MY LAND, MY LIFE

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*My Land, My Life* is a documentary film about the woman, Jo Angela Lamb, who lives and works on Frying Pan Ranch in Texas Panhandle. The film explores the complexity of a ranch woman's experience that breaks the spell of the stereotyped image of American cowgirls. It also reflects on women ranchers’ relationship with their family members and their relationship with the land.
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PROSPECTUS

Introduction

On the Southern Plains of the Southwest, American cowgirls, along with their fathers, brothers, husbands and children, still work cattle and endure the vagaries of weather and landscape. In the twilight of the severe winter, or in the darkness of the corral, these cowgirls redefine women’s traditional roles as housewives, and function as an undeniable force shaping the face of the American West. It is not the romantic story portrayed in film, story and song, but it is no less inspiring than any of the Western legends.

The cowboy is a national icon in America. The same holds true for ranch women even if the term “cowgirl” is not a widely acknowledged label. Popular culture, such as adventure novels, art, photography and Western movies, feed audiences with the stereotyped portraits of women – rodeo queens, loving housewives and helpmates, or outlaws. Barney Nelson (2001), a real cowgirl herself and a professor of English at Sul Ross University noted:

Most of the rural women I’ve known – women who bought, inherited, or married ranches, women who rodeo or break and shoe horses, women who rope, build fence, fight grass fires, jockey pickups and trailers, pay bills, keep records, homeschool the kids or haul them to town on long muddy roads, and educate themselves in everything from environmental law to curanderismo – hate the word “cowgirl.” (32)

Frances Octavia Smith, better known as Dale Evans (2001), once said, “‘Cowgirl’ is an attitude, really. A pioneer spirit, a special American brand of courage. The cowgirl faces life head-on, lives by her own lights, and makes no excuses” (34).

Then what is it like being a cowgirl in today’s America? What are their life experiences, struggles and sources of pride? How do they handle gender roles in a male-dominated world?

Jo Angela Lamb, a working cowgirl on Frying Pan Ranch, is the main character of My
Land, My Life. She was born into life on a ranch. Her father was a cowhand, a working cowboy. The family came to Texas when she was 7 years old. Jo Angela’s intimate involvement with the land and the cattle began early in her life. She had her first horse at the age of 3. Early on she realized she enjoyed the freedom to work cattle on the ranch, an uncommon occupation for a girl at that time. Life is full of both hard work and adventure. While riding and roping were part of her chores, the landscape of the Frying Pan Ranch was a real playground for her. She has happy memories of growing up on the ranch with her brother and sister.

At the age of 55, Jo Angela is absolutely a self-sufficient woman. She has dual roles on the ranch, doing both ranch work and domestic work. On the open range, she is able to recognize each of more than one thousand head of cattle; at home, she is a loving mother and grandmother. Jo Angela has a very strong sense of belonging to the ranch even though she does not own the land or the cattle. Family and friends are the most important things for her.

Jo Angela’s husband, Tony, is supportive. He left his father’s ranch in New Mexico to raise a family here with Jo Angela. Even though there were disagreements from time to time, they have negotiated a way to live a happy life together throughout years.

Even with all the rewards on the ranch, Jo Angela has some worries about the future. The rapid changes in society, such as urbanization, put the traditional lifestyle of the American West at stake. Land owners lose their land and cowhands lose their jobs. It has been hard to earn a living as a cowhand. Today’s uncertain economic situation in America causes those who make their living from the land even more vulnerable. Without a college degree, Jo Angela feels she and her sons have nothing to fall back on if their jobs on the ranch
are not available anymore. The unfriendly environment of this part of the country creates another challenge for them – drought. They have spent more money to raise cattle. Jo Angela and her family treasure their land but face an unpredictable future.

The film *My Land, My Life* explores women rancher’s relationships with their family members, and their experiences as women in a male-dominated arena, as seen in the life of Jo Angela Lamb. Family dynamics are the emphasis of the film, which breaks the spell of the Western myth that stereotypes women as either powerless or sexually aggressive. The film also gives a contemporary working cowgirl a chance to speak against the stereotyped images that society imposes on them, telling the audience that the realities of being a cowgirl, though rewarding at times, might not be romantic as once thought.

**Style and Approach**

*My Land, My Life* is a realistic portrait of a contemporary working cowgirl blended with formalist techniques.

Observational footage constitutes the majority of the film content, which reveals what life is like for women living and working on a ranch. The audience sees ranch life through the eyes of the characters and hears the first-person narrative talking about their life stories. The seemingly mundane events in their life speak to the extraordinary nature of the American West.

*My Land, My Life* adopts a poetic approach that opens up “the possibility of alternative forms of knowledge to the straightforward transfer of information, the prosecution of a particular argument or point of view, or the presentation of reasoned propositions about
problems in need of solution” (Nichols, 2001, 103). In the film, the logic of a master narrative is disturbed by “a series of fragments, subjective impressions, incoherent acts, and loose association” (Nichols, 2001, 103). The poetic sequences appear non-linear and montaged. They weave together different moments and actions. This kind of approach emphasizes on women’s nature as flexible, free, and at the same time, complex. One of the montaged sequences comes when a dozen cowgirls gather at the Cowgirl Roundup Showdeo in Hill Country State Natural Area. The camera pans over their faces. Even without a word, the faces of these cowgirls say much about their lives. Each line, wrinkle or scar, each laugh or sigh, tells a story. Through the images, the inner world comes out; the untold is told. This kind of “intrusion” from outside Jo Angela’s world brings an alienation effect that engages the viewer in a critical reflection and evaluation. There are also times when Jo Angela herself breaks the “fourth wall” and speaks to the filmmaker/audience directly – waking the audience up from the visual pleasure of the big screen and reminding them that the film is just another cinematic illusion.

Some other individual moments in the film are intentionally extended, lingering to give the audience a chance to reflect upon their own life experience and the film as well. For example, when Jo Angela talks about her feeling about loneliness, a long shot follows her walking through the barren land. Her small figure appears against the huge backdrop of the canyon. The stark contrast provides a surreal feeling about the lonely life a cowgirl might encounter on a daily basis. Camera movement within the long shot “makes the audience aware of the independent subjectivity behind the camera” (Smelik, 1998, 51).

*My Land, My Life* breaks the spell of the mythical image of cowgirls. Not only does it
present cowgirls’ real life experiences and register their subjectivities, but it also inscribes the filmmaker’s authorial subjectivity. The fact that the filmmaker is from China, a totally different culture, adds a new layer to the whole picture – an image is filtered through the eyes with fresh feelings and opinions about American culture. The concept of the “third voice” comes in here, suggesting that both sides of the image construction – the filmmaker and the collaborative subject – are being transformed during the process of filmmaking. Their visions coalesce into a new perspective that emerges in the film (Ruby, 2000, 247). The new perspective can be sensed through the film language such as montage and mise en scene. Dealing with a typical Western topic, China’s traditional aesthetic that has been infused into the filmmaker plays an important role here. The imagery of the film exhibits an eastern philosophy that nature and man come together. For example, an image of a pink flower dissolves into a close-up of Jo Angela’s mother’s white hair. The lady is getting older, but her youthful days are just like the blooming flowers embedded in people’s memory. In another shot, a horse looks mischievous in slow motion while the soundtrack Jo Angela said I think it is me and Robby made Kelly the way she is. The horse, to some extent, represents the spirit of the American cowgirl – independent, tenacious, humorous, and loving.

