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JMS 4 – Television

## **RagingFerrets**

### **CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

We decided to use only three subjects because we had difficulty finding other subjects who were willing to share their stories with us. Addiction is a very serious, intense and compulsive habit which can affect anyone, no matter what profession or culture. Wayne was the first person to agree to talk to us without any inhibitions. Shane was initially reluctant to talk to us but after a short while he agreed to relay his story to us. The subjects that we chose were perfect for the piece because they did not hold back. They were willing to talk about anything and everything regarding their lives, addiction, family and what the future holds for them.

The third subject, Prince the drug merchant, also helped the piece because although he sells drugs, he himself is a drug user who has been to rehab before. Prince was also willing to talk freely, but this only happened after a little persuasion. Having Prince in the piece only took place after a long discussion between the RagingFerrets as there was a bit of reluctance, especially from my side, because there were some moral issues which I felt very strongly about. But for the sake of the group, the piece and being out voted, I decided to let my guard down. This proved to be a good move because Prince gave the piece more substance and real meaning. Even though his speech was not that good, the essence of what he was relaying was a good source of information from a real drug merchant.

We had also decided to use a psychiatrist or counsellor for drug users, as a form of having a voice of authority. However, this did not work for our piece because the psychologist that we interviewed, Mr Scott Wood from Fort England, did not add anything to the piece and he seemed very out of place because of the diction. He contrasted badly with the other subjects because he spoke from a very professional point of view and he was not as subjective as the other subjects in the piece. We then decided

to take him out of the piece totally, as the other subjects could carry the piece by themselves. Thus the piece became about drug addicts.

The setting of the piece was mainly Salem Crossroads, as two of the subjects reside there. Since this was their place of comfort, their little haven, it was only logical to shoot the documentary there. It also helped us to convey the essence of the roles that they play in the centre, such as: Wayne is the cook and Shane works with plants; which is why we introduced them within their roles. The shots of Wayne peeling potatoes, chopping onions and meat, convey a sense of him trying to cut himself away from drugs and addiction; in a sense purging himself of his bad habit, within this rehabilitation centre.

We then had different shots of Shane with shots of plants and cuttings because they in a sense are metaphorical as they relay the sense of starting afresh, growing as a new person. This metaphor is intensified by the shots of Shane watering his plants to which he regards as his babies.

Prince's interview was shot at Bryce's house, by Bryce because that was the only place Prince felt comfortable at. Since he is from Port Elizabeth and he would not have let us into his personal space, Bryce's house was only place we could conduct the interview. We also had to think of protecting his identity, which is why we decided to place him in front of a window. This idea, although it was a good one, sort of worked against us because the plants in the background makes it seem like he is in the same space as our other two subjects. Therefore, it would have been wiser to create some sort of indication that he is from Port Elizabeth or in a different setting. In the same way as we chose to introduce Salem Crossroads at the beginning of the piece.

Since the whole documentary was not set on Salem crossroads and the essence of the documentary was not only to show how bad an addiction is, but how real people living with addiction have chosen to deal with it, we decided to introduce the centre in a short manner with the shot of the car passing by and the sign of Salem Crossroads to show that it is situated outside Grahamstown.

The shots that we used were mainly close-ups as to show the emotion of our subjects clearly. The initial interviews we had with our subjects were quite formal, as they were still warming up to us, but the more we went to Salem, the more they became familiar with us and the interviews became more informal and real; hence the shots of them

carrying on with their daily activities while being interviewed. This gave our documentary an informal and more flexible feel, where one can sense that our subjects were being real and nothing was rehearsed. I feel that we could have, however, had more interesting shots of their daily activities: like spending an entire day at Salem Crossroads in order to see what they get up to during their breaks and how they interact with each other.

Most of the shots were obtained with a hand-held camera, as our subjects moved around a lot. The shakiness of the camera also gives the notion of a "reality show" feel which reflects the reality of the lives of our subjects and how real addiction is; Hence the shots of Shane wearing the orange cap. We decided to let him move his head however he felt because at this stage he was still a bit camera shy and we did not want to impose further than we already had. If that is how he was feeling, then we had to let him feel that way.

In all honesty I think that the sound was relatively good and we tried by all means to get good sound in all the interviews. There is always room for improvement, but we did the best we could.

One might argue that the piece has a lot of talking heads; we tried to go for a different way of making documentaries, as in this case. I think that if we had done this piece in any other way, it would have lost its essence in the sense that the shots that we chose to use encapsulate the emotion behind what is being said and thus the viewer connects more with the person that is speaking. The talking heads also link very well with each other; they form one whole story, with different characters, when put together. In this case this form of our documentary is relevant. Any other format would have been very complicated and confusing for the viewer and for us.