways such as offering low cost, low hassle, quick turnaround, or specialized productions.

The lack of other typical organization resources also affects direct-to-client productions. An optimistic ex-journalist noted that, while working a past job at a newspaper, he “never took into account” how the organization absorbed costs like licenses for music or archival footage (personal communication, December 7, 2012). However, the freedom that comes with self-employment is appealing to some of these documentarians, and they choose to use that flexibility to “do the projects we know we want to do” rather than to “just be handed projects that we had no interest [in] or
A magazine videojournalist was considering freelancing because she felt drawn to an environment where she was “the ultimate decision-maker,” but she also enjoyed working for an organization because “it’s nice to have that structure” (personal communication, January 21, 2013). Thus, direct-to-client micro-documentarians may choose that production space precisely because of the absence of traditional organizational gatekeeping forces, despite the resulting lack of organizational resources.

Fortunately for these directors, there is a growing market for micro-documentaries. Many smaller companies and nonprofits commission directors to produce micro-documentaries profiling their organization and programs. While working directly with clients (not through an advertising agency) may ease communication and increase a director’s agency over the final edit, developing concept and messaging is still not a simple process. Even in smaller companies and non-profits, multiple stakeholders exist (board members, communications departments, executives, donors, etc.), and those stakeholders are less likely to have their involvement limited by departmental boundaries. A micro-documentary studio owner said she and her partner are slowly learning how to balance the sometimes divergent needs of the board and the donors for non-profit work (personal communication, December 13, 2012).

Because many of these micro-documentaries cover clients’ programs or products, clients are often “the experts in the story they’re trying to tell,” but also they are also often “not visual storytellers” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). In other words, clients’ expertise in their own stories does not equate to facility articulating that story in a visual medium for an external audience. Thus, many interviewees noted that
smaller clients, especially nonprofits, need help articulating their own story internally before creating a story to promote their organization externally. This often means production crews must operate as marketing “consultants” during pre-production (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Another interviewee agreed that she and her partner have many conversations with clients at a project’s outset in order to define the scope, tone, and approach. They also must establish whether “what they want is what we do” (personal communication, December 13, 2012), because some clients misunderstand what visual services small micro-documentary operations can provide. An optimistic ex-journalist agreed that “managing client expectations” on the front end is critical to a project’s success (personal communication, December 7, 2012). Thus, direct-to-client micro-documentarians use client education to prevent possible future gatekeeping issues.

As one interviewee noted directly, special interests are at play no matter the client size: “The reality is that whenever you're working for anyone, you're always thinking about them as well as their needs and what they might need” (personal communication, December 7, 2012). Interestingly, he compared this practice with a stint spent as a photojournalist:

[It’s] the same thing I did when I was working at the [paper]. You know, I'm out there telling the story, but I'm also in the back of my mind thinking, "Oh gosh, this is for 1A, and for 1A, I need to take a different kind of picture." So you adjust. (personal communication, December 7, 2012)

Still, he differentiated between his work in journalism and for clients. In his client work, he believed he was “telling the story from the point of view of this nonprofit,” and unlike
journalism, he did not go “out of his way to find somebody who doesn’t agree with this mission or message” (personal communication, December 7, 2012). In essence, this divide between journalism and journalistic client work could be characterized crudely as *the story* and *their story*.

Direct-to-client directors reported different methods of protecting their editorial control. Some sold their services as near-journalistic accounts of brand-related stories, while others noted that clients often wanted to “control the narrative” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). Speaking from the near-journalistic end of the spectrum, an optimistic ex-journalist said:

> The way we sell ourselves and our services are very much, "Put your story in our hands. We're trained professionals, and you know what you get is our vision of it. We pretty much try and give the general hand-off approach, so the client doesn't get too much say in it once we start producing it. (personal communication, December 7, 2012)

Speaking from the other end of the spectrum, an ex-nonprofit filmmaker said that some of this kind of work is “essentially advertising” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). Indeed, because of those advertising overtones, she would have never submitted some of her nonprofit micro-documentaries to film festivals, and she has made it a personal goal to inject more “nuance” and round reporting (i.e. journalism) into for-hire, nonprofit media. A micro-documentary studio owner said she had experienced both extremes: one in which the client forced her to “make a lot of compromises” and one in which “the client basically loved everything we did” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Of course, she said she and her partner prefer the latter. In rare
cases, reality might differ so much from a client’s goals that the production must manipulate or fake details. One interviewee recounted a situation in which he had to stage a story’s ending because it would not have happened naturally during the booked production days. Recounting a call to the client during production, he said:

“I'm telling them what we're getting, and they wanted the story to end differently from what reality was. … Then we had to make things happen, make that ending happen that they wanted. But that's just what producing is. It's just simply getting the right people in the right place and going with it. (personal communication, December 11, 2012)

This interviewee emphasized that this situation was rare and that the ending the client wanted would have happened naturally, if on an inconvenient time table. Still, this situation clearly illustrates that the ultimate commitments of client projects are substantially different than journalism’s. While direct-to-client projects are committed to the power of real stories, journalistic ethical standards like non-intervention and transparency are negotiable in the client-driven micro-documentary space.

Another interviewee recounted a project in which the client did not want to tell a particular story that, although true, might reflect negatively on the organization. The story involved a child in a disadvantaged neighborhood who had continued attending school despite his father’s imprisonment. The micro-documentarian felt it was an inspiring story of a child defying the odds. On the other hand, the client did not “want people to think our kids have parents in jail” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Although the director felt the client was “sweeping something under the rug that everyone knows is true: that people from this community are put in jail,” in the end he had to investigate
other story options (personal communication, December 13, 2012). The client’s concerns over protecting their image won out over the power of an emotional story. Client-direct micro-documentarians may subscribe to journalistic or documentary ethics, and they and their clients both believe in the power of “real stories.” Still, as with agency-driven commercial work, clients serve as a story’s ultimate gatekeeper because they also foot the bill.

**Self-publishing production.** Self-published projects are free of many of the traditional gatekeeping forces associated with media publishing. Indeed, that is their appeal. Self-publishing in this study refers to a micro-documentary filmmaker uploading a video to an online platform, whether YouTube, Vimeo, a personal website, or elsewhere online. Interviewees spoke of publishing “personal projects” or “passion projects” in this way, and one interviewee had made a living, in part, by self-publishing micro-documentaries. A majority of interviewees believed that in this space either there are no gatekeepers or the only gatekeepers are filmmakers themselves.

Further freeing this space, there are few gatekeeping forces that affect self-published work at the organizational level. Most of the gatekeeping forces reported in self-publishing pertain more to distribution than publication. Thus the gatekeeping forces associated with production in the self-publishing space are marked by absence, often in relief to other organizational contexts. In self-publishing, often there are no organizational resources (gear, gear insurance, legal, salary, benefits), no staff hierarchies, no mentorship (personal communication, December 11, 2012), no deadlines (personal communication, December 18, 2012), no firewall between funding and content (personal communication, December 9, 2012), no responsibility to audience, no
responsibility to advertisers or clients, and low to no financial compensation (personal communication, December 7, 2012).

Thus, filmmakers in the self-publishing space often trade a lack of organizational gatekeeping forces for a lack of organizational resources. A direct cinema filmmaker reported that, unlike the local broadcast news, he and a colleague had difficulty gaining access to events because they lacked immediate credibility (personal communication, December 7, 2012). Additionally, a self-publishing filmmaker reported that, due to the size of their operation, any form of litigation—whether for libel, privacy, or copyright—could easily “shut us down” (personal communication, December 9, 2012).

Although citizen journalism is sometimes considered a corrective or at least alternative news source, one interviewee disagreed the he and his partner, despite their videos garnering over 8 million views collectively, had real clout in the marketplace of ideas given their small staff, infrequent publications, and small audience size compared with major networks (personal communication, December 9, 2012). Although they could reach certain audiences by marketing themselves as a “corrective” to mainstream media, they felt little agency to act as even a small gatekeeping force for mass media (personal communication, December 9, 2012).

Since he and his partner were trying to support themselves in part with advertising revenue and public donations from their videos, he reported they felt it was an economic necessity to create content that could be shared: “the way we fund our operation is by making sure that our videos get seen” (personal communication, December 9, 2012). If micro-documentarians are depending on self-published work to generate funding, they must ensure their work is seen by many people (advertising revenue, small donations) or
at least the right people (patrons-funding, grant-funding). Funding models will be discussed later.

Another filmmaker said she had begun multiple “passion projects,” but given her workload of paying projects and a lack of real deadlines, the projects were proving “really hard to finish” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). A micro-documentary studio owner said she and her partner think of personal projects as “a marketing tool slash way to continue pushing ourselves” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). In this way, producing work in a space with lesser gatekeeping forces allows micro-documentarians to carve a niche in which they can showcase and be hired for the work they prefer to produce. An optimistic ex-journalist noted that his personal projects were driven almost purely by his own curiosity. In other words, “in independent projects, story is the absolute bottom line” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Notably, many of the gatekeeping forces reported for self-publishing actually draw more from the individual level of analysis. It seems in the absence of formal organizational structure, gatekeeping forces from other levels of analysis rise up as primary considerations.

**Film festivals.** Film festivals occupy a unique organizational niche. Along with broadcast television, they were the past, primary venue for non-fiction shorts. As such, most films that festivals screened were not commissioned by festival officials themselves, but rather were selected for programming from a large pool of submitted entries. Thus, film festivals exert editorial influence over the topicality and shape of films through the curatorial standards and interests implied in their programming, and the gatekeeping forces they exert on production are much less direct than those of other organizational
contexts. Competition for acceptance in film festivals has always been fierce (personal communication, December 18, 2012), and interviewees reported that placing a film in a festival today is still associated with some level of prestige (personal communication, December 7, 2012; personal communication, December 10, 2012; personal communication, October 23, 2012). One interviewee with access to statistical information at a major documentary film festival reported a 5% acceptance rate for submissions (personal communication, November 15, 2012). A film festival founder said that both short-form and long-form submissions had seen the same considerable increase the past few years (personal communication, October 23, 2012). Still, that interviewee said shorts rarely fared as well as long-form because festival-goers wanted to “see a movie” (personal communication, October 23, 2012). He also noted that shorts submitted to festivals could afford to be more “contemplative,” “quieter,” and six to seven minutes longer than shorts screened online. However, festivals often preferred not to accept films that had already screened online because they had consequently killed their “festival buzz” (personal communication, October 23, 2012). An academic with significant experience as a film festival juror noted that the fundamental “authorial values” of many festivals were “antithetical to the online world, which is iterative and collaborative” (personal communication, February 29, 2012). In fact, she believed the Internet now served as the primary venue for artists making “high-end” or “experimental” work and that this represented a current “crisis” for festivals (personal communication, February 29, 2012).

As gatekeepers, film festivals align more with traditional gatekeeping models in that selection for publication is a higher hurdle than distribution. However, their
curatorial standards for programming are more accepting of experimental, interpretive, and hybrid works than a journalistic organization’s might be.

**Strategic production.** Regardless of the organizational context, interviewees noted strategic production as a means of maximizing resources and overcoming gatekeeping barriers. One noteworthy strategy was a resistance to the pressure to maximize production value (personal communication, January 21, 2013). A magazine videojournalist noted that exposure to user-generated content and video chat had sensitized the Internet audience to varying image and audio qualities (personal communication, January 21, 2013). Similarly, an arts videojournalist said that her organization attempts to use as few “resources as possible without sacrificing quality” (personal communication, December 18, 2012). A veteran videojournalist said that a “big 6000 dollar camera” was unnecessary and in fact could conflict with the style expected of certain content, especially videos filmed in “edgy” locations (personal communication, December 13, 2012).

Beyond considerations of gear, a magazine videojournalist extended her sense of strategic production to personnel. She suggested organizations could better match the particular “skills” and “strengths” of individual producers with their job parameters. This journalist also noted that journalistic organization sometimes fall prey to an “eat your spinach” mentality regarding online video, meaning producers felt an audience should consume content simply because of its importance. While she believed there was a place for video coverage of important social issues, she advocated adding metaphorical “garlic,” and she asked why micro-documentarians were not more often “cooking it in a way that’s going to be palatable and interesting to me?” (personal communication,
January 21, 2013). A self-publishing filmmaker reported that although he had a running list of possible films, he often chose to begin a certain project based on “who can stack with us,” meaning partners who were sympathetic to his message and who could extend his reach (personal communication, December 9, 2012).

