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Degree: Bjourn 4

Name of Course: Television specialisation

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Title of essay assignment:

Write a critical analysis concerning your production of your 10 minute
documentary.

I hereby declare that this essay is my own work. I have acknowledged all other authors'
ideas and referenced direct quotations from their work. I have not allowed anyone else
to borrow or copy my work.

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          Jans (C.J.) de Jager   Date

The social documentary "A Hard Day's Night" is centred around bucket toilet system and the workers who service it in Grahamstown within a national context of issues around it. To analyse its representation it is necessary to consider the text from different angles (or theories). Firstly the author looks at it in terms of the genre of investigative journalism. Secondly the research methodology is evaluated. Thirdly the production of the script for the documentary is considered. Lastly the production is analysed in terms of critical film theories to place it within a framework of preceding criticism and then analysed in terms of concepts of discourse and ideology.

"A hard day's night" (De Jager et al 2007), focuses on the bucket workers who provide sanitary service to areas in Grahamstown that do not have built drainage systems (flushing toilets) or pit latrines (outhouses constructed over dug out holes). These workers are stigmatised by the communities they serve and named "Amabucha", the toilet workers. When setting out to produce the documentary Shot Productions came across the original story idea (or primary text) through a photographer who captured the night-time work in a series of photographs (Rees 2006) with quotes from the workers. Many of the quotes complained about the filthy work ("Now you must stay even if you finish the job. You must stay in this smell for 8 hours."), their ostracisation from the community ("if you go to a social dance some they don't like you [sic]. They say you are Bhaca. You carry shit…"), and their treatment as workers ("It spills on your face and body and make [sic] you sick; There is no treatment for us; no doctor.").

To produce a competent investigative documentary the producer must make use of an array of basic tools. In their "Basic Tools for Investigative Journalists", Ray Joseph and Derek Luyt (2007) discuss three areas of important consideration in such a production: the basis for further investigation (Joseph & Luyt 2007:1), sources and leads (Joseph & Luyt 2007:2), and the interview (Joseph & Luyt 2007:8). Our story was referred to us by our executive producer concerning the social stigmatisation of the bucket workers because of their degrading work, referring specifically to a photographer (Rob Rees) who captured their work on camera to present their plight to other municipal workers around the country. After speaking to another source about the bucket workers (local municipal councillor Mike Whisson) we felt that there was indeed a story and the ability to capture their work on camera would be instrumental to demonstrate the issue visually. When selecting our sources we decided that the bucket system was degrading and should have been eradicated by the local municipality a long time ago and there were speculation by Rob Rees whether enough safety equipment and health check-ups

were provided. As such we needed someone to represent the council (eradication co-ordinater Phakama Booi), to represent the workers (bucket worker Boyisiswe), to represent their union (provincial co-ordinator for the South African Municipal Workers' Union Tenten Dyalivani), to show how the bucket system works (bucket truck driver Speerman). Other sources that the production uses include an on-going study of bucket workers in Cape Town (for national focus) and online news articles. In terms of interviews we used a social survey style of research which will be discussed next. People who could not speak English were interviewed in their home language in order to make them feel at home.

When conducting interviews we worked with hypotheses that informed our questions in regard to specific interview subjects and specific theoretical concepts of the story we were following. A hypothesis is "a specific statement about the research that can be tested using *empirical* data" ("Social Surveys" 2007:105). For the story our hypotheses included ideas about the bucket workers such as that they do degrading work and are treated badly by the community. This in turn informed our operationalisation of the concepts into "something that you can define and *measure* in practice" ("Social Surveys" 2007:105) through our questions. As such this concept was investigated thoroughly in all the involved subjects by asking about specific cases of demeaning treatment. In terms of specific subjects the example of Mike Whisson demonstrates a hypothesis in terms of position. Mike Whisson has been a Makana Municipality councillor for more than seven years and as such our questions related to his working experience of the Makana Council's decisions and experiences.

This type of research is indeed highly valuable, but only when it can be applied effectively to film representation. It is intended for social science research and applying it to film requires an understanding to how it is to be applied. When asking questions during a recorded interview it will be used in the final production and it is related specifically to the source that you are interviewing. If you were doing research for a documentary then it might be of value to have a linear set of questions that could be given to a series of participants to get a quantitative result on your hypothesis. But when interviewing people for a film the value in seeing your questions as operationalisation of a hypothesis lies in tying in together your intended direction of inquiry together with the parts that make it up. In a documentary, then, you are dealing with the characters and events that portray your story.

In starting out with planning the documentary the initial script was limited to a treatment based on what was known at that stage before any in-depth interviews. This is in line with observational or direct cinema which Marre Delofski (2007:1) describes as "a rupture with the concept of pre-visualising the 'real' and, by default, the documentary screenplay." The documentary can also be described largely as an "improvisation" (Delofski 2007:3) which shows on its volatile and constantly developing nature. The term for authoring the film might be called a "hybridised authorship" (Delofski 2007:3) which shows on the limiting of creative writing in documentaries as opposed to having the dialogue written by the subjects in their speech along the way.