Intended Audience

The film appeals to people who love ranching and its culture. Ranch and horse owners, people in the ranching business, or students in college learning history of the American West will especially find this film valuable because it provides authentic knowledge about today’s working cowgirls in America. The film also appeals to people who
live in urban areas, and long for western lifestyle. Local PBS audience in TX is especially targeted as well as those who live in the places where ranch culture strives, such as New Mexico and Montana.

An international audience is addressed, too, because the film provides an interesting comparison between similar or totally different cultures. Countries that share the same landscape with TX, such as Mongolia, can be a good place to screen the film. Audience in those countries will be eager to know how people in the other side of the world live their lives and confront the similar problems.

The film generally appeals to women audience as it is a feminist film. Both ordinary women and feminist activists will find this film inspiring since they can relate a lot with the main character.
PRE-PRODUCTION RESEARCH

Subject Matter Research

The meaning of womanhood in America has been undergoing a series of transformation throughout its history; the visual representation of women always embodies these changes. In terms of “Cowgirl”, there are heroic figures of the Wild West Show, the popular spectacles of classic Westerns, and the strong, independent female rebels from more recent revisionist Westerns. There are also contemporary productions of alternative cinema that try to survive beyond the mainstream and breathe new life into the visual representation of ranch women. *My Land, My Life* belongs to this category.

In Ponca City, Oklahoma, a statue of a pioneer woman has been standing for almost a century. She is a young mother striding toward the future with her child beside her. The inscription reads: “in appreciation of the heroic character of the women who braved the dangers and endured the hardships incident to daily life of the pioneer and homesteader in this country.” The image of the pioneer woman dominates the nation’s imagination of women’s role in the Nineteenth Century West.

With the same spirit, a different group still under the designation of Pioneer Women has been thriving ever since they settled down on the vast land of the West. Since the 1850s, these women have been performing equestrian feats in the public arena (Catherine, 2003, 72). They became well-known largely due to Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show where they were referred to “vaqueros – women who could rope and ride as well as men” (Roach, 2006, 10). The name “cowgirl” was created later in history as the counterpart of “cowboy.” The Wild West Show introduced the cowgirls to the world; in rodeos, they were crowned as the rodeo
queen. From such women as Lucille Mulhall and Tad Barnes Lucas, the cowgirls stepped into the spot light. Their appearances were constructed in such a romanticized way that the reality falls into myth.

Although pioneer women are not absent from the early days of the expansion into the American West, the wild West has always had a male face; more specifically, a white, male face. However hard women ranchers of diverse ethnic backgrounds worked the land and cattle, or however magnificent the cowgirls of different skin colors appeared in the arena, the official history, primarily written by white, middle-class, and heterosexual males, as well as the popular culture exhibited by the same group, ignored women’s experience. They imposed a hierarchy of gender and race into the West. According to Johnson (1993), the West is “a place where white women were civilizers, women of colors were temptresses or drudges, and men of color were foils for the inevitable white male hero, who is, after all, the true subject of the history of the ‘American West’” (495). With many social constraints that confine women to certain dresses, manners and roles, the representation of women, written or visual, was reduced into a set of archetypes.

Even if, during the 20th century, a series of social changes like women’s participation during WWII or the second and third waves of the women’s movement have challenged the conventional perspective, and even if for today’s historians, academic scholars and image makers, gender and race have become important issues to discuss, the same hierarchy, though often with certain kinds of obscuration, still prevails. The white masculinity of the West “has not been dismantled, and the ‘American West’ still exists as a sort of happy hunting ground for Anglo virility” (Johnson, 1993, 495).
With the invention of photography and cinematography, the western popular culture acquired a new vehicle to spread the ideology of the status quo. The images captured on celluloid created cinematic codes that reflected and reinforced the power relationship that existed in reality. After the first several years of filming the Wild West Show, a new genre was brought into being largely based on its episodes – the Western. The grandeur of the Great Plains, the heroic figures and their moving stories helped create America’s national identity throughout the world. With all the bias and stereotypes, the advertising industry adopted the strategy of Westerns to produce a more exaggerated image of women ranchers. People believed that the product would sell if there was a sexy cowgirl on the cover, including cowgirl tobaccos, cowgirl jams, and cowgirl pans. Few were eager enough to know about what real cowgirls were like.

Outside the mainstream film industry, however, indigenous (often referring to American Indian) women filmmakers found other modes of expression to challenge the rules. A small group of photographers and filmmakers, some with the background of ranching, some not, equipped themselves with less expensive cameras and set out for the ranch. They pointed the camera toward their own lives and explored their own desire and subjectivity. For example, the co-filmmaker Teresa Jordan of the documentary film called *Cowgirls: Portraits of American Ranch Women* belongs to the fourth generation on a cattle ranch in the Iron Mountain country of southeast Wyoming. Devoted to her own people and culture, Teresa has written and edited several books about Western rural lives. In 1985, she teamed up with filmmaker Nancy Kelly and made the film *Cowgirls: Portraits of American Ranch Women*. The film tells the real-life stories about cowgirls in the American West. A new identity for
women ranchers, far from the fantasy in a national myth, was negotiated through the image making process.

People, Location Research

Jo Angela is the main character of My Land, My Life. Other important characters include her mother, her sister and her husband. They all live in and around Amarillo, Texas. The whole family keeps very close.

Jo Angela’s mother is an independent woman. To financially support the family living on the ranch, she worked as a bookkeeper in the city when she was young. She is a good cook and published a cook book. She taught her children to love nature and enjoy life on the open range. She left the ranch and lived on her own after her husband passed away 5 years ago, but the ranch is always her home.

Jo Angela’s sister, Kelly, is also a cowgirl. She lives with her husband on another ranch. Jo Angela shares with her many childhood memories. Kelly always comes to the Frying Pan Ranch to help with ranch work. The sisters team up in the rodeo as a family group every year.

There are other families and friends who come to visit or help on the ranch. They also occasionally appear in the film.

The major location for the shoot is the Frying Pan Ranch which originated when Joseph F. Glidden bought 95 sections of land in the Texas Panhandle in 1881. The ranch now is the property of Mary Emeny – the great granddaughter of Glidden. More than a century
passed, and Frying Pan Ranch witnessed many historical changes around the Amarillo, Texas area.

Two different color tones dominate the film: the yellowish brown of the exposed earth in the canyon; and the lively green around Jo Angela’s house. It’s interesting to notice the contrast of colors. It brings out the contrast of the harsh environment and warmness of a family.

It is 6 hours’ drive from Denton to Amarillo. I traveled there 7 times and usually spent three or four days for the shoot.

During the production phase, I also went to a Cowgirl Showdeo in Hill Country State Natural Area and D bar B ranch in Aledo. Fritz Dent, the photographer, and Hanny Lee, the second camera operator, took video/still portraits of the cowgirls. These images are montaged and put in the beginning, the middle and the end of the film.