Interestingly, two micro-documentary theorists and one practitioner questioned whether traditional short films were the best means of reaching an audience. An academic noted that, given the nature and culture of the Internet, a micro-documentary director should “think strategically” and “from a user-centric perspective” (personal communication, February 29, 2012). Likewise, a video tech theorist questioned whether short-films were the best means of achieving filmmakers’ goals, especially those of a filmmaker motivated by social issues. “You've got to get back to why you're doing it,” he said. “Making a film might not be the best tactic for changing the world. Or making a film the way you have traditionally might not be the best tactic for changing the world” (personal communication, December 6, 2012).

Some short-form documentarians are attempting mixed-media storytelling. In an effort to “leverage the medium in the strongest way to communicate,” a journalist-turned-filmmaker found a collaborator to construct sculptures as companion art works for his film (personal communication, December 17, 2012). The video tech theorist suggested that filmmakers should support a social-issue film with community partnerships, “a tool that makes it easy to write my Senator,” and data graphics that are easily shareable. Still, he cautioned that individual filmmakers should concern themselves with “the one thing in the tapestry that you do better than all the others,” rather than attempting to produce all these elements alone (personal communication, December 6, 2012).
Notably, production strategies like these involve improving a story’s palatability in anticipation of a potentially distracted, disinterested, or attention-deficit audience. Strategic production of micro-documentaries often involves preemptively shaping a message, whose publication is almost guaranteed, for better visibility, share-ability and watch-ability online.

**Strategic distribution.** In the 2010s, discussions of media distribution are inevitably bound up in considerations of the culture and nature of the Internet. Consequently, this study will address those elements only generally here and more thoroughly later in the social institutional level of analysis.

Online distribution is perhaps the most perplexing gatekeeping force and understandably so, because it represents a seismic shift in the way that media authors think about publishing. The “old media” publishing model never guaranteed a warm reception for a message, but it could at least guarantee a minimum viewership. More than ever before, the Internet has reminded creators that publication does not guarantee visibility. The lowering of production and publication barriers results in a flood of content, and thus a solution to an old problem becomes the germ of a new challenge.

The challenge of getting work seen has spawned a bevy of strategies (or lack thereof) to connect micro-documentary work with interested audiences. Certain directors—particularly those working with broadcasters or advertising agencies—seem to enjoy an insulation from the distribution mechanisms for their work. This has historically been true for successful filmmakers and is still true today for some. In fact, a long-form executive producer reported that long-form documentaries depend increasingly on large marketing budgets— that often exceed the production budget— to reach
theatrical or broadcast audiences. Large marketing budgets are administered by marketing departments, and filmmakers themselves have little responsibility for building an audience in this model.

For those without “really deep pockets,” the alternative is increasingly popular: being “really creative and aggressive and committed to building that audience yourself by blood, sweat and tears, by reaching out to constituent groups, by getting people excited about your film on Facebook or whatever” (personal communication, April 6, 2012). This emphasis on small-scale social marketing through social media and the blogosphere surfaced in other interviews as well. Micro-documentarians working in online journalism, directly with clients, or in the self-publishing space were successively more concerned with how their work could better reach an audience. Although a few particular distribution strategies emerged, the majority of interviewees felt that “doing good work” (i.e., production) was the primary criterion for whether work would travel well on the Internet.

Micro-documentarians who had self-published a story seemed to have thought most about how to distribute their films, especially if those stories were personal projects. A micro-documentary studio owner reached out to influential bloggers, colleagues and friends in search of coverage for a personal project, and due to that coverage, Wired Magazine profiled their project. Though the Wired story did not earn them “thousands and thousands of views,” she and her partner used the publicity as a hard launch for their business (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Interestingly, this micro-documentary studio owner distinguished her operation from a “publication,” saying that
she does not care whether an audience finds her work on her portfolio or embedded elsewhere online.

A self-publishing filmmaker reported that many of his stories were shaped and their releases timed to match current news pegs (personal communication, December 9, 2012). He also reported cultivating and maintaining relationships with influential bloggers and journalists who might share or profile his films. Although he felt these relationships were necessary, he regretted that they were more about “scratching each others backs” than the “quality of anyone’s work” (personal communication, December 9, 2012). In a rare move for a micro-documentary filmmaker, he also had done radio interviews and other “traditional publicity” measures in an effort to keep his story in “people’s newsfeeds” (personal communication, December 9, 2012).

Two interviewees had assessed their audience for a personal project before deciding whether they should self-publish or partner with an existing organization. “Not every story I do or participate in is going to be perfect for my personal audience,” said an optimistic ex-journalist (personal communication, December 7, 2012). He reported trying to sell stories to news outlets or relevant nonprofits if he felt stories could have a wider audience. If an organization bought his story, he said he most often would publish that story “on my own networks as well” (personal communication, December 7, 2012). Likewise, a veteran video journalist noted that stories published through “conventional distribution points” like the “New York Times, Time Magazine, Nylon and PBS” can achieve greater “impact” for a story (personal communication, December 13, 2012).

One strategy popular across organizational contexts is pushing video content to multiple publication points and multiple devices. An MFA program director said he
encourages his students to try to place work in as many venues as possible, whether in theaters, installations (e.g. in museums, bars, music venues), film festivals, on DVD, and online (personal communication, November 15, 2012). A newspaper videojournalist reported that his employer pushes most content to every possible device and rarely makes content with a single device in mind (personal communication, December 20, 2012). An optimistic ex-journalist publishes on his Vimeo, on his blog, and on a major metro daily’s website (personal communication, December 7, 2012). Similarly, a direct cinema filmmaker publishes on “all available channels,” citing Internet streaming, online video-on-demand, film festivals and DVDs (personal communication, December 7, 2012). He also believed his films were reaching audiences “watching YouTube videos on their TV” or through web TV (personal communication, December 7, 2012).

An ex-broadcast DP noted that he believed his clients frequently missed opportunities to publish his work, or clips from it, in more than one place. When he hands final cuts over to nonprofits, he said rarely sees “anybody really thinking beyond the gala.” His work is shown for donor fundraising purposes and then posted online with little strategic thought. He believes his clients could make better use of the material by gathering visual “assets” from the film to “sprinkle out” across a concerted social media campaign (personal communication, December 11, 2012).

A few distribution strategies for web journalism surfaced in the course of interviews. An arts videojournalist described her organization’s strategy as one of quality over quantity, which for her organization means publishing and promoting no more than one well-crafted video per day (personal communication, December 18, 2012). She also noted potential in sharing serial content with television broadcasters for use in co-branded
storytelling programs (personal communication, December 18, 2012). A journalist between jobs thought organizations should try publishing content on a predictable schedule so that audiences might know when to expect it (personal communication, January 21, 2013).

All things considered, it seems micro-documentarians would prefer to be authors rather than publishers, auteurs rather than marketers. The smaller the size of the associated organization the more likely distribution of a story will become the responsibility of the micro-documentarian that produced it. If forced to handle distribution themselves, they can develop respectable strategies, but few have spent the time necessary to build personal platforms with reach that rivals “old media” organizations’. Micro-documentarians that self-publish are likely to lack the support and reach that organizations offer.

**Auteur mentality.** Notably, micro-documentarians working in production contexts with large organizations seem to have spent less time thinking through or implementing distribution strategies. In fact, commercial directors, whose work is deeply entrenched in multiple organizations, reported giving little to no consideration to how their work—even their personal work—reaches an audience. A commercial director said of a personal project he self-publishes, “It’s sort of a happy accident sort of strategy” (personal communication, December 18, 2012). When asked if he had a distribution strategy for his personal work, another commercial director said, “I don't think that's the way my mind works. The way my mind works is just that I'm honest to the story that I'm telling” (personal communication, December 10, 2012).
A magazine videojournalist noted that, during her time at a major metropolitan daily newspaper, she knew videographers with a Field of Dreams mentality—“If I produce this beautiful story, then people will watch it”—that was rarely, if ever, backed up in reality (personal communication, January 21, 2013). Still, an optimistic ex-journalist held a similar view:

It's hard for me to understand people … who see a hurdle in terms of getting their work out there. I just don't see any barriers. I haven't seen a single barrier. I have a very kind of Kevin Costner "Field of Dreams" mentality, which is that if you build it, they will come. If you create something good, people will come, and it will not be hard to share. And that all you have to do is put it in the network, and people will begin to share. So I don't see in any form—be it any long-form, short-form, stills, video, movies—I just don't see any barrier to share-ability. (personal communication, December 7, 2012)

Whether they believed it or not, many micro-documentarians seemed to wish this distribution meritocracy—where all good work gets an audience—were true.

Along with others, a long-form executive producer critiqued the “Field of Dreams” mentality: “[An audience] doesn’t just happen. It has to be worked. There's an awful lot of chance that's out there, and you can't assume that people are going to find it just because it's on the Internet” (personal communication, April 6, 2012). Speaking generally about documentary filmmakers, she continued:

There is no such thing as an auteur anymore. You can't be the auteur and hand [your film] off to somebody and expect them to sell it for you. It's not happening.

And in some ways, it shouldn't. You're the one that cares a lot about the film, and
there are reasons why you wanted to make that [film], and there are reasons why
you think other people should see it. That passion should carry you into actually
getting those people involved. And you are the best person to get those people
involved because of that passion. (personal communication, April 6, 2012)

As she notes, there exists a natural connection between a filmmaker’s enthusiasm for a
particular topic and a possible marketing strategy for a film. Although she is referring to
both short and long form producers, the use of auteur to distinguish between creator and
publisher in the online space is serviceable in this study.

Rooted in film studies, the term *auteur* refers to the idea that, despite the
collaborative nature of filmmaking, a director’s art so infuses a film that he or she is
considered a film’s “author.” Additionally, once an auteur had created art, they could
pass that film off to marketers. As this long-form executive producer alludes, this
definition could be logically extended in the 21st century. Auteurs, she says, can no
longer simply pass off their art to monied marketers and distributors; auteurs must now
be author and advocate, artist and entrepreneur for their film. In other words, if an auteur
builds a good film, there is no guarantee an online audience will come. Of course
exceptions exist, but many interviewees reported similar notions, even if they did not
specify the term auteur.

Indeed, 20th century articulations of gatekeeping theory allude to a segmented
publication system infused with notions of the auteur, as cited by Shoemaker and Vos:

Regardless of the industry, the preselection system has clearly differentiated roles
and functions (Hirsch, 1970, 1977): The *artist* provides the creative material,
which is identified by an *agent*, who acts like a talent scout for the *producer*, who
supplies the capital necessary to get the product under way. The promoter’s job is to create and manage anticipated demand, while the gatekeeper stands between the industry and its consumers, deciding which products will be recommended or publicized to the public, the ultimate consumer of the product. (2009, p. 63).

Here, the “artist” is the auteur. In a way, this system still exists at the high end of commercial scale or success, be it commercial long-form, commercial advertising, broadcast programming or conceptual high-art. In limited ways, it also seems to exist in web journalism, where organizations delegate content production and promotion to specialized employees.

However, for most emerging filmmakers, especially those self-publishing work online, auteur theory has, at the very least, paused for the time being. For micro-documentary filmmakers with little or no organizational support, the roles described by Shoemaker and Vos are all collapsed into one. This results in a significantly wider required skillset, as detailed at the individual level of analysis. Although a lowering of production barriers may have empowered filmmakers to infuse a work with their unique vision, the marketing infrastructure that auteurs traditionally enjoy exists only for a select few filmmakers. Some interviewees wished the auteur system had survived because they preferred to create work rather than promote it. A direct cinema filmmaker said:

Sometimes I would prefer the old way, where we sell a story and then … somebody else “tells” it. That might be easier because we could make more stories. And that's kind of where my heart is: writing down the story, capturing the story and then having it there with the hope that it will get out or believing that it will get out. (personal communication, December 7, 2012)
Another interviewee remarked that he, like many filmmakers, now had to consider “elements of business” that had previously been reserved for “the business office of HBO or Showtime or PBS” (personal communication, December 17, 2012).

