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Critical analysis and self reflexive report on 2<sup>nd</sup> term production

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

Date:

25/05/07

Signed:



A hard day's night is a ten minute documentary that looks at the bucket system- a form of sewage disposal that the South African government claims will soon be a thing of the past and a form of sanitation which many South Africans are unaware still exists in this country. By revealing the nature of this system, the documentary explores the hazardous life of a sewage worker and by touching on the Makana Municipality's maladministration, consequently questions whether flushing toilets will actually become a reality for the 15, 3 million people nationwide without basic sanitation services.

In attempting to critically analyze our ten minute documentary I must be honest by stating that I am still in the process of trying to understand and digest what has been said about it, the criticism and feedback it has received not just over the course of this final week but over the entire period that we have spent making it. Whilst trying to do this, I have tried to use (perhaps what some may argue as the very) little knowledge I have accumulated in the years I have been engaging with this medium to objectively criticize our documentary and rationally defend the piece. I am unsure if complete objectivity is possible, but perhaps there is truth when **George A. Romero** states:

*'There are so many factors when you think of your own films. You think of the people you worked on it with, and somehow forget the movie. You can't forgive the movie for a long time. It takes a few years to look at it with any objectivity and forgive its flaws'.*

Even in attempting to be objective there remain several aspects of the criticism that I fail to understand and thus cannot agree with. We received an 'F' for our technical work. I am aware that certain slip ups made our entire group falter when we chose to shoot certain things even though we were not entirely happy with what the shots looked like. This should not have happened at all. Yet from my understanding, (and I could possibly be wrong), to say that our piece is technically bad and would have to be redone means that every technical aspect of the piece was not up to scratch.

Whereas I do not dispute the fact that our piece had technical errors that could've been avoided, I find it difficult to accept the generalisation that the entire piece was a write-off. I would have liked the piece to be viewed in its entirety and hence I believe this would have led to more constructive criticism which ultimately would have been more fruitful, beneficial and conducive to growth. The deciding factor for the 'F' seemed to revolve around an isolated technical fault and this gave us the impression that everything else didn't matter. A critiquing approach similar to the one employed

in the viewing of our rushes would have helped us in the long run.

The feedback we did receive I can partly agree with. I agree that the telephonic interview could have been more stylistically appealing. We were fully aware that a telephonic interview requires a mug shot of the interviewee and did everything possible to get Mr Henwood to send us a picture of himself. He was informed after the interview had taken place and was reminded everyday after that of the necessity of his photo. After contacting him again on Sunday night and still having not received his picture on Monday morning we resorted to other measures such as the internet for possible images and after having no luck, we had to resort to simply using titles for him. Therefore to be told during the grading that we did not try hard enough is not true.

I acknowledge that given the opportunity we would redo the case study interview this time ensuring a clean lens and ensuring the picture is not overblown. I am aware that we were short of cutaways therefore I also agree that this lack of visuals took away from the piece and didn't allow the viewer to get a true sense of the life of our case study.

Some of our shots were shaky; here I'm specifically referring to the shots in the beginning- the headlines. This could have been avoided by using a tripod and to be penalized for this is fair.

We have stated that it was not a conscious decision to not interview the men when we followed them during their early morning shift. The bucket system has been described as dehumanising and demoralising for the people who use it. I felt it would be derogatory to point a camera in the face of a sewage worker asking how it feels to do such work when the nature of the type of work they do is self-explanatory. I feel that we as filmmakers need to represent members of a culture with sensitivity to their own ideas of identity. Looking back, I do feel that we could have explored different ways of probing deeper into the sewage worker's life because symbolically, even our choice of shots which were mainly medium shots and not intimate, did very little in bringing the subject closer to the viewer.

Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) stated that 'ethics is nothing else than reverence for life'. Therefore as much as journalists claim that there is dignity in telling people's stories, what many fail to recognize is that in telling people's stories, the manner in which we choose to approach the stories already reflects a certain standpoint and whilst it may not be obvious, our choices perpetuate certain stereotypes and continue



the cycle of classifying people. Thus in the case of the bucket workers, I personally did not want the viewer to pity the workers but rather to be made aware that some things really haven't changed for some people in this country because the people who were previously/historically disadvantaged are in many ways still disadvantaged. Conceptually, I think that our ideas changed a great deal and in the end the piece didn't look as good as it did on our editing script. Although the piece flowed, was cohesive and understandable, it did lack creativity and did deserve a 'C'.

