

FIXED: A STORY OF ADDICTION

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CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Reflecting on our finished product, I feel that while we are content with our production "Fixed", there are still several areas which could be tightened. It took some time before we settled on the idea of producing a documentary focusing solely on drug addiction. The original angle was a focus on Salem Crossroads itself as a sanctuary for recording addicts, however, taking this angle would prove to be highly problematic as the owner and founder of Salem Crossroads farm refused to talk to us on camera. Thus, we decided to focus on two men at the farm, Wayne and Shane, who are both recovering drug addicts. In focusing on two people in such a manner, we felt that the documentary could take an almost comparative approach as it cuts between the dialogue offered by the two men. The third person introduced into the documentary is Prince, the 'drug merchant' whose identity is hidden. We felt that Prince's presence would be vital in representing the 'other side' of addiction, that is, the dealer or provider of the drugs being consumed. What we thought was also interesting and relevant to the documentary was the fact that Prince himself is fighting an ongoing struggle against heroin addiction.

We decided to attempt to create a documentary that veered away from certain documentary filmmaking conventions. For instance, we took the approach of using 'talking heads' almost stylistically throughout the piece. Although this style is broken with space throughout the documentary, we wanted the interviews with the subjects to continually reflect on what the other is saying as well as to elaborate on their own experiences. The documentary is thus about two addicts sharing their experiences and opinions surrounding drug addiction.

Although most of the content is focused around drug addiction, there are spaces in which shots of the two main subjects are not discussing addiction, but are doing other things like preparing food or watering the plants. We also wanted to try and reflect on other activities which the subjects partake in, such as cooking food and watering the plants, in order to show another side of their lives.

Due to the importance of the interview segments, we chose to use several other techniques which we felt would serve to heighten the emotion conveyed with each interview. For instance, one will notice that big close-ups are used throughout the piece. The camera work is also sometime handheld, so many of the shots display movement as well. This is intentional as we also wanted to attempt to capture the feel of the on-the-spot interviews that we were conducting with our two subjects throughout the shooting process. One will also note that there is a lot of quick-cutting throughout the documentary. This is especially noticeable at points where titles introducing the central subjects appear mid-sentence, introduce silence, and then return to what was being said. This quick-cutting technique lends itself to the flow of the piece.

I am very pleased with the quality of sound achieved for the most part of this documentary. Although we did have several technical difficulties regarding the sound setup, we chose to exclude interviews and segments with really poor sound. The importance of using the rifle microphone throughout the shooting became most apparent when we decided to use the camera microphone during one shoot. The sound from that particular shoot was incredibly inferior to the quality of sound achieved on our previous shoots. We chose to abandon that particular footage and to keep the sound constant by using the rifle and boom throughout.

One interesting aspect of our documentary is the use of flowers and plants as metaphors for growth and recovery. Thus, the plants that the people at Salem Crossroads grow and look after reflect their own fragile states as people that need to grow and develop themselves. Close-ups on flowers and plants are also used as a means of breaking the flow of the interviews when some space is required. The fragility of the recovering addict

is reflected quite well by the image of the two dandelions in our piece – one which is full and healthy, the other which is bare and dying.

SELF-REFLECTIVE

As with most of the work produced this year, I feel that we have all contributed equally to the production process as a whole. We did not assign specific roles to each person in the group (editor, director, camera, etc.), instead we naturally adopted these roles as we felt the need. I found myself doing a lot of the camera work, which was quite challenging at times because our camera (after supposedly having been fixed) began to show problems with focusing, regardless of how decent the lighting setup was during a given shoot. I tried a number of possible solutions for the problem and emerged unsuccessful. Many of the interviews that we shot were very on-the-spot and, as a result, we found that many of our shoots were handheld. This was not really problematic in itself, but became problematic when the subject being recorded moved around or walked and talked to us, due to the mixer and rifle microphone being attached to the camera and having to move along with the subject. The problem in this case was that the motion produced a crackling sound that was recorded on the camera, rendering the footage pretty much useless. Luckily this did not happen too often.

The editing process was a group effort. I feel that this worked very well in that we did not rely on one person to make the piece work on a timeline. Instead, we were all present during the editing process and were able to make suggestions as the documentary unraveled itself. We would sometimes take turns editing while other members in the group worked on their individual pieces.

What I found rather difficult was working on this documentary as well as my individual piece simultaneously over the period of (essentially) four weeks. Another problem that I had was the fact that we were not able to use cameras or any equipment during the first two weeks of the term. I had planned shoots for my individual at this time so that I could

get it out of the way sooner and spend more time on the long documentary towards the end of term. This was not at all possible as a result. I do strongly feel that the time period that we had in which to complete these two projects was somewhat insufficient owing to the delaying of the use of equipment for two weeks. This having been said, the project has been completed, however, there are many areas that we would have liked to see develop further.