

Name: Jans de Jager
Student Number: 604d1547
Degree: Bjourn 4

Name of Course: Television specialisation
Lecturer: Paul Hills
Hand in: 10 October 2007
Words: 1 000

Title of essay assignment:

Write a self-reflective report concerning your production of your 5 minute documentary.

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

Jans (C.J.) de Jager

Date

After completing the 5 minute documentary piece the research, production, edit of “trance life” reflects an image of a cycle of life. The film represents the final outcome of an uncertain deliberation over the content and story for the originating assignment. From early beginnings the story of its making showed signs of faltering strength. It was only after changing its study-area that its full potential could be realised. Furthermore it was a growing experience for the individual producer. It has shaped ideas around producing films in the 5-minute format. These ideas relate to where such productions might occur and how they are motivated in terms of remuneration and public exposure.

Many ideas had been considered for the story and during the pitching session held to present story ideas there were three options for the individual piece. The first was related around the social construction of death and dying and to investigate the stigma around HIV and AIDS. During pre-interviews with patients at a hospice in East London the story had taken form around dreams and disability. Some of the patients had talked of dreams where they had of been cured and some of the caretakers had told of dreams of deceased patients. The second was intended to investigate charismatic churches in terms of what contribution they have to the communities around them and to ask whether they are simply capitalist institutions which work by profit-motive. A story in the Daily Dispatch described how one well-known church in East London (River Park Ministries) was the centre of controversy when it refused to return a large donation from a mentally handicapped congregation member who is dependent on a disability grant. A third story was concerned with the system of child maintenance pay for single parents. This was replaced by a story in Fort Beaufort where apparently a big supermarket was taking advantage of its employees by replacing many on a probation cycle of 3 months in order to save costs on additional payments such as unemployment and medical insurance and pension funds. This was apparently happening in conjunction with Labour department inefficiency and inability to register workers, and was causing many to struggling getting access to unemployment grants.

When the first choice story became unfeasible, consideration was put into other options. Despite doing extensive research on thanatology (study of death) and pre-interviews in East London, the patients who I needed to interview refused to talk on camera. This might be because of a fear themselves of death and superstition that they might die during production in order for me to film them. This can only be blamed on me because I had initially approached the story with the intention shooting someone on their deathbeds. While this had turned out to not be necessary because of the wealth of

other stories about dreams, my approach was overtly sensitive to their feelings and I was not assertive enough in getting the interview in the hopes of appearing ethical to my colleagues who criticised me for choosing the story. After this the River Park Ministries stories became an option, but it was scrapped because I felt that I couldn't do anything interesting with the story. At this stage the group film that Shot Productions had to produce also left over stories which could be used for an individual piece. Apart from the Fort Beaufort story, another story set in the Tsitsikamma National Park close to Plettenberg Bay offered an option for the individual piece. A national outcry from scientific and environmental lobbies had caused the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism to re-consider plans to open parts of the Park for fishing for the local community. Shortly after adopting this story as the individual piece, it was decided to rather use it for the group piece because of a serious shortage of other viable options for it.

Following this deliberation a new story had to be found for the individual piece and the consequent struggle was simply to decide how much could be done in 5 minutes. It was decided that an effective solution would be using a narrative that have been developing for a couple of years. It concerns the popular practice of outdoor electronic music festivals which attract large crowds around Cape Town and are characterised by binge drinking and drug abuse. While trying to shape the story the main challenge became trying to fit a cohesive story into 5 minutes. A topic so large and diverse was only complicated more by the difficulty of portraying drug use fairly without promoting it. It is also a story which is generally covered from one of two angles: the anti-drug Oprah Winfrey position which portray subjects as victims of drug dealers; and the promotion video style used by companies and record labels which are music videos with on-location visuals of party-goers and stage decoration. For this individual documentary it was necessary to choose one or circumvent both. Considering the material the piece might fit onto a magazine show but can't be categorised as news. The best category it can fit into is "short documentary" and it might have a future to be shown at film festivals.

Thus the final construction of the story was decided to be based on stories from the party-goers themselves. Instead of becoming judgemental or indulging in visual eye-candy, the piece is aimed at introducing the "trance life" to viewers who have not experienced it. It deals with the issues of drug use, underage experimentation and a common feeling of exploration and escape which is felt by all the interviewees. And so

the production of this piece completes a cycle of rebirth from its deathly beginnings to its final celebration of life.