Funding

Diane McFarland Cornwall Memorial Foundation sponsored the film with $8,000. The foundation was established in memory of Diane McFarland Cornwall, a working cowgirl and the owner of D Bar B Cattle Company. It aims to support women ranchers and female students who are in ranching schools, and preserve ranch culture in the U.S.. I showed my film *Chasing the Green* and the budget for the future film (*My Land, My Life*) to David Cornwall, son of Diane McFarland Cornwall and the president of the foundation, and he believed a film about women ranchers can benefit the promotion of the American ranch culture. So he decided, in the name of the foundation, to sponsor the film.
The Department of Radio, TV and Film provided the in-kind production and post-production equipments, including Panasonic HVX 200 and HVX 500 cameras, post-production software such as Final Cut and Soundtrack Pro.

Distribution Possibilities

The festival strategy for *My Land, My Life* involves targeting festivals that deal with women’s issues such as Women’s Film Festival in Vermont, and environmental issues such as the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival in Montana. The film will be submitted to the film festivals hosted in areas such as Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado where cowboy culture thrives. I will also submit the film to some international film festivals such as Beijing International Movie Festival and the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam. Whereas the image of American cowboy impressed the world during last century, today’s American cowgirl will make an appealing appearance in the international stage, too. I have registered the website of Withoutabox which provides film festival information and a pathway for submitting. My budget for submitting is $ 800-1000. A list of film festivals is attached as an appendix.

The distribution possibilities also include media library in universities and institutions. As an important American national icon, the cowgirl’s image and life portrait will fit into the classrooms of many courses that deal with American culture in general or women’s issues in the U.S..

There are also several possibilities for broadcast, mainly on PBS outlets within the West of the United States.
I will get in touch with the two major distribution companies in the U.S. that handle the distribution of documentary film: Documentary Educational Resources and Bullfrog Films. *My Land, My Life* falls into the category of American studies, women’s studies, gender studies and environmental studies.

I will donate the film to National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame to promote the cowgirl culture in America.

A website of the film was set up at [www.cowgirlmylandmylife.wordpress.com](http://www.cowgirlmylandmylife.wordpress.com).

**Goal of Production**

This film redefines and reevaluates women’s role in ranching. It provides authentic insights on today’s ranching women’s lives and works, shedding light on the social and cultural issues from a feminist perspective.

Texas boasts a large population of ranching people and families. Numerous communities of cowboys and cowgirls thrive on this legendary land. On one hand, they share the lifestyle and the spirit of the American West; on the other hand, each of them embraces their own local and family traditions. This film also promotes the understanding and communication among these communities and encourages people from next generations to cherish a lifestyle that, though undergoing huge changes today, maintains some core values for being Americans.

**Feasibility**

Before the production of this film, I had been working with several ranch women on a
previous documentary for more than one year. By talking with them and observing their life and work, I become familiar with the ranching culture in Texas and developed strong empathy toward them. My communication skills allowed me to enter into their world and make the best out of our friendly relationship.

Diane McFarland Cornwall Memorial Foundation sponsored the film with $8,000, which makes the shoot financially possible.
RECONCEPTUALIZATION BEFORE PRODUCTION

As a filmmaker from a totally different culture – China, I always feel amazed by the American West – a world I only learned from movies and books. I became involved in this project with mostly keen curiosity and love for nature and horses. Ranch life for me, at that time, was merely romantic, legendary and mythical.

Closer contact with my social subjects made me realize that a different world thrives outside the naïve imagination and consumption of popular culture. Each cowgirl whom I got to know remains individuals, even within their cowgirl culture. They step out of the spotlight of the mythical, away from patriarchal glory and let me observe who they really are and how they fit in, or not, in the real world of today.

Joyce Gibson Roach, who wrote the foundational text on cowgirls (*The Cowgirls*, 1978; 1991) and a 2010 honoree in the national Cowgirl Hall of Fame, explains it best: “Cowgirls are all different in their likenesses, although they share a common identity and label. In spite of recent interest in the subject that leads to the conclusion that there are still a lot of cowgirls in the Southwest and West, such is not necessarily the case. Taken all together – rodeo performers, horse competitors, cattle raisers, ranchers, business women, trainers, and hundreds playing dress-up and identifying themselves as types exhibiting cowgirl qualities - the group may appear larger than it really is. Finding a cowgirl such as Jo Angela is rare and although there are more out there like her, they are disappearing as the ranching industry, itself, grows smaller and smaller” (Interview, 09/10/11).

The particular cowgirl on whom I focused, Jo Angela Lamb, lives in the Panhandle of Texas where the natural environment is especially harsh. She works side by side with her
husband on the ranch; sometimes she is the leader of hard work—foreman of the team. Back home she still takes care of the meals, the household, the family. I observed that she and others like her are the true masters of their lives.

Therefore, in my film, rather than showing cowgirls’ one-dimensional role as powerful or independent, portrayed in many mainstream movies, art and photography, I try to bring out a well-rounded image of one kind of ranch woman in today’s America. The film presents Jo Angela’s family life along with her hard work on the ranch; it explores her experiences as a woman in a male-dominated arena. The film also looks at the intimate relationships between Jo Angela and the land she lives on. The land here is like a character with whom Jo Angela has discourse and dialogue – a friend and comfort sometimes; sometimes an adversary.

The following is a list of interview questions:

- Can you describe the “western lifestyle”? What is a woman’s contribution to this kind of lifestyle?
- Tell me about your mother. What kind of a woman is she and what are the influences she has had on you. How did you raise your own children on a ranch?
- Tell me about your husband.
- Are there rules that you think you had to follow during the days you grew up on a ranch or elsewhere?
- In the 1970s when the feminist movement was in its heyday, what was your reaction toward it, then and now?
- If there are any differences between a ranch woman and a city woman, what do you think they are? What are the likenesses?
- Do you need to fight, in any form, for the things that you want or deserve today?
- Do you believe in the spiritual connection between you and your land (the nature)? Tell me about the precious moments you have experienced on your ranch.
• What are the modern methods of ranching? What are your daily duties on the ranch? How do you handle the roughness of the cattle work?
INTEGRATION OF THEORY AND PRODUCTION

Theories and Rationales for Use

*My Land, My Life* is basically a film about one woman within a culture. There are two main points that can be examined from a theoretical perspective. 1) The film is an ethnographic documentary; 2) it is a feminist film.

*An Ethnographic Film*

The history of ethnographic film goes back to the times when scientist-explorers went to a remote area and produced the images of the people there. They brought back the films and presented them to the audience who marveled at the exotic scenes they had never seen. From its “prestigious” beginnings, ethnographic film was embedded with world colonial ideology. The subjects of the films are, just like the traditional subjects of anthropological study, those who are “economically disadvantaged and politically disenfranchised” (Ruby, 2000, 224).

