

BEHIND THE VEIL: THE MAKING OF BTS FILMS

Honors Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This study purposed to describe the process of narrative film production by investigating Behind-the-Scenes (BTS) films, featurettes and books created to explain other film projects. Insights describe how films succeeded and faltered through planning, execution, or in post-production and emphasize methods for drawing in the audience through the use of perspective, voice, silence and dialogue. Results include observations and recommendations from authors of BTS books and filmmakers.

Keywords: behind-the-scenes, BTS, documentary, filmmaker, making of movies

Behind the Veil: The Making of BTS Films

Documentary film is treated as a single genre but includes a dozen types of projects. As film production developed during the mid-twentieth century, filmmakers determined to listen and observe meandered into spaces previously off limits to larger crews (Barnouw, 1993). Barnouw (1993) describes how lighter, more innovative equipment permitted the intrusion of observers to record previously hidden or ignored interactions and events, accelerating the development of documentary film (p. 230). Unlike promotional documentaries, observer-made films are ambiguous and incorporate juxtapositions, perspectives, and lighting that prompt a viewer to create a personal interpretation of the story over one scripted by the documentarist. Behind-the-Scenes (BTS) films are a unique type of observer-made film, providing a window into the world of film production specific to each project depicted.

BTS films detail choices for story, location, and decisions that led to the perspectives selected to communicate the story. Rabiger (2014) emphasizes the value of researching unique situations to tell the most compelling story comprised from footage collected. This study describes the process of narrative film production, investigating the works of documentarist filmmakers, researching short films, and reviewing books published to explain other productions. Exploring BTS films created to explain familiar and classic works reveals the unique qualities of each project and how the contributions of these projects enhance the viewing of films depicted.

In case study research, the typical question for investigation addresses how or why a phenomenon exists (Yin, 2014). This short documentary thesis addresses both how the film production process was completed to why it depicts the story effectively. The research conducted meets the criteria for qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and is credible, based on the evidence of previously produced short documentaries telling the story of how a film was made. It

is transferable since the same process can be followed to create future short documentaries depicting other films. The results are dependable because its components can be checked against the film it represents for accuracy. The outcome is confirmable since it reflects the intent of the work communicated through the narrative production it represents rather than demonstrating bias. The research question addressed follows: Why did this film merit a production? Why did it need to be in Florida? How did the director effectively tell this story?

Behind-the-scenes, or 'making of' documentaries, can take the form of film or written works, which add to the body of knowledge surrounding the films in question. This documentary contributes to the understanding and appreciation for a feature film made in Central Florida during pre-quarantine 2020. Researching and producing this project gave me an opportunity to compel viewers of the BTS documentary and readers of the article to learn from the experiences of those making the larger feature film. The purpose of this thesis project is to investigate and describe the process and purpose of BTS film production. My mission focused on gathering observations and publishing both a 'making of' documentary film and research article.

Review of Literature

When a film is in production, members of the cast and crew believe there is hope for the project to get a great reception, but whether the project will even be screened or streamed is still unknown. Each project presents learning opportunities for all contributors but once filming wraps, documentation of the film production process cannot be recaptured. Contracting with a videographer and photographer to shoot BTS during production has become a standard for larger productions. Capturing the footage and interviewing cast and crew during or shortly after shooting wraps provides reference material which may be converted to supplemental short documentaries for viewing by consumers. The opportunity to see the story being created has

contributed to the value of films by stimulating interest. BTS or 'making of' short documentaries tell the story behind the story.

In the BTS film, *On the Edge of Blade Runner*, Mark Kermode (2000) took the perspective of Ridley Scott, communicating the culmination of his vision. Interviews with Scott are used to weave between others' remarks to connect the shifting subject matter. Pulling from *Blade Runner*, *Blade Runner: Final Cut*, and the extensive making-of version *Dangerous Days* by Charles de Lauzirika (2007), Paul Sammon (2017) depicts the plot, setting, concept, and genre, as new and unprecedented. Thirty years after the film's release, Sammon (2017) offers graphic descriptions for gaining optimal interview footage including questioning, location, shots, and camera angles. Sammon (2017) released an updated version of his BTS book *Future Noir* in anticipation of the sequel. Through this descriptive writing, Sammon (2017) not only documents a comparison between the seven-years-in-the-making original and subsequent projects, but also extolls Scott's innovation for bringing futuristic literature to life.

