

Graeme Comrie

Self-reflective Essay for Individual Piece

In all honesty, I was rather disappointed with the final individual piece I submitted. It did not look much like what I had envisaged when I first pitched the idea weeks earlier. Also, I am well aware that it is flawed technically. However, I must stress that this is not a reflection of a lack of effort on my part. Rather – in retrospect – I think that I might have perhaps been overambitious and simply bitten off more than I could chew. I had a very steadfast idea of how I wanted the piece to be elaborately introduced and spent a disproportionate amount of time on shooting and editing this part of the piece (possibly, to the eventual neglect of the rest of it). Further, there were various shoots I did (also largely to supplement the start of the piece) that resulted in footage that was simply unusable. In short, I did a lot of shoots (rather ridiculously walking for half an hour a night before deadline to get 2 minutes footage of someone drinking tea), and a lot of editing (unwisely not leaving the building for 24 hours). My effort was not lacking.

However, like I have suggested, my efforts were somewhat misdirected. I had convinced myself that the introduction was most deserving of my attention (probably because it was bound to be the most interesting part of the piece to edit), and the rest of the piece suffered. I struggled to edit the subsequent interviews in a way that was exciting and could sustain itself (largely because of the less than flamboyant nature of the interviewees – but this choice of interviewees was not entirely unconscious). The end result was a disjointedness that I had not foreseen and had definitely not hoped for. I think I have always held a belief that I can rescue almost anything in post-production, but large tracts of my footage were uninspiring and even unusable. And because my approach was to keep gathering footage for as long as possible, I left myself minimal time to peruse it, and thus was forced to include shots that should not have made the cut. I really should have given myself fewer things to shoot and more time to re-shoot them if necessary. Once again, I emphasise that my effort was not lacking, but my time and work management definitely was.

On reflection, I had also been overly stubborn and proud in creating the piece. Where others had asked friends to assist them with their filming, I tried to desperately to keep mine totally individual. I was surprised at how difficult it can be to manage

camera, sound and interviewing (and lighting) all at once in a limited time period, and the quality of my footage suffered as a result. I even did some standuppers by myself – that I discarded because of time constraints and poor sound. If I could start over, I do not think I would attempt this juggling act. At the same time, however, I know that I have learnt a lot from this, and will be more confident in the future.

I also learnt a great deal from working with a new system for the first time as a TV student. It was quite a risk to adopt a new editing suite for my final piece and I must admit that there were times at which I wished I was working with the Premiere Pro that I know very well. As relatively easy as Final Cut Pro is to learn, I still found myself frustrated in trying to do things that are easy with other software (the “colour pass” option for instance). So, ultimately I guess that I gained from teaching myself a new programme, while the final product suffered somewhat. More frustrating was the workstation that I was using, which tended to switch off of its own accord from time to time, or the mouse would die, or the spacebar would act as if it was being held down. On reflection, I think these issues really wore and slowed me down, but I forged onwards.

All in all, I can say that I worked very hard on this piece, but that my focus was sometimes misguided. This was the last of many ideas that I had come up for the individual assignment, and probably the least likely to hold water (thus the “spoof” style of the final product). I had simply felt that while the other ideas I had proposed were maybe more interesting and important, this was something that interested me and was able to allow me a degree of self-reflexivity. Thus, I was able to use voiceover as an important story-telling device, and I think this gave the piece something a bit unique.

It may sound ridiculous, but another problem that hampered me was having my experts not exactly saying what I had hoped they would. Ordinarily, one would obviously work around what the subjects say and reformulate the story. However, this was never intended to be a hard journalistic piece and – as a spoof – I needed to construct a strong opposition between experts disapproving of the obsessive fanaticism and fans who couldn't care less. Thus, I was somewhat frustrated that the experts were very toned down in their analyses and refused to condemn the fans for going over the top. I had to somehow construct this tension, and was not entirely successful (largely due to a lack of useable interview footage).

I found equipment failure to be a huge stumbling block. On a single shoot both a light and the Shure mixer failed within the space of a few minutes. And on last-minute shoots, this tends to become problematic. Once again, I guess the lesson here is about time management. I simply mulled over other ideas for too long, so that I was too stretched when I found a subject that I knew I would enjoy.

I have gained a huge amount of experience and knowledge from this process. I think every one of my skills has grown – from interviewing, to scripting, to shooting to editing. I am simply disappointed that I tended to focus my attentions too broadly – I have definitely shot better footage (when I've been able to focus wholly on camerawork) and have definitely edited better pieces (when I have not been juggling two projects before deadline). But, I now know why my piece fell short where it did and am using this knowledge as ammunition for further projects I pursue. It is merely upsetting to know that I have worked really hard on something that I have wanted to do for a while, only for it not to be how I had always wanted. But, I am learning and have learnt.