

Critical Analyses

(Bryce McNamara)

The final product "Dying to Live" attempts to explore the controversial issue of 'defaulting' on Antiretroviral medication. The piece provides the grounding information necessary in order to understand this problem, and then proceeds to gain numerous opinions surrounding this issue. Sandile (one of the main personalities throughout the piece) then takes the crew on a journey through the Grahamstown township in order to reveal the poor living circumstances that often result in people defaulting on their ARV medication in order to ensure that they are still eligible to receive a government grant.

The piece opens with shots of the township and provides a setting for the Jabez Centre as it is introduced in the voice over. In the background we chose to use a clip of a song about ARVs sung by a group of women at the Jabez Centre. Although I enjoy the introduction, I regret that the camera at the time had specs of dirt on the lens that we were not able to clean off. This dirt is apparent in the introduction and during several shots throughout the piece. The title shot "Dying to Live" is one of my favourite instances of the piece. The shot of the two women is most effective in its apparent sadness and its aesthetic beauty.

The piece then goes straight into a moment of dialogue between a crew member and one of the people (Mavis) at the centre. This reiterates the issue from a personal perspective and stands well in the introduction of the piece. It thus provides the lead-in for the first interview surrounding the topic of defaulting. The two main introductory interviews with Sandile and Yoliswe are essential, and work well, in establishing the fact that people do indeed default on ARVs for the grant. What then follows is a sequence of people refusing to acknowledge that anybody that they knew did this. The total refusal to entertain the idea almost seems to imply that they are not being entirely honest (which is an opinion that I still hold). I feel that this was conveyed during the piece and was highlighted with interviews from people such as Jabu and Sandile that have worked with HIV/AIDS for many years.

The piece then proceeds to highlight the stigma surrounding the abuse of ARVs and covers reasons as to why people will not talk about the issue openly (let alone in front of a camera). Annelie "Jabu" van Niekerk is introduced at this point, and once again she reiterates that she personally comes across one or two defaulters

every month. During Jabu's voice over I feel that the footage of Xoliswe (an employee at the Raphael Centre) showing the ARV medication and then taking the medication, works very well, and is essential in showing those watching the show what the medication actually looks like and how many different forms of tablets are involved in the daily process of treatment.

What follows is the beginning a journey into the heart of the township, in order to talk to people on ARVs and also to reveal the absolute poverty surrounding many living with HIV/AIDS. I feel that this journey brings more excitement to the piece and detracts from the 'talking heads' feel, as it involves going on-foot into the very living space of people and documenting this process throughout on camera. Sandile becomes the central personality in terms of carrying the narrative of the piece from this point up until the end of the documentary. He begins by showing us the dilapidated conditions in which he himself lives. The eroded mud houses and the poor toilet systems show expose the circumstances in which many people with HIV/AIDS have to live. Sandile explains that the circumstances are not conducive to work and often result in people not being employed.

We then talk to Sandile's ex-girlfriend who discusses her personal views on ARVs and the government grant. The piece then leads into the final key interview. While driving in the car, Sandile explains that we are going to visit a woman that has defaulted on her ARVs for a while. Her name is Notutu Matini. A fade to black is used after this car scene, in order to soften the sounds of the road and to highlight the severity of Notutu's condition when she is shown in the next shot. The point of showing that Notutu is in a very poor state as a person suffering from HIV/AIDS allows one to sympathise with her in being refused ARV treatment. This highlights a key problem in the ARV system, one that goes back to the administrative procedures used. Sandile has a final word as he looks at Notutu and explains how unfair her situation is (her struggle to get ARVs). Thus, the story goes from attempting to show how people default on ARVs for the grant, to revealing that sometimes people have no choice but to default. Annelie has the last word from an authoritative point of view on the shortcomings of the administrative mechanisms of the ARV rollout system. The documentary then fades into a group of women singing a song of prayer, until the documentary fades out to black. I feel the ending is effective in that it reveals that this is a major issue that lacks any current resolution. The ending leaves one in suspense to some degree and portrays the solidarity of the group of women at the Jabez Centre as a symbol of hope for the future.

In terms of aspect of the piece that could improve, I would definitely say that the sound could do with more work. Although, granted, many of the shots were on foot and utilized the camera mic, perhaps replacing the camera mic with a more directional radio mic would improve the quality of those particular shots. For the next documentary I would like to use the lapel mics to a greater extent. I feel that those will probably eliminate more of the background sound that we experienced with some of the interviews while using the rifle mic.

In future I would also pay more attention to the focusing of shots (although our camera was providing us with problems in this regard), as well as using the tripod to a greater extent – although we often did not have time and were required to use only the camera on certain shoots. In terms of the overall voiceover, I feel that it worked very well. Palesa's voice complemented the story very well and sympathized with each scenario. It was also central to the piece in terms of carrying the narrative and linking certain ideas. This was important, given the fluctuation of our narrative as the story's major angle shifted during the filming process as new information was discovered.