Rob Goldberg (2010) collected footage from personal video records and interviews to complete his documentary commemorating the 35th anniversary of the surprise blockbuster *Jaws*. Goldberg describes the resilience of the film's leaders, working to make the most of each filming day even when the mechanical shark failed to deliver. Using footage gathered from handheld cameras while on the boat, underwater scenes were ultimately recreated off Australia's coast after shooting wrapped for everyone but the stuntman. Insight from locals still residing where the project was filmed contributed character, as did the personal footage from talent and crew, many still connected with Spielberg after advancing in the film industry for decades.

Along for the shoot, Vivian Kubrick (1980) documented the making of *The Shining* as her father directed. Her participatory style feels more like a home movie, as talent and crew

interact warmly with the camera behind which a familiar face captures their insights. Kubrick (1980) reveals her father's practices: elevating the need for actors and actresses to bring their best to each scene, listen to the director's desired outcome, and draw on their ability to improvise. As a member of the company, Kubrick (1980) captures reactions that may have otherwise been guarded by participants, drawing the viewer in to experience the film as a project in progress.

Eleanor Coppola led a team of documentarists to describe the ups and downs during production of box office sleeper *Apocalypse Now* through the eyes of the director's greatest fan, his wife. While on set, Coppola (1991) filmed behind-the-scenes as Francis Ford Coppola poured his own financing into a project with geographical, political, cultural, climate, disease and personnel factors working cooperatively to doom the production. Coppola (1991) created the BTS *Hearts of Darkness* as a tribute to the grit of a director with unlimited funds determined to tell a story at any cost. Ultimately, it shows how one perspective lacks the interest yielded when other voices contribute collectively.

Trilogies present an enhanced opportunity to document the connection between the multiple entries. Francis Ford Coppola (2016) published his own journal from making *The Godfather* projects, entitled *The Godfather Notebook*, offering his own perspective for loyal followers to address continuity factors for consideration when completing a series spanning multiple generations over multiple release years. Documentarist Jeff Warner (1990) produced *The Godfather Family*, describing Coppola's innovation, even covering for an actor who had proven unreliable by changing a scene on the spot. Warner (1990) emphasizes Coppola's attention to continuity, employing the same actors for subsequent contributions to the series, and interviewing members of the original cast whose characters were deceased according to the

story. More outtakes were included in this BTS film than clips from the completed film, which effectively fills in the gaps by telling the story behind the story.

Documenting the shooting of the original *Star Wars* trilogy, Kevin Burns and Edith Baker (2004) describe the physical stress endured by George Lucas, a little-known director who had been perceived as inconsequential by others in the film industry. However, Lucas produced the projects by operating outside the studio system creating not only a production company but his own studio, building every aspect of the production from scratch. The story utilized talent who carried their roles with realism rather than the flair and vanity typical of most sci-fi culture and fantasy films of the 1970's. The characters went through many drastic revisions before they were embodied by the now-iconic actors and actresses who received them. Burns and Baker noted that shooting in the heat and desolation of Tunisia, perfect for the film setting, made accommodating physical needs of the cast and crew almost impossible. Risk-taking by the director subjected the documentarists to similar compromises. However, the outcome provided historical data for referencing the making of classic projects and contributed significantly to developing the perspective of a renowned documentarian.

George Lucas and Steven Spielberg teamed up to make the *Indiana Jones* trilogy, recreating a previous era while telling the story of an archeologist as a hero. Contracted for the BTS documentation, Laurent Bouzereau (2003) focused primarily on the perspectives of the director, producer, and talent in lead roles. Among many challenges creating this iconic series, Bouzereau (2003) listed illness, timing, casting, live creatures, and wardrobe malfunctions, pointing out the second episode presented the majority. J. W. Rinzler (2008) published an accompanying book, immersing readers in a full BTS experience. Bouzereau (2003) noted the value of capturing the work performed and collecting interview footage as filming concluded;

dialogue from these interviews provided supplemental material for Rinzler's work. The tone of each project advocates for creative measures to overcome trials that will inevitably arise, and the genius of the key players to problem-solve and produce audience favorites.