If as one interviewee said “it’s not a story until you’re telling it to somebody” (personal communication, December 7, 2012), some micro-documentary filmmakers must locate and cultivate audiences for their work. Interviewees reported this task could be “daunting” (personal communication, December 18, 2012) or even “the hardest part” of the profession (personal communication, December 7, 2012). In response to these pressures, journalists, commercial directors, and self-publishing filmmakers are “on our way to constructing our own platforms” on social media and user-generated video sites, often in addition to the platforms offered by their affiliated organizations (personal communication, December 13, 2012).

Elaborations of the complications of auteur theory could quickly become a circular repetition of the entirety of this research project. As a whole, this study, in illuminating the gatekeeping forces affecting micro-documentaries, serves as testament to the complication of an auteur mentality.

**Social Institutional Forces**

Social institutions exist one level of abstraction higher than organizations, and consequently they exert the same forces on multiple organizations. Interviewees reported that the following social institutional gatekeeping forces affected their work: markets, geographic markets, “old media” organizations, audiences, Internet culture, Internet corporations, and academia.
**Markets.** As noted earlier, a radical expansion of the publications points and a lowering of production costs have dramatically increased the demand for online video of all kinds, micro-documentary films included. An ex-broadcast DP attributes this increased “desire for video” to the fact that “more outlets exist” (personal communication, December 11, 2012). As publication points have expanded so have job opportunities for micro-documentarians. Journalism outlets, nonprofits, governments, universities, and production companies all hire micro-documentarians.

Still, many interviewees kept or recommended side jobs in addition to micro-documentary work. An MFA program director said instructors in his program often talk about day jobs as a “reality” for artists: “What is your day job may well not be your passionate work” (personal communication, November 15, 2012). An optimistic ex-journalist also distinguished between “personal projects” and “commercial ventures,” which a creator might never include in his or her public portfolio (personal communication, December 7, 2012).

A direct cinema filmmaker reported that he and his partner take project commissions from “every type of client,” citing short-form fiction, corporate video, museum installations, music videos and other “creative short-form videos” (personal communication, December 7, 2012). An ex-broadcast DP will still occasionally take freelance broadcast gigs but is hoping to do so less frequently as his business grows (personal communication, December 11, 2012). A micro-documentary studio owner shoots weddings on the side and teaches at a local university (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Amorphous professional categorization, as discussed earlier, helps
directors move more easily between organizational contexts and micro-documentary subgenres.

In a similar vein, a veteran videojournalist “diversifies” his business by teaching workshops, teaching at a university, selling instructional guides, consulting, and taking freelance gigs (personal communication, December 13, 2012). A self-publishing filmmaker reported that advertising revenue from his videos “pays our rent functionally” but that his videos provided a platform that he could monetize. “I don’t make a living doing [citizen] journalism on the Internet,” he said. “I make a living by, in some ways, having a reputation as someone who does journalism on the Internet, [which] gets me other opportunities where I can make money” (personal communication, December 9, 2012).

Still, some client-direct directors and all agency-driven commercial directors reported creating time to work on personal projects, most of which involved no direct financial returns. No working journalist reported having time for video projects outside of their job, although no specific question were asked.

Regarding market value of micro-documentaries, multiple interviewees reported that clients often vastly underestimated the time and budget required for micro-documentary production. An ex-nonprofit filmmaker reported that she had spoken with multiple online news outlets that offered $300 for a two to three minute news package. “How is it possible that anyone lives off that?” she asked. “Maybe that’s why there’s not a lot of this going on [with online news]” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). A filmmaker/consultant reported hearing that the New York Times offered a similar payment, which he felt was impossibly low (personal communication, December 13,
An ex-broadcast DP reported that he often spoke with clients who expected a project to cost a tenth of his minimum for international work, and he expects that only amateur producers are able to satisfy those budgets (personal communication, December 11, 2012).

Funding difficulties were reported across the board for client projects and especially personal projects. As a curator noted, fewer resources are required to produce short-form than long-form, and thus “you can have solo filmmakers just off making [short-form] by themselves” (personal communication, March 20, 2012). Still, as an ex-nonprofit filmmaker said, micro-documentarians are capable of producing solo work, but she feels like project budgets that do not allow for a crew limit her best work (personal communication, December 10, 2012). She told a story about working on an international project that the director had funded by selling her car. An optimistic ex-journalist agreed that “it’s expensive to be freelance” (personal communication, December 7, 2012). A commercial director said he wished he could get funding behind a personal project so that he could justify spending more time on it (personal communication, December 18, 2012). An ex-broadcast DP said he had learned “there’s absolutely no money in nonprofits” before moving on to target foundations as clients (personal communication, December 11, 2012). Again, it seems lowered barriers have not made micro-documentary production cheap or easy so much as they have made it “feasible.”

A “lack of funding,” as a film festival founder noted, is a primary obstacle for short-form (personal communication, October 23, 2012). Coupled with impractically low expectations for cost, that lack of institutional funding makes financing micro-documentary projects a challenge. As a video tech theorist noted, the sources of funding
for artistic ventures rarely change. Those options include sourcing funding from third-party advertisers, a patron or client, individual viewers paying for the product, or individual viewers paying for collateral (personal communication, December 6, 2012). Most micro-documentarians funded projects through commissions from clients, whether advertising agencies, corporations, nonprofits, or individuals. While no interviewees reported experience with funding productions through video on demand (individual viewers paying per view), a few reported experience with third-party advertising, and a few offered opinions on crowd-funding, although none had experimented with it.

Only two interviewees reported receiving revenue for advertising served against their final product, and neither made a living solely from that revenue. An academic had a sense that advertising revenue paid through YouTube might be paying “phone bills” but not “rent” (personal communication, February 29, 2012). A self-publishing filmmaker confirmed that a “viral” YouTube video (by his definition over 1 million views) could make substantial money, but he felt that neither was the pay was not high enough nor virality predictable enough for third-party advertising to prove a reliable source of income. He felt this was especially true for stories that were more informational than entertaining. Although YouTube has never published official advertising payout rates, anecdotal estimates for YouTube advertising payouts range between $0.68 and $10 per 1000 views ($680-$10,000 per million views), depending on the type of ad and the cumulative number of views. In April 2013, after the conclusion of this project’s interviews, YouTube introduced a new “YouTube Partner Program” that aimed to update its relationships with popular YouTube producers. Regardless, most micro-documentarians interviewed reported they had never attempted to monetize a video using
advertising, and a few were opposed to the idea on principle. Two interviewees mentioned interest in working directly with either hyper-local or sector-specific advertisers to fund future work (personal communication, December 7, 2012; personal communication, December 10, 2012).

Although none had direct experience with crowd-funding, a few interviewees mentioned it as a viable funding model. A long-form executive producer said she saw the emergence of crowd-funding as a “dramatic change”: now the audience can have a larger hand in the “construction of the story” because they can fund and even participate a film before its completion (personal communication, April 6, 2012). A film festival founder agreed that crowd-funding represents a shift in funding models and that it allows the production of niche films funded by members of the niche or subculture covered (personal communication, October 23, 2012). He expected crowd-funding to become a more popular financial model as audience’s comfort with online commerce increases. However, he noted that a subculture funding a story about itself could have some implications for editorial integrity, although journalists might be more concerned than documentarians (personal communication, October 23, 2012). Interestingly, an optimistic ex-journalist called traditional fundraising methods like galas and benefit concerts “real-world Kickstarter” events. In that sense, crowd-funding does resemble some traditional fundraising methods, except that it casts a much wider and digital net via social media for mostly smaller donations.

In the end, consensus emerged that a variety of funding sources would prove the most reliable funding method, especially for personal projects. According to a video tech theorist, that “mix of funding sources” requires filmmakers to “be more of an
entrepreneur” and “hustle a little bit more” (personal communication, December 6, 2012). A long-form executive producer had observed successful documentarians diversifying their funding strategies (personal communication, April 6, 2012). A self-publishing filmmaker disclosed that his revenue streams consisted of YouTube ad revenue, audience donations, DVD sales, footage licensing, and grant funding (personal communication, December 9, 2012). An ex-nonprofit filmmaker said she had successfully “multi-purposed” an expensive international production by selling additional video edits to news organizations (personal communication, December 10, 2012). Clever solutions aside, it became clear that although market demand for micro-documentaries is growing, there does not yet exist a standard funding model beyond client-commissions. In addition, there is often little financial “return on investment” (personal communication, October 23, 2012).

Importantly, micro-documentarians did not value their work based solely on a dollar-for-dollar financial return on investment, but rather they considered a complex network of qualitative and quantitative returns when considering a project’s success. Reasons they took projects beyond immediate financial returns included personal growth, professional growth (personal communication, December 13, 2012), good will towards subjects (personal communication, December 13, 2012), portfolio-building (personal communication, December 13, 2012), building community around a particular topic (personal communication, December 17, 2012), and prestige (personal communication, October 23, 2012; personal communication, November 15, 2012; personal communication, December 7, 2012; personal communication, December 13, 2012; personal communication, December 17, 2012). An ex-nonprofit filmmaker had begun a
“private crusade” to bring round, journalistic storytelling to non-profit media, which she felt typically flattens complexity in the name of marketable messaging (personal communication, December 10, 2012). This same filmmaker noted that at one point in her life, one of her professional goals was to tell international stories because they involved travel. Now, she would prefer to “do a strong story about my neighbor down the street than a weak story across the world” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). As a particularly heartwarming example, a commercial director alluded to a short film he had done on a gentleman whom he thought might feel valued through the film process:

I know who I am nowadays. I know how my craft can serve others. If I do a film about someone, and it celebrates their life and they're a nobody and they go on to show their mother and father and it makes them feel special for a year and it gets watched a thousand times, then that's a huge victory for me. (personal communication, December 10, 2012)

**Geographic market.** A few interviewees mentioned geographic market as a force affecting their work. A filmmaker/consultant reported meeting and making clients purely by virtue of the city he lives in. He chose to establish his business in New York City and has an office in Manhattan because he feels the “density of people who were connected” and “the way that people share things” in New York is “unparalleled” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). At the same time, that density produces competition, which has prompted him and his partner to over-work. “There are a lot of people gunning for us,” he said. “We’ve been running, running, running for the last year. We produced way too much work” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Furthermore, all of the interviewees live in a metropolitan area with a population
exceeding 1.5 million. Twelve of the fifteen micro-documentary practitioners interviewed live in New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco or Washington, D.C. This phenomenon could be a byproduct of this study’s sampling mechanism, but it could also suggest a minimum civic and economic activity required to support micro-documentary work.

“Old media.” Micro-documentarians reported a complex relationship with “old media” organizations. When interviewees spoke of “old media,” they often meant organizations whose first media footprint was in newspapers, broadcast or radio rather than the Internet. Some interviewees depended on old media as a licensor for their freelance work, and they reported some of those licensing fees were more livable than others. When “old media” would not pay what a director though a piece was worth, that director might still license the story because publication under that organization’s auspices could “legitimize” work (personal communication, December 7, 2012), extend its reach, or lend a certain “weight” or “prestige” to the story and by proxy the director (personal communication, December 13, 2012; personal communication, December 13, 2012). A nonprofit filmmaker expressed disappointment that some old media organizations did not offer advances on video stories but rather would consider only final products for licensing (personal communication, December 10, 2012). A self-publishing filmmaker noted that he had more financial success licensing his footage as stock material to news organizations and long-form documentarians, and he noted an irony that he and his partner, though part of a new wave of self-publishing filmmakers, were “still making most of our money from old, not new media sources” (personal communication, December 9, 2012).
**Internet culture.** As a social institution, the Internet has of course facilitated change much more radical than the invigoration of the micro-documentary subgenre. Still, the Internet as a medium can be considered a significant, if not primary, contributor to the rise of micro-documentaries. It has enabled relative easy publishing, immediate global availability, and relatively permanent display. The Internet has become the “obvious” and “easiest” publication venue for documentary films (personal communication, December 7, 2012). Furthermore, it serves as both a “delivery service” (way to receive media) and a “platform” (place to watch media) (personal communication, January 21, 2013). As a distribution mechanism, the web circumvents traditional legal and organizational hurdles, allowing users to upload content without confirming proper copyrights or jumping through other “hoops” (personal communication, December 6, 2012). Still, easy answers are not always the best answers (personal communication, November 15, 2012). Aware of its power and challenges, interviewees reported a great number of gatekeeping forces that can be attributed to the nature and culture of the Internet, whether its abundance, interactive capacities, interface design, precise metrics, or social media sharing.

