

Let's Not Call It "Multimedia"

Let's call it
"multiplatform"



"TIM HETHERINGTON WAS ABLE TO tell stories across multiple mediums in multiple ways," Bob Sacha told me. "Hetherington leveraged all kinds of storytelling to tell stories across multiple mediums."

Hetherington was killed April 20, 2011, in Misrata, Libya, alongside Chris Hondros while they were covering the Libyan rebel uprising.

Now back to freelancing after working for MediaStorm, Sacha is a 1979 graduate of the S.I. Newhouse School of Communications who worked as a freelancer for more than 25 years. He went back to school as a Knight Fellow at Ohio University before joining MediaStorm.

"It was really hard to leave [MediaStorm] – but since I had been on my own for such a long time, I got itchy to get out and do it again," Sacha said.

He says that today's readers consume media in a multitude of different ways, through mobile, online, and print products, so journalists need to look for ways to tell stories on multiple platforms. While doing this, he says, we also need to figure out how our work can remain relevant while reaching for higher quality. The future of photojournalism is not just multimedia journalism, Sacha believes, but multiplatform journalism.

"If you are interested in mass communication, then you have to stop thinking of yourself as a photographer. We live in a post-photographic world. If you are interested in photography, then you are interested in something – in terms of mass communication – that is past. I am interested in reaching as many people as possible. ... Working across all these editorial spectrums; not saying, 'I am a photographer' or 'I am a filmmaker,' just saying: 'I am a person who goes out into the world and makes these images. And I want to reach as many different audiences as possible. To do that, I have to reach into different forms.'"

– Tim Hetherington, in the LENS blog on www.nytimes.com

"I love the concept of comparing 'stills to motion,'" he says. "When you say 'video' it is like saying I shot film."

Independent filmmaker Scott Anger started out as a still photographer then moved into radio before making the transition to television, shooting for Frontline and producing seven films for them over the course of a decade. After a brief stint as the video director for the *Los Angeles Times*, he left that job last year to return to being an independent journalist and filmmaker. Lately he's been working more



SOCIAL OUTREACH. Scott Anger (with boom) and Bob Sacha photographed a squatters' village that's set up in a former railroad station outside of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, while they worked on a film about torture in healthcare. **Photograph by Pamela Chen**



SHORT FILMS. Sacha (with camera) and Anger collaborate on what they call “dramatic nonfiction stories.” Photograph by Pamela Chen

on social outreach and multimedia projects with Sacha.

Their collaborative films are what Sacha calls “dramatic nonfiction stories.” Recently they published a trio of short films for the Open Society Foundation (OSF), started by investor and philanthropist George Soros in 1984 to help countries transition out of communism. Sacha says that lately OSF has been developing a visual communications strategy to tackle complex global social issues.

“I am working on projects similar to the OSF project, to help build community and reach more niche audiences,” Anger says. “The OSF films are pieces of advocacy journalism. After years of working in different mediums, this has been a way to create a nonfiction story for positive change.”

Their OSF pieces were based on stopping torture in healthcare. “I put a lot of my skills to use as a journalist for something I felt was a good cause,” Anger said. “It was really my first real advocacy piece of nonfiction storytelling. I feel like I am doing something positive for positive change. It excites me because I feel like I am doing good storytelling for a known audience.”

The three pieces they filmed (“Forced Sterilization,” “Denial of Pain Relief,” and “Detention as Treatment”) were published on a Web site called stoptortureinhealthcare.org. The organization’s published philosophy says: “Health care settings should be places where human rights are realized. Yet, too often, they are places where human rights are severely abused, sometimes amounting to torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment. The Campaign to Stop Torture in Health Care promotes gov-

ernment accountability for all forms of torture and ill-treatment in health settings, including those most egregious and pervasive abuses condoned on the grounds of medicine, public health, or social order.”

“One of the issues with storytelling for newspaper journalism is that you produce work for a general audience,” Anger says. “Through the Soros Foundation it’s for a specific outreach to specific groups to educate people in these countries.”

Anger says it’s a lot like news work, but with a different mission. “We enter with the intention of being journalists. The contract with the Foundation involves truthful storytelling; we do not create anything. The piece could have been done for any news organization. Our ethics never waiver, and they cannot waiver. I’m always going to be a journalist, always tell stories truthfully and unmanipulated. It’s the core of who I am, and something that speaks to the strength of the Soros Foundation. It’s journalism to push initiatives.”

Sacha says, “They did not tell us what our stories were supposed to be; we told the stories based on the characters we found.”

Anger and Sacha are indeed accomplished storytellers. Anger spent much of his career as a filmmaker for PBS, and Sacha was a photographer for *National Geographic*.

