

CREATIVE PROJECT

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

Joe Deighton - **Assignment 2**

2019

FEBRUARY

PRE-PRODUCTION WORK

The main bulk of the pre-production for this Major Project was handed in for submission on January 4th of this year. However, as noted in my previous reflective journal, I was unsatisfied with the amount of pre-production work I had produced for major project. This led me to spending some free time thorough January on developing the script and other pre-production documents to a better state than where I left it. The week after our first introductory tutorial on this module, I met with Matt for our first personal tutorial (08/02/19) to discuss my current progress and the work I had done of the script since the last submission. Most of what we discussed involved the current state of the script, including its plot structure and character development. Also discussed were the actors and shooting schedule. These were two parts of the project that I hadn't put too much thought into yet, and Matt reminded me that the sooner these were considered, the better. I was told to approach possible actors, and put in a rough shooting date for anywhere between February to early March.

After this tutorial, I started to focus my attention on developing the script to a point where I was satisfied it was ready. I decided to make several changes to the script, mostly to the beginning segment and the complete exclusion of the 'BARMAN' character. Both of these changes were done to make the process of shooting more efficient, yet I believe the former change actually benefitted the script itself. The original opening of the script had the character of Polly sat in her car outside the Inn, doing her make-up and leaving a message on her friends voicemail (the purpose of which was exposition). This instead changed to an opening that shows Polly leaving her apartment in a city and heading towards the countryside at night. The benefit of this is that I could shoot in a way that didn't required the actress to be present, using a stand in which saved *her* time and *my* budget. The second benefit is that it actually establishes where Polly lives, and shows her journey into the countryside, which provides exposition and sets a tone for what's to come.

Whilst work on the script continued, I also sought out possible actors / actresses. I started by creating a casting call and posting it onto several Facebook groups via the help of contacts with whom I worked with before. Speaking of which, most – if not all – of the actors /actresses I had worked with before had graduated and moved away, leaving me to seek out new talent for this production. Whilst waiting on replies, I had come into contact with Syama, a talented actress that I had worked with previously. She told me there was actually a possibility that she'd be available for the role, and that she would be in touch.

One set-back for this production was the location. Having confirmed with the owners of the St Govans Inn that I could use their premises for one night of shooting, I unfortunately had to set the unofficial shooting date back from the 17th of Feb to the 24th of Feb. This in turn led to the owners of the establishment wanting payment for closing the premises, as the 17th was a planned closure for the Inn regardless. I initially agreed, and a £100 payment was confirmed for the Inn's closure. However, after further delays in finding an actor / actress, our agreement had to be cancelled, as I was told that closing the Inn in March was not a possibility for business. This led to me seeking a new location for production, and I already had a place in mind.

The Stackpole Inn had served as the basis for my Documentary module back in late 2018, so I already had a strong rapport with the owners of this business. I was relieved to find out that The Stackpole Inn actually closes on Sunday evenings throughout the whole of March, and they offered to let me shoot in there on any given Sunday, so long as I could confirm which one. I gladly accepted, and the 17th of March was confirmed as the production's official shooting date.

During my second tutorial with Matt (22/02/19), I discussed my progress over the last two weeks, including the gain of a possible actress, as well as the change in location. Despite the change of location, we agreed that it was actually very beneficial, as having every Sunday night free meant I could schedule time for reshoots, as well as spending a day on-set going through the blocking and organisation of scenes in the script. In regard to the script, I explained to Matt the changes I made and the reasons why I made them. After some discussion, I felt comfortable that the script was nearly ready. For the next tutorial, Matt advised me to finish confirming the rest of the cast, as well as finalizing the script so that it would be ready for shooting.

After the tutorial, I realised that some minor parts of the script would need to be amended to better fit the change of location. This mostly referred to the end scene, including a part where Polly picks up a fire poker placed in front of a hearth. Despite having a fireplace at the Stackpole Inn, the blocking of the scene for this to happen would be illogical, so it was changed. Instead, Polly moves away from Adam until she backs into a toilet door, which made more sense considering where the characters would be dining. Other pre-production documents – shot list, scene blocking, prop list – were also being worked upon during this time, and up until the end of February. It had been long month of pre-production work, and yet despite that, I feel that more could have been accomplished in this time. I didn't seem to be that much further forward than I was at the start of the month. However, over the coming weeks, there would be a major shifts in progress, and of course, the shooting date itself.

2019

MARCH

PRE-PRODUCTION WORK

At the very start of this month, I was scheduled in for my third tutorial with Matt (01/03/19). Much of the discussion was based around the progress I had made with the rest of the pre-production documents, but it was reassuring to hear that Matt was pleased with the changes I had made to the script. I felt safe in the knowledge that this current version of the script is the one that I would shoot. This achievement was met with an urge to start finalising my cast, something that was also discussed in this tutorial. I left this meeting with two major goals; find an actor to join my unconfirmed actress, and book the necessary equipment for production.