As a curator noted, the Internet’s great appeal and great problem is “just volume, sheer volume” (personal communication, March 20, 2012). This abundance holds true for online video, and micro-documentary filmmakers are not immune. “Let’s be honest,” said a commercial director. “Everyday there’s just a billion more films” (personal communication, December 18, 2012). Overwhelmed by the number of videos online, one interviewee asked, “How am I going to see [a video] unless somehow it’s gone viral?” (personal communication, January 21, 2013). A film festival curator noted that the
“signal to noise ratio” worsens as more videos are uploaded, and videos that are “thoughtful,” “urgent,” or “well-crafted” become more difficult to locate (personal communication, October 23, 2012). A newspaper videojournalist framed the problem of abundance in terms of audience choice: “You're basically asking somebody to stop at an intersection where there's like fourteen roads” and choose your story (personal communication, December 20, 2012). Not only do audiences have an enormous array of video choices, but those choices also occasionally duplicate each other topically. An MFA program director calls this phenomenon “polygenesis,” in which multiple filmmakers produce stories on the same topic, if from different story angles (personal communication, November 15, 2012). To further that abundance, online stories reside at their URL permanently, barring copyright infringements, censorship or server space issues. In rare cases, this permanence allows films to capture wide audiences well after their publication. Abundance is the problem that complicates the “Field of Dreams” mentality. Millions of new ballparks are built everyday.

In part, interface design and user experience dictate a video’s visibility, watchability and share-ability. A magazine videojournalist attributed some low video play counts to a “poor viewing experience for our audience” (personal communication, January 21, 2013). Critically, her employer’s website did not have a video player on the home page, and video content was “getting lost” (personal communication, January 21, 2013). An arts videojournalist noted that her organization had developed their own proprietary video player, rather than using YouTube, so that they could control the viewing experience as well as the advertisers (personal communication, December 18, 2012).
As a brief case study in “watch-ability,” multiple interviewees commented on their choice of one of two main video hosting sites—YouTube or Vimeo. A direct cinema filmmaker chose YouTube because of faster video load times, especially for mobile devices, although he regretted that often meant his videos would be viewed at a lower resolution (personal communication, December 7, 2012). A commercial director posted his work to Vimeo because of a more appealing layout that he felt better featured the work (personal communication, December 10, 2012), and another commercial director also preferred Vimeo for its aesthetics, usability and community (personal communication, February 1, 2012).

Regardless of interface design, the Internet also allows an unprecedented precision in measuring an audience’s engagement with video. As a journalist-turned-filmmaker noted, individuals and organizations producing video are now able to “measure things we’ve never been able to measure before” (personal communication, December 17, 2012). A self-publishing filmmaker explained how the Internet had atomized metrics. In the past, newspaper publishers never knew if “someone bought the newspaper for sports scores or if they bought the newspaper for coupons,” but now online publishers know precisely which pieces of content are viewed and shared (personal communication, December 9, 2012). Chief among these metrics is video play count (how many times a video has been played), followed closely by play through (how long audiences watch a video) (personal communication, March 20, 2012). A newspaper videojournalist said web metrics can be a “harsh reality” that paints a discouraging portrait of an audience’s interests (personal communication, December 20, 2012), and he
was confident that his video metrics were considered a component of the success measures for his videos.

As noted earlier, interviewees reported a network of qualitative returns in addition to play counts. A commercial director noted that metrics can be “dangerous” when creators base the value of their work on play counts alone. “It’s a bit of an illusion that many filmmakers and artists fall in that can hurt them in the long run,” he said (personal communication, December 10, 2012). An arts videojournalist felt “fortunate” that her work received “value through other places” outside of web metrics, specifically as “brand-defining” showpieces inside and outside the organization (personal communication, December 18, 2012). Regarding views and followers online, a self-publishing filmmaker noted that “followers are not all made equal,” meaning that a viewer who shares video content is more valuable than one who merely watches it (personal communication, December 9, 2012). An arts videojournalist agreed that it sometimes matters “who watches [a video] more than how many” (personal communication, December 18, 2012). She described her satisfaction with a video that had only “pretty good metrics” but was shared by key video stakeholders as well as respected online influencers (personal communication, December 18, 2012). A commercial director said online metrics could not measure whether people “cared about” a video, only that “they watched it” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). A journalist-turned-filmmaker called distributing to the “widest audience possible” the “old way of doing it” (personal communication, December 17, 2012). In short, micro-documentary filmmakers understand the value of good video metrics, but they are able to find qualitative value in even the most quantitative places.
Because the Internet is a largely gatekeeper-less space with ever more abundant content, micro-documentarians depend in part on social media to connect their content to interested audiences (personal communication, December 10, 2012). This is a unique capacity of the web that allows individuals to share content frictionlessly with a network of friends, colleagues and followers. In fact, when pressed to name a gatekeeper, many interviewees responded with social media circles. A gatekeeper can be “some kid in middle-America who’s super-passionate about a film” (personal communication, December 10, 2012), and in fact that single kid might have the power (or luck) to “share that idea and that thing sort of explodes and multiplies and other people … go on to share it” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). A curator believed that circles of trusted friends would become “more and more influential” in the dissemination of video content (personal communication, March 20, 2012). A direct cinema filmmaker noted that sharing a video on social media could create a constructive conversation more complex than the video itself (personal communication, December 7, 2012).

Beyond social media sharing, another of the unique capabilities of the Internet is interactivity. Indeed, a newspaper videojournalist felt interactivity was “the power of the web” (personal communication, December 20, 2012). Audience members are able to interact with stories, whether by choosing the order of content, building their own story from the media provided, contributing information to the story, interacting with filmmakers or plugging in their social graph for a customized experience. Although one interviewee was completely uninterested in interactivity (personal communication, December 11, 2012), multiple interviewees expressed interest in developing interactive content, although few had found the time or resources to do so. However, a long-form
executive producer believed that “a live venue like the web” and the length and linearity of a documentary made it difficult to “craft a true interactive experience” online (personal communication, April 6, 2012).

This tension between linearity and interactivity surfaced in other interviews. An academic noted that the Internet is both “fundamentally user-centric” and “fundamentally interactive,” and she believes these two features present a “stumbling block” for the traditional filmmaker’s mindset, which values authorship and a linear product (personal communication, February 29, 2012). A video tech theorist went as far as predicting that being a “professional filmmaker” was “not sustainable” because, beyond fundamental interactivity of the web, Internet cultures tends towards a mosaic or “tapestry” of smaller media rather than a singular product (personal communication, December 6, 2012). He thought these smaller media might include micro-documentaries. An academic noted that micro-documentaries, unlike long-form documentaries, could serve both “lean-back” functions through entertainment or lean-forward functions through news (personal communication, February 29, 2012). A film festival founder noted that shorts programs rarely fare as well as long-form at festivals because audiences expect to “see a movie,” or in other words, have a “lean-back” experience (personal communication, October 23, 2012). Online, shorts fare much better. A curator noted that short-form was something audiences could consume in “little bites” throughout the day (personal communication, March 20, 2012), and an academic described audiences as “stealing time” from daily routines to watch micro-documentaries (personal communication, February 29, 2012).

Although there were few exceptions, interviewees were generally committed to the linearity and authored vision of micro-documentaries. A newspaper videojournalist
believed that linear, lean-back storytelling is the “model that has been handed down for tens of thousands of years. It started at campfires. It’s not a choose-your-own-adventure. That’s hardwired directly into our DNA” (personal communication, December 20, 2012). Furthermore, he believed most interactive projects he had experienced were little more than “multimedia masturbation,” saying often interactivity was unnecessary and “flashy” (personal communication, December 20, 2012). A commercial director defended micro-documentary’s linearity, maintaining that “films are films” and that they are something “to get lost in” and to “relate to” (personal communication, December 18, 2012). A direct cinema filmmaker thought audiences still preferred a filmmaker “leading them down a path rather than them having to create that path or to interact with it” (personal communication, December 7, 2012). He also felt that the audience engagement required by many micro-documentaries was a form of interactivity. An optimistic ex-journalist noted that he was “the target audience for interaction” but that he never finishes interactive material online (personal communication, Dec. 7, 2012). He believed that, on the whole, online users are still looking for linear storytelling, although there may be a “golden age of interactive stories” to come (personal communication, December 7, 2012). Unlike most micro-documentary filmmakers, a journalist-turned-filmmaker believed that directors should become more “accessible” by sharing production with their audiences, possibly “[handing] something off to the audience to finish” (personal communication, December 17, 2012). For him, interactivity included sharing authorship with the “collective, distributed network” of an audience (personal communication, December 17, 2012). This was a rare stance among documentary filmmakers; almost all were committed to their authorship of either a film or an interactive site including films.
Unfortunately for micro-documentarians, the Internet audience does not share the same values of high authorship and social importance. Speaking of Internet audiences, a self-publishing filmmaker said:

On the Internet, it's like the worst of the worst of the worst, because [your content is] competing with the id of every news reader. You're up against everything, not just cat videos. You're up against any other possible browsing decision that someone could make. … It's not like people are sitting in a dark cathedral watching it, absorbing it, considering it, even meeting me halfway. No, they're chatting with someone, and in the small box in the screen my video's playing, maybe on an iPad on a subway. (personal communication, December 9, 2012)

On the whole, neither the viewing habits nor viewing environment reflect the high values with which micro-documentary filmmakers often infuse their work. This self-publishing filmmaker reported spending thousands of dollars traveling for a story of social importance that, in the end, received a tepid audience response. He compared that to another film, of whose tone and mission he is now embarrassed, which took fewer than six hours of work and garnered millions of views. He believes this inverse relationship between the cost and social importance is unfortunate and common (personal communication, December 9, 2012). Given the current “frivolity of our society,” a veteran videojournalist felt “profoundly fortunate” to have experienced pre-Internet “the last days of the golden age of journalism” (personal communication, December 13, 2012).

Considering its abundance, the Internet forces micro-documentaries covering issues of social importance to compete with “cats flushing toilets and sitting on turntables” and
other forms of short-form video entertainment (personal communication, December 17, 2012). A self-publishing filmmaker noted that he and his partner attempted to “keep this pitter-patter going” to keep audiences’ attention, and they also use “simple, clean graphics that people can see on any device” and “shoot close” details are not lost on small screens (personal communication, December 9, 2012). As a viewing environment, the Internet forces micro-documentarians to consider the length, style, structure and topicality of their videos. Thus like every other medium before it, the Internet makes unique demands on the messages it spreads. As a gatekeeping force, the Internet represents both a welcoming platform and difficult viewing environment for micro-documentaries.

**Audience.** By comparison, online audiences for micro-documentaries are on average much smaller than those of any television broadcast (personal communication, October 23, 2012; personal communication, March 20, 2012; personal communication, December 9, 2012). Still, with gatekeeping barriers so low, most micro-documentarians publish online. Though micro-documentarians find online audiences unpredictable, many develop online platforms—whether social media profiles, online portfolios, or others—to publish their personal and professional content. A few micro-documentarians have personal platforms that rival the reach of smaller journalistic organizations, and one reported that his work receives more views from his personal platforms than past, similar work for a journalistic organization did (personal communication, December 7, 2012).