In the post-colonial age, the salvaging paradigm still lingers. Looking through the mainstream programs of BBC, PBS, or NGC, one can always come across the voice of god narration with magnificent pictures, though this time the meaning of “marginal” has extended into every social stratum within a culture. Women, children, poverty-deprived people or people with disability or sickness become the focus of these films. It is still, after all, a male–power–wealth–dominant society where marginal people are the subject of the spectacle. They were being looked at, analyzed, and granted a cultural identity from the western
perspective. Most times, they are not representing themselves but representing the people with the outsiders’ eyes.

Throughout cinematic history, a few ethnographic filmmakers have dared to make a difference. Robert Flaherty employed the participatory and reflexive approach when he produced *Nanook of the North*: Inuit people not only participated in the process of filmmaking but also had some say on the content of the film. Jean Rouch, in his film *Jaguar*, gave the social subjects even more authority in terms of production of meaning. The outcome of these endeavors captured the world that is no longer a reality of what the westerners believe, but a culturally constructed reality that, to some extent, reveals the ideology of the subjects.

Culture is not something sitting there to be discovered, as was believed before. According to Ruby (2000), ethnographic films should be “grounded in the assumption that culture is created, maintained, and modified through social acts of communication” (242). Culture is subjective; cinema is a device to produce meanings of culture.

Since the 1970s, the camera has become more and more accessible. 16mm film cameras are often used in small budget films. Today, digital video is widely used by ordinary people. And cyber space such as Youtube provides these amateurish filmmakers an outlet to distribute their works. Low-budget DV production becomes an alternative cinema that deviates from mainstream film production by providing multiple perspectives free from the dominant culture. As Russell (1999) argues, filmmakers “develop film languages that could convey something about the microcultures in which they live……they sometimes create new means of representing culture, in which people and art could be fused in new forms of
cultural production that lay resolutely outside the film industry and all that it represented”

(17).

In this social context, the representation of women in the American West undergoes huge changes. Many documentary/ethnographic films are produced to challenge the rules of traditional storytelling. The women characters in those films step out of the mythical arena of the Western and appear as real women who are true to their lives. For example, the film *Miss Navajo*, premiered in 2007, portrays a young Navajo girl’s life and her participation in a pageant with 55 years of history behind it. The director is a Native American; his mother was Miss Navajo of 1966. We can also see his great grandmother and grandmother on the screen. When asked why he made this film, the director, Billy Luther, said:

I decided to make *Miss Navajo* because growing up as a Native American in a very westernized way, I felt ambivalent about my heritage. I felt connected yet also disconnected and wanted to make a film about my culture. I really wanted to avoid the earnest, slightly reproving tone that almost inevitably seems to become the voice of a minority culture trying to be heard. (Filmmaker statement)

A pageant is such a western thing, like a film or a TV show that puts a girl’s beauty under scrutiny. However, the pageant on the reservation adds something more – to preserve the endangered traditions for Navajo people. Assimilated into the dominated culture, young Navajo people face losing their traditional heritage. The film traces the dark days when westerners pulled children away from their family and infused them with English culture. Children grew up with the idea that speaking their own language was a shame. The identity of the whole generation fell apart.

What the director brings into the film is not only a new perspective, but also a new culture identity that Navajo people are managing to establish. Both the pageant contestants
and the filmmaker work as the active agents during this process. Both of them convey a new
definition for Navajo people by their different means.

*My Land, My Life* is also an endeavor to renegotiate an identity – the identity for
today’s ranch women. Although I am not one of them, with the understanding of film theory
and more than two years’ wholehearted involvement in ranch culture, I am fully aware that
there is a huge gap between who ranch women are and how they are portrayed in the media.
According to my observation, ranch women still live under a shadow of misunderstanding. At
the same time, belonging to the working class, many cowhands, men or women, lack a
college degree and other skills to earn a living in the city. The land is their only resource to
rely on. Like numerous minority cultures, ranch culture now becomes another microcosm
surviving on the edge of the bigger social-cultural picture of America. *My Land, My Life*, on
one hand, brings up the question “who are today’s American cowgirls?” and on the other
hand, tries to figure out an effective cinematic way to better serve the establishment of
cultural identity.

During the production, I worked very closely with Jo Angela in terms of image
construction. We built a reciprocal relationship. Jo Angela reviewed all versions of the rough
cuts. We talked about how a certain shot can be captured and what kind of meaning it can
convey. Jo Angela also suggested that I shoot the things that I did not ask her in the interview.
For example, after watching the first rough cut, she made the comment that the film should
incorporate more content about family because they are the ones who built this life with her
together. In the following shoot, I followed Jo Angela and her mother planting flowers and
making quilts. Had she not mentioned the small things, I would never have known their importance.

Filmmaker-subject relationship is an important issue for ethnographic films. To create a world as the subject sees it is the ideal situation that Flaherty wants to achieve in his film. The problem is how a film crew can make it come true. The mainstream film industry takes it for granted that they render the subject in a way that is actually born out of the knowledge and experience of the filmmaker rather than that of the natives themselves. Even though many films and TV projects nowadays are trying to portray people’s lives as it really is by employing native protagonists, personal narratives, and a storytelling style of a native culture, the power relationship has already been built as soon as the camera is pointed to the subject – the subject is the spectacle being gazed by the spectators. With all the “advanced” knowledge and techniques, film crews become the representatives of the ideology of the status quo. Frankly, they are the practitioners of cultural colonialism under a perfect disguise.

The collaborative approach of filmmaking proposes a way to incorporate different perspectives and worldviews into the big picture. Through the process of producing the image, collaborative media projects allow a subjective reality to be presented from both the filmmaker’s and subject’s point of view. Not only do the subjects acquire some say in the construction of their image, but also, in many cases, they get access to the equipment of filmmaking. They point the camera toward their own life, and get their voice across in a way that becomes negotiation with the filmmaker. The outcome of this endeavor reveals a world that is no longer a reality of what the westerners believe, but a culturally constructed reality that, to some extent, reveals the ideology of the subjects.
A problem that Ruby (2000) found with the collaborative approach is that “the editorial control still remains in the hand of the filmmaker. The empowerment of the subject is therefore more illusionary than actual. While new voices are heard, traditional forms of authorship have not been significantly altered” (204). Although there is no easy solution, Ruby mentioned in an article (1991) that “in trying to give the subjects’ voice room in their films, documentarians are also attempting to locate a new voice for themselves” (62). Therefore, a “third voice” is created. The concept of the “third voice” was first brought into being by Barbara Myerhoff. It suggested that both sides of the image construction – the filmmaker and the collaborative subject – are being transformed during the process of filmmaking. Their visions coalesce into a new perspective that emerges in the film (Ruby, 2000, 247). This notion brings a hopeful situation where a subject-to-subject relationship in filmmaking is not merely a slogan. The filmmaker’s transformation, or the influence the subject exerts on the filmmaker, in my opinion, reflects a greater involvement of the subject in the collaborative works. Not only does their point of view appear in the film, but they also challenge the dominant ideology that is inherent in the filmmaker.

