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Self-reflective Essay for Group Documentary

Once again, each of us filled a number of varied roles during the making of *Fixed*. On most shoots, I found myself in charge of sound (manning the boom microphone, the mixer etc.) But - as always - our roles were fluid, with each of us feeling comfortable to jump in and ask questions during interviews or grab the camera for a shot. This system seemed to work well for the Ferrets - we each knew our own individual role, but we also had enough confidence in one another to interchange roles when the desire struck.

Apart from doing sound (which I thought was quite good actually), I think that I tended to add most value to the group in the conceptual phases of both pre- and post-production. For instance, I devised what I thought should be the main arcs or themes of the piece (hope vs despair, addiction, family relationships etc.) and our entire edit followed these guidelines. Thus, we were able to sort footage into groups and sequences and structure our edit. I also assisted greatly when it came to devising questions for upcoming interviews. I think, because I did a lot of the capturing of our footage, I had an excellent knowledge of what content we had and what content we might still need. So, I played a major role in the conceptualisation of the project.

Like everything else, we interchanged the role of editor. This was probably a good idea, as spending long hours editing meant that when one editor would invariably tire, another could immediately take over. Thus, we all had a hand in the final edit. However, I suppose that this also led to some issues. Sometimes one person would make a change in the editing unbeknownst to the others, and this would lead to unhappiness. We definitely work best when we are all together in the editing suite, as when someone takes over without the knowledge of the others, the rest invariably see problems with what has happened. I tend to think that I have quite a good eye when it comes to what needs to be included and what requires exclusion, and sometimes when someone had edited something in a way which I felt was incorrect, it took time to put right (or wasn't put right at all because of time constraints). However, we largely were all present at every edit, and really feel that this gives us an edge. Four alert minds questioning every editorial decision is a huge improvement on a single editor working alone (as I found with my individual, for instance). Thus, it may have taken us longer to edit minute-by-minute, but I think it was very necessary.

On the subject of time management, I think it is worth mentioning that we might have been overconfident in this regard. When editing our 10-minuter last term, we had been quite confident to do a last-minute shoot on the day before deadline and then stay up all night making sure it was exactly what we wanted. I think we all felt that we would do the same with this piece. However, the pressures of editing the individuals and this piece took their toll, and I don't think any of us were entirely happy with the final product we were forced to submit. We realised too late the huge discrepancy between 10 and 24 minutes and that the latter demands much more time and concentration. Just sitting down and watching the piece through to see where we were (something Bryce and I find particularly important) would obviously use up 24 minutes (and more) of precious time.

Having said this, we did dedicate a huge amount of time to this piece (far more than any of us spent on our individuals). We were fully focused throughout, as we felt this was our major project for the year. Thus, we made many, many trips to Salem Crossroads (also, because we needed to establish a constant presence so as to make our interviewees more comfortable around us). The result was that we probably had too much footage to make editing easy. In the pursuit of excellence, we often re-shot interviews for better footage, but this also served to add to and complicate the piles of footage we already possessed. We even carried out interviews with interviewees who we totally cut out of the final piece (the psychologist, Scott Wood, for instance). Thus, our effort out in the field cannot be questioned, but was not without its flaws.

I honestly think that our biggest problem in making this documentary was our inability to identify with our content. As much as we tried, we simply could not enjoy our subject material. This was in stark contrast to our 10-minute piece, where I feel that we were genuinely interested and genuinely believed that we were making an important piece of documentary. The content simply felt stale. Where in *Dying to Live*, we had cottoned on to a new story with important consequences, *Fixed* was the story of people devoid of hope of a bright future. On previous shoots, we could go out into the field and experience real environments and situations, but in *Fixed* all we could really do was walk around the farm and interview Wayne and Shane. I just feel that we, as students, struggled to identify with middle-aged men trying to re-establish themselves (as opposed to story that affects everyone and the country at large). So while we found our content interesting and important, it just didn't strike a chord with us, and the piece suffered.

Finally, it is worth emphasising our interpersonal relationships throughout the making of this piece, and the year as a whole. I don't think any of the other groups worked as well together as the Ferrets did. Any disagreements we had (and there were very few) were strictly in terms of the piece and its content. We never had any personal disagreements. I think this stemmed from a certain level of maturity we possessed, as well as a basic belief in each other's ability. Being our final assignment for the year, we knew each other's strengths and weaknesses, and were able to tap into them very effectively. Unfortunately, when deadlines loomed, positions had to shift. But, all in all, we were a tight, effective unit who enjoyed each other's company and I think it showed.