Interviewees reported that robust online platforms are not easy to build or maintain, and some directors said they were “too busy making films to be posting all kinds of extras” on social media (personal communication, December 11, 2012). Still, a
few had strategies for finding and building audiences. A direct cinema filmmaker believed social media was the “one of the quickest, best ways to find an audience” (personal communication, December 7, 2012). Multiple interviewees noted that most audiences are built slowly with “discipline” potentially over years of quality work (personal communication, December 13, 2012; personal communication, December 7, 2012). Additionally, intentional relationships with partners inside and outside the industry can cross-promote content (personal communication, December 13, 2012; personal communication, December 13, 2012; personal communication, December 9, 2012). A few interviewees thought of this work as building a brand that signaled the “style and quality” of their work to audiences (personal communication, December 13, 2012; personal communication, December 13, 2012). An optimistic ex-journalist noted that building a personal brand might also include passing along useful information, rather than just a director’s own work (personal communication, December 7, 2012), and he believed that social media audiences cared more about “what have you done for me lately” than the breadth of integrity of a career (personal communication, December 7, 2012).

The audience expectations built by a brand can also serve as a negative gatekeeping force on future work by limiting a director’s perception of what work will be well-received. For example, after producing an unexpected viral video, a self-publishing filmmaker felt pressure from his audience to produce similar content and, among other reasons, did so for three years (personal communication, December 9, 2012). “We started out making things based on what we were interested in,” he said. “[But] at some point, we started being steered by what other people en masse were interested in” (personal communication, December 9, 2012).
communication, December 9, 2012). By producing for this particular audience, the filmmaker established a partisan tone that, now as he moves on to new projects, has complicated his ability to raise funds and most critically interview certain sources (personal communication, December 9, 2012). Still, he believed he could have appealed to an even wider audience by “suppressing” content quality, but he said he instead chose to stay “independent and sincere” about his citizen journalism (personal communication, December 9, 2012). Indeed, this self-publishing filmmaker had by far the most sophisticated and strategic relationship with his audience. He promoted his work through multiple venues and partners in old and new media. In his words, “heat begets heat” on the Internet. “If you get big enough numbers, people sort of follow each other” (personal communication, December 9, 2012).

**Internet corporations.** No study of 21st century gatekeeping forces would be complete without mention of the influence Internet corporations exert on the space. Many of the most popular Internet services are offered by million- or billion-dollar companies, which shape the online landscape through interface design, terms of service, and corporate interests. The Internet has been widely (if hastily) heralded as a liberating and equalizing medium, which in many ways it inarguably is. Free access to troves of information, near-instant global communication, and a fast and furious marketplace of ideas are real benefits the Internet offers. These and many other factors comprise the “culture” of the Internet. However, the Internet is a platform for corporate and government interests as well.

One of the most fascinating phenomena in the Internet age is the public’s understanding of Internet companies (YouTube/Google, Facebook, Vimeo, Twitter, etc.)
as enablers of the Internet’s culture, rather than its beneficiaries. In the words of Shoemaker and Vos, “elites use the cultural tool kit to affect false consciousness as a means to achieving their own ends” (2009, p. 105). In other words, some entities are powerful enough to create or capture self-serving cultures. For example, YouTube welcomes the promotion of its free services as a force for global democracy and education, but YouTube’s bottom line depends on ads served against the “sheer volume” that the opportunity for free video uploads creates. As a further illustration, a curator explained his distrust of Internet corporations:

I think one thing that people forget with the Internet is that it's driven by a commercial bottom line, and as soon as it becomes either non-profitable or non-profitable-enough for these various networks to be as open as they are, they will quickly shut down or they will quickly take control over the makers' work in some fashion. … I don't trust YouTube. I don't trust Google. I don't trust Facebook. I use all these things, but I know ultimately that they are looking at me and my activity purely in a commercial [way], not in a social progressive [way].

(personal communication, March 20, 2012)

The benefits Internet corporations offer may be real, but inevitably the Internet has been “deformed along the lines of big, powerful interests” (personal communication, February 29, 2012). In many ways, corporate interests have sustained the openness of the web and the ease of publication. In addition to creating and sustaining the micro-documentary space, the corporate interests of Internet companies tend to affect the success of certain types, topics and qualities of videos.
A self-publishing filmmaker seemed to have the best sense of how an Internet corporation might limit the ability of his videos to spread. He first established the centrality of Facebook as a current content distribution point and then took issue with Facebook as a platform for the distribution of significant journalism:

Facebook is designed for advertising. You can only "like" things on Facebook. You can't click "important." So if you have an article about young girls suffering acid attacks in Afghanistan and you share it, do people "like" it because they like the journalism and they think it's an important thing that people should read? Probably not. They don't “like” it, because they don't like acid attacks. … And so, the whole system … favors sort of frivolous content. It favors funny stuff. It favors simple stuff. It favors unserious stuff, especially novel stuff. (personal communication, December 9, 2012)

He expressed frustration that sharing “high-quality journalism” on Facebook often required a “simplistic or novel or funny” headline, which complicated his ability to establish himself as a brand publishing thoughtful journalism (personal communication, December 9, 2012). Of course, users do share serious journalism on Facebook, but they must overcome infrastructural obstacles and biases to do so widely.

Law. Micro-documentarians reported very few legal hurdles, and they thought of legal hurdles primarily in terms of subject releases, contracts and music licensing. Many interviewees reported few if any legal concerns. As an ex-broadcast DP said, “I don't spend any time thinking or worrying about legal anything really” (personal communication, December 11, 2012).
Interviewees were divided on the necessity for releases. Some thought they were necessary because freelancers should prepare for any possible publication point (personal communication, December 7, 2012) or because their work was decidedly commercial. Others felt releases were unnecessary because journalists did not collect them from subjects (personal communication, December 7, 2012) or because “there’s no law requiring you to get a signed release” (personal communication, December 9, 2012). Because he produced work in a “mixed genre,” a direct cinema filmmaker felt disconnected from legal precedents that might exist for more institutionalized practices (personal communication, December 7, 2012).

A few special legal situations surfaced. As mentioned earlier, an ex-nonprofit filmmaker senses an injustice in American non-profits using international citizens as the subject of non-fiction, promotional films. She believes these subjects should be educated on and possibly compensated for the use of their image and story. However, as a freelancer, she has no way to enforce this conviction with clients because it all happens on the backend (personal communication, December 10, 2012). Additionally, a commercial director spoke of using creative solutions to shooting around trademarks: “You might not be able to get that shot of Lay's Potato Chips for example. But you can get a shot of just potato chips out of the bag” (personal communication, February 1, 2013).

No interviewee brought up errors and omissions (“E&O”) insurance policies without being asked. Once asked, most reported that they had never heard of, much less considered purchasing one. Errors and omissions insurance covers a filmmaker in the event they are sued for libel or negligence by the subject of a film. As noted earlier, a
curator noted that in his experience E&O insurance is cost-prohibitive for short-form filmmakers because premiums are the same for both short-form and long-form. Those interviewees that had purchased an E&O policy had done so for feature films (two instances) or for freelance project (one instance).

As one academic suspected, micro-documentarians knew little about fair use and used it extremely rarely. In the words of one interviewee: “I try and shy away from it because it can get so squishy. I’d rather not get in trouble for it” (personal communication, December 7, 2012).

Another interviewee admitted that he and his partner knowingly “flat-out steal” music for soundtrack purposes because they often could not afford the rights to the songs they wanted. All other filmmakers said they obtain music legally.

Notably, micro-documentary filmmakers seemed, with some exceptions, to exhibit only basic fluency with legal matters pertaining to their craft. Most avoided legal gray areas, rather than taking legal risks, but some took paths of least resistance regarding obtaining proper legal licensing or consent. Many micro-documentaries are produced for audiences too small and tell stories too soft to provoke retaliatory legal action, but if legal action were initiated, many micro-documentarians might be caught unprepared. Micro-documentarians without access to organizational legal resources could easily have their operations shut down.

**Academia.** Academia has proven influential to micro-documentary production only tangentially. At risk of being too self-referential, all interviewees expressed interest in reading the conclusions of this study. Few micro-documentarians had access to formal research on their field.
A few interviewees mentioned graduate school as positive influence on their practice, both because of the skills they learned and the connections they made. An MFA program director noted that his program intentionally lowers many gatekeeping forces like funding, equipment access, audience expectations, etc., to foster a better learning environment. A micro-documentary studio owner noted that she and her partner felt prepared by an “incredibly strong program” and were still connected to many colleagues and classmates (personal communication, December 13, 2012).

**Social Systems Forces**

As Shoemaker and Vos conceptualize it, the social system level of analysis is a collection of “society-level influences on news media content” such as “social structure, ideology and culture” (2009, p. 105). Rather than as a map of homeostatic, structuralist norms governing society, these influences might better be understood as a lens through which to view social systems. These forces are evolving but not so fast to render research stale; heterogeneous but not so diverse to invalidate description; abstract but not so ineffable to paralyze analysis. As a reminder, this study has limited it focus to the United States, although admittedly, the Internet and other globalizing agents increasingly tie together disparate cultures. Additionally, there exists a power differential between nations and citizens, corporations and individuals, elites and non-elites to affect social systems, but social systems should be understood as neither totally emergent nor totally manufactured.

All interviewees, especially practicing micro-documentarians, reported fewer gatekeeping forces at this level than any other. David Foster Wallace’s parable of fish
and water may be apt here. In it, one fish asks another, “How’s the water?,” and the other fish responds, “What the hell is water?” In a similar fashion, practicing micro-documentarians may be so enveloped by social systems forces that they are habituated to their existence. Regardless, a few forces surfaced, including generational fluency, socio-economics, techno-romanticism, commercial authenticity and shifting literacies.

**Social Structure.** Two forces emerged regarding social structure: generational fluency and socio-economics. Although only one micro-documentarian mentioned it (notably the most senior), technological fluency surely varies by generation. As a veteran videojournalist noted, “You have a new generation of young people who grew up with this stuff. They understand the technology. … They’re talented, and their skills bubble to the top” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Of course this direct proportion between a person’s youth and their facility with technology functions only as a general rule with many exceptions. Still, it is logical that generations with greater exposure to democratized technology would have a greater opportunity to hone related skills.

An exception to rule of generational fluency is socio-economics. Although production and publication technology have become considerably less expensive, they are still more affordable for the middle class than the working class (personal communication, December 13, 2012). Although they are outside the scope of this study, developing nations in particular have limited access to new technologies. An academic noted that the “great majority of poor people are getting access [to the Internet] through their mobile phones,” and when mobile data plans are sold in with capped monthly data blocks, lower-income users ability to consume video content (a data-heavy activity) is restricted (personal communication, February 29, 2012). In particular, she thought editing
software was prohibitively expensive for people in lower-income brackets. More so than mobile Internet access or equipment cost, she speculated that the most significant barrier is “the confidence to believe that they can do this stuff … that you can screw it up and it’ll be okay” (personal communication, February 29, 2012). Thus education, equipment access, and empowerment become critical gatekeeping factors in the development of new micro-documentarians from lower-income backgrounds.

**Ideology.** For this study, ideology will be loosely defined as the way people think, and in this regard, two primary gatekeeping forces emerged: authenticity and techno-romanticism.

Authenticity proves a problematic concept across a range of disciplines, but fortunately, this study is less concerned with whether a micro-documentary actually is authentic than whether it is produced with that intent. The term “authenticity” arose in multiple interviews, particularly with commercial directors working with agencies. One commercial director delivered a rather articulate, if lengthy, summary of the cultural value advertisers see in authenticity:

There was this golden age of cinema where, like, it was like the silver screen. And the silver screen was the place where idols were presented, where the most famous and the most beautiful lived. And then, slowly but surely, through the 70s and 80s those people became a little more accessible. And then in the 90s they became even more accessible. And by the mid-90s all of a sudden, we became capable of creating some of that stuff ourselves. And all of a sudden, the technology has gone from super-expensive and out-of-people's-hands to less expensive, more accessible and in-people's-hands. And I feel like that's really the
beginning of the idea of user-generated content, which then gets a full-force push with social media and sharing. All of a sudden, we're all in this together. It's the everyman story. The world is getting flatter. … It's about real people really sharing with one another who they are, what they're about, what their ideas are. And that becomes the conversation. So authenticity is part and parcel to the evolution of media. … We now demand and require authenticity. Because we are the creators of so much of this content ourselves, we can sniff out the bullshit versus the real stuff. People are appreciating that more and more. They understand the difference. [But at the same time] I think we can't deny the idea that we are—whether we like to admit it or not— we are genuinely excited about products and material items. And so the idea of companies trying to target certain audiences and create content that expresses that interest and excitement and authenticity...