Another favorite, the *Back to the Future* trilogy, set entries in multiple eras, begging the audience to imagine the implications of time travel on human life and history. Bringing a detached, unbiased view to the documentary, Laurent Bouzereau (2002) helped the viewer catch a realistic glimpse of filmmaking. Interviews with Bob Gale and Bob Zemeckis revealed the difficulty they had getting the first project funded, and the benefits they gained from actors and actresses who wanted to collaborate again after a great experience. Bouzereau (2002) revealed that the greater challenge in the subsequent offerings was recreating the sets utilized in the previous episodes; but the efforts were well-invested as these settings coupled with the consistent talent wove continuity between eras on the space-time continuum. Bouzereau (2002) also noted that appreciation and respect among actors and head crew members ultimately matter more than nitty-gritty minute details that form facts when telling of the story.

Brian Sibley (2002), documentarist for the *Lord of the Rings*, faced an unusual challenge. Because the shooting for all three features were filmed during the same period, he had the material he needed to publish prior to the first film's release. From this bittersweet position, he had longer to edit his project but had to sustain his interest while awaiting approval for publication. The author's philosophy aligned well with that of the films' director, Peter Jackson, never allowing unpredicted circumstances to derail a day's plan. He researched New Zealand's geography, support from the community for hosting the film, work required of costumers, armament builders, set architects, and experienced actors brought in addition to their work

preparing for their roles. Sibley's writing revealed a deep interest in every aspect of preparing for the production in addition to the execution of filming.

The value of a 'making of' short documentary film is often not realized until the film it accompanies has been released and received well. Terry Gilliam (2003) presents an exception in *Lost in La Mancha*, which documents a movie production that was never completed. Lessons from this loss offer filmmakers insight as they consider boundaries to establish in their pursuit of telling a story. For that director-documentarian, Terry Gilliam, the experience of producing an incomplete film with a successful 'making of' documentary inspired him to recreate his dream in the production of *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* over a decade later.

Similarly, when a remake of the classic *Dune* by filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky was set aside, the documentary *Jodorowsky's Dune* by Frank Pavich (2013) described the production process, the investment made, and where it went wrong. Integral details of excessive investment coupled with poor planning provide insight for every filmmaker to consider. These insights taught and incentivized another film director to revive the film. Denis Villeneuve's remake of *Dune* is currently on track for release in 2021, having applied lessons learned from his predecessor.

I studied these BTS movies and books created to explain familiar and classic works, and those made to explain the success of other films. Unique qualities of each project show how the contributions of the documentary works contribute value to the viewing of the works they depict.

Methodology

The purpose of completing this thesis was to investigate and describe the process of BTS documentary film production. My mission focused on gathering insights to share with other student filmmakers through researching the process, creating a project and writing a publication. I researched the works of other documentarians, reviewing short documentary films and books

published to explain other productions. I explored BTS films and books and wrote up my observations about particular nuances incorporated in each project.

To find a potential filmset to work on, I contacted the Tampa Film Commission and learned of a director interested in supporting student filmmakers. I reached out to the director and negotiated to get approval and connect through the appropriate leaders for the project. I gained permission to participate on his shoot for the purpose of making a student behind-the-scenes documentary to be presented through my university. After connecting with the director, I was referred to the production company as my ongoing point-of-contact.

I located other filmmakers in the area and arranged to crew on their projects to get experience with professional productions. I wrote out the steps I would follow for creating a pilot BTS and attended the pre-production meetings. I found a local filmmaker producing a supernatural film through the Tampa Film Society and arranged to serve on his shoot and practice the steps for creating a BTS. I also reserved the equipment for rental and came ready to help while doing my own shooting. I wrote interview questions and secured a local actress to work with me to complete these.

After completing the pilot shoot, I synthesized and wrote up lessons learned. I made a plan for working with the feature filmmaker on the upcoming project. This meant staying connected to the director through email while he secured final funding and established the shooting schedule. I was referred to the producer and, upon receiving tentative dates, ordered equipment based on what I had learned from the pilot shoot. In preparation for post-production interviews, I wrote interview questions for the cast, crew and leadership. I secured permission from the production company to film a promotional event for the feature, including a panel

interview with the director. With a notice of only four weeks including holidays, I received the dates to plan for the film shoot.

