



Open College of the Arts

Formative feedback

Student name	Ashley Lauryssen	Student number	515532
Course/Unit	Digital Film Prod.	Assignment	4
Type of tutorial (eg video/audio/written)	Written		

Overall Comments

This is a good and pretty ambitious attempt at a documentary. But it has a very serious problem: the sound quality of the interview is terrible. You are aware of the sound issues but perhaps not sure what to do about them - the interview with the farmer is way below the standard required for clear comprehension. It is difficult for a viewer to understand a German speaking English in the first place, so trying to make out what he's saying under the wind noise and the other sounds on the soundtrack make this unuseable. Sound is really one thing you have to get right - an audience will put up with wobbly camera and grainy images, but if they can't hear the dialogue or interview properly, they switch off.

Apart from this, the film has many satisfying highlights demonstrating your continued talent for communicating with images like the first shot of the landscape with the golden wheat field which is suddenly 'invaded' by the enormous metal harvester! The overviews and drone footage is also excellent. It is interesting to understand something of the economic and climatic conditions of farming and also the challenges from the wild boars!

In terms of narrative flow, this film is not as tight as it could be. You start well and follow the process of the harvest but at times the film feels like it digresses and feels uncertain of its own structure - is it about a particular farmer/farm or is it a general overview? If it is about a process, then should you have made a more scientific exposition with significant close-ups in the wheat testing process for example?

Assignment 4 Assessment potential

I understand your aim is to go for the Photography/Creative Arts* Degree and that you plan to submit your work for assessment at the end of this course. From the work you have shown in this assignment, providing you commit yourself to the course, I believe you have the potential to pass at assessment. In order to meet all the assessment criteria, there are certain areas you

will need to focus on, which I will outline in my feedback.

Feedback on assignment

Demonstration of technical and Visual Skills, Quality of Outcome, Demonstration of Creativity

Sound

Sound is so important in a documentary (and any film!) and you must never underestimate it. You needed to check the sound of the interview. Then you would have noticed it was the wrong place to interview the farmer or maybe the radio mic batteries were not full.

What to do?

- Firstly, you should aim to get quite high (but never peaking) levels while you're recording sound.
- Never use poor a technically poor interview as your main source of narration. If a key interview is your main narration, then it must be absolutely crystal clear - no wind, no dogs barking - just the perfect sound of the voice.
- You can replace this interview with your own voice over - your own voice is very clear and intelligible. Just say whatever the farmer is saying. Or you can re-shoot or re-record this interview. If you do this, let the farmer speak German. You can use subtitles.
- You don't have to use the interview to 'illustrate' what we can see is happening in the video! Let the video explain and illustrate visually. Use words to do what video can't do.
- You can try to 'fix' this sound, but it requires advanced technical knowledge - I'll try to explain:
 - Use a low cut filter (can also be called a high pass filter or EQ) to remove low frequencies from the interview - maybe as far as 220Hz. This will diminish some of the wind noise. It can be automated so that the low frequencies are only filtered out when the wind is blowing.
 - Use a compressor and/or a limiter to push the levels of the interview up but limit how high they go - so they never peak.

Narrative Clarity

It looks like you started by looking at the harvest as a process and perhaps because you covered that in one minute, you move the narrative to "the people who help me" and the further testing of the wheat and the issue with wild boars. This is one of the reasons why it wasn't clear where this film was going. But you also had a shot of the farmer greeting a family and little kids touching the wheat. This is somewhat out of context and visually steers the film in a different direction - perhaps towards a tourist experience, or some kind of social inclusion experiment, "showing the kids how the farm works" etc. This would be fine if it was narratively consistent - if you started and pursued this narrative strategy, but you don't. These shots just come and go.

Another issue here is the disparity between the universal and the personal. Is this about a wheat harvest in general or Farmer Marcus' farming experience?

I reckon the more personal experience could have been something like a 'fly on the wall' documentary which also showed some of the emotional reactions of Marcus and others to the destruction caused by the wild boar as well as the interactions between the farmer and his staff. This then becomes about a social experience and deepens the personal, making it about

people we can clearly identify and empathize with.

Cinematography & Editing

Your cinematography and your editing are very proficient. You're really getting the hang of editing for narrative continuity to illustrate what the farmer is saying as well as for information communication and visual effect.

The drone shots are really wonderful and you've managed to show the boar damage well using them. It's also great you got some nice shots of the boars! The shots from the drone should last longer on screen, you cut them way too short. This is because they appear so abstract with no contextual references like trees or a combine harvester.

Some shots need to be stabilized because the hand-held wobble is either too bad or because the shots don't edit consistently together.

Coursework

Demonstration of technical and Visual Skills, Demonstration of Creativity

One approach you could have used was the way documentaries today use a 'presenter' or focus on one or more protagonists (as you noticed with Deep Water Disaster. What this does is give the documentary a hero and a villain or rather, a protagonist working to overcome the antagonist. In turn, this tends to help an audience to empathize with the project of the film and get more out of it. You seem to have almost toyed with this idea with your shots of the visiting family.

Research

Context, reflective thinking, critical thinking, analysis

Your research could show a bit more analysis of documentaries - particularly with reference to nature and farming processes if you can find them. Anything that helps you to contextualize what you've done as well as become more aware of what others have produced with similar subjects.

Learning Log

The films on your blog display at high resolution and the blog is very clearly laid out.

Suggested reading/viewing

Context

Documentary may not be the direction you're going in, but if you want to learn more about it, then you may want to include a Documentary photography module in your degree. That will help you with observational skills and communication. I wish you well in your continued development as a film maker.

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