It's authentic! I am genuinely excited about my [Brand X] products. I think there's some truth there. So for [Brand X] to hire us to go out and make a film about how [their products] are changing people's lives, I think that's a great fit. There's a direct line there. That totally works for me. (personal communication, December 18, 2012)

In short, moving pictures have historically emitted a cultural glamour, and technological advancement have now made it possible for the former audience to be both the stars and directors of short films. Advertisers expect the public, despite any anti-corporate sentiments, to trust stories about itself more than stories about a corporation. Thus corporations hire micro-documentary directors to produce “authentic” stories about real people solving real problems with a company’s real products, in hopes that the positive
emotions stirred by the stories transfer to the brand. In a sophisticated form of product placement, brands create content of the people by the people for the corporation, thus capturing bottom-up, reflected value from citizens for credibility. Another commercial director agreed with a culture-wide thirst for authenticity:

I think with the access that everyone has now with DSLR technology democratizing the filmmaking world, and everything looks sort of a touch closer, the bullshit meters of the audience become greater, because you can [call a lie] anything now. … Culture is dictating the direction of the brand itself. Brands don't really have the option to sort of say who we are. So because of that, you have to be a lot more transparent and honest, and so I think why they're in the doc space is that the creative project culturally is a documentary. What they're really looking for is honesty and less glitz and less manipulation. They're trying to create something that resonates in an authentic way. (personal communication, December 10, 2012)

Crucially, this director believes advertisers have recognized the documentary as the current premier cultural product. As mentioned earlier, advertiser’s use of “authenticity” to market to customers is an example of powerful interests using “the cultural tool kit to affect false consciousness as a means to achieving their own ends” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 105). Although customers may share a corporation’s enthusiasm for a product that provides real value, corporations are unlikely to employ authenticity if they did not believe it would increase product sales.

Discussions of authenticity relate tangentially to another ideological phenomenon: the dichotomy of online and offline life. As the Internet becomes an ever-more pervasive
utility, some users and pundits recoil in an attempt to protect “real life” from digital encroachments. Articles like Sherry Turkle’s “The Flight From Conversation” and Stephen Marche’s “Is Facebook Making us Lonely?” exemplify this kind of digital dualism. However, as one commercial director pointed out, “it’s hard to know where online starts and offline begins” (personal communication, February 1, 2013). Indeed at the other end of every profile, email, account, and video is a human being. Relationships in the “real world,” whether between people or organizations, often transfer into the digital world and vice versa. Furthermore, mobile phones with Internet connectivity mean that millions of people travel daily with the Internet in their pockets. Thus, “real life” and life online becomes a more tightly woven “augmented reality that exists at the intersection of materiality and information, physicality and digitality, bodies and technology, atoms and bits, the off and the online” (Jurgenson, 2012). In this way, the Internet is not just a social institution but also a re-organizing force for culture, ideology and social systems. Like many online media, micro-documentaries further this connection by telling stories of “real people” online.

Techno-romanticism is the second ideological force that emerged in interviews. As mentioned above, the equation of accessible technology with social progress is a product of a myth best termed “technoromanticism.” Popularized by Richard Coyne, the term describes how an over-valuation of technology “encourages inflated expectations, diminishes tangible concerns with equipment and embodiment, promotes the heroism of the digital entrepreneur, and dresses conservative thinking in the guise of radicalism” (2001). The technoromaticist envisions the future as “unified, fair, egalitarian, and highly
productive” (Coyne, 2001, p. 20) primarily due to an ever-widening distribution and use of new technology.

The most relevant articulation of technoromanticism as it pertains to micro-documentaries is the maxim: “Everyone is a filmmaker.” By this point in the analysis, this study has hopefully complicated, if not debunked, the myth. Despite its half-truth, this popular sentiment has surely eased entrance into the genre for both professionals and amateurs by bolstering producer’s confidence. Although no interviewees used the term technoromaticism, they alluded to relevant cultural phenomena like the public’s confidence in producing video content and their own faith in technology as a revolutionary force.

**Culture.** For this study, culture will be loosely defined as the way people live and interact both with media and each other.

As mentioned in the literature review, media literacies exert a decided, if obscure, influence on the consumption and creation of cultural products. As digital technologies proliferate, the Internet the increasingly becomes the dominant medium. In fact, 2011 was the first year that more news consumers reported getting news online rather than in print (“State of the News Media 2011,” 2011). Perhaps one component of the Internet’s dominance is its ability to envelop and enable previous media like text, audio, photo and video. All may be displayed and delivered side-by-side, rendering the Internet a fundamentally “multi” media platform. More fluid than print, less regimented than broadcast, more visual than radio— the Internet combines and contains many of the best qualities of previous media.
That the public is consuming online video rapaciously is inarguable. Rather than the availability of video creating an appetite, an academic believes the opposite is true: people have always had a hunger for all things visual and now the Internet has opened up a new source of visual material (personal communication, February 29, 2012). Indeed the worldwide spread and popularity of cinema in the last century attests to a latent desire for visual stories. Online video owes much of its current language to cinema. As an academic noted, the film industry established the fundamentals of today’s visual language by solving a number of temporal-spatial and storytelling problems (personal communication, February 29, 2012). Younger generations have grown up immersed in this visual language through movies, television, photography and now the online video (personal communication, December 13, 2012).

Still, literacy comprises multiple skills: comprehension (hearing, reading) and creation (speaking, writing). General audiences are much more adept at comprehending the visual language (seeing) than they are fluent in creating it (filmmaking). A veteran video journalist believes that most visual content online “does not reflect an understanding” of “the visual language” (personal communication, December 13, 2012). He attributed this lack of fluency to a lack of training. Similarly, a curator noted that, although audiences may understand the fundamentals of visual language, higher-order and interpretive functions— like identifying tone, nuance and agenda— often seem lost on Internet audiences. He described audience confusion when online short films blur the boundaries between commercial, documentary, art and propaganda. “I get surprised,” he said. “I think there’s definitely a higher level of media literacy than there was 10 or 15
years ago, but I think we have an awful long way to go” (personal communication, March 20, 2012).

One video tech theorist noted the relevance of Walter Ong’s scholarship without solicitation. He agreed that visual comprehension is much easier than creation. Invoking Walter Ong’s delineation of oral and literature cultures, he described the increasing burdens that successive literacies require:

In [oral] cultures, it's very easy to speak and be spoken to, right? There's sort of automatic oral literacy if you learn language. And in written cultures, you can sort of learn how to read, and you can be reasonably good as a reader and understand different ways of logic and rhetoric and symbolism. But you need to go a little bit beyond it to become a writer, to be able to make a composition. Moving up, if you think about visual culture, it's pretty easy to get a point-and-shoot camera and to make … an image. Seeing things is sort of natural imaging. You have eyes. And then, you move to things like music and video and sort of cultural production, and all of a sudden, the skills you need to be able to work on that, just rocket up, really fast. (personal communication, December 6, 2012)

As evidenced earlier in this study, micro-documentary production in particular requires a wide array of technical and creative skills. Beyond equipment cost, this skill burden restricts the layperson’s ability to “speak” or “write” through video. A veteran videojournalist noted that most of human communication is still composed of visual and oral skills rather than written words (personal communication, December 13, 2012). The visual literacies he references would include elements like body language, facial expressions, culturally conditioned graphic symbols and other visual environmental
inputs, but it would not include compositional and editing techniques that have become essential to the visual language of film.

Additionally, a video tech theorist explained the unique impenetrability, or “read-only” nature, of video as a medium. He described video as a “locked box,” meaning that a video file contains a collection of visual and audio elements that cannot be broken apart or “recontextualized” after the export (personal communication, December 6, 2012). Although video’s “ready-only” nature protects authorship and creates workable file sizes, the impenetrability of video complicates quoting or “copying and pasting” (personal communication, December 6, 2012), thus restricting public access to and fluency with the visual language.

A few interviewees touted the rise of a “visual culture” or “visual vocabulary.” A commercial director alluded to the differing difficulty levels of comprehension and creation: “I think that visual culture has trumped literary culture. And it's hard to give a reason why. … Visuals just sort of like … [are] effortless” (personal communication, February 1, 2012). Earlier he had adamantly reported how difficult filmmaking is. Many interviewees believed an increase in visual stories would improve society. A video tech theorist noted that “If people can speak in video, they're more literate beings” (personal communication, December 6, 2012).

If any kind of fundamental shift in literacies were to exist, micro-documentarians would be among the standard-bearers. As such, their assessment of the culture is implicitly biased. While their testimony cannot prove a cultural shift, micro-documentarian’s experience, market and experience provide supporting evidence to such claims. Based purely on their small corner of the world, it would be a stretch to claim that
visual culture has superseded literary culture. At this point, Walter Ong’s “secondary-orality” remains an open-ended and working description of changing literacies. Whether the Internet proves a seismic shift or natural evolution of the written word requires some historical distance.
CONCLUSION

As the media landscape evolves, so too must the theories that explain it. The micro-documentary is an emerging digital subgenre, and as such, it begs classification in relation to its forbears—long-form documentary film, broadcast news, home video, advertising and photojournalism—and differentiation within its current organizational contexts—broadcast, web journalism, commercial agency work, direct to client work, self-publishing and film festivals.

Primary Findings

Through semi-structure interviews with six micro-documentary theorists and fifteen micro-documentary producers, this study uncovered an extensive (but by no means exhaustive) catalogue of gatekeeping forces affecting micro-documentary production at five levels of analysis: individual, routine, organizational, social institutional and social systems. After the analysis of twenty-one interviews, five phenomena emerged as primary findings. The first four relate to the field practically and the fifth relates to gatekeeping theory itself.

- *Unacknowledged gatekeeping forces* affect micro-documentaries, and theorists are more aware of these than practitioners.
- *The erosion of the auteur mentality* means many micro-documentary producers must consider themselves, in some fashion, both the artist responsible for the crafting of content and the entrepreneur responsible for its successful distribution.
• *Qualitative returns* represent a large portion of the impetus behind most micro-documentary productions.

• “*Share-ability*” has become a guiding principle in many micro-documentary productions.

• *Decorporealization*, or the transfer of gatekeeping power from elite individuals to emergent forces, represents a fundamental shift in gatekeeping theory’s central metaphor.

**Unacknowledged gatekeeping forces.** Unacknowledged gatekeeping forces refer to forces that at least one micro-documentary theorist reported that no micro-documentary practitioner repeated. Of course, the fact that a practitioner did not report a force does not mean he or she has never considered its ramifications. In addition, the interviewer shared responsibility for uncovering those forces. Still, no mention of these forces in sixteen interviews with practitioners indicates that these forces are, at the least, not primary concerns during daily production. Still, unacknowledged gatekeeping may be the most restrictive because they limit producer’s perceptions of what is possible. In the words of an academic, micro-documentary producers who do not “think at all about what they would like to do” regardless of gatekeeping forces are “coloring straight within the box” (personal communication, February 29, 2012). Notably, many of the forces listed here are technical in nature and might be considered nested or buried within larger technologies. Others are broader and more infrastructural.

• Internet search: Although it makes the glut of online information accessible, there does not exist a way to search for a target video using visuals rather than text.
• File Format and Codec Standards: There exists a “welter of standards” that micro-documentarians can use for their work. At the time of this study, no single file format is compatible with all web browsers. Thus micro-documentarians must publish video either through a user-generated site (YouTube or Vimeo) or through a proprietary player. Additionally, different file formats and codecs result in different file sizes and playback qualities.

• Technology Stack: Nested within both production and publication tools are a “thicket of licensing” issues related to component pieces, such as digital imaging hardware, digital imaging software and online video player codecs (personal communication, December 6, 2012). The cost of licensing these components raises the overall price of a technology, thus increasing the likelihood that an item will be cost-prohibitive for new producers or publishers. As a video tech theorist noted, no corollary exists for licensing the production and publication of text products.