I tried contacting Syama, hoping to have confirmation from her that she would indeed be available for the part. After several days had past, she got back to me. Unfortunately, as she is constantly travelling around, it turned out she wouldn't be in Wales at the time of filming – therefore I had to search elsewhere for the role of Polly. I decided to post to more Facebook groups over the next two weeks, as well as contact the performing arts department to see if there were any willing participants there. Sadly, only a couple of people responded, but they didn't seem right for the part.

Whilst this was happening, I send out a booking form and risk assessment to Dan Bailey, in order to secure the necessary equipment for our official shooting date. Thankfully, I'd also enquired if the equipment would be available for the week after, in case there were any more delays, to which Dan confirmed that it would be.

After also two weeks of no response from actors / actresses, I decide to use a more official means of gathering a cast. On the 14th of March, I created a casting call on the website 'StarNow'. This website had an entire network of actors /actresses looking for roles, and my casting call was surprisingly well received by them. A total of 78 people applied for the two roles, leaving me with a wealth of choice when it came to short listing them. After much deliberation, I decided to contact two of the applicants – Amber Brockway and Matt Reed. Both had previous experience with acting, and both of them showed interest in the script after sending it to them. On the 19th of March, I decided to cast both of them in their respective roles – Amber as Polly and Matt as Adam.

At the time, this felt like a huge relief. I'd finally nailed down a cast, and felt like I was almost ready for the approaching production date. Speaking of which, with the original production date as the 17th of March, I had to push it back a week. This was for several reasons, most important of which

was due to the actors only being able to make it for shooting on the 24th. This actually benefitted me, as it allowed me to visit the set on the original shooting date (17th) and thoroughly plan the blocking whilst answering any small queries I had about the set.

Almost everything was in place, but during this entire pre-production process, I wasn't able to find a cinematographer. It was something I had budgeted for, and most of those that were in my price range were not able to make it for our planned shooting date. I couldn't afford to spend more money on hiring a professional, and at the time, I saw it as an addition that wasn't completely necessary – mostly because I already had a baseline knowledge of how to work a camera.

Unfortunately, not putting more effort into finding / being able to afford a cinematographer is probably one of my biggest regrets of this entire module.

PRODUCTION

The day of shooting had arrived, and cast and crew met at the Stackpole Inn at around 4pm. Once the set dressing, script read through and blocking practice had been completed, we began shooting at around 6pm. Most of the shooting started smoothly, despite a few changes to which rooms of the restaurant we'd be shooting in, but it soon became apparent that my dual role as both director and cinematographer was a lot to handle – effecting my ability to do both efficiently. It took me longer than expected to set up the camera for different shots, as I had to check the shot list constantly for changes to frame-rate and many other things. This meant that the main dialogue scene didn't begin shooting until 8pm, and we still had plenty left to shoot after that.

All of this regrettably led to me completely rushing the dialogue scene: I only shot two angles on both the characters for an entire 8 minute conversation. I also had little to no time to actually direct the actors on how to portray some of the dialogue, leading to uneasy segments of back-and-forth conversation – some of it completely different from how I imagined it. One of the actors struggled to nail down one particularly lengthy piece of dialogue - sometimes going completely off-script, which meant that call-backs to what they said earlier didn't make sense. I found myself caught in the impossible position of having to complete this shoot in time, *and* trying hard to keep the quality of footage at an acceptable level. I felt like most of this could have been avoided by having a dedicated cinematographer, and unfortunately, the end quality of the film suffered as a result.

Shooting that day wrapped at 1am. It was an exhausting experience, but I was still hopeful that I had shot enough footage to edit together a cohesive film.

2019

APRIL

PRODUCTION

After a stressful shoot back in March, I focused upon my next shooting date, the 5th to the 7th of March. Fortunately, none of these involved having a strict time schedule, or any actors on set for that matter, which meant I able to focus better on the quality of filming.

The first day of shooting was on the 5th, and took place at a hotel room I had booked in Cardiff. Me and Caitlin stayed on the 5th floor of the St Davids Hotel, which provided us with a spectacular view of the city – perfect for the opening shot of the film. The rest of the shoot was focused on shooting the briefcase, and trying to angle it in order to hide the obvious fact that we were in a hotel room. Most of this went smoothly, but to my dismay, there seemed to be a *lot* of noise in the footage. I used a picture profile that I assumed would work to hide this noise, and I also made sure I didn't turn the ISO higher than 1000. Unfortunately, I should have taken better care when filming this scene, and I would have used an external camera monitor if I had known the noise would turn out so bad.

The next day of shooting (6th of April) involved two separate shoots at two different locations. The first of these took place at the cliffs of Stackpole. This mini-shoot was by far the most successful one of this production. Granted, I only needed to capture a handful of shots, but they all turned out great when reviewed in post. I'm glad I spent the time capturing this extra footage, as it helped to flesh out the latter part of the dialogue scene in the final edit. The second shoot of this day involved the exterior shots of the Inn, alongside the POV car shots that shows Polly's descent into the countryside. The latter part of the shoot went well, as I managed to capture an abundance of footage from which I could pick out the best parts. However, the exterior shots of the Inn – which were lit by the outside lights - suffered from extreme strobing / flickering. I tried to remedy them in post that very night, but once I realised that they were unusable, I decided to return the very next night to reshoot them.

