

## A Self-Reflexive Analysis of Max White Investigates...

The brief for our individual project was simply to produce a 5 minute piece on any topic we could imagine, in any style or form we desired. The scope for imagination and creativity were endless. Another benefit of the project was that it allowed for fine-tuning of showreels to cater for specific career development.

I chose to work on the Max White project as it was a relatively light-hearted way of approaching a serious topic. The Angelo Fick course on 'Race, Representation and Ethics' revealed many biases that exist within mainstream media and made me think more critically about what 'norms' were commonly portrayed on the television I liked to watch. Not surprisingly the common element within most of my preferences was that the humor and meaning created would usually serve to idealise certain standards of living. I thought that parodying these standards of 'macho' male figures would be a fun way of looking at how the influence of 'whiteness' operates within the media.

The use of 'emo kids' as a figure of ridicule was a fairly easy choice. They are a community that purposefully seeks to alienate themselves from the mainstream society I sought to portray and acted as a binary opposite to my 'norms.' 'Emo' as a subculture is a fairly recent phenomena which has been lampooned and parodied in recent times, for a variety of reasons and the way it operates outside of mainstream cultures typical practices. Another important facet is that very few people will describe themselves as 'emo' – it is a label applied arbitrarily by others to create stereotypes. Thus I felt the piece would be able to work as a parody with satirical overtures, as it would point out the ridiculous notions of privileging certain social groups through representation at the expense of others. Unfortunately, I don't feel I quite managed to reach the potential of my idea for a variety of reasons.

I began my project with a fairly comprehensive proposal which could, in essence, have acted almost exactly as script. My shooting schedule began ahead of schedule, and I felt I began on the right foot by filming most of my intro montage early on. I ran into problems in my early interviews, when I realized I wouldn't be able to make sarcastic quips back to subject being interviewed. This was a result of the directional boom-mike and also my inability to capture the correct tone and mood of the replies. Hence, much of my early interviews weren't of much use and required to be re-shot. My earlier interview with Pete O'Donoghue had to be completely re-shot as the tone and character I hoped he would portray were completely wrong. I soon realized that interviews were not the way to go and began to script small inserts for 'actors' to partake in. This resulted in a bit more success and shooting moved on at a quicker pace.

Another challenge within my piece was with the technical quality of my work. While I feel I managed to provide decent quality audio for most of the piece, there were bits of very poor sound where I hadn't been able to use the XL-1/Boom-mike combination. This was when time had become a major factor and frankly was not a good option. A major problem I ran into was lighting, and the use of the "automatic" mode on the camera. I frequently struggled with the focus and iris on the manual mode and this pressure was compounded by the fact that I was trying to check the sound, the shot and conduct the interview on my own.

This led to certain in-jokes and even entire features to be dropped. There was an entire sequence featuring 'Max' outside Die Taphuijs claiming to go undercover in "the Emo's natural habitat" that didn't materialize due to the shot being too dark to be used. This was unfortunate and would have eventually linked in to a fake-song sequence that in turn had to be dropped.

The song sequence had to be dropped for a variety of reasons. The poor lighting outside the Taphuijs that night and my inability to provide decent vocals to the generic backing track meant that the bit, although it was really funny, had to be dropped. Thus my exasperation with

technical difficulties grew. One of my main problems throughout shooting Max White was struggling with the lighting and technical aspects. Many of the shots appear to be over-exposed and just generally don't feature as I would have liked.

Thus, the vision I had for Max White was definitely hindered by a few simple technical shortcomings which limited my ability to carry out what I had envisaged. Other shortcomings are that there was no clear establishing visual indicator to put a clear idea in the mind of the viewer, what exactly an 'emo' kiss is supposed to look like. A friend who watched commented that he didn't struggle to see what I meant by 'emo kids' but he already had a vast knowledge of the subculture. I still think for someone who didn't know exactly what these kids look like would struggle to exactly know what Max was talking about. Thus, there had to be a lot in the actual content to explain what was meant by 'emo' and I'm fairly confident that the descriptions from Professor Walters and 'Conrad' did a lot to describe what exactly was being criticised.

A lot of the subjects who featured in the piece were acting, who were contrasted with the more dry informational interviews. A few of these came off well, and I was particularly pleased with these efforts as they contributed greatly to the over-the-top, ridiculous nature of the piece. When they didn't come off however, I felt they were very detrimental and confusing to the viewer and even broke the flow of the piece.

The piece felt a bit rushed in the end, and the pace was a bit too helter-skelter. The 5-minute time frame meant that things needed to be concise and time to let the story progress was severely lacking. I think that a piece of this nature would generally be a bit longer and need more time for the film-maker to develop his ideas and build the absurd nature of the parody. Cutting so quickly from one sequence to another did absolutely nothing to develop the style and character of the piece, which I thought ended up being a bit clumsy. One of the funniest features of the piece, the link-ins between various pieces, had to be cut down dramatically due to time

constraints. Whereas, I had originally wanted to have as many as 5 or 6 link-ins, this had to be cut down in the final product as the seconds began to add up.

However, there is still a lot that I'm quite happy with in the piece. I was happy to be able to edit the entire package down by about 2 minutes into the final product. I was disappointed that the song sequence failed to materialize but still managed to make a plan to cover the gap. I thought the contrast between the classical literature version of 'emo' and more modern-day cynical view was more than successful in making up for my lack of punchy quips as it created a contrast between those that would be 'in-the-know' and those who wouldn't.

This piece was my debut in the director/producer role and I didn't feel it was a success. There were many faults and problems that arose during production of Max White and much of the piece remains a disappointment in my mind. However, I was really happy with the conceptualization and creative element of the media that I had envisaged. I felt that the media I had hoped to produce would act as a humorous piece, that still was able to comment on what is a very serious social problem that exists within our society. Unfortunately for a variety of reasons I don't think that meaning was broadcast as clearly as it could have been.