“I have always loved movies and sound,” said Sacha. “I taught myself how to make movies seven or eight years ago. I took a Platypus Workshop along with Ed Kashi. For me it’s a perfect convergence of things. It was all coming down to this point, to leverage everything I knew in order



WEB DOCS. Sacha and Anger in Cambodia (above), and title screens from three of the films they made for stoptortureinhealthcare.org.

to start making short documentaries for the Web.” Sacha’s first short was a piece for OSF on Hurricane Katrina. The audio was by Anger, and the video was edited by Chad Stevens.

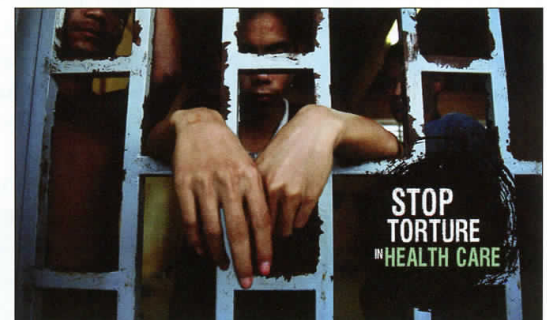
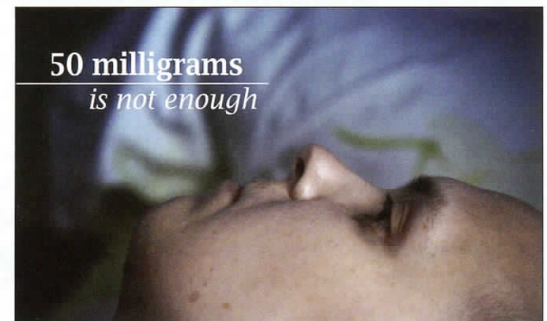
“Scott is the perfect example of a multiplatform journalist,” Sacha said. “He can shoot stills, motion, and record sound. In addition he can edit audio, video, and produce and direct.”

He says multiplatform storytelling is different and has a different narrative arc. “I have a relentless pursuit of story,” he says. “A *Geographic* story appears in print with powerful images that illustrate that part of the story; the narrative arc of drama occurs over time. In the magazine it’s a collection of pictures about a related topic. But for *Geographic* I never followed one person over a period of time over their life. For the magazine it was more of a survey story, about a place, or an issue, or an event, from different angles. Magazines cover issues or places and are less about a particular individual.”

Many of the stories Sacha did for *Geographic* were issue stories or places, or illustrated science topics. “I don’t feel like there was a narrative arc, any change or surprise. They were collections of pictures to illustrate what was going on.

“We had this theory that the ideal way to do stories now is as a team of two,” Sacha says. “We switched off roles as director, producer, shooter, and sound editor. We split it 50/50. When you have two people who are cross-trained – producer/director together as one – you see a story in a different way than through your eyes and a camera; it’s different than through your ears.”

“When I’m shooting I’m so immersed visually that I can’t step back,” Anger says. “When I was doing sound, I



would think about the story, of the entire piece, so I could do more producing, taking a breather from making images to allow me to think about how the story is shaping up while wearing more of the producer's hat."

"We'd swap," Sacha says. "I'd shoot one day – experiencing the story through my ears. We'd go back and forth. Even the interviews, not having the same person doing the interviews all the time. We'd really connect with the subjects. The strength in teamwork, the ability to switch off, helped us. We'd go through it at night over beers to figure out what we had, strengthening out teamwork. We never had any disagreement."

"Scott and I would talk about the story all the time," Anger says. "What is the metaphor? What's the story turning towards? Little would be about technical things."

"I couldn't tell what he shot and what I shot," Sacha says. "Choose a partner who knows more than you. ... I was lucky to be working with Scott."

When he's not shooting, Anger is the Community Studio Artist in Residence at the Angels Gate Cultural Center in Los Angeles. He's also managing the distribution of a film he shot, "The Lost Bird Project." He says the

film is aimed at a dedicated niche audience, and today he's more interested in doing work on films that have more of a specific focus for a specific audience.

Anger and Sacha don't see themselves as multimedia journalists, but as multiplatform journalists who seek multiple publishing avenues for their work. They believe that how the viewer perceives the final story is what really matters, not the platform. And it's not about the medium itself – stills or video – but where and how the work is published. Realizing that each medium has its limits, they believe that fully harnessing each one for specific platforms will make it possible to get the message they're trying to tell out there to viewers.

"These stories are important issues," Sacha says. The purpose of journalism "is to report stories so the world can become a better place. We approached these stories as journalists, but I have less of a problem with advocacy if the world becomes a better place. If we can ease the suffering and save a life, is that a bad thing?" ■

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