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**Degree:** Bjourn 4  
  
**Name of Course:** Television specialisation  
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**Hand in:** 8 October 2007  
**Words:** 1 600

**Title of essay assignment:**

Write a self-reflective report concerning your production of your 24 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.

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Jans (C.J.) de Jager

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Date

The experience of producing the full-length television documentary “The one that got away” had led me to realise the incredible time-constrained effort that goes into such work. Film and television is such an ethereal and fleeting medium that the hazard which every producer risks is blowing their budget on a directionless script and aesthetically displeasing design. The process requires vast amounts of labour which means many individuals need to work together fulfilling diverse roles. The division of labour results in hierarchies of power which complicates functioning and regularly leads to the creation of a coercive environment of fear and subservience. Terminating this film has exposed all three members of Shot Productions to these concepts and the final result is a product of them.

While every work must conform to some standard, it is expected to contain some level of artistic ingenuity. The standards are grim obstacles which limit this sought ingenuity, and it does this under the banner of maximising the audience and getting returns on investment. It could be argued that the discourse of television journalism perpetuates the inequalities within the socio-economic relations in South Africa. In a television course the initiation of productions is charged to the participants in the form of evaluation of their abilities, but in the industry commission jobs are highly competitive terrain for cut-throat negotiation and the players are always winners and losers. When the opportunity for work presents itself through an agency, broadcaster or studio, there is no space for championing causes or personal bias. Your proposal must be viable and convincing, but also contain a creative zest which will garner common appeal. It must be the product of debate and development. It must work on a timeline.

For Shot Productions the fear was always there that if any risk was to be taken the results could be hazardous. For the previous production, “A hard day’s night”, a heated discussion following the suggestion to drive 30 minutes outside town to shoot an interesting aspect of the work. But this response was the product of seeing the work as a school project which needed to be handed in for work. It is not akin to fostering the work as if it was part of you like a child. One symbol which occurs in pilot episodes and intro jingles of US-based television serials is the new-born child or frying of an egg to herald the start of the production. Immediate examples of these are the bible-bashing science fiction serial Revelations or the exploits of vigilante serial killer Dexter. In Pedro Almodovar’s Live Flesh the birth of a child at the start of the film and one at the end completes the cycle of life which drives the film’s narrative. Whether it is a widespread occurrence or not, the subplot suggests an editorial decision which

proclaims as much an adoration of your trade, just as the flash frame in Disney's Lion King which spelt out "sex" proclaimed the artist's boredom of its subject matter.

A television course is also different from commercial productions in that resources and equipment are rare, and individuals need to fulfil the requirements of many roles under tremendous stress and responsibility. With no formal experience or professional knowledge, the absolute highest performance is expected with no form of remuneration except a mediocre mark. It is a challenge to an individual's character and willingness to perform. For this documentary these demands were made in parallel to finding common ground with your peers. Where in the professional world your peers are regularly enemies on a corporate playing field competing for recognition and promotion, in the academic world your peers need to be conducive to a constructive environment where the simple pleasure of the work is enough for its anti-thesis: productivity.

Shot Productions may then call itself an imaginary production house, but really it is a vehicle to experience the daily challenges of working closely with other people. In this manner choosing roles for its parts were always rudimentary. After trying to set roles in the first production, we always collaborated and filled in each other's shortcomings. By the time of "The one that got away" we had disposed of the idea of "roles" entirely, but mostly by consensus. Just like a vehicle, Shot Productions could take us places. It could teach us things. But just so it also had a driver, someone riding shotgun and someone riding backseats. The seats changing more often than the status of our professional roles, and it broke down more often than when it would work, but it got us where we were going with no shortage of style.

It could easily be excused for a mother to brag about her children, and just so I can admit that I am quite pleased about "The one that got away". From planning its conception to completing the final touches, it was as if I was carrying it with me as if in a womb. I felt it the small changes. The formation of its subtle features. Its simple life. It filled my thoughts. From its microscopic beginnings to its complicated delivery, it was a journey of complete and utter joy. While wanting to share this joy with the world, I don't want to share its shortcomings. I don't want to discuss it or even consider that it exists. It is a part of me. Inadvertently the realisation which presents itself is my dependence on other people for its success. All the people involved. My "crew members" who carried it just as I, the sources who forms its material, and the people who might watch it will all have unforeseeable influences on its outcome.

In spite of the project being a shared operation, the final topic was more my own impetus than the other two members. Despite trying to convince them of the wondrous possibilities which the fishing in the Tsitsikamma story presented itself, the other two members had a shared opinion that a story of school girl abortions in close-by Port Elizabeth would be preferable. It could be said, admittedly ironic, that they had been carrying this story in their wombs as well. Whether by coincidence or not, our access to the hospital was withdrawn by order of the Eastern Cape MEC of Health, and our shortage of valuable sources caused us to terminate it as an option. Despite having the necessary research and contacts for the Tsitsikamma story, a further alternative needed to be found, and I decided to pursue the story for my individual piece. Only after going through another abortion of a story was my idea finally chosen.

After the initial despondency against my idea (despite its immediacy as news, the available option of courtesy accommodation, and the possibility, while remote, of broadcast) it appeared to be the only viable option. It became my mission to convince my co-members of the merits of the story and to instil them with similar excitement for it. It could be said to have been a successful mission, because after arriving at our accommodation one of the members commended me for finding such a great place to stay. During production they were always co-operative, but left me to decide on all the questions, sources and organisation. It is reflexive of a discussion that I had with Amanda about doing stories together that we could be more effective if we were all interested in the story that we were doing and developing it together. They had been shoved into the story as a last resort and had an understandable handicap against the Afrikaans in which most of the sources communicated.

Following the last production we had completed, “A long night’s day”, I had made a resolution to assert my position of director to kindle the narrative into a comprehensible whole. This was particularly an offshoot from the fact that “A long night’s day” was a disappointing piece. Having left for the film festival in Cannes for 2 weeks and leaving the final edit for Lindile and Amanda, I thought that it would be a rite of passage for them to assert their own involvement in the film instead of simply completing it for marks. This intention superbly blew up in my face when they were not able to satisfy our executive producer with the final piece. After this I had decided to revert back to our original ethic which dictated that the most paramount aim for any “production house” is the product. As long as the product is successful, all else is of secondary

importance. It is also an ethic which is concretised in the decided name: Shot Productions.

In South African colloquial speech “shot” means “thank you” and also contains the metaphorical images of a shot in the arm, a gunshot, or a completed camera shot. It reflects the group’s dedication to finalising a scintillating product despite all else. By disposing of our roles from the start, we had attempted to waylay the white hierarchical structure of power which is contained within them. The discursive boundaries which dictate who may pick up a camera, or who may tell that person what to do with it, or who may deal with catering staff, also dictate salaries, who is allowed to speak in the presence of whom, and who’s story is told and remembered. In this way we were able to reconfigure this framework of techno-jargon and discursive arrangement of knowledge that presents itself in the television journalism discourse into a language that we understood ourselves. Having grown up and having studied as part of an increasingly socialist and African society, we’ve needed to transform our working environment to a place where we would be able to contribute as a natural extension of ourselves, as opposed to under the pressure of coercion and fear.