The producer added me to the crew distribution list so I received call sheets and identified shoot locations a day in advance throughout the shoot. As the film was shot in multiple locations, each day I mapped my way to destinations all over central FL. I picked up my equipment from the rental company and reported each day. I arrived early and was in place to collect footage from a position that showed action rather than recreating the film's scenes. I loaded my own gear and helped as asked while keeping a low profile on set. As requested, I arranged to transfer copied footage to the producer for use by the production company.

To complete the BTS film, I contacted each cast and crew member and arranged for post-production interviews. I established a schedule for meetings at a studio, their homes, or a mutually determined location. I shared the interview questions with each participant in advance of the interviews, so they would be prepared for a smooth shoot and I could minimize takes. I recruited a fellow student who had also served on set to aid in setting up the interview shoots and completing them. I sent reminders in advance of the shoots and met with each cast and crew member available, completing the interviews within four weeks of the film shoot.

As with any production, post-production for a BTS film begins with organizing the footage. I organized the shots collected for telling the story in sequence according to their execution. Next, I organized the interviews, looking for connections between each participant's reflections. Then I selected ideal clips from interviews to describe scenes depicted. Finally, I produced the final version of the short film in preparation for release to student film festivals after the feature is released later in 2021.

Results

To experiment through a pilot project, I located other filmmakers in the area and arranged to serve on their projects to get experience on professional production sets. I then contacted the Tampa Film Society to find a filmmaker shooting locally where I could practice the process that I wrote out for creating a BTS. I wrote out interview questions and invited a local actress to read the questions aloud to interviewees, members of the cast or crew who were open to participating in this BTS project on their own time. I arranged to rent the necessary equipment and came ready to help while doing my own shooting. After completing the pilot BTS shoot, I synthesized and wrote up the lessons I learned.

Through Film Tampa Bay, the film commissioner Tyler Martinolich recommended I contact Dan Myrick, director of *The Blair Witch Project*, as he has been supportive of letting students work on set for previous projects. For me, this meant staying connected to the director through email while the executive producer, Kristian Krempel, secured final funding and established the shooting schedule. I was referred to the producer and prepared my equipment rental order based on what I had learned from the practice project. In preparation for post-production interviews, I rewrote the interview questions for the cast, crew and producers, and circulated the new ones for review. I secured permission from the production company, The Power Station, to film behind the scenes at the iHorror Film Festival, a promotional event that featured a panel interview with Dan Myrick. With a notification of only a few weeks, I received the dates to plan for the film shoot early in 2020.

The process of film production is broken into these phases: Pre-Production, Production, and Post-Production. Pre-production includes all the planning that happens in advance of the shoot; about 40% of the time invested in any film project. This is like project management in the

corporate sector; a lot of work goes into planning for a short-term implementation. For a feature filmmaker, it includes getting a script, hiring the crew & talent, location scouting, acquiring equipment, and communicating with leaders who oversee crew— so details are passed along as needed to each team. Through my research and personal experience, I learned that although BTS filmmakers are hired or permitted to be on a set, they are responsible for sorting out all the details of their project independent from the feature.

The Production phase is often 1 week to 1 month of shooting, condensed into long days to maximize use of talent, location and equipment. In the case of this film, five locations were shot in the span of one week, which is a serious overhaul. Doug Fox, a producer, added me to the crew distribution list so I would receive call sheets and identify shoot locations a day in advance throughout the shoot. As the film was shot in multiple locations, I mapped my way to destinations all over central FL, picked up my equipment from the rental company, and reported to the film shoots each day. I arrived early and was in place to collect footage from a position that showed crew actions, rather than recreating the film's scenes. I loaded my own gear, and lent a hand to other crew occasionally, while keeping a low profile on set.

Post-Production takes the collected footage and converts it into a story through juxtaposition. As with any production, post-production for a BTS film begins with organizing the footage. I organized the shots collected for telling the story in sequence according to their execution. Next, I organized the interviews, looking for connections between each participant's reflections. Then I selected ideal clips from interviews to describe scenes depicted. Finally, I have produced a final version of the BTS short documentary to be sent to film festivals after the feature is released later in 2021.

