

Formal essay "Suspense"

In its conception, "Suspense" was going to explore the motivations and procedures of suspensions piercing. In doing so, it would hopefully demystify mainstream conceptions of the act, where it is often thought of as 'unnatural' or an act of extreme sadomasochism. In addition, the act is visually exhilarating, provided one can suspend disbelief or disgust when actually watching the procedure. It was with this in mind that "Suspense" was crafted; a well lit and almost unbelievable visual hook together with an idea that the narrative would go to the core of what it was like to be up there, hanging by your skin, and why anyone would want to take part in this seemingly 'unnatural' act.

Preparations for the piece began being made in the beginning of May. As suspension piercing is only a small part of what is commonly referred to as body modification, there were surprisingly many sources of information, both online and in South Africa. First a contact list and research into the types of suspensions took place, which resulted in a shooting schedule being in place for the holiday period between the 22nd of June and the 22nd of July. Lots of time was spent preparing the shoots, mainly because of the level of planning involved. Interviews were shot in Cape Town (Jason Macdonald and Lliezel Ellick), Johannesburg (Marisa Noorgergraaf and Paul Collocott) and Port Elizabeth (John Wayne Sive).

Conceptually, the piece's narrative is designed to develop with the process of a suspension, where preparations actually begin to take place at least six to eight weeks before the suspension, which was something the piece had to spend time on to broaden the understanding of the suspension as a whole. The final act is actually two separate themes, namely the multiple piercing and the actual hanging time itself. Finally, in the interview setting they are able to reflect on the key experience that made them do it in the first place, and a

conclusion is then reached. This was the logical way to develop the narrative because it allows the viewer to acquaint themselves with the people who are talking about their experiences. At the same time it opens up a multiplicity of reasons and reactions that each had for participating without initially being distracted by the visual act of the suspension itself.

The piece promises the act of suspension to the viewer in the introduction to the piece, and that promise is fulfilled two thirds through. However, the visuals are balanced out throughout the piece so that the final suspension still catches the viewer's attention and has not been desensitised to the act in the beginning of the piece. In this regard, black and white still visuals were used in the introduction to prepare people for what would follow. From the introduction, colour stills were then introduced to further develop along with the narratives, and by using Motion light templates these stills are revealed fleetingly. In addition, the light templates also added life to the still images, which were provided by the interviewees and were used to illustrate each of their particularly different suspension experiences.

The main subjects of the piece were three people, namely John Wayne 5ive, Paul Collocott and Lliezel Ellick. Representing different demographics equally was always going to be a problem, however the act of suspension is an off shoot of middle class white alternative culture in south Africa, and except for Marisa Noordergraaf, none had performed more than one suspension on anyone who wasn't white. In this regard, Lliezel Ellick was a particularly good find, as women are also less likely to suspend themselves in South Africa, according to the pre-interviews.

The interviews normally took at least half an hour on location, and their sound bites are inter-cut through the narrative to follow the road to the final act of being suspended. Thus their initial fears and reasons for doing it are represented in the beginning of the piece along with the intensive preparation they undertake

before the procedure. By identify the themes within each of their narratives the piece also broadens the understanding of the procedure, and how each of the participants participate for different reasons and have a wide range of dissimilar experiences during the piercing and suspension itself.

Through this wide range of experiences, the interviewees demystify the motivations of their suspensions. In particular, it is their individual feelings about their experiences once they are suspended which expose the gulf between the mainstream idea of pain and self inflicted pain with John Wayne's complete experience of reality while hanging, to Lliezel's boredom and Paul's spiritualistic type experience where "everything just faded away".

In order to space the themes in the narrative, metaphoric visuals were used in concert with particular pieces of music to signal both audibly and visually that a new theme or narrative development is being introduced. These visuals were conceived, in the most part once the initial six-minute narrative had been placed on the timeline. In addition, the music is used to distract the viewer and give them a break from a visual overload, and sets the mood for the next development in the narrative.

However, due to the cutting of one minute a week before deadline, a decision was made to cut all of the contextual history of suspension and the development of suspension techniques and positions. This was because the visuals for this part of the piece were weakest and the narrative was the most boring. As such, Marisa Noordergraaf appears only halfway through the piece, and in general the piercing artists do not fulfil more of a role in the narrative other than to contextualise the alternative nature of the act of suspension and to illustrate that mental strength is vital in dealing with the pain. As such, the piece focuses mainly on personal experience and dealing with the pain.

Production values on the piece are fairly good on the piece, which is due mainly to the long period of

post-production that was afforded after shooting in the holidays. One exception are poor instances of sound, such as the tattoo gun in John Wayne 5ive's interview. In addition his foot is foreground in one interview shot.

At a practical visuals level, there was not enough work done on location after the interviews to ensure enough cutaway for each of the interviewee's, albeit that metaphoric shots still had to be planned. While this is not self evident in the piece due to the stills provided and shoots that were metaphorical recreations of each experience, it should be noted that there is normally not enough time in real world productions to shoot bits and pieces as you conceptualise them during an edit. In any event, certain metaphorical shoots were sacrificed due to time constraints at the end of the production cycle and camera faults.

Certain conventions were also sacrificed during editing, most notably those around titling. Paul's title at the beginning of the piece runs over a cut and most of the titles fade out right before cuts. This was due to the fast nature of the cuts in the piece, which were then slowed by the theme breaks discussed previously.

However, the piece answers the questions of how and why, which were the main questions that the piece hoped to explore in order to demystify the act of suspension itself. The actual act of suspension functions as the visual hook of the piece to good effect, and but for a few niggly technical issues the actual production was completed according to the plan which had been constructed in May this year. As such the piece represents the time that it was afforded to be completed, and captures enough of the depth and meaning of suspension to the people who participate in it.