

Partaking in the summer term of Television Production, which spanned over only five weeks was definitely a creative challenge. Being given such a short amount of time to create both a short-length documentary and a drama meant we all had to push ourselves to our creative limits. On the other hand, this also meant that we all had to be fully engaged and committed to the project, which I believe played a big part in achieving successful teamwork and producing content that we are all proud of.

One of the first things we had to do in this module was to assign ourselves a distinct role in the production team, one for the documentary and a different one for the drama. Of course, in a non-professional setting such as this, these roles were somewhat fluid as each person had to take that extra step in order to carry the project through. This role designation however not only organized the group but it also gave us a better idea of each person's strengths and weaknesses within the production process, which was really important as we did not really know each other prior to collaborating on these projects. For both the documentary and the drama I immediately gravitated more towards either the role of the director or the roles most directly connected to the visual aspect of a film; camera and art direction, which were the roles that I ended up taking on for the documentary and the drama respectively. My teammates also agreed with me that I would be better suited for these roles as they had complimented me on my attention to detail and my approach to creating a visual composition, judging from what they had seen during our filming for the viral. In fact, there was an instance where, due to limited natural lighting, all of the team members on set had to hold up a light each which meant there could only be one person behind the camera directing everyone in the way they held the lights in order to get a perfect shot, and my teammates all agreed that they trusted me to do the job, making that a very moving and memorable moment for me.

In the making of our documentary, we had to come up with a topic that would be interesting to research into. However, between the time restraints and the limited locations –we couldn't travel too far off campus carrying all that equipment, and in some areas it may not have been safe to do so either- we had to find the golden ratio between creativity and availability of locations. The topic that we ended up going with was connected to the theme of fire and it was about alcohol and drug addiction as, like fire, once it starts it is all-consuming and hard to put a stop to. After a lot of research, we were able to find a rehabilitation center near campus that allowed us to film. Even though we knew that this topic is not necessarily new or fresh, we felt that having the ability to go and film in the center premises and interview people we didn't know would make for more professional results and would push us out of our comfort zones more so than filming on campus would have. I felt like that was truly achieved as I gained some important skills in terms of knowing how to be friendly yet professional with people that I'm meeting and collaborating with for the first time. It was also really important to manage how to get people to open up and film them in their own personal environment without being intrusive. In accomplishing that, however, I learnt about the importance of establishing a good relationship between the production team and the interviewees, which should go without saying but it really does make a difference. In a way, we got lucky as the managers and the residents of the center were all really welcoming towards us and some of the residents were actually interested in filmmaking themselves so they felt invested in the project.

This sense of feeling invested on the behalf of not only the people behind the cameras but the people being filmed as well was something that I found to be of the utmost importance in the realization of both short films. I believe I made a really good suggestion for an actress for our drama not only because she had experience in performing arts, but also because she was really friendly and managed to immediately fit in well with the production team and take on this project with such enthusiasm, not making us feel like she was doing us a favor but rather like we were sharing the project with her. I felt like she exhibited the exact kind of professionalism that is needed in this field and that there was a lot to learn from her as well. In fact, this whole module has been a big learning curve in terms of the importance of interpersonal skills in this type of a workplace.

Another really important aspect we had to take into consideration when we were filming the documentary was learning to go with the flow of the interview, not interrupting a person when they are opening up and realizing that we can always cut material out but it is better to have more than not have enough. In his book "Writing, Directing, and Producing Documentary Films and Videos" (1990: 3) , Alan Rosenthal writes "*When I gently suggested that a documentary director's main task was listening to people, they thought I was joking.*" In our case, this was really proven to be true as we did end up with a very large amount of material, which made the editing sessions a lot more demanding on our part. Even so, it was worth it for the high quality of the interviews we gathered. Picking and choosing which parts we wanted to use and which not was largely based on the story we wanted to convey and the tone we wanted it to have. We were really inspired by the positive atmosphere of the center and we wanted our piece to carry the same vibe through, as we didn't feel it would have been truthful otherwise. Having that in mind made the editing process a bit easier and certainly more focused. Still, knowing how to make the hard decisions of editing material out without subtracting from the essence of the narrative was a tough but necessary skill to acquire and practice. Looking back at the documentary now, I can see a lot of improvements that could have been made in terms of maybe using more cutaway shots so that the audience could get more of a feel of how the center physically looked like but we chose a big project to take on and I personally feel I've learnt a lot doing it.

Working on both a documentary and a drama, I felt that the biggest difference between the two was the fact that in a documentary the material guides you whereas in a drama you guide the material; you can plan your shots, their order and the overall story. In a documentary you have to stay true to the facts as they are without intervening too much. In other words I feel like I got more creative freedom while shooting the drama. Despite planning our shots, however, we ended up making a few tweaks in the clips we ended up filming compared to those of the original storyboard, as some of the material was the product of good opportunities on set that we hadn't accounted for. For example, our actress didn't have time to do her makeup before filming so she had to do it on set while we were setting up. I saw that as an opportunity and suggested that we film it in case we want to use it later and it ended up fitting in nicely and, in fact, becoming an integral part of our opening sequence. Furthermore, due to some delays in our individual schedules we had to push the time we started filming back. That could have been a major setback, as we needed to set the scene in the daytime. Luckily, however, the sunset that day was beautiful and I saw another

opportunity to use it as the sunrise, which worked out beautifully. Indeed, I learnt how to go with the flow of the set and to take what may have seemed a mistake, make the best out of it and incorporate it into the final piece.