Over the course of three academic terms, data was collected through the study of other BTS documentaries, experimentation through a pilot project, and creation of a short film reflecting the value of the story selected for production. Photo stills, BTS footage, and B-roll were collected and interviews conducted with cast and crew to aid in forming a documentary short depicting the BTS film. Because release of the film was delayed by the director due to the pandemic, the documentary's release cannot disclose details of the film prematurely. When approved, the documentary will be entered into student categories of local and international film festivals or documentary categories of student film festivals in time for screening at 2021-2022 events on the film festival circuit. This entry will represent a collaboration formed to meet the University of Tampa BFA in Film & Media Arts and the proposed Honors Thesis.

Discussion

BTS shorts often accompany DVD/Blu-Ray releases. While general audiences may find entertainment value in these, developing filmmakers benefit on another level since they study directors' choices for location and cast, as well as what decisions were made that ultimately guided how the story was told. When I discovered the existing gap in the literature, I was intrigued to investigate how BTS films are produced.

Results include observations and recommendations from authors of BTS books and filmmakers including insights about where films succeeded and faltered through planning, execution, or in post-production, drawing in the audience through the use of perspective, voice, silence and dialogue. The documentary created provided an opportunity to practice making a BTS film while compelling viewers to gain insight from those producing the narrative film.

Through the review of existing works, a willingness to take risks and be flexible is essential for BTS production. Investigating the film's story in advance and adding insights about

the geography and talent supported the director's purpose. Describe what is unique about the telling of the story as the director conveys it. Making inquiries about story details and how characters fulfilled their roles bolsters the value of the interviews. While on set, stay close to the primary crew: director, producer, and other leaders. This will ensure capture of sufficient direction to make footage engaging instead of soundless. Angle the camera up to magnify the director but be level for the lesser positions.

Getting coverage of the talent and crew over the director makes for a more interesting BTS than one featuring only the director's perspective. Friendly interactions with crew and cast members and a willingness to adjust around their schedules for interviews also proved essential. Write interview questions in advance; schedule interviews; film interviews quickly after shoot concludes before participants become involved in other projects. Move the camera during interviews, intentionally not accidentally. If possible, hold interviews at the locations depicted in the film, in the spots where characters were in the movie, so they can be recognized.

Appreciation and respect among the talent and crew set the stage for collaborating on future projects. Drawing in the audience by capturing real reactions makes a significant impact. The value of outtakes cannot be overstated. Get photocopies of documentation supporting the production. Archival footage can provide entertaining and insightful contributions, especially when provided by locals. Get a panorama of the original story's location. Use easy iconic special effects that appear in the film. If juxtaposing BTS with a clip from the film, try to make matched action cuts. Documenting a project that does not succeed still has value for the director and other filmmakers. Lessons learned from a project that does not succeed can produce a valid project.

What I found firsthand was eye-opening and shifted my perspective greatly. Through the process of researching, collecting data, and completing the products for this thesis project, I

learned lessons on every level. From a saturated review of existing resources and my own application experience, the greatest lessons I have gained from investing in this research project have centered around behind-the-scenes filmmaking etiquette.

Unlike student films, professional projects require a specific person to fill each role. Stay out of the way and minimize engagement with the cast and crew on set. After the film plan is established, above-the-line leaders meet daily to consider potential alterations to the plan. There's always a need for extra hands, especially when someone does not show, gets sick, or must leave the set for another reason. Persistently follow up with directors, producers, talent and crew to get the info needed; they are busy and overlook BTS filmmakers easily. Innovators and entrepreneurs often experience these lessons multiple times before succeeding.

Application for BTS could expand beyond narrative films and explore applications for genres such as biopics, animation, or musical storytelling. Future research would apply the lessons presented, develop a more streamlined process, and deliver a more polished, engaging project. There were conversations and activities on set I was not permitted to record; while understand the justification for these choices, I disagree that they should be concealed since much could be learned from them. Researchers may investigate material withheld by directors and examples of material covered up during production. In the process of completing BTS films, documentarists could repeat this study and determine if they get similar results, either building on this research or adding to it from a different perspective on a different project. Much opportunity is still available since this project was among the first published of its kind.

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