To me, the filmmaker, making the film of “My Land, My Life” means a lot more than producing an art piece. The whole process of filming is like a journey in which I complete a part of myself. The American cowgirls reveal to me the most intimate relationship human beings can develop with the land. The land is not only their recourse of living, but also their root. They acquire energy and happiness from the land, and pay it back by protecting it. Being a city girl, raised in the steel forest of the capital of China, I have lost this kind of connection. Making this film provides me the opportunity to rebuild the connection with the
land, even though this time I am on a foreign land. In the film, there are many shots that reveal how Jo Angela and her families appreciate the land and nature. For example, the canyon on the ranch is Jo Angela’s “spiritual place”. She can stay there for hours just to enjoy the time being along with the land. The land, to her, is like an old friend with whom she can communicate intimately. I was there with Jo Angela one day. Her calmness when she sit down on a rock and stretched her look toward horizon moved me deeply. I captured the scene with my camera, but more importantly, I felt life in its most gorgeous way. Being there myself, even just for two hours or so, fulfilled a certain part in my heart that I have forgotten for too long. The film conveys the longing to be close to the land that I always overlooked before.

A Feminist Film

While ethnographic films help negotiate a new cultural identity for minorities, feminist films call for the interpretation of the world from women’s perspectives. With the second wave of the women’s movement, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the mushrooming of feminist documentaries that register women’s subjectivity and desire, explained their concerns about sexual difference and gender relations. These collective endeavors construct the “cinema version of ‘her-story’, that is to say an alternative historiography” (Smelik, 1998, 8).

Feminist films and ethnographic films share some common agenda. Both of them represent minorities within a dominant culture; both of them are seeking methods of deconstructing the conventional narratives that reinforce the ideology of status quo – in the
other words, the myth. The marriage of the two disciplines is reciprocal. Borrowing the idea of cultural identity, feminist filmmakers deviate from the mainstream cinema and create the counter-practice that speaks for themselves. They strive to address gender and sexual differences, and promote diversity within genders.

In terms of counter-practice, two aspects need to be carefully examined – subject matter and form. A shift of focus on women’s lives or issues particularly concerning women represents the abrupt change since the 1960s. Women’s voices were unprecedented. They become the center of the narrative.

Direct cinema is the approach that was often employed in early feminist documentary. Filmmakers simply “put ‘real’ women and their lives on the cinema screen without constructing the limited range of images of women prevalent in dominant cinema” (Kuhn, 1994, 143). These women are ordinary people with their own specific troubles or worries. The realistic depiction of them shakes the assumption of the traditional myth about women. They took off the veil that obscured them since the early days of cinema, and became the active agents for the political and aesthetic expression. Women finally acquired the status of historical subjects on the screen. The audience identified with them by sharing with them common concerns and emotions. Realism is often “the first recourse of oppressed groups wishing to counter vicious stereotypes of lies” (Walker, 1999, 12); and it no doubt brings a new chapter for visual representation of women ranchers – cowgirls.

Some critics, however, assert that realistic documentaries produce a realist illusion about women. They argued that “the idea of non-interventional realism is actually a pure mystification. It promotes a passive subjectivity at the expense of analysis. It’s not enough to
discuss the oppression of women within the text of the film; the language of the cinema/the depiction of reality must also be interrogated, so that a break between ideology and text is effected” (Johnston, 1973, 215).

More recent feminist filmmakers with a postmodern perspective not only replaced the content of the myth, but also gave the film a totally different appearance. They concerned themselves more with the formalist revolution that undermines the notion of the master narrative. They suggested that “if illusionism is a feature of certain textual practices, then it may be challenged on the level of the text by means of non-realist or anti-realist strategies and modes of address” (Kuhn, 1994, 152). Some feminist films employed anti-realistic techniques such as “intellectual montage, expressionistic sequences, voiceover and dramatization” to examine aspects of women’s life (Walker, 1999, 8). Other feminist films revealed the processes of meaning-construction that was obscured by classic cinema. The audience was constantly reminded that it was another film or illusion that a filmmaker made on the screen. These films are concerned more about text-spectator relation. Theorists suggested that “in the moment of reading, recipients of texts are themselves involved in producing meanings.” They confronted the cinematic pleasure produced by voyeuristic gaze and narcissistic identification, forcing the audience to intellectually involve themselves into the process of meaning-construction.

A review of filmography suggests that most documentary films about ranch women in America employ the realist approach. The film Cowgirls: Portraits of American Ranch Women follows two adult women and two little girls on three ranches in the West. A film review said Cowgirls “tests the depths of ordinary experience and discovers its secret worth.
Without flourish or fanfare, the film strings a subtle web-work in which the audience finds himself/herself happily caught up” (John Daniel). Given the subject-matter, realism works fine in this case. The straight forward portrayal adds an important dimension to the representation of ranch women.

With the same goals, documentary film *My Land, My Life* tries to make a difference on the level of text. It employs some formalist techniques in order to engage the viewer more in a critical reflection and evaluation.

*My Land, My Life* is constructed with Jo Angela’s personal narrative, which traces her own life in the most intimate way. Patricia Hart (2006), one of the editors of the book *Women Writing Women: The Frontiers Reader*, said: “personal narratives have embodied the feminist adage that ‘the personal is political’, acknowledging that what happens in the lives of ordinary women rightfully belongs in the consideration of larger feminist and political concerns” (3). In the film, Jo Angela not only works hard on the open range, feeding cattle, breaking ice, riding horse, she also works in the domestic – the traditional arena of women – cooking, cleaning, and taking care of her husband and children. These are the most ordinary scenarios that one can expect to see at home. Far from people’s wild imagination of a cowgirl based on the Westerns or commercials, Jo Angela appears as a “caregiver” (her own words). The film dares to claim the ordinary, even mundane experience of a woman as a strong proof of their existence and celebrate the ordinary wholeheartedly. Annette Kuhn (1994), a professor of London University, argued that the *truth* is not “an absolute truth derived from ‘neutral observation, but a situated truth embedded in a feminist politics founded on an acceptance of the validity of individual experience” (147). Jo Angela’s experience as a
daughter, a wife, a mother, a grandmother, as well as a working-class woman rancher illustrates the living condition of many ranch women, and registers a gendered subjectivity that is generally ignored by mainstream cinema. Another feature of My Land, My Life is the dialogue between mother and daughter, as well as wife and husband. With so many shared recollections, family members talk with each other during the interviews. There is a natural flow of language and emotion, and this adds more energy to the whole.

While continuity editing is the norm of film industry, many feminist films intentionally break the rules. The departure from the convention undermines the audience’s expectation and it can be so abrupt that the audience is provoked to response intellectually as well as emotionally. For example, the sign boards of time in Cleo 5 to 7 reminds us of the relation between filmic time and real time, which are always concealed in traditional cinema. Or the direct dialogue from the actor to the viewer in Vagabond warns the viewer that this is a story told by actors rather than their own. In My Land, My Life, I was not introducing the main character directly. Instead, the audience is led into the story by a sequence of black-and-white portraits of ranch women. At intervals, three questions appear on screen and address to the audience directly: “Are you familiar with these faces?” “Do you know about their lives?” “Legend or Reality?” The audience is encouraged to seek answers while watching the film. Jo Angela’s personal narrative accompanies these portraits as a voice-over. She talks about her childhood dream, her understanding about being a cowgirl and her experience living on a ranch. Images of other cowgirls are juxtaposed against Jo Angela’s voice to produce a puzzle-like effect that puts the audience into an active personal interpretation of the film.
Several expressionistic sequences in *My Land, My Life* function as pauses for the audience to reflect intellectually, too. For example, when Jo Angela’s mother said I don’t know a hero who is a cowgirl, the shot is followed by a completely silent, deep-focused shot where Kelly was on a horse as a foreground; in the distance, a cowboy showily rode his horse. The uncomfortable silence of this shot has the connotation that women have been put into silence for a long time.

