**The future of storytelling**

**A few thoughts by Myrna Jelman**

To understand the future potential of anything, it is useful to understand its current state.

**Fiction storytelling? Someone used to do that well…**

On the film side, world culture is dominated by the Hollywood model with a lower appetite for risk since the recession as seen by the current reliance on tried and tested stories or concepts. Within the top 25 films for 2013:

* Number of superhero Films: 5
* Films that were either sequels/reboots/prequel/remakes: 16
* Films Based on Original Ideas: 6

**(Reference information only) -The Top 25 (Globally)**

1. *Iron Man 3* — $1.25 billion

2. *Despicable Me 2* — $918 million

3. *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* — $797 million

4. *Fast and Furious 6* — $787 million

5. *Monsters University* — $743 million

6. *Man of Steel* — $662 million

7. *Gravity* — $653 million

8. *Thor: The Dark World* — $629 million

9. *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* — $625 million

10. *The Croods* — $587 million

11. *World War Z* — $540 million

12. *Frozen* — $506 million

13. *Oz The Great and Powerful* — $493 million

14. *Star Trek Into Darkness* — $467 million

15. *The Wolverine* — $414 million

16. *Pacific Rim* — $407 million

17. *G.I. Joe: Retaliation* — $375 million

18. *Now You See Me* — $351 million

19. *The Hangover Part III* — $351 million

20. *The Great Gatsby* — $348 million

21. *The Smurfs 2* — $347 million

22. *The Conjuring* — $316 million

23. *A Good Day to Die Hard* — $304 million

24. *Oblivion* — $286.2 million

25. Elysium — $286.1 million

The smaller budgets if TV mean that it is currently regaining power from the film industry in terms of originality and attractiveness for successful actors.

**Whose stories?**

Between 1991 and 2000, women wrote 14 percent of spec scripts sold and only 9 percent between 2010 and 2012.

You might ask, is it because young men are the target audience for cinema? Movie goers are 52% female, 48% male.

You might ask, is advertising revenue targeted at men? Women “control $12 trillion of the overall $18.4 trillion in global consumer spending.

I looked for the first two films I could say were mainly targeted at women within the all time top grossing films. Here’s how long I had to wait before I found the first two: Mamma Mia! At No88 and Ghost at No121

Which means that women go and see men (and children’s) stories. Why is that? Is it solely because there is nothing else to watch? What are we missing out on in our global human culture if the female voice is so underrepresented? This *has* to be a key direction for future storytelling?

**Quality non-fiction storytelling: The invisibles**

It is hard to produce quality fiction from the sidelines, but nothing stops documentarians from producing quality films, When are these films ever on TV? How many quality films are made, ready to watch, but left unseen?

I went to the largest UK documentary film festival a few years back and saw many films I would have loved to see on TV. Original stories that were entertaining, human and revealing. They are there safely tucked away on the internet, for people to stumble upon. How can we make these more mainstream?

Two examples:

For example, a young Iraki filmmaker is given the chance of a lifetime to work on the film set of ‘Everything is Illuminated’. The story of such a rare ‘exchange’ is so inspiring that a North American woman filmmaker decides to follow him during his work experience. Unexpectedly, she discovers slowly but surely his manipulative, selfish nature, wanting to promote his own interests over those of the people who generously gave him a chance. The film culminates in his bending of the truth to the British Government to get asylum and happily borrowing more money from kindhearted strangers, touched by his story, to go on to study at film school.

(http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/operationfilmmaker/film.html)

The short interviews of several Muslim UK citizens upon their return from Gantanamo and speaking with a peaceful voice with no hint of anger or injustice about the torture they suffered, what helped them survive, the small pleasures on first arriving and how they now see America, as a country of many good people led into horrifying acts by a few. These few men speak with a voice that sounds like it comes straight from their inner, stripped bare by the horrific experiences of Gantanamo life. They are men at peace, barely days after their release. (ACLU.org - Justice Denied: Voices from Guantanamo).

So if the stories are there, how do we find them? This is where one other aspect of the future of storytelling lies. We need to have hubs of quality storytelling that help our emerging global society learn useful lessons of multi-cultural understanding, emotional intelligence and the challenging of long-held assumptions and stereotypes. Watching such stories will in return inspire the next generation of filmmakers and authors to give us the same quality storytelling.

**Storytelling of politics**

Two years ago I wanted to do a documentary on one of my client organisations, the International Committee of the Red Cross. I started researching the field and came across the book ‘Complex emergencies’ by David Keen.

In the book, he reveals that the story of war we have been fed is a myth and often totally opposite of the actual reality. He says: It was assumed that war was the ‘end’ and abuses the ‘means’, but perhaps the ‘end’ is to engage in abuses and war is the ‘means’ to do that.

The ‘story’ of war we are fed is far from the true motivations guiding key players. The future of political storytelling lies in news people debunking the myth of war and explaining how and why wars really happen.

“In discussions of war, abuses against civilians have usually been portrayed as an unfortunate deviation from humanitarian law (as embodies in particular by the Geneva Conventions), or as a means to a military or political victory. However, such abuses may confer benefits that have little or nothing to do with winning the war (and may actively impede this endeavour). The point of war may lie precisely in the legitimacy which it confers on these abuses – in other words, the legitimacy it confers on actions that in peacetime would be punishable as ‘crimes’. The aim may not be to change the law but to break the law” p.19

Eg. “Looking back on the long civil war in Guatemala (1960-96), some analysts felt that the army (given sufficient resolve) could have destroyed a not very numerous guerrilla movement, but that the army actually found the rebels’ continued existence useful – in legitimizing both the army’s own economic enterprises and the suppression of human rights and pro-democracy forces. The officially defined enemy was communism. But the war was also an occasion for intimidatory violence against a wide range of pro-democracy, union and human rights groups. Once civil war broke out in Guatemala, villages could be dubbed a ‘guerrilla village’ not because guerrillas were present but because of villagers’ progressive politics. In fact, a significant element of the counterinsurgency was the attempt to deter indigenous political awakening in a country where racism was underpinning profoundly exploitative economic relations” p.22

In Sierra Leone, the government looked good because it waged a war against abusive and predatory rebels and had low inflation (all the corruption going on?) so donors from the world bank were impressed. The army and rebels both resisted the advent of democracy fearing loss of economic opportunities and prosecution for what they had done to civilians in the war.

“It is not ‘evil’ that creates atrocity but the category of ‘evil’ and the use of ‘evil’ as a key explanatory framework. This process is integral to the demonization of certain groups. In other words, part of the moral force for atrocity lies precisely in the business of explaining previous atrocities” p.98-9