

Advanced Critical Thinking Report

“The most successful pieces of branded content have been the honest stories that resonated with global audiences” (Mace, dan mace., n.d.) Daniel (Dan) Mace, a twenty first century director and filmmaker that creates a sensitive style, graphic aesthetics and inspirational narratives. He creates films and tells stories that showcase the power of the perception and challenge the way people interpret life. Dan goes online by the persona of Danthedirector. “Danthedirector is not me, he’s simply the best parts of me combined and made into a colourful film in hope to inspire you, to be more you.... I want to tell your story. But only if you belief in your brand and that is authentic and beneficial to all people” (Mace, Dan Mace Showreel, 2016) For the last 12 months I’ve been watching Dan’s short form online content and for me, he has stood out above the rest. His storytelling technique is so compelling it has won him 3 Cannes Young Director Award and allowed him to capture a large worldwide audience online.

“Remember that hope is a powerful weapon even when all is lost” (Mandela, 2018) The importance of how to tell a story in the 21st century is so important, and with the ease of access to the internet comes large scale saturation of content being uploaded online. Which means for the few who have a true, raw story to tell, you need to make sure it stands out. With cons, come pro’s and thanks to companies like *Rode* and its yearly competition, Dan Mace got his first online break with the film, *GIFT* (Mace, GIFT, 2015). A film “about perception and understanding that everything is perfect always, maybe it's just you looking at it wrong. You can't control your surroundings, but you can control the way you SEE them.” *GIFT* got showtime at *TED Global 2017*, it won the best short from *Rode 2015* and won *Cannes Young Director Award 2016*.

In 2007, 47% of South Africa’s population was living under the food poverty line. (Herald, 2014) There’s no hiding at all about the poverty in South Africa, all you have to do is go to *Google*, and search for ‘Poverty in South Africa’ and you’ll see pages after pages of facts and news on this situation. The BBC defines poverty as “There is no one single definition of poverty. One figure which has been suggested is that an income of half the national average indicates poverty,” (BBC, 2014) However the South African government actually has 3 types of poverty lines, so they can categories different stages of poverty. South Africa is a country with clear poverty problems, however, Dan approaches the film *GIFT* with a different attitude. He chooses to embrace your surroundings instead of having it as a hinder. “You know in South Africa, we are so culturally diverse, everyone is so strange to everybody. We almost fuel each other with confidence with the fact everyone is so different, and different is epic, different is beautiful. And here in South Africa alone we have unlimited stories. Everyone is so excepting and natural on camera. I find South Africans have the ability to just speak from there heart, and that’s what really draws me to South Africa” (sabc3topbilling, 2017)

Dan’s representation of South African poverty is polar opposite to other media depictions of the situation. South African based films typically feature a white male South African lead like *Spud* (Marsh, 2010). However, when poverty is the main theme, the representation of a black child’s life is always that of a drama and depressing film. Always stories to let the audience remember how lucky they are to grow up in a first-class country. “Poverty.

Something that's seen as a disability, but to me, I look at this concrete jungle society, and think surely I'm the one that's free" (Mace, *GIFT*, 2015) This is where *GIFT* stands out. Dan's story telling in short form content is a modern online approach, and with that, it speaks to younger more open-minded audiences that embrace this kind of heart-warming content. Content where the good always overpowers the bad and just allows the audience to think past the obvious. Dan's visual storytelling with modern slick transitions and camera techniques allows you visualise the main characters conditions differently, because at the end of the day, that's how Dan wants you to view the story, different. His use of visual and audio together allow for a more poetic video. The audio used in *GIFT* is all raw sounds, this technique is called Musique Concrete, this means that the sound track was completely made from diegetic sounds. *GIFT* is a short film that bridges the gap from commercial work to online short films for Dan, it is a major turning point in his career, and is a film that he could only build on for the future.

"What if I am you, and you are me" (Mace, *HUMANKIND* (see the world in 4 minutes), 2018) After *GIFT* Dan decided to focus all his energy into creating online content, specifically for YouTube. *Humankind* (Mace, *HUMANKIND* (see the world in 4 minutes), 2018) is a recent short film he released. A short with 100 filmmakers all over the world, all combined together to create 1 short film about how nothing is stopping you creating videos and living your life.

In 2011 a crowdsourced film under the name '*Life in a day*' (Macdonald, 2011) was screened at Sundance festival. Like Dan's *Humankind*, this film was about capturing life in a day and editing together to create a feature length documentary that was eventually distributed by *National Geography* and uploaded, for free, to *YouTube*. A lot like *Humankind*, the message of the film was about how impacting each day can be. "Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known" (Kelly, 2011)

Humankind is a short, it is quick paced with modern effects elegantly edited together to look like one continuous movie. Everyone who filmed for *Humankind* had a set shot list, the narrative was already pre-planned, however the narrative for *Life in a day* was completely dependent on what kind of footage was filmed by the participants. The shot list for *Humankind* involved precise and traditional shots within it, e.g. mid-shot, stabilised shots, drone shots. While *Life in a day* had no shot list, and majority of the shots were handheld from people, using their phones and had less of a professional element to it, however, the documentary felt very personal as if you were looking into their lives for that brief moment of time. "Your brain gets too comfortable in your everyday surroundings. You need to make it uncomfortable. You need to spend some time in another land, among people that do things differently than you. Travel makes the world look new, and when the world looks new, our brains work harder" (Roach & Dominguez, 2015) *Humankind* is less about just connecting videos together of different people around the world, but it's creating one universal story, told by hundreds of people around the world coming together in unison. People are all represented the same in *Humankind*, one human or landscape does not make the next one look as important, each cut is there to embrace the next, with an overall goal to show everyone in the same light, no discrimination, no barriers, just the love of filmmaking.