• Privacy: Whether because they do not exist or because the Internet continues to redefine them, privacy concerns surfaced in only one interview, and even then, only in passing. Micro-documentarians reported no conflicts between their stories’ content and subjects’ privacy, although surely they exist.

• Bandwidth: According to a 2012 study, online video audiences begin to abandon a video if it does not start playing after two seconds. Every second after that represents a 5.8% increase in the video’s abandonment rate.
rate (Krishnan, 2012). This abandonment rate makes Internet bandwidth a crucial gatekeeping factor.

- Terms of Service: Despite the fact that many micro-documentarians use YouTube and Vimeo to publish their work, none mentioned terms of service restrictions. Although in general these terms of service are more permissive regarding obscenity and copyright considerations, content site’s terms of service still place boundaries around video content.

- Digital Millennium Copyright Act: Passed in 1998, this act (also known as DMCA) legislated a variety of copyright laws that were conceived and implemented in the early days of the Internet, before the existence of monumental content hubs like YouTube, Napster, Facebook, Instagram that have challenged conventional notions of copyright. Although the DCMA protects content creators from having their work pirated, it also restricts their agency in the creation of new works involving other copyrighted material. The DCMA is also the legal root for YouTube’s takedown notices, which allow content creators to report alleged copyright violations that culminate in the removal of a video from the site. In addition, the DCMA has implications for fair use, which few micro-documentarians use. This could be due to the peculiarities and trends of the form or could be due to a fear of legal repercussions for misuse of copyrighted content.

- Centralization: As user-generated video sites proliferate, centralization becomes less of an issue. Still, a few websites host the majority of user-
generated content (YouTube, Facebook, Vimeo, Daily Motion, etc.).

Intense centralization of publication points eases censorship, and it also widens content losses or restrictions if that central body shuts down or changes its policies.

• Internet and Mobile Service Providers: The size of video files make them particularly vulnerable to data limits on wireless or mobile devices. If an audience member has a cap for monthly data consumption and video content represents a higher data “cost,” that user might be less likely to consume video on that device, especially if no means of previewing the content exist. In this sense, Internet and mobile service providers are a unique set of gatekeepers whose gate is based exclusively on file size rather content.

**Erosion of the auteur mentality.** As explained in the organizational forces section of the analysis chapter, micro-documentarians must, on the whole, serve as author and advocate, artist and entrepreneur for their work. An academic fears that “filmmakers run a very serious risk of getting run over by reality” when they do not consider both of these dual roles (personal communication, February 29, 2012). When she interacts with filmmakers during the development stage of a project, she encourages them to think about strategic production, possible partnerships, target audiences, strategic distribution and social media collaterals. Similarly, a long-form executive producer recommends that both short-form and long-form directors consider distribution strategies early in the process:
“Most filmmakers think that when they finish the film, they’re done. … But they're not even half done. They're not half done. They're 49% done. And [filmmakers] don't think about it that way. It's no longer a matter of offering something and assuming that it's going to find it's natural audience. It's not going to because there's so much stuff out there. (personal communication, April 6, 2012)

Unless a filmmaker has built an expansive personal platform or her or she partners with an organization with reach, the likelihood of a non-strategic film reaching an interested audience is low. Good films do not land audiences by virtue alone; good films require strategic production and distribution to succeed. These strategies might be developed by deliberately cultivating positive gatekeeping forces and/or lowering negative ones. After all, “it’s not a story until you’re telling it to somebody” (personal communication, December 7, 2012).

**Share-ability.** Many filmmakers alluded to “share-ability” as a guiding production principle. Any estimations of share-ability involve evaluation of the audience’s viewing habits and desires. If micro-documentarians believe Internet audience is at best attention-deficit and at worst frivolous, then an over-dependence on share-ability places significant boundaries on the tone, length and topic of micro-documentaries. Critically, an emphasis on share-ability surrenders to the infrastructural biases of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. These platforms were not created with micro-documentary values in mind. As organizations funded by advertising, Twitter and Facebook value the volume of content consumed and the frequency of user
visits rather than the quality or importance of that content. As one micro-documentarian noted, Facebook’s primary button is “Like” not “Important.”

On the other hand, filmmaker’s desire for share-ability—or distribution within online social networks—also indicates acceptance of a certain level of entrepreneurship as beneficial, if not necessary. These filmmakers are considering audience during multiple production stages, and they are tailoring their messages to travel well in the online environment. Although purists might worry whether filmmakers are trading their message’s integrity for mass appeal, the truth is that no medium is value-neutral. Total disregard for the Internet’s unique demands could easily result in a radical reduction in audience. Thus, filmmakers, as always, have to balance their desires to maintain authorial integrity and to share their story with a wide audience.

Additionally, micro-documentarian’s conceptions of a diverse, distracted and attention-deficit audience may lead them to shape their content in new ways. Given the audience’s unpredictability, filmmakers may resort to using their own interests and curiosities as guides for shaping content.

**Qualitative returns.** Although a clear and growing niche market supports micro-documentarians, most filmmakers produce work in pursuit of a range of qualitative returns rather than sole financial compensation. These qualitative returns might include humanitarian concerns, a sense of nobility, personal growth, professional growth, building a portfolio, building a community around a particular topic, or prestige of association with a certain brand. Jobs as commercial directors (advertising) or working journalists (journalism) certainly exist and in fact, overlap. However, micro-documentaries cannot be mass-produced, and therefore micro-documentary directors’
professional models resemble those of artists and craftsmen. Although market demand is increasing, market value for micro-documentaries is relatively low considering the wide skillsets and long labor required. Fortunately, the importance of qualitative returns for micro-documentarians buffers their profession against market demands.

**Decorporealization.** When asked whom they considered their gatekeepers, many interviewees found it difficult to provide an answer. When pressed, nine interviewees stated, more or less explicitly, that they believe there are no gatekeepers anymore. Eight interviewees believed that gatekeepers still exist but that they are changing. Four reported that everyone is now a gatekeeper. Of course, these answers make sense only in the context of the Internet. Within organizations, gatekeepers certainly exist in the form of supervisors and colleagues, as interviewees suggested. However, when one arts videojournalist was asked if she saw gatekeepers for her stories outside of her organization, she responded with “Isn’t that outside of the gate?” (personal correspondence, December 21, 2012).

Indeed, in previous gatekeeping models, established publication points enjoyed pockets of dedicated readers or viewers, and publishing meant reaching that audience. Under the traditional gatekeeping model, if you “get past the gatekeeper, you have their audience” (personal communication, January 21, 2013). Thus under the new model, the potential audience is much larger, but the guaranteed audience is in most cases much smaller. Today and especially online, the primary gate has shifted from one between the communicator and the platform to one between the platform and the audience. Traversing that second gate has more to do with visibility than publishing. In keeping with this shift, interviewees discussing gatekeeping spoke less about people and more about
“influences,” “pressures,” “requirements,” “restrictions,” “frustrations,” “difficulties,” “boundaries,” and “possibilities” that affected their productions. When interviewees did actually supply a gatekeeper, they listed Vimeo, Vimeo’s Staff Picks, Facebook, Reddit, Google, or YouTube. They also referenced popular blogs, social media, and other online sources that were “trusted” (personal communication, December 13, 2012) or had “taste” (personal communication, December 10, 2012). No interviewee mentioned an established news organization—broadcast, print or radio—as a current gatekeeper. Referencing his own media consumption habits, a journalist-turned-filmmaker said “I don't care where it is as long as it's what I want and when I want it, … I don't see any gatekeeper. I'm not loyal to anybody” (personal communication, December 17, 2012).

The central metaphor of gatekeeping theory— that of an individual standing between a message and its audience— applies only in limited contexts today. The original gatekeeping study involved a single editor selecting wire stories for inclusion in a small town newspaper. Subsequent articulations of the theory have adapted to the complexities of the media ecosystem, and now the theory addresses multiple levels of analysis (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009) and the overlap of old and new media models (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). Based on this study’s analysis, gatekeeping theory should address gatekeeping’s decorporealization, meaning the transfer of gatekeeping power from elite individuals to emergent forces. Online, there is no one tending the gate between publisher and platform; that gatekeeper is no one and everyone. As one interviewee noted, gatekeeping theory traditionally assumes an “active agent” or “purposeful blockage,” whereas today content producers are presented with an array of “passive phenomena” that comprise an “ecosystem of challenges” (personal
Indeed many of the reported gatekeepers—designers of Facebook’s interface, Internet service providers, developers of search algorithms—are in fact content-neutral. Rather than keeping a gate whose fundamental nature is blockage, they keep a bridge whose fundamental nature is passage. Rather than selectively permitting passage based on a collection of standards particular to a message’s content, new gatekeepers—or bridge-keepers—regulate the flow of information from producer to consumer. The former chief value is selecting a program of relevant content in scarce publication space; the new chief value is maximizing a library of relevant content in abundant publication space. Thus the new gatekeepers care less about what a message says and more about whether it has been said at all.

Considering these findings, gatekeeping theory must evolve. At least in the micro-documentary genre, bridge-keeping entities and gatekeeping forces both bind and channel the agency of micro-documentary filmmakers. Online, gatekeepers are disembodied and their power transferred to a distributed network of forces, hidden and conspicuous, strong and weak, citizen and corporate. The major players are the same—source, author, and audience—but a message’s path from player to player has changed dramatically. Gatekeepers are no longer required.

**Future**

Like the medium that supports them, online micro-documentaries are a evolving rapidly. Digital technologies continue to become a more pervasive part of the lives of ever-widening demographics. Video production and distribution technologies will likely become increasingly inexpensive and accessible in the coming years. Despite that
probable proliferation, professional micro-documentarians are likely to survive. After all, in the words of an MFA program director: “While everybody's got a camera in their pocket, nobody's even considering that this is a moment that somebody might be able to tell a story about that is both particular and universal” (personal communication, November 15, 2012).

Even if it were designed to, this study cannot predict the future. As a magazine videojournalist noted, definitive answers are often more bluster than truth. Still, micro-documentarians expect the need and value for their craft will continue to rise, and they expect their field to evolve. Many interviewees offered speculations on the future of the field from their unique vantage as theorists or practitioners. An ex-nonprofit filmmaker hoped to garner corporate clients that would support her video journalism on a per-project basis (personal communication, December 10, 2012).

A few theorists predicted that the interactive potential of the Internet would slowly erode film’s linearity. In addition to the Internet’s baked-in cultural values like diverse input and combinatorial creativity, this linearity might also be compromised (or liberated) by the increasing incorporation of “social graphs” culled from social media (personal communication, December 6, 2012). An interactive environment like the Internet fundamentally values “iterative” expression, and consequently, films may manifest themselves less as singular, stone-cut products and more as media collections that evolve with the story (personal communication, February 29, 2012). Furthermore, a video tech theorist predicted that fewer online films would “define the conversation” around a particular topic; rather a “tapestry” of short, “low-fi” media would address crucial social issues (personal communication, December 6, 2012). An optimistic ex-
journalist predicted that the touch screens of tablets and other new mobile devices would spur new developments in interactive video (personal communication, December 7, 2012). On the other hand, some interviewees believed that linear delivery was a fundamental storytelling mechanism. A newspaper videojournalist maintained that “[Linear, lean-back storytelling] is the storytelling model that has been handed down for tens of thousands of years. It started at campfires. It's not a choose-your-own-adventure. That's hardwired directly into our DNA” (personal communication, December 20, 2012).

Regardless, micro-documentarians concerned with producing stories in the public interest must be strategic about both production and publication, and dedication to their messages and missions should involve dabbling or embracing new technologies in production and publication.

According to an MFA program director, students of the documentary arts are interested in creating “something that can be of the moment but can live far beyond the moment” (personal communication, November 15, 2012). Generally, micro-documentarians are interested in creating a testimony to the truth, and that testimony is a precious message. Aufderheide (2007) notes that “media affect the most expensive real estate of all, that which is inside your head” (p. 5). Ideally, this study can establish an academic foundation for micro-documentaries as a subgenre emerging at the intersection of documentary film, journalism and advertising. Because of its hybrid nature, micro-documentary filmmaking has not yet institutionalized ethical codes, legal practice or standard form.