I also use some editing techniques such as slow motion, fast cut and collage to encourage emotional and intellectual response from the audience. For example, a few scenes of the film were originally shot with the frame rate of 60, meaning it appears as slow motion. In the shot where Jo Angela, her daughter-in-law and her grandson rode horses shoulder by shoulder, the tempo slowed down to reveal the magnificent figures of the two women, the little boy and horses. This kind of time distortion reiterates the idea that the spirit of the American West is something that will last even though today’s ranchers face many new challenges.

Like many New Wave directors, I reflected on the very nature of cinema. There was a moment when Jo Angela asked the filmmaker can you hear the coyote. A moment of silence fell in after that. The filmmaker as well as the audience hears nothing. The truth is that Jo Angela is so tuned into the life on the open range, so she can sense things that other people usually can not. A question is posed here – if films are to reflect the world around us, can it really achieve this goal?
Review of Additional Text

Films

In order to become familiar with the subject matter, I first reviewed many fictional films that tell the story about ranch women in America. Most of them are revisionist Westerns that are different from classic Westerns. The films include *The Ballad of Little Jo, Bad Girls, Annie Get Your Gun, Cat Ballou, Cattle Queen of Montana, The Giant, Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, The Furies*, etc.. In these films, women find themselves moving to the center of the genre. In many cases, the characters are portrayed more realistically and well-developed. However, revisionists Westerns, with all their subversive features, are still confined within the ideology of the dominant culture and a man’s world. They are usually sponsored by mainstream production system, tell story about fictional or legendary historical figures, and employ the classical story telling mode. They only break the rules to the degree that the premise of their existence is not threatened. They are, after all, the “the western myth revisited.” It is like the lenses are changed while the nature of the spectacle remains the same.

It is relatively hard to find documentary films in which ranch women are the main subjects. The only three films I was able to locate are *Cowgirls: Portraits of American Ranch Women, Cowgirls* and *A Woman Rancher Making a Difference*. There are some episodes portraying women ranchers in the visual exhibition of National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame. The realistic portraits of ranch women in these films provided me a better understanding about today’s cowgirls. I also reviewed other documentary films which are not directly about ranch women but about women living in the American West, such as
Troublesome Creek: A Midwestern, and A Farmer’s Wife. In these films, not only did women become the center of the story, but they are also the active agent of the narrative.

Literature

There are significant books that talk about women’s life in the American West and feminist/ethnographic cinema. The following are the books and articles I reviewed.


  The article sees the American West as an imagined place where “cultural meanings have collected until it has becomes a sort of preserve for white masculinity”. By examining two books about the West, the article examines gender roles that popular culture exerts on women.


  The article traces the development of women’s film/video production that deviated away from the mainstream film industry. It provides a fresh look on the various approaches that women filmmakers adopted and evaluate their achievement in film history.


  The article looks at two films “Walker” and “Posses”. It exams the different perspective that revisionist Westerns bring about to an old genre.


  The book traces the development of feminist cinema. It analyzes several feminist films and point out their different approaches and achievement.


  The book examines women’s role when they are doing the jobs that are not
traditionally women’s jobs.


  The introduction of this book traces the history of cowgirl culture since the beginning. It gives great significance to cowgirl in shaping the face of the American West.


  From ranches to Wild West show and rodeo; from dime novels and fiction to song, joke, tall tales and the movies; from the frontier to the footlights—that's what The Cowgirls is all about!


  The article examines the relationship between filmmakers and social subjects, suggesting that ethnographic film should be produced out of the cooperation of the two sides. It also evaluates the achievement of indigenous film/video production and envisions the future of the genre.


  The author brings together two distinct fields from film studies that have previously remained separate—the avant-garde and ethnographic film—and reconstructs their relationship in such a way that both fields are significantly transformed.


  The book explores the connection between documentary and feminist film in terms of theory, history, and practice. By analyzing the feminist documentary films produced throughout years under certain themes, like self/other, innovative (Auto) Biographies, the author suggests a bright future for the genre.
PRODUCTION

Overview

*My Land, My Life* had its beginning in my mind at the end of 2009 when I was producing my first documentary film about cowgirls: *Chasing the Green*. The ranch women I worked with at that time amazed me a lot and made me want to delve deeper into this fascinating culture in America.

With the same enthusiasm, I visited a few more ranches in Texas. The Frying Pan Ranch was one of them. I first met Jo Angela at October, 2009 and I had a short interview with her in her beautiful yard on the ranch. The fact that Frying Pan Ranch is one of the biggest and most historical ranches that survives in today’s Texas and that Jo Angela is a typical working ranch woman who is, at the same time, comfortable with the camera brought me back to Amarillo in 2011. The whole process of shooting was very collaborative. Jo Angela took me into her daily life warmly. Not only did I follow her on her ranch work, but also joined her for a family reunion and parties. She also provided suggestions regarding the content of the film.

The harsh environment that shapes people’s character is a critical element in the film. The film was shot during three seasons in Texas – the cold winter, the sunny and windy spring, and the early summer. No matter what the weather was like, Jo Angela worked hard on the land. It is absolutely a twenty four/seven job. The weather also gave the shoot some difficulties. When I was shooting on location for a spring roundup, the wind blew at almost 50 mile an hour. I felt as if I was constantly trapped in a sandstorm. The shoot at their home, on the contrary, was always warm and pleasant. Sometimes I was circled by a bunch of kids and dogs; sometimes I was touched by the day-old colt that was so cute and gentle. To me,
the whole process of production, on one hand, was a real adventure; on the hand other hand, an important phase of my professional pursuit.

Schedule

Production occurred from January 1, 2011, when I shot the second Cowgirl Showdeo in Hill Country State Natural Area, a one-day event for local cowgirls to exhibit their cowgirl skills.

The first shoot on Frying Pan Ranch occurred on Jan 22nd. I had a sit-down interview with Jo Angela at her house. This was the second time I talked to her. Although not too much of the interview is used in the film, it was crucial because it established a trusting relationship with Jo Angela. I had planned to stay there for the weekend, but ended up staying there for another whole week. I followed Jo Angela to the ranch when she fed the cattle early in the morning. I also interviewed the land owner, Mary Emeny, from whom I get a better understanding about ranch culture in Texas.

The second time I shot on location was one month later when Jo Angela had a roundup on the ranch. I got the majority of observational footage of ranch work and family life at this time. I had made another interview with Jo Angela at the canyon, which is her spiritual place on the ranch. She talked about her father as the sun was setting, which provided a very beautiful shot in the film. I also looked through the family album and brought back old photos to scan in order to use them in the film.