"The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance" (Biernat, 2017) This speech by Alan Watts for me perfectly describes *Humankind*, though similar ideas with *Life in a day*, he has approached the film differently by telling a

completely different kind of story, and cutting together similar shots. Dan also has a direct impact on the story for his film, he narrates the voice over and was the director overall who created the shot list and moulded the edit. The participants didn't have a say on how their footage could be used. *Life in a day* has no narration and uses on board camera audio with no noticeable extra audio elements added in post-production

Even though they both have the same kind of goal, to bring people from around the world together using film, that's the overall message. "Be curious about the world in which you live. Look things up. Chase down every reference. Go deeper than anybody else – that's how you'll get ahead" (Kleon, 2012) *Humankind* does have similar aspects to *Life in a day*, arguably the opening is near enough the exact same, however, I think the difference is just how Dan has told a clear story in his film. *Life in a day* is more personal, and I believe everyone comes away with their own interpretation to the film, but Dan's is clear, and overall, it's made for a more modern online audience, using young filmmakers as the subject matter. They both have similarities, however it's how they take different approaches to telling a similar story which makes them most interesting.

Dan uses different techniques in each film, constantly trying to mix things up and make a new film every time. However, there is one technique that keeps cropping up in his films, and that is Musique Concrète. Musique Concrète, a technique created in the 1940's. "The idea behind Musique Concrète is that the composer begins with a set of "concrete" sounds and arranges them into a piece of music." (Henshall, 2011) Musique Concrète was for the composer not to be limited by traditional ways of creating music, for example, musical instruments. This idea slowly spread throughout filmmaking and into other art forms. It was a major turning point for *The Beatles*, who's song *Tomorrow Never Knows* (Beatles, 1966) includes experimental tape rewinding and sound effects within it, this changed them from a 3-minute pop song group into what is now known as the 60's era of music.

The Broadway Musical (Mace, The Broadway Musical, 2018) is the third and final film of Dan's that I will be discussing. This a shortfilm, constructed through the sounds of NYC and embracing a city that never sleeps. Dan uses the technique of *Musique Concrète* as the main storyline for *The Broadway Musical*. Now I believe there are hundreds of short films out there and also features that use *Musique Concrète*, and I don't think that's how this film breaks conventions, that comes in the style that he's shot and edited the film. *Cinema Verite* is a technique that is implemented in all of his films, and in *The Broadway Musical* it's something that is very prominent. Now *Cinema Verite* took place back 1960's France, it's a film movement and started to show the film industry to include more natural actions and authentic scripts into movies. 50 years later this camera technique has taken leaps and bounds and it has now been implemented into a lot of Documentaries, and more impactfully, YouTube has taken *Cinema Verite* and has made it into a norm style for online content. *Humankind* is shot like a music video with *Cinema Verite* as it's style, and this allows it to stand out, with the talking to camera along the way, showing the objects that are making the sound, and the process to making the film overall, incorporates two different techniques seeming less. "When you can tell a story as it unfolds, with your camera and without very much needs of words, you have a documentary in the palm of your hands" (Hall, 1991) Even though *Humankind* isn't a documentary, it still applies. Dan cleverly reveals the world of New York City to you through sounds and visuals, showing you what you need to see for the film, not what you want to see. This kind of minimalistic film making is the reason why I believe as a film maker Dan Mace is breaking conventions.

Conventions are a way of doing something that is classed as 'normal,' something done by a certain way. I don't like to look at films and judge them by what's normal, I like to look at them and judge them by what's not normal about them. "I'm a sworn enemy of convention. I despise the conventional in anything, even the arts. I paint canvasses on the floor and drove one art teacher out of his mind. But that's just the way I paint best." (Lamarr, 2012)

Dan's storytelling techniques is an area that connects to me. I see his work and the way he tells stories through audio, visuals, direction, editing and writing, and it broadens my mind and inspires me to want to create something like this, on this kind of scale. He shows me a world of filmmaking that I can relate to, a true raw story, a personal adventure. I understand that a lot of his films already have versions out there like features or the techniques he implements are already existent, but I'm discovering these through Dan, he's a source of my learning and inspiration for me. I don't and haven't learnt filmmaking techniques the 'traditional' way, and by watching creators like Dan I learn more modern approaches to filmmaking in style and stories that capture a 21st century filmmaker, rather than someone who is inspired by older generations worth of work. I don't think this is bad at all ether, we are in a completely new generation of filmmakers and creators, there are thousands of people out there who are now learning film through creators like Dan, instead of more mainstream filmmakers, and I hope within the next few years more people will look towards what Dan and other people are doing for a source of inspiration. At the end of the day, it's not about how you start, it's about how you finish that counts.

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