



A Documentary Filmmaking Case Study

Capturing the raw power of a grassroots hip-hop movement, *INSIDE THE CIRCLE* tells the story of two strikingly talented b-boys, Josh and Omar, former best friends who become rivals when they join competing dance crews. Immersed in the b-boy culture of defiant creativity, Omar rises to international renown, while Josh tangles with the law. Both of them struggle to keep dance at the center of their lives, and the "B-Boy City" competitive events thrown by visionary street dancer Romeo Navarro serve as emotional milestones in their journey to adulthood. Facing off in intense dance battles that mirror the larger events in their lives, Josh and Omar seek meaning and identity "inside the circle." As Romeo aptly observes: *"If you can hold yourself down in battle, you can hold yourself down in life."*



www.insidethecircle.com

www.myspace.com/insidethecirclefilm

Producer/Director/Editor: Marcy Garriott
Camera: Marcy Garriott, John Fiege, Gail Kapsambelis, et. al.
Composer: Adrian Quesada
Edit consultants: Kyle Henry, Leah Marino, Joanna Rabiger
Sound mix: Tom Hammond (Soundcrafter)
Titles: Marc English Design and Glenn Dill of Rip Tear Shred
Animations & website: Mario Jaramillo (Robot Agency)
35mm Transfer: DVFilm
Still photographer: Terri Glanger

Filming started: 2002

Camera used: PD-150 (mini-DVCAM format; 4X3) plus Shure lavalier mics

Number of tapes shot: > 450 mini-DVCAM tapes

Edit system: Media-100

1) Selection of subject matter

- Subject selection is a very intuitive process; should be something that speaks to you on a very deep level (even if you don't understand why initially)
- Critical components for me: (1) strong visual elements (2) moving individual stories that reflect larger societal issues and (3) subjects who are open and convey their "energy" on camera (connecting them with the audience)
- For neither of my films did I know the narrative flow up front, how the story would unfold (risky process)

2) Production techniques

- Minimal crew for intimate interviews and natural verité
- Multiple cameras at dance events
- Emphasis on quality audio recording
- Natural light often used, but lighting always considered carefully
- Carefully monitor footage as you go to improve technique

3) Relationship with subjects

- For a long-term character-driven story, building trust with subjects is essential; trust feels a lot like friendship, but it's important to stay committed to the integrity of the portrait & story
- Trust with community also important (sharing tapes, long-term presence)
- Conduct interviews like conversations (eye contact); follow up; stay open-ended; interview frequently (catch events when "fresh," catch subtle developments that you don't know at the time are important); sometimes audio-only interviews
- My different "demographic" ironically worked to my favor in interviews
- When to intervene? (making a film is in and of itself a form of intervention – attention, visibility, a listening ear; still at times you have to choose between the priorities of a filmmaker vs. a friend)

4) Collaboration & creativity

- It is a given that film is a collaborative medium. Play to your strengths, and find talents that complement your own. Strongest areas of collaboration on ITC: b-boy community, camera, music, editing.
- Find and trust your own creative process:
 - Find ways to inhibit your critical left brain.

- Creative insights come on their own, but almost always come as a result of hands-on work (“sketching”).

5) Finding the story structure & editing

- Understand structure options (e.g., “Story” by Robert McKee and “Documentary Storytelling” by Sheila Curran Bernard)
- Log all footage (log interviews myself; notate high impact sections)
- Paper edit (reflect on what scenes stay with you even when not reviewing the logs); per “Directing the Documentary” by Michael Rabiger book
- Assembly edit; rough cut(s); fine cut(s); the process should be footage driven as opposed to script-driven.
- Mentally get over what you “missed”; concentrate on what you have; let the emotionally strong footage drive the story forward
- What’s “bothering you” can end up being your strongest material
- Be prepared to shoot more during editing
- Use an outside editor or strong independent edit consultants
- Critical role of test screenings – certain things are just not predictable in the edit room
 - Pacing, length
 - Points of confusion (dates/facts)
 - Perception of characters (audiences are emotionally smart)
 - Docs-in-Progress

