LMD07105 Representing the Real

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| NAME: **Sophie Marshalsey** |
| PROJECT: **Julie** |
| DATE OF CRITIQUE: **27/04/22** |
| TUTOR(S): **Sana Bilgrami, Tomas Sheridan, Joe Li, Leonardo D’Andrea** |
| VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT OF FEEDBACK:  **SANA**: That’s really good, it’s always good when you enjoy the process. So, I really enjoyed that. It was a great character, what I really liked was how you started off with her talking about having been born during the war, and you know then you have a nice, slow process of revelation. She moves to this place, and then wow it’s a Tibetan monastery, and then you find out about the firing range. Then the irony, and then the whole war thing at the end. Structurally, the film worked really well. And actually, my main feedback to improve the film for a start, the film starts and then she starts speaking, and she stops while the credits are rolling. And she doesn’t stop for a second in-between, right? Let the film breathe. You need to just cut out some of that. It would be really nice if you could’ve just started with her not speaking, but because I think you use the landscape beautifully in your film, and I just wanted the film to start with silence. And you might’ve had to construct, you know get ready-made sounds of nature, but put us in that space – sorry, library sounds – but you know let us be immersed in that countryside before she starts talking about coming from London. We can see her there, I’m sure you have a moment of footage where she’s not speaking. I really appreciate that you held the shots, the cutaways, you said you didn’t treat them like cutaways and I can see that. I actually have a note here that says ‘nicely held shots’, you let us look at the stream, and the mountains, and so on. So really well done on that. I guess alongside what you would do in those moments of silence, where she stops speaking, is let us be immersed in that sound of the countryside. The whole film is about sound. Your film is quite literally about the contrast between the sound of silence, which she wants, the sound of prayer, which you didn’t get, and the sound of gunshots, which we never hear. We don’t need to hear them; we just need to… She says is enough, although the signs, all of that is enough for us to imagine it. Your film is gasping for the sound of nature. I mean otherwise it’s totally engaging, and really interesting. The only thing I’d say is if you have any other shots of the temple and the praying, I think that would help give us a little bit more and payoff… Instead of what you take away some of the interview, I liked the interview and the way you set it up. I didn’t mind the sound of the wind, and well done on improving it, you know it didn’t bother me. We’re outside, so, um, yeah. That’s my feedback.  **JOE:** Well done. I liked the film as well. You travelled all the way to the Scottish Borders, that’s not easy for students of film. I agree with what Sana said, the first comment about delaying the voiceover a few seconds because it’s too fast. Have the empty shot and the music or the ambient sound first and then start the voiceover. The other thing is about the sound as well. I think very often we are looking at the source of sound, like the river or the water, but we don’t hear the sound. That’s ambient sound. When we see the source of sound, we need to hear the sound. It’s quite bizarre. We have this empty shot where we hear the wind and cut to the river, but there’s no sound of the water.  **SANA** *(About the comment of having sound effects but not using them):* Well, that’s good, because you have the chance to re-edit your film and make it better. You’ve got that sound, and if you don’t, use library sounds.  **JOE:** I think you did a good job anyway for the most of the parts… You know you can just download it [the sound] from the Internet and then add it to your film.  **TOMAS:** No, they have the sounds but clearly the editing was taking a lot of time and it’s your classic ‘sound last’ thing, and then you don’t have time for it.  **JOE:** The other thing about the technical aspect is really the shaky camera, and the shaky shots. It happened across the board, the whole day. You need to say ‘I’m going to use handheld for empty shots’, and I would recommend for you to still take your tripod with you. You put your camera on the tripod, and you can imitate the movement. That kind of handheld looks very smooth and natural. You don’t need to worry about shakiness because it’s on a tripod, but at the same time you can just imitate the movement.  *(Comments about the production and production issues from the crew).*  **JOE:** I have to talk to Tommy about giving extra marks for going on your adventure to make this film. My last point is really about something that happened across the board today is really the narrative structure. It’s the way you tell a story. These are not fictions films so we are not conscious of this. You don’t need to tell a story, but mainly films today tried to tell a story of the characters. You have such a conflict here; the religious location and next door is a shooting range with guns. If you established that conflict in the beginning, so it’s much more powerful to engage the audience to listen to the whole interview because you don’t establish the conflict. It’s all narration through her interview. I don’t think that the drama is there. Number one, number two, the gunfire is also missing. Such an important element. Where is the gunfire? We don’t hear it at all.  **SANA:** What we need really is the peaceful sounds, at the very least. We can imagine the gunfire. The sound that’s already there in your film needs to be there. Does that make sense? Yeah?  **TOMAS:** First of all, congratulations on the trip down there, that was bold and I thought it was a bad idea to go so far so you couldn’t really shoot or pick-up stuff and I know you worked really hard while you were there to make it happen. Ah, long days so, well done for bravery. I totally agree with Joe. So, on the technical camera side it’s like I feel there was quite a lot of over-exposure which is really the thing that bothered me the most. In terms of what should be peaceful being this high-contrast… Was that on a Blackmagic? Ah, okay, yeah. So, it was like shot in HD? Yeah, full HD, yeah. So, yeah okay that was pretty noticeable and maybe with like the punk film we wanted more of that dynamic range and more of that peacefulness, but it’s fine. You used what you had on the system that you could bring so, it’s just something to think about. While the punk film doesn’t suffer from some graininess and some over-contrasting shots, but here I kind of wanted that peaceful landscape. The shots themselves were really beautiful, and were betrayed by the colour and the contrast let it down a bit because it’s so, boom, video. But I did find the colourways quite tasteful, like the timing in the edit I would leave them even longer in terms of the peace. I kind of agree more with Joe than with Sana in terms of the creative potential of the bullets, especially because when I saw the metal plates for the shooting range, those are like gongs when you hit them from far away. This is not something you could know, and this is not something we discussed. There were so many overlaps between the gun range and the prayer session and the Buddhist philosophy. So, when she’s like they told us to live and let live, I found the irony really powerful. Or when they’re like it should improve your meditation practice to meditate through gunshots, that’s actually kind of true in terms of meditating in noisy spaces. I can tell she’s bothered by it being guns. I just think that subtlety is very nice, and the storytelling is quite a complex situation, which I kind of like that it comes across. Definitely agree about starting later, I would love – Duncan, I know you’re not super experienced and you were thrown in at the deep end with the edit – sound design in a pro shoot in a pro film has its own time. You lock the picture, that means no more edits are going to happen, and you allow like 2 weeks, 3 weeks, you know a long time, to just sound design. To go find the sounds, go find the wild-tracks that the sound recordist has made, etc. I feel this film was… I would love if you wanted to play a bit with the sound design, because I think it’s a film that would benefit massively from it. The silence and the noise and the prayers, all these things are really sound-driven rather than picture-driven. I feel a creative sound design could enrich this so much, you know if you started with birds chirping and the breeze and the hills and the… (Mimics bullets hitting targets) … You know it’s like hearing the shooting range. You can find them [the sounds] in sound libraries. Yeah, yeah, I understand. I know. Please take this as constructive criticism, when I say this it’s really in the light of what you can be aware of in the future. This is not marked down material, you know. It’s learning opportunity material. All the feedback is around improving your work in the future. We totally understand there’s different levels of experience amongst you, there’s different levels of kit you had access to, that’s not really what we’re looking at. It’s more like you know awareness. I did talk quite a lot about sound to be honest, it was even a running joke how much I spoke about sound and not using music. There’s a lot of sound design potential, so use it creatively. Play with the peace and non-peace. I thought the dealing with sound from a technical point of view with the sound, I was very impressed with the recording and you can see horizontal laundry from the wind and cleaning up was really impressive because it was really clean sound for that recording. The shot wasn’t that wide, so I don’t see why the microphone couldn’t have been just out of shot underneath, but… That’s fair enough. I mean sound people do work out and it is physically demanding, so yeah… There are actual tricks like popping the boom under your armpit or like leaning it into your hips so, but these are things you can learn… I know she referenced Gardner, that’s the name of the shooting range, but I only know it because I read the proposal and that was context that wasn’t really that clear for someone who’s just watching the film for the first time. Your payoff line, your conclusion over the credits, is really killing it. And not in a good way. It’s sort of, it really undermines what is a really important reflection of hers. We should hear it and then go back to the countryside, and then go back to the credits, really give it that breathing space. I’m aware that you were aware of time, but don’t squeeze it in because that’s really important stuff.  **SANA**: Something else might need to come out to accommodate that.  **TOMAS**: Breathing doesn’t need more time, it needs stuff taken out. Just to be clear, every time we said today ‘you need more breathing space’, we didn’t mean make your film seven minutes long. It meant that there’s stuff in there that is redundant and doesn’t carry the story forward and can come out without us missing it. That generates the space for the things that need space around them, so it’s always the case. None of the films that were non-stop talking had such vital five minutes of non-stop vital information that there weren’t bits that could come out. This comes with experience. Otherwise, I thought she was a really good character and I really applaud the bravery and commitment to do it and you guys faced a lot of tough odds along the way, so I’m aware of that and it was good. There’s an opportunity there [with sound]. Some of the most fun stuff about sound is in creative post-production. Like in the recording and in the cleaning it’s all technical, but there’s so much fun to be had with creating spaces and creating atmospheres and stuff.  **LEONARDO:** I think it’s such a fascinating premise and I totally agree with what Sana said about needing the breathing time and the silence, and centring not only around the quiet sounds – so the nature, and the praying and everything – but I really think the sounds of the bullets would’ve been necessary. I really think that in terms of also setting up mysteries and withholding information, so imagine beautiful shots and in the distance, you hear rapid gunfire, and your audience goes ‘what is that? What is going on?’ You kind of reveal it. This opinion may not be shared among here, but I think your subject was really boring to listen to. Like she has a really interesting story, but the way she speaks is just dragging on the sentences. So, while I agree you should’ve cut around it to make it concise, I don’t know how you would’ve done it because… There’s a lot of information being delivered, which is relevant, she’s talking about the war and you’re thinking ‘why do I care here?’ It kind of comes back at the ending, these people have not experienced a war. In a sense I feel for you because you had a lot of information to convey to make the conflict clear. Then it wasn’t easy to do it without completely butchering the dialogue. In a sense it might’ve benefitted, and I understand it wasn’t feasible because of time constraints, but it could’ve benefitted from adopting a more abstract or more fictionalised approach to what you were showing. You know whatever, however long she needed to say ‘the sounds of the bullets don’t quite fit into the-‘, you could’ve suggested that in the five second clip that showed like people meditating and the sound of distant gunfire. When I say gunfire, I am talking about library sounds. As I said earlier, don’t be afraid to like push the fiction aspect a little bit more if it’s necessary. I don’t think in any way it would’ve been a case of lying, you’re just placing sounds you couldn’t have at the moment.  **TOMAS**: It’s the small lies for big truths.  **LEONARDO**: So definitely this film could’ve been, and still can be to be honest if you feel like it, kind of replanned around sound and see what you can do by creating a rich soundscape. |
| MAIN POINTS GLEANED FROM FEEDBACK:   * Sound design is crucial. Don’t overlook or underestimate it. * Documentary can have elements of fiction to it. Small lies for big truths. * Narrative can be communicated through a combination of visuals and sound design. * Breathing space is not making a film longer, it’s taking out what isn’t crucial to allow what is absolutely vital to the film to sink in and resonate. |
| REFLECTION:  For research we considered a lot of varying sources: material directly from Samye Ling, or videos produced by, or in support of, Gardner’s Guns. By taking note from conflicting sources, we incorporated nuance into research conducted for the documentary.  In pre-production, we wanted to explore how the firearms range interacted with a peaceful, serene natural landscape. We planned visuals that focused on what Julie and Samye Ling wanted to preserve. We thought extensively about sound design, but unfortunately this was not realised in the documentary.  Production was fraught with challenges and difficulty. We struggled to get sound equipment working due to a lack of preparation – despite this, we made it work and produced work to a high standard. I realised quickly that familiarity with equipment is imperative, and would insist upon equipment testing prior to any shoot in the future.  Our editing process was unconventional in that Duncan had to assume the role of editor rather abruptly. The edit and narrative ended up being rather conventional and almost too formulaic, so I would like to go back and restructure it to be more innovative. We relied heavily upon one interview shot combined with visuals of the surrounding environment and Samye Ling, which I think didn’t do it justice.  Our focus was on Julie and her life before and after finding Eskdalemuir and Samye Ling, but we found it difficult to balance the brief with the bordering on journalistic narrative. The documentary followed a chronological approach to Julie’s life. I think the structuring worked, and so did withholding the firearms range until we had established Julie as a character, but was perhaps too formulaic.  Our visuals of the nature shots and monastery worked well and supported Julie’s answers, but we could’ve pushed the cinematography further and been prepared for the prayer session we could attend. Our sound choices were the most disappointing aspect of the film to me. I envisioned having sounds of nature, experimentation with gunfire and the interaction with prayers or the tranquil countryside. This was not achieved due to miscommunication and misunderstanding between responsibilities within the crew, and was entirely avoidable. We aim to re-edit in our own time to incorporate this, and in future I will not let the bare minimum be done for sound design due to its importance in world-building.  The real engagement came from the subject matter of a peaceful Buddhist community going against a firearms range. Julie spoke well and gave interesting answers, but her delivery perhaps wasn’t the most compelling. We covered a long time-frame of Julie’s life: from her upbringing in post-war London, to the hippie era and conversion to Buddhism, to the interference from the firearms range, to her activism. Julie was more animated and open when the cameras weren’t rolling, so I would’ve made our set-up less intimidating to showcase her personality. |
| ACTION PLAN:   * Re-edit documentary in own time to incorporate creative sound design to support the narrative. * Reconsider introducing the conflict with the gunfire range earlier in the film. * Hold on some shots for longer. * Introduce more silence and breathing space. |