The third shoot was from April 22nd-25th. On the first day, I followed Jo Angela for another roundup. The next morning, Jo Angela and her mother planted flowers together in the
yard that had turned green in the spring weather. I also took footage of the new born colt.

The fourth shoot was from May 7th to 9th. Since Jo Angela’s mother needed to go back home, the shoot on Mother’s Day was canceled. But I got the footage when Jo Angela was cooking for a picnic for the cowboys.

The fifth shoot occurred from June 4th to 6th. At a rodeo in Amarillo, Jo Angela teamed up with her sister, Kelly, and her nephew to compete as a family team. Tony, her husband, took Jo Angela to a dance after the competition.

Crew

Mingyun Zhang, Producer, director, cinematographer and editor.
Hanny Lee, Second camera.
J. Fredrick Dent, Still photographer.

After graduating from college with a B.A. in Communication, I worked for three years in one of China’s leading publications called Traveler Magazine as a writer/photographer. I traveled extensively in China and abroad, published more than 50 articles, and led the production of several special issues for Traveler Magazine which exams today’s cultural landscape in different countries. During those years, I cultivated critical thinking and writing skills that facilitated my undertaking jobs in various circumstances.

In the past three years, I studied documentary film production at the University of North Texas. I worked on several documentaries and short films, wrote scripts and studied film theories. “Chasing the Green” and “My Land, My Life” (in production) are two documentaries that I made in order to look closely at women’s involvement with the land.
Equipment

Due to the mobility of Jo Angela’s life and work, I decided to keep my equipment as simple as possible. The Department of Radio, TV and Film provides me with in-kind equipment – the Panasonic HVX 200 and Panasonic HVX 500 cameras, a shotgun microphone and two lavaliere microphones, P2 cards with memory of 16 and 32 gigabytes. The footage was shot on 720/24pn, with the frame rate of 30 and 60. All scenes are shot under natural light. No additional lighting was used.

Budget

I have included a full budget for *My Land, My Life* in Appendix I. The major expense on the production comes from travel expense, car rental and music recording. I also purchased a hard drive with the memory of 2 Tb for storage of all the footage captured.
POST-PRODUCTION

Schedule

The postproduction of My Land, My Life is overlapped with the process of production. After coming back from the second shoot in Amarillo, I logged the footage and began to build the sequence. The following is the postproduction schedule:

- March 3-7: Logging of footage and review
- March 15-19: Rough cut #1
- April 30: Music recording:
- May 23-27: Rough cut #2
- June 8: Rough cut #3
- November 17: Fine cut.
- December 4, 2011. Final Cut

Equipment

My Land, My Life was edited with in-kind equipment provided by department of Radio, TV and Film, including an iMac with Final Cut Pro. One 2 Tb external hard drive was used as a work drive while the original media was backed up on a 1 Tb hard drive. For audio editing, I used the software of Soundtrack Pro.

Reconceptualization of Film during Post-production

My Land, My Life is not a story-driven or an issue-driven documentary. It strives to present a living situation of American ranch women. There are three major themes in the
film: 1) women in a man’s world; 2) ranch woman’s identity defined by her family; 3) problems that ranchers are facing in today’s society. During post-production, I basically structured the film around these three themes.

Jo Angela leads the audience into her life on an early winter morning. We see her loading feed, breaking ice and feeding cattle. It is not an easy job for a woman, especially when she is getting older. Most of us are familiar with the independent cowgirls on big screens. They are tough and fearless, sometimes even “bad”. But to Jo Angela, it is people’s respect that makes a woman a successful rancher. She admires her father who took her and Kelly, her sister, to the nearby ranches for work when they were little. At that time, girls were not usually involved in the ranch work, but her father took them anyway and they did help, winning the acceptance of men. Time passes; Jo Angela is now the leader, the foreman, in her contingent. She arranges not only the ranch work schedule, but also prepares three meals for the fellow cowhands.

There are some misunderstandings about life on a ranch. People like to either romanticize it or feel sorry about it. On one hand, it is true that the beautiful morning mist or magnificent sunset can take one’s breath away, but lots of hard work occupies majority of a rancher’s time. On the other hand, it is difficult to survive as a cowhand. However, there are always rewarding moments that are worth the hardships. Jo Angela, as a female cowhand, masters and balances her life very well. While working hard, she enjoys the time when she is alone in the canyon. She takes care of her Shetland ponies and several dogs. She plants flowers to decorate her house and yard. She does not feel she sacrifices any thing for this kind of life and she thanks God for everything she has in her life.
Besides work, it is Jo Angela’s family that makes her who she is. Jo Angela has loving parents who taught her to embrace life and nature and who were always there for her; a brother and a sister who accompanied her growing up and joining her in countless adventures on the ranch; a supportive husband who made sacrifices to move to Texas and raise a family with her; and good boys, excellent cowhands and cherish the lifestyle of the ranching. There are some intimate moments in the film when the family members communicate with each other. The natural affection between them is an important element in the film.

The future of the western lifestyle is not predictable because society is changing rapidly. Jo Angela has worries but remains optimistic. Tony said once that not living on the ranch will be the end of Jo Angela. I concede. Like many other ranchers, Jo Angela’s life grows out of the land and is defined by the land. Who knows what the future will bring for her descendants?

The first rough cut of *My Land, My Life* was done on March. I decided to open the film with a long shot of Jo Angela riding her horse. Her figure is blocked by some trees of cactus in the foreground at the first few seconds, but she finally emerges on the screen. In my opinion, this image has a mysterious quality that draws the audience into Jo Angela’s story. The sequence that follows was structured basically by the topics of interview – work, husband, father, children, environmental problems, and economic challenges. Observational footage is supportive to the voiceover. Three songs of Joni Harm’s are used.

After the third and forth shoot, I began to put together the second rough cut. Three themes that I discussed above come into focus. I got more footage of Jo Angela’s mother and
husband that illustrates the communication between family members, adding more dynamics of the family into the film.

Making a feminist film that departs from dominant cinema must occur not only in content but also in form. Therefore, I put some cinematic “codes” to deconstruct what I did in the first cut. In the beginning and middle of the film, I insert portraits of other women ranchers. If the first rough cut of *My Land, My Life* is like a closed world that might becomes another “cinematic illusion”, the images of other ranch women function as an intrusion of the outside world that awakens the audience from that illusion. It is an indicator of a larger picture of the life of women in America. Jo Angela is only one of them. This kind of deconstructive strategy is “to open up space for active intervention on the part of spectators of the meaning production process” (Kuhn, 1994, 161).

I also added a subhead for the film in the phase of postproduction – “Cowgirl Revisited” because the film presents a different perspective from the classic Western movies that imposes stereotyped images of women ranchers. The film strives to negotiate an alternative identity which speaks true for them.

In the opening scene, Jo Angela introduces herself to the audience with the handwriting-style subtitles in first person. She introduces her families in this way, too. The subtitles support the film’s overall first-person narrative.
EVALUATION OF COMPLETED WORK

Pre-Production

The pre-production of My Land, My Life is a long process which started in the fall of 2009. Social connection plays an important role here. I talked with Dr. Grace Bascope in the Department of Anthropology and she introduced me to several friends of hers who are involved in the environmental and cultural study in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. I took my first trip with them to the Crosswind Ranch belonging to Professor Joyce Gibson Roach who later became a member of my thesis committee. One of Dr. Bascope’s friends planned a trip to Amarillo where she hosted a workshop. Learning that Amarillo is a legendary place in the American West, I decided to go with her. It was on this trip that I got to know Jo Angela and the Frying Pan Ranch.