I am also in agreement of the 'C' for our interpersonal skills because for the first time we had major conflict and tension during the shoots. This conflict did affect us and the end product because it was never really resolved, everyone would just shrug it off and not confront it head on. The conflict was not a result of personality clashes but a result of a lack of the ability to make effective decisions. I was also at fault because I chose not to get involved and left it up to the two group members who were arguing to sort it out. I have learnt from this though that in order to ensure we make a success of the assignment we are working on, we need to all handle conflict, resolve it and move on.

Doing the documentary brought up a range of issues and questions such as:

- Where do we as journalists draw the line between getting a story and intruding, invading or disrupting people's lives?
- Are the people in our stories merely subjects or tools that aid us in meeting our deadline?

After giving this some thought I have come to the realization that we as filmmakers need to respect the subjects of our productions as independent social actors. I agree with Bill Nichols in his *'Introduction to Documentary'* when he states that 'people are not merely convenient raw material for our filmmaking needs'.

Out of the six types of documentary modes, these ten minute documentaries we have done reflect the expository mode because they speak directly to the viewer through authoritative commentary by using voiceovers or titles. Bill Nichols in his *'Introduction to Documentary'* explains that the images in such documentaries illustrate the verbal commentary which builds a sense of dramatic involvement around a need for a solution to a problem. Our documentary though, does not fit the criteria of an investigative documentary. Derek Luyt in today's production stated that the piece falls into the category of a good human interest story because it failed to answer

the question of why the Eastern Cape, especially the Makana Municipality was behind in servicing toilets. Therefore, in retrospect, there were things we could have done differently to make it more investigative but didn't follow due to time constraints. There were possible angles that came up during the course of doing this documentary that would have been worth following. For example, it would have been interesting to explore the angle of dying workers and municipalities who still do not provide sewage workers with equipment. We also failed to probe deeper into what our case study mentioned-that as hazardous as the work they do is, they still refuse to wear protective masks simply because it means getting the job done quicker.

Next time I think we will definitely not settle for anything that we know is beyond standard. I also think that we need to strive to work to finish our piece a few days in advance so as to create distance from the piece and to then be able to go back to watch the piece to be able to pick up faults that we were not aware of before. On Saturday afternoon when we had our first viewing session we were forced to restructure our entire piece due to a fault that wasn't entirely our own. There was a misunderstanding in what was said during the feedback from our editing script. Due to the fact that we were now pressed for time the piece had to be rushed to meet the deadline. Having a member of our group away though did not particularly put a strain on us. There was never a time when either one of us said something to the effect of 'I wish we had Jans to help us'. If anything, it forced Amanda and me to lean on each other's knowledge. It also meant that we were both actively involved in the editing process because we both took turns at editing.

We assigned roles in the beginning whereby Jans was director, Amanda the editor and me as producer. These are just formalities though because in every project we've done everyone does a bit of everything. No specific job is strictly assigned to someone. This has worked thus far because it also spreads the work and perhaps doesn't put pressure on anyone specific person but maybe we need to start acting like we are in the industry and assign roles properly as this would make each of us take accountability should the job not be well done.

As mentioned above, the work was equally distributed therefore everyone took down minutes, phoned sources to set up interviews, did the camera work, monitored sound, took charge if they felt that something needed to be done to improve during the process of shooting and so forth.

I did the majority of the interviews this time around. I had the responsibility of



translating questions into Xhosa and acquainting myself with our interviewees simply because I am the only person in the group who can vaguely understand and speak a little bit of Xhosa. This I found to be irritating because I became a token and my group members at times took very little initiative to get to know our sources. Yet at the same time, my people skills were put to the test and were deepened during this process of interacting with the greater Grahamstown community. I also was forced to practice being assertive with certain community members who simply wanted to be interviewed just to be in front of the camera. Therefore I learnt how to deal with people in a tactful way.

Overall, our work took a dive during this assignment but we are optimistic because we have a great deal to build on from the experience we have had from making this piece.