When considering the writing procedure in "A Hard Day's Night" it is definitely true that there was no clear script to start the project with. We started with a journalistic basis for investigation and developed our selection of sources and direction of question on the way. Instead of "pre-visualising" the story we only felt the need to construct a script when nearing the editing stage to create a coherent narrative through voice-over and quote-selection, and to decide what was missing from the story. After determining our basis for research we were basically improvising the story based on what the sources were telling us and where we felt the story was heading. We allowed the sources to construct the parts of the documentary that we would finally add together in a process of hybridised authorship.

It is possible to discuss the film in terms of various film theories. According to Pieter Fourie (2004:198), expressionist film theory argues that "film, like all art, should introduce structure and order into the chaos and meaninglessness of the world around us." The documentary aims to make sense of a subject that is almost entirely hidden from the view of the public and as such a terrain of much contention and disorder. By giving the stakeholder in the story to voice their concerns within a framework of issues the viewer can start to make sense of the story. Formalist film theory contends that "film should not merely imitate events as they occur in real life, but should produce an expressionistically edited version of nature and reality," (Fourie 2004:200). The documentary contains the subjectivities of the film-makers and can thus be said to make commentary on the reality of the bucket workers. Realist film theory favours "film that reproduces reality undiluted, *imitating* it as closely as possible," (Fourie 2004:206). While no objective truth can ever be found for any story, the film-makers on the

documentary try to give as many sides of the story as possible in order to portray it as thoroughly as possible.

For "A Hard Day's Night" elements of expressionism, formalism and realism made up the final product. The documentary was expressionist in that it attempted to portray the wide variety of often conflicting opinions from different subjects into a coherent whole. We did not want to merely represent reality but also apply our critical journalistic opinion on the sources' dialogue and investigate their truth. Lastly it can be said that we attempted to portray the characters fairly and as real as our knowledge of the context of the story allowed us.

In the world of language there is a vast amount of speech and text that is produced continuously by millions of people. Most text is enunciated but then instantly forgotten, but occasionally it is remembered and ritualised as "primary text" (Foucault 1971:57). Primary texts are accepted truth and is somehow considered magical and of high worth when compared to other texts. In journalism these primary texts influence the way knowledge is constructed through what is considered to be true. All texts derivative or critical of the primary text is "commentary" (Foucault 1971:57) on it and of less importance. While it may reinforce the primary text by pointing to previously hidden meanings, it is always "mere recitation" (Foucault 1971:58) of the primary text and thus limited by it. Another form of limitation is the scientific establishment of "disciplines" (Foucault 1971:59) which are directions of thought which knowledge is limited through confines in research, as opposed to a "science" which embraces all possible truths. Disciplines end up being a "control over the production of discourse" (Foucault 1971:61) by accepting without question some undeniable truths with which all research findings must comply.

In the group's attempt to create a documentary film on the subject we realised that our research direction was continually being dominated by the issues of the primary text and that our documentary was becoming a commentary on Rees's photographs. This became clear when we found that some of the presuppositions that had been made about the workers had been vehemently opposed by the municipal sources. One source, bucket co-ordinator Barend Mentoor, refused to speak to us without a go-ahead from his SAMWU (South African Municipal Workers' Union) co-ordinator. Claims by the workers to Rees such as that they received no medical support and were not given enough protective equipment became complicated when offered to municipal officials. It was claimed that medical check-ups were given every six months and that workers

preferred not to wear their equipment to make their work easier. The primary text had locked the documentary into a discipline of pre-considered ideas about the subject and by entering into its discourse we were being obligated to investigate these claims from both sides.

What is intriguing about the group of bucket workers in "A hard day's night" is that they are ascribed this work by virtue of living in the area of Mount Frere and Mzimkulu. During Apartheid-time discourse different types of work was ascribed to what was then seen to be different ethnic groups. As such Xhosa's are given office work, Shongaan are given security work, and Sesotho are made to do hard labour. According to the spokesperson for the South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU), Tenten Dyalivani (and many other interview subjects and one of the workers themselves), this makes up part of these groups identification and he stresses that the bucket workers indeed like the job that they are given. This division of labour inscribed to the workers would have happened through what Louis Althusser calls "Ideological State Apparatuses" (Althusser 1994:110) which are institutions of the state which contain discourses on what is right and proper. Through the process of "interpellation" (Althusser 1994:128) the workers have been subjectified to the state and given roles to fulfil.

By critically analysing the documentary piece it is possible to see how we, as documentary film-makers, unintentionally enter our work into many oeuvres of films which can inform our work with our knowledge or without. We can mimic these styles or try to avoid entering into them entirely, but by simply being conscious of them allows us a critical eye on our own work.

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