Although I only visited Jo Angela for one or two hours during that trip, I got a sense that she would be an excellent social subject for a documentary film about the American cowgirl. She was very comfortable facing the camera and liked to share her experiences. Most importantly, she is a typical ranch woman: she belongs to the working class, was born and grew up on open range, has been working as a cowhand since an early age. She still lives and will probably die on the same ranch. I did not begin to work with Jo Angela immediately because it was financially difficult for me at that time; but her image stuck in my mind.

As soon as I decided to pursue my interest on another Texas ranch, Jo Angela was the first person I thought of. There were also several other ranch women I wanted to work with. But I finally made the decision that the film would only focus on Jo Angela and her family because she is a perfect example to carry my intention on film. In addition, the film is
basically a personal portrait. Within a certain time limit, one main character has a better chance to be well developed.

Besides choosing a good social subject for the film, I read and watched many movies about cowgirls and the American West. The National Cowgirl Museum was another place to find information.

The pre-production would have been easier if I could have gone to Amarillo and talked to Jo Angela in person before the production phase began. I found out many things that I did not know about her during the shoot. For example, I did not realize how much influence Jo Angela’s father had exerted on her and her sister until the first interview. I always imagined that it was her mother who taught her to be a cowgirl and was her role model. The fact is that Jo Angela’s father was a real pioneer in that he brought little girls to work for roundups during 1960s and 1970s, which was not common at all. There is an important scene in the film when Jo Angela talks about the last days of her father – a real cowboy who “loves his job everyday” (Jo Angela, interview). While the film is about Jo Angela, I decide to convey the idea that the spirit of the American West has been connecting generations of ranch people. So the family dynamics finally come into focus after the second shoot. I would have been prepared better if I had spent more time to talk with Jo Angela about her family during the pre-production phase.

Production

The production of *My Land, My Life* went very well except that one important shoot was cancelled due to an emergency involving Jo Angela’s mother. Hanny Lee helped me with
the shoot of cowgirl video portrait and the first interview with Jo Angela; Fredrick Dent did all the still photographs. I shot the rest of the footage.

The shoots were hard, at the same time, exciting. In order to follow Jo Angela’s work on the ranch, I needed to get up before sunrise during winter. Sometimes I was stuck in a sand storm under the baking sun. The open range of Texas showed me its enduring qualities and connection to the past. I roamed a canyon with Jo Angela, picked up the arrow heads that were used by Indians twelve hundreds years ago, wondering what kind of eyes might have stared at it. I watched the sunsets, magnificent as in the old days, starry skies, the red rocks. I got the chance to experience another way of living, shared the happy moments and emotions with a big family. To me, making a film is not a terminal goal. It is a life extension. I was eager to experience, to feel, with my whole physical body, mind and spirit, the existence of human beings in a world and culture not my own – the act of being human that binds us together on the planet.

Post-Production

With the three themes in my mind, the second rough cut of My Land, My Life was more focused. Several irrelevant sequences are left out. More important ones are added. I also replaced the songs with a guitar solo since the songs are competing with Jo Angela’s narrative. The running time is cut to 20 minutes due to having only one character.

In the final cut of the film, the episodes that reflect the three themes are fabricated together smoothly. Ranch work, daily life, leisure time with families constitutes the majority of the film; the first-person narrative of Jo Angela recounts her stories. A few episodes from
outside Jo Angela’s world, such as black and white pictures of other ranch women, black and white shots of other ranch women competing in the rodeo function as an “intruder” that constantly remind the audience that this is a film, a cinematic illusion produced by a filmmaker.

Fast cuts appear when a series of shot of women ranchers competing in a rodeo are put together. This is another important aspect of ranch life – harsh, intense and physically challenged. The fast tempo communicates these feelings to the audience.

One of the examples of collage appears in a scene when Jo Angela and her family have dinner together. The first shot shows an empty dinner table; in the following shot, the table is surrounded by Jo Angela’s family. This kind of collage has something to say about what a family is.

Sound correction is an important part for post-production. Since most scenes are shot outdoors with a wireless microphone or a shotgun microphone and no mixer was used, the ambient sound is a problem when voiceover is used. So I use the software of Soundtrack Pro to mix the sound tracks.
APPENDIX A

PRODUCTION SCHEDULE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 1, 2011</td>
<td>Cowgirl Showdeo in Hill Country State Natural Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 22, 2011</td>
<td>First sit-down interview with Jo Angela</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 25-27, 2011</td>
<td>Daily ranch work</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 26-29, 2011</td>
<td>Ranch work and family life, second sit-down interview with Jo Angela</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 22-25, 2011</td>
<td>Roundup, Jo Angela and her mother planting flowers</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 7-9, 2011</td>
<td>Cowboy Picnic</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 4-6, 2011</td>
<td>Cowgirl Rodeo</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX B

PRODUCTION BUDGET
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>Time/Amount Required</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>In-kind</th>
<th>Funds Requested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Above The Line</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producer/Director</td>
<td>$150/day</td>
<td>Throughout the Production</td>
<td>$18,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Pre-production</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$18,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Below The Line</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Camera Operator</td>
<td>$150/10hrs. day</td>
<td>20 days</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second camera</td>
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<td>Camera Package Rental</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sound Recordist</td>
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<td>Audio Gear Rental</td>
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<td>Grip and Lighting Package</td>
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<tr>
<td>Still Photography</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Travel and Living</strong></td>
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<td>Vehicle Rental</td>
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<td>Meals</td>
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<td>Editorial</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Music</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Composer</td>
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<td><strong>Stocks</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 X 4 TB</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Total Below the Line</td>
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<td>Total Production Cost</td>
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APPENDIX C

POST-PRODUCTION SCHEDULE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 3-7, 2011</td>
<td>Logging of footage and review</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 15-19, 2011</td>
<td>Rough cut #1</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 30, 2011</td>
<td>Music recording</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 23-27, 2011</td>
<td>Rough cut #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 8, 2011</td>
<td>Rough cut #3</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 17, 2011</td>
<td>Fine cut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 6, 2011</td>
<td>Final cut</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX D

DISTRIBUTION OUTLET
Film Festivals

Documentary
Big Sky Documentary Film festival
Hot Docs
Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival
Real to Reel
Next Frame

Local
Austin Film Festival
Dallas Video Festival
Desert Reel Film Festival
Lone Star Film Festival
SXSW Film Festival
Thin Line Film Festival

Women and International
Beijing International Movie Festival
International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam
Boston International Women's Day Film Festival
Brilliant Light International Film Festival of Los Angeles
MadCat Women’s International Film Festival
The Baltimore Women's Film Festival
Women's Film Institute Shorts Tour

Broadcasters
America’s Best Student Shorts
Texas PBS stations
WORKS CITED