Using a frame-rate of 60fps, as appose to 120fps, I managed to eliminate the flick entirely, and reshot all of the effected footage from the night before. After this reshoot, I had effectively completed production on this film, and it was time to start the post-production process.

POST-PRODUCTION

I began my post-production on the film throughout the latter of April, giving me plenty of time before the deadline to assemble the best final edit I could make with the footage I had. I started by focusing on the main dialogue scene in the film, as I knew this would be the most time consuming part of the edit. I realised that the choppy nature of how I shot the dialogue scene – due to rushing the filming of it – did not do me any favours when it came down to structuring it. I had to watch every single take and make notes of which line worked best, which is it common and expected when editing a film. But the real problem was structuring Adam's monologue near the end of their conversation. The actor's reading of the script differed drastically each time, meaning I had to combine a variety of takes in order to fully piece together a paragraph of dialogue that matched the script.

What made this task even harder was the lack of close-up or insert shots, and more noticeably absent was different angles of the conversations. It made cutting between the two a mundane task, so I had to try and edit as best I could in order to create a watchable rhythm and pacing to their conversation. However, I believe I have (to some degree) achieved this. But, despite this, the length at which the conversation goes on for means that, no matter how well paced and rhythmic it is, the shot-reverse-shot of the scene tires after a few minutes.

Another major problem I ran into was the audio. As mentioned in the 'Post-Production Techniques' document, there was a lot of sound coming from some kitchen appliances on set which couldn't be switched off. And after doing as much as possible in trying to remove that background noise from a particular scene, it unfortunately affected the original vocals too much to be usable. Therefore, the scene where Adam and Polly converse at the bar before was regrettably cut from the final edit. Fortunately, despite the scene giving them both a proper introduction – and it contained a great single take that unfortunately couldn't be used – the narrative still works without it. Thankfully, most of what that scene spells out it told in the visuals of the scene that comes before it.

A culmination of every problem mentioned previously led me to try and stylise the sequences that come before and after as much as possible. Now that the main part of the dialogue storytelling had been edited, I wanted to see what I could make out of everything around it. Maybe this stemmed from my dissatisfaction of the dialogue scene, but I felt that by doing this I could at least remedy some parts of the film to make it hold up. Therefore, much of the latter time I spend on post-production process was centred around choosing the right visuals and music to create moody and atmosphere sequences that sandwiched the main part of the film. Further problems that I encountered in the edit of the film are detailed in the 'Post-Production Technique' document

2019

MAY

FEEDBACK

After finishing off the final touches of the first edit, it was ready for its first screening. On the 7th of May, I screened this edit to Brett Aggersberg and Matt Jones for feedback. It was immediately apparent, however, that the overall volume of the short film was too low. The rest of the feedback, however, was based around problems that I was aware of. The dialogue scene came off as slightly tedious towards the end, due to the limited amount of camera angles. The very end scene, where Polly realises that Adam has her car keys, didn't really come across as effective. Brett and Matt offered some positive feedback on other aspects, which definitely lessened my overall dislike for the film. It spurred me on to complete the final edit, and implement the changes they suggested I make.

The first change I made to the film was to raise the volume of each individual audio element. Brett and Matt's collective advice to listen to the film back on traditional speakers, instead of headphones, made it much easier to calibrate the volumes to an equal level, and to one that could actually be heard properly. The second change I made was to the ending. The original ending didn't come off as effective as I would have liked it to, but fortunately I had shot an alternative ending on a whim, just in case it needed to be used instead – and I'm very glad that I did, as I believe the alternative ending fits much better into the overall narrative. After implementing the suggested changes, as well as ironing out any other minor issues, I rendered the final cut of the film. This is the cut that has been submitted for assessment.

CONCLUSION

In summary, there is much I would do differently if given the chance to take on this project again. I believe the concept of the film was solid, and there wasn't much I would have changed in regard to my previous submission for developing this project. The execution, however, could have been much better. A flawed dialogue scene, alongside a rushed production shoot, meant the final product suffered from a lack of finesse and cohesion. Employing a dedicated cinematographer could have solved a lot of the problems I encountered, and would certainly have freed me up to concentrate on what this short film was sorely missing – direction.

Despite some of the negativity I have expressed with the film, the overall experience I have gained from this module has been immeasurable. It's certainly taught me the value of seeking out a good

crew, and the importance of surrounding yourself with like minded individuals. I mentioned previously that, by the end of February, I felt as though I could have made more progress – I realise now, more than ever, that working on an individual project such as this takes an immense amount of dedication, especially if you want the final product to work better than you imagined it to. It certainly made me long for more collaborative efforts, where the weight of the final product doesn't rest entirely on your shoulders. But I understand now that to get to that point, you need to prove to others (as well as yourself) that you're capable of handling these individual projects.

What I've learned from this module, and the last three years of the course, will certainly be applied to any projects I take on in the future. The importance of pre-production cannot be understated, and I will without doubt pour all available resources and effort into that stage of whatever future employment project I take on. And if I could take one single lesson away with me from this module, it's this; consistent dedication is essential for any level of success within this industry, and it's something I will be committing to all my post-graduate work from now on.

Word Count:

3618