An evolving media landscape and its attendant gatekeeping forces have implications for both the quality and nature of the messages the public receives. As a part
of that evolving media landscape, micro-documentaries have implications for the reality that the public perceives to be true. This is the same reality that informs the public’s actions, choices, beliefs, habits, prejudices, and future. Told with honesty and skill, micro-documentaries can inspire change when the public realizes the world they have just watched is their own. This study can aid documentary filmmakers in identifying, combatting, or enduring gatekeeping forces particular to their production context. By illuminating such gatekeeping forces, this study has grounded gatekeeping theory in micro-documentarians’ working experience, further articulated gatekeeping theory in the digital age, and aided micro-documentary filmmakers in telling better stories that better inform the public and thus better the world.
WORKS CITED


APPENDIX A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Pre-Interview
- **Introduction:** Explanation of the study’s goals and research scope
- **Explanation of Anonymity**
- **Question Breadth:** Some of the questions may feel broad, at times impossibly so, and in those cases, I’m just interested in what comes to mind.
- **Last Check:** Any more questions before we begin recording?
- **Consent:** Do you mind if I record this interview for transcription purposes?

Question Bank—Open Ended
1. How do you describe what you do: journalism, filmmaking, art, activism?
2. What are your goals as a __________?
3. Most of your work currently appears where: television, the internet, film festivals, etc? Most of your short-form work?
4. How is making short-form easier now than it ever has been before?
5. What are the difficulties that most people don’t expect?
6. Who or what influences your documentary productions that you wish didn’t?
7. Have changes in your workflow based on new technology influenced the way you tell stories? How so?
8. How do you choose new projects / stories to tell?
9. When you’re dreaming of new projects, why do you decide against certain stories?
10. When working with non-profits do you feel like they generally want control of the narrative or are you free to tell the story you see as you see it?
11. What are the biggest legal barriers to documentary production today?
12. What are the biggest distribution barriers to documentary production today?
13. What are the biggest financial barriers to documentary production today?
14. How do you actually pay the bills?
15. Are there corporate interests that affect your production or distribution?
16. Are you thinking about your audience as you shoot / edit? Have you ever changed a story because you thought an audience would like it better? How so? Why do you think your audiences like your stories? What do they get out of it?
17. Curtailing length based on perceived audience?
18. Are you thinking about how people consume media online as you’re making your stories?
19. Who do you see as gatekeepers for your work?
Question Bank—Targeted

20. Do you feel pressure to make your work interactive? Why?
21. Do you have a strategy to cut through the noise on the Internet?
22. Have you ever decided not to tell a story because others already were?
23. Do you have communities or partnerships that make your work easier?
24. What’s the longest/shortest you’ve ever taken to turn a story?
25. Is your equipment insured?
26. Have an office?
27. Have you ever gotten an errors and omissions insurance policy on a film?
28. Do you receive revenue from content posted on YouTube / Vimeo?
29. Fair use question?
30. Do you ever worry that an audience will be distracted from your stories by bandwidth issues? By viewing on multiple platforms / devices?
31. Do you handle the promotion of your own stories?
32. What’s your relationship with new technology?
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to learn the gatekeeping forces—legal, technological, institutional, market, etc.—that influence short-form documentary production in the digital age. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your personal experiences as a filmmaker, factors influencing production/distribution decisions you made, your general perspective on the industry, and other related topics. Depending on your convenience and interest, interviews will last between one and three hours and will be conducted either in person or via Skype. Results of this study will be submitted for publication in a scholarly journal and/or for a presentation at an academic conference.

Participation in this study is voluntary.

Risks and benefits: Potential risks for you would include:
(1) conflicts with colleagues who resent productivity loss due to time spent in interviews
(2) loss of one to three hours of productivity for your business
(3) conflict with your professional community if raw audio recordings of your discussions of legal gray areas, criticism of other documentary work, or accounts of pressures from specific gatekeepers were made public (See Confidentiality).

Confidentiality: This study is confidential. Your interview will be recorded using an audio recorder or screen capture software. The transcript of your interview will not contain your name in the body of text or in the name of the file. The written and published work resulting from this study will contain neither your name, nor any identifying information. In order to protect you from the possibility of being identified by voice, audio files with your interview will not contain your name in the file name. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. If I tape-record the interview, I will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which I anticipate will be within three months of its taping.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Nick Michael. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Nick Michael at nicktmichael@gmail.com or at 1-901-871-8699. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Campus Institutional Review Board at 573-882-9585 or access their website at http://research.missouri.edu/cirb/.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature________________________Date________________________
Your Name (printed)________________________________________________

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview audio recorded.

Your Signature________________________Date________________________
Signature, Researcher________________________________________________
Printed name, researcher_______________________________________

*This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least seven years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the IRB on February 28, 2012.*
APPENDIX C
Anonymized Interview Monikers

General background is provided to help readers contextualize the data presented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEW DATE</th>
<th>ANONYMIZED MONIKER</th>
<th>GENERAL BACKGROUND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 29,</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Acclaimed journalism professor with research interests and publication history in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>documentary film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 20,</td>
<td>Curator</td>
<td>Broadcast curator for both short and long-form documentaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 6, 2012</td>
<td>Long-form executive producer</td>
<td>Oscar-winning long-form executive producer with a background in cable non-fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 23,</td>
<td>Documentary film festival founder</td>
<td>Documentary film festival co-founder, festival program curator, and director of both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>short and long-form films</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 15,</td>
<td>MFA program director</td>
<td>MFA documentary film program director with a background in documentary photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 6,</td>
<td>Video tech theorist</td>
<td>Software development company manager with significant university-level teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 7,</td>
<td>Optimistic ex-journalist</td>
<td>Former photojournalist, chronic early adopter, current filmmaker and professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 7,</td>
<td>Direct cinema filmmaker</td>
<td>Emerging short-form filmmaker, producer of a side-project of direct cinema profiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 9,</td>
<td>Self-publishing filmmaker</td>
<td>Young, self-publishing filmmaker with aspirations for feature-length production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 10,</td>
<td>Commercial Filmmaker</td>
<td>Commercial director of films for household brands, producer of deeply personal side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 10,</td>
<td>Ex-nonprofit filmmaker</td>
<td>Freelance director, producer and editor of short and long-form documentaries, has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>background in journalism school and in the media department of a major nonprofit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 11, 2012</td>
<td>Ex-broadcast DP</td>
<td>Freelance director of photography for cable non-fiction programming, now working as a freelance director and DP for foundations and nonprofits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 13, 2013</td>
<td>Short-form studio owner</td>
<td>Commercial director, producer, editor for nonprofits and brands, co-owns the studio with a colleague from graduate school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 13, 2012</td>
<td>Filmmaker/consultant</td>
<td>Commercial filmmaker producing primarily for nonprofits and small brands, slowly doing more consulting work for brands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 13, 2012</td>
<td>Veteran videojournalist</td>
<td>Veteran video journalist with a background in photojournalism and print reporting, now working as a videojournalist and professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 17, 2012</td>
<td>Journalist-turned-filmmaker</td>
<td>Former multimedia director for a nationally-known metro newspaper, currently producing nonprofit films</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 18, 2012</td>
<td>Arts videojournalist</td>
<td>Short-film director, producer and editor working for large, national journalism organization who attended journalism graduate school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 18, 2012</td>
<td>Commercial filmmaker</td>
<td>Commercial director producing films for household brands, operates significant personal project that has garnered millions of views, history with both short and long form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 20, 2012</td>
<td>Newspaper videojournalist</td>
<td>Short-film director, producer and editor working for a nationally-known metro newspaper, attended graduate school for photojournalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 21, 2013</td>
<td>Magazine videojournalist</td>
<td>Short-form director, producer and editor with professional experience at a nationally-known metro newspaper and an online-only publication, currently between jobs and considering freelancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1, 2013</td>
<td>Commercial filmmaker</td>
<td>Commercial director producing films for household brands, producer of “viral” videos at the intersection of journalism, documentary film and art</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

Taxonomy of Reported Gatekeeping Forces

Reported gatekeeping forces are grouped by levels of analysis. A (+) indicates a force broadens a micro-documentarian’s agency over the product or eases a message’s passage through a gate. A (-) indicates a force lessens a micro-documentarian’s agency over the product or complicates a message’s passage through a gate. A (+/-) indicates that the intensity of nature of the force has differing effects. A (shape) indicates forces that primarily affect the shape of a message in anticipation of future gatekeeping forces.

Individual
1. Professional Categorization (+/-)
2. Diverse Skillset (+/-/shape)
3. Personal Motivations
   a. Confidence (+)
   b. Personal Standards/Ambition (+/-/shape)
   c. Mood / Disposition (+/-/shape)
4. Professional Goals
   a. Survival (+/-/shape)
   b. Sharing Stories (+)
   c. Do Good Work (+)
5. Preferred Lifestyle (+/-)

Routine
1. Technology
   a. Better, Cheaper Tools (+)
   b. Speed of Technological Advancement (+/-)
2. Form (shape)
3. Practice
   a. Crew Size (+/-/shape)
   b. Travel (+/-)
4. Conceptions of Audience (shape)
5. Relationships
   a. Peer Feedback (+/-/shape)
   b. Awards (+)
   c. Ethical Relationships with Subjects (+/-/shape)
   d. Lack of Institutionalized Ethics (shape)
Organizational
1. Soft Genre Boundaries (+/-/shape)
2. Broadcast Production
   a. Time Slots
   b. Rights Acquisition
   c. Perceptions of Advocacy (PBS)
   d. Target Demographic Delivery (Commercial)
3. Web Journalism Production
   a. Internal Respect for Video Journalism (+)
   b. Internal Use of Video Journalism (+)
   c. Allotted Resources (+/-)
   d. Story Sourcing from Non-Visual Colleagues (-)
   e. Bureaucracy (-)
   f. Mentorship (+)
   g. Departmentalization (+/-)
   h. Legal Support (+)
   i. Gear / Liability Insurance (+)
   j. Credibility With / Access To Subjects (+)
   k. Daily Structure (+/-)
   l. Brand Particularities (shape)
   m. Sector Differentiation (shape)
4. Agency-Driven Commercial Production
   a. Director Creative Vision (+)
   b. Overreach by Agencies or Clients (-)
   c. Logo and Product Placement (-)
   d. Distance between Directors and Corporate Clients (-)
   e. Crew Size (+/-)
   f. Divergent Measures of Success (-)
5. Direct-to-Client Commercial Production
   a. Client Size, Budget Size (-)
   b. Low Organizational Resources (-)
   c. Nimble Organizational Response (+)
   d. Fewer Cooks in Kitchen (-)
   e. Client Control of Narrative (+/-)
6. Self-Publishing Production
   a. No Gatekeepers (+)
   b. Lack of Access and Credibility (-)
   c. Lack of Organizational Resources (-)
   d. Lack of Mentorship (-)
e. No Deadlines (+)
f. No Firewall between Funding and Content (+)
g. No Responsibility to Advertisers/ Clients (+)
h. Low / No Guaranteed Payment (-)

7. Film Festivals
   a. Prestige of Acceptance (+)
   b. Audience Desire to See a Movie (-)
   c. Competition with Internet Publication (?)

8. Strategic Production
   a. Adaptable Production Values (+)
   b. Low Resource Use vs. Production Quality (+/-)
   c. Available Partners (+/-)

9. Strategic Distribution
   a. Producing Good Work (+)
   b. Marketing Budget (+)
   c. Online Media Connections (+)
   d. Organizational Partnerships (+)
   e. News Pegs (+)
   f. Multiple Publication Points (+)
   g. Predictable Publication Schedules (+)

10. Auteur Mentality (+/-)

Social Institutional
1. Markets (+/-)
2. Geographic Markets (+/-)
3. “Old Media” (+/-)
4. Audiences (+/-)
5. Internet Culture (+/-)
6. Internet Corporations (+/-)
7. Academia (+/-)

Social Systems
1. Generational Fluency (+/-)
2. Socio-economics (+/-)
3. Authenticity (+)
4. Techno-romanticism (+/-)
5. Visual Literacy (+)
6. Read-Only Nature of Video (-)
7. Secondary-orality (+)