6) “Objectivity” vs. “Integrity”

- “Objectivity” impossible – affected by your presence, by what you shoot & miss, by how you edit
- “Integrity” is possible and important: portraying the essential truth as you genuinely perceive it; treating subjects and events “fairly”; let the audience draw their own conclusions wherever possible
- A little bit goes a long way! (“Movie” language is by definition concise; reality show example.) It’s important to “test” the story with real audiences, to see what people are perceiving; they can surprise you. Subtle changes can lead to big differences in perceptions.

7) Festivals & marketing

- Top tier strategy vs. festivals as informal “theatrical release” and as extension of activism
- Choice of premiere festival important

- Evolution of festivals:
http://www.indiewire.com/ots/2007/04/festivals_the_p.html
- Essential to have graphic artist, website designer, and grassroots internet marketing expert on your team (publicist in some situations.)
- Collateral
- Distribution: bad news (saturation, low returns) versus good news (new options developing; niche marketing)

8) Closing thought

Your film will be as good as the bar you set for yourself. Set high expectations and be patient about reaching them.

From 7/2 Indiewire interview with Jennifer Fox (Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman)

What general advice would you impart to emerging filmmakers?

I think there are two things that are really important to discuss with young filmmakers. The first is to say: believe in your process. Filmmaking is a strange complex art that requires lots of creative ideas and forms coming together. It requires a lot of faith that when you have a first idea, the rest will come together. For me, creativity is like trying to remember a dream after you wake up. I have the feeling of a trace of something important, but I have to sit still long enough to let the bits arise that will give it flesh and form till I can say, "oh that's what it was I imagined! If we try to force our ideas or run after them, they often disappear. Because we are dealing with timelines and budgets that's when we fall back into old, well known responses, techniques and ideas. And true creativity dies.

The second is to make stories that are close to the heart. Often today people want to be famous, so they say, "I am going to make the next 'fill in last big hit...' film." But of course it never works. Making an original authentic story is what works; a story that the filmmaker knows intimately in all of its original details. No one has to know why a story is important to you--and you surely don't have to put yourself on screen like I did. But the story should burn in you; you should have to make that film or die. This will give you the tenacity to make it and go through the endless struggle and obstacles required, but also it will mean that your desire, your need will show up on screen. It is important that the filmmaker be on a quest--albeit secret--inside the filmmaking process. He/she has to need that film because if you don't there will be no power in it.

http://www.indiewire.com/people/2007/07/indiewire_inter_83.html

From 4/11 Interview with Filmmaker Ellen Spiro (BODY OF WAR):

What general advice would you impart to emerging filmmakers?

Soak up as much as you can from the culture, from the community and from life. Do not think of your work as the goal but as a way to live an interesting and inspired life. If the work takes you on a life-changing journey, that in itself is a worthy goal and will probably make your finished work better. Always think about what you are giving back when people share their stories with you and what you are giving the world in making your art.

http://www.indiewire.com/people/2008/04/indiewire_inter_148.html

Bio:

MARCY GARRIOTT is an Austin-based independent documentary filmmaker. Her first feature length documentary film, *SPLIT DECISION*, was broadcast on public television after its award-winning festival run and is currently distributed on DVD by First Run Features. *SPLIT DECISION* tells the story of a young and talented boxer who is deported to Mexico for a crime committed as a teen, where he must struggle to pursue his passion and re-unite with his family. Marcy's second film, *INSIDE THE CIRCLE*, had its world premiere at SXSW 2007, where it won an Audience Award. Through the intense and intertwined stories of three dancers, *INSIDE THE CIRCLE* provides a rare window into the global underground culture of b-boying. The film is distributed by Cinema Libre Studio. Marcy has been on the Austin Film Society Board of Directors for the last six years, serving two of those years as Board President. She is also on the Board of Directors of KLRU (Austin's public television station) and on the Advisory Board of Cine Las Americas.