The drama was born off of the interviews we got from the documentary. We decided to go with the theme of how addiction becomes a habit. Kendrick Lamar's music video for his song "God is Gangsta" (2016) inspired us for god is gangsta in the fast paced, frantic manner that it was filmed. Another inspiration was a clip of the film "The Untouchables" (1987) that made use of intense cuts to show emotion and show the progression of the storyline. We decided to have a female protagonist, as the rehabilitation center was an all male one. Finally, our drama's title "Purpose" was derived from one of the interviewees who said that he fell into addiction as he felt he had no purpose in life. We came up with this theme of a double life; a girl with an addiction who manages to put on the façade of a perfectly healthy and functioning student and keeps her addiction a secret. I suggested that we show that contradiction by relying heavily on editing and cutting between shots of the girl at school and then at night, drinking. Following Mamet's style of storytelling, "A succession of images juxtaposed so that the contrast between these images moves the story forward in the mind of the audience." (1991: 2). We wanted to cut between these shots increasingly making the cuts shorter and faster leading to a shot of her on the bed and having the alarm go off, indicating she has to do that all over again the next day. Our tutor pointed out that in creating such a fast paced narrative with so many cuts, it had to have a good rhythm and a well-organized storyboard.

As I said, there were a few tweaks made to the storyboard but after we'd selected our clips and their place within the storyline, we had to cut them according to the beat of the song we had chosen. Now, I don't believe that rhythm is my strong suit, as I said I mostly lean towards the visual aspect of a film despite my strong appreciation for sound. However, one of my teammates is a dancer and she has an amazing ear for beat, which made her ideal for the job. Even though practically I can't say I learnt how to cut on beat, I feel like I can say I learnt something even more important; how to appreciate someone's strengths and use them for the greater purpose of the project. I learnt how recognize when I am able to be helpful and when I simply have to take a step back and let someone better fitted for the job do it, I also feel like I encouraged the rest of my teammates to take a step back and let her take the lead in that situation. No one can excel at every single thing so it is important to know when your attempts to help push the team's work forward or drag it backwards; the best way to get something done is not always to do it yourself. In the end, we did get a lot of compliments on the pace and rhythm of our piece, which in a way confirmed the success of our approach, which was essentially effective teamwork.

Reflecting back on the roles I undertook, camera work familiarized me with the rule of thirds and the importance of focus in a shot. Looking back at the documentary I feel like it would have been nice to bring the chair that the interviewees were sitting on a bit forward so as for the background to be blurrier, bringing them into the "spotlight". Focus is really important to be done correctly while filming as it is one of the things that can't really be fixed in post-production. The cameraperson together with the art director kind of work together in figuring out what will go into the shot. The art director in particular I learnt has to have a very strong eye for detail and needs to be able to

manipulate the set to achieve a specific purpose (such as using the sunset as a sunrise). Looking back at the drama, I noticed that since our opening and our closing scene contained an alarm going off we thought we could get away with only shooting it once. However, we should have had two different shots, as the dates on the alarm ought to have been different. Finally, during our last day of editing, our editor didn't manage to make it in until the middle of the day so I had to step in and do some editing. I had already acquired some knowledge on Avid Media Composer by just watching our last editor do it, but having to take over I put those skills to practice and also learnt how to color correct. I found that color correction is instrumental in making or breaking the visual impact of the whole film, and regretted not having time to do it for our documentary as well.

All in all, I thoroughly enjoyed both projects and I feel like I've learnt a lot from each but I think our drama was more successful in achieving its original purpose. That is because, by that point, the team was more familiar not only with each other but also with the equipment, which resulted in an overall better collaboration, expression and realization of ideas. I believe that is also reflected in our final pieces in terms of flow and also in the fact that the documentary exceeded the time limit given to us whereas the drama was right within that limit, despite it being more restricted (the time limit for the drama was thirty seconds less than that of the documentary). The more put together the team, the better the results. This module has been a major learning opportunity in terms of being exposed to this environment and practicing as well as developing my own skills. Nonetheless, I also felt that one of the most important outcomes was learning from other people and how they approach professionalism, how they make use of their own talents and how they carry themselves in this field.

References/Bibliography

Jack Begert & the little homies. (2016) *Kendrick Lamar – God Is Gangsta*. [Online Video]. 13 January 2016. Available from: youtube.com. [Accessed: 1 May 2017].

Mamet, D. (1991) *On Directing Film*. New York; Viking.

Rosenthal, A. (1990) *Writing, Directing, and Producing Documentary Films and Videos*. 4th edition (2007). Carbondale; Southern Illinois University Press.

The Untouchables. (1987) [Film] Directed by: Brian De Palma. USA, Paramount Pictures.

Mark – 69%

Good introduction. There is some good learning here about the balance between time and travel (and budget) constraints and your creative ideas. You also reflect well on building trust with contributors and actors. You also have clearly learned much about editing down your material and indeed how you might go about building up a more visual picture of the place as well as the interview footage you gained next time. Your comparison between drama and docu is interesting - it would have helped you perhaps to bring in some theory to help work this through further. There is a lot of creativity in documentary making, but perhaps it needs working at in a different way. Learning around making the most of opportunities also is something I'm sure will stay with you. You use the theory of Mamet to good effect in relation to your film. It would serve you well to do a bit more in depth reading around Mamet. As regards positioning of interviewees - the technique you are talking about is 'depth of field' - make sure you use the correct film language. I'd like to have heard a bit more about colour correction in terms of some examples of where you thought it made a big impact both in your film and in other examples.