

Film Essay

Group Name: R.E.IM

Film Title: *Finding Your Feet*

Film Link:

<http://www.themediastudents.net/im1/projects/finding.your.feet.reim/index.html>

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Content

Our K-Film *Finding Your Feet* is a collection of fragments which focus on sixty individuals' feet whilst they impart a personal lesson which has helped them to 'find their feet' in life. This Western idiom refers to the feeling of becoming familiar, comfortable and settled in a situation or environment. In order to extract these lessons from our subjects, we asked them the question: 'what is one piece of advice you would give to someone?' or 'what is the biggest life lesson you have learnt?'.

The result of our K-film is somewhat like a list of the human experience, offering advice, suggestions, warnings and philosophies on how to survive in our modern world. What keeps the K-Film interesting is that each of these adages is told from a completely anonymous perspective. Viewers are required to fill in the gaps using their assumptions and hypotheses gained from only the visual information contained in the subject's feet and lower-body movements.

The purpose behind the K-Film is to collate and share significant life lessons which often go unobserved. This will hopefully lead the viewer to consider and/or relate to the varying snippets of advice and encourage them to think about and notice how these manifest in their own lives and relationships.

As a group, we decided to hone into the everyday poetry contained in the language of feet. By focusing on feet alone, we attempted to eliminate the prejudices of appearance. We did this for two primary reasons: the first was in order to enable the audience to engage more freely with the audio content of the fragment, in what is similar to an exercise in 'close-listening'. Secondly, we wanted to allude to a sense of mystery which continues to build as you navigate through the film, activating the audience's emotions and desire to know.

As you delve further into our K-Film, you begin to build a set of skills and a certain literacy for interpreting the information you're given as a viewer. You piece together the subject's responses and evaluate them against what you can infer from their body language - such as whether they are twitching, crossing their legs, standing up straight or slouching. The environment in which they are situated helps to bring context to the fragments as well, for example, whether the subjects are working, socialising, studying or relaxing. Finally, the viewer can try to learn about the personality of the individual subjects through visual and verbal clues, like whether they give short, generic, clipped answers and demonstrate introverted tendencies, or whether they will give a detailed, personalised, open answer and weave a story. Slowly, the viewer can build a 'profile' on each 'character' as they engage with the work.

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One of the biggest challenges we faced when filming our content was working out how to embrace the innate spontaneity of our project. Whilst we were attempting to catalogue small glimpses into individuals' lives, we were aware from the beginning that we mustn't try to control or construct the scenes/answers as this would be detracting from the original purpose of the film. For instance, if one of our subjects moved a certain way, mumbled over words or repeated themselves, we tried to maintain the integrity of their answers. Similarly, if two different subjects gave a similar answer, or if they didn't want to elaborate on their answer, we decided to include it because that was, in fact, how the respondent chose to represent themselves.

However, we were also very aware of the fact that our project's success would be contingent on our interviewing technique. As we were filming our fragments, we noticed that our technique in approaching subjects was changing, and the way we were phrasing our questions and prompting the subjects was changing alongside this. We adapted a confidence in our conversational interview technique that relaxed our subjects and prompted more comfortable, instinctual responses. We also tried filming the subjects feet without them noticing. This allowed for more natural body and feet movement, as they were concentrating on their responses rather than their appearance.

A downfall of our K-Film is the lack of diversity in our subjects. Whilst we attempted to interview subjects from all ages and cultures, what results is more of a collection of content from the filmmakers networks and close circles (which is largely the young, privileged white demographic). Therefore, we don't think that our project gives the most accurate representation of the population than it potentially could.

Pattern

The patterns in our work appeared and evolved as we were creating our content. We found that we really enjoyed this process, as it meant that we were understanding the power and capacity of our work as we were going, instead of upon completion - which allowed us to make changes and be open to the idea of emergence.

Our linkages were not scripted or planned in any way. The information provided by the subjects presented themes that carried across a variety of responses, for example, many people chose to speak about the importance of family.

We initially wanted to link our fragments with keywords that orbited around the content of each clip, such as love, kindness, self-respect, relationships, success, happiness, enjoyment, adventure, respect for others, and self-realisation. After exploration of these potential keywords and testing them in an early Korsakow prototype, we decided that we were saturating our content in keywords and feared that the work would become too random. We rewatched all of our clips during a close, critical viewing, and discovered a broader concept that was present throughout all of our fragments: the fragments are connected through their relation to the past, present or future.

Every fragment we filmed contained a subject speaking of personal advice that was often vastly different, but still contained a *tense*. These sixty individuals showed us that life lessons can be learnt from past mistakes, they can be aspirations for the future, or they can be something to abide by each and every day. By identifying the tense that was used in each response, we created three keywords which then formed three webs for our

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content (past, present, and future). We chose these keywords because they are strong, simple and poetic. In compliance with Soar's advice, we keyworded with meaning, as opposed to visuals, in order to create more profound relations (2014).

Often our fragments contained elements of more than just one tense, as the subject told multiple messages or spoke of how they are still learning their life lessons. These particular fragments really played to our advantage, as they allowed us to use them as multi-keyworded connections that would link between multiple webs, or clouds, of content. Therefore, the patterns of our K-Film are architecturally strategic. We gave the double-tensed fragments increased lives so that they appear more often and allow the viewer more opportunities to jump in and out of the clusters.

The repetitious style and pace of our K-Film adds another layer of poetics. As the user clicks through each fragment, an almost meditative rhythm of repetition builds. This will either make the user entrenched and engaged in the content, or tire them quickly. To combat this, we have designed our film so the user can watch as much as they desire and then return later to continue at any stage and still gain perspective and insight. This aligns closely with the idea that interactive films, and K-Films in particular, are designed to be grazed on. Because it is non-linear, it does not matter where the user pauses or finishes. They can rewatch it again and again and still gather a whole new understanding based on their interpretations.

Interface

The main viewing window is positioned in the centre of the window to create hierarchy, and surrounded by preview windows that create a frame around the main fragment. We based our interface design on the idea of first impressions or judgements that are often made in regards to appearance. At first, the user must choose their way through a series of previews which have muted sound - a process which forces them to make instinctive assumptions about what to expect from their selected clip. However, when the user hears the subject talk in the main viewing window, they are given a brief insight into the character, which will either contradict or fulfil their expectations. The premise behind our design is similar to the idiom 'don't judge a book by its cover', and we hope it might surprise the viewers who find themselves making snap judgements which do not align with the advice which is then imparted. This decision was informed by Drucker's assertion that navigation is "never natural; it is always the expression of a set of cultural assumptions and controls (cited in Luers, 2013).

Having a choice of 12 previews gives the viewer a lot of agency to decide what course they will take as they navigate their way through our K-Film. The user can scroll the cursor over each preview to get a three second glimpse of what will ensue. We added a playhead to appease the viewer's curiosity of how long a clip may or may not be (as there is quite a variety of short, clipped answers, and a few rambling stories and soliloquies). There is also a full-screen toggle option to encourage users to experience the K-Film without any distractions. We employed the Gestalt design principles of proportion, proximity, and repetition to create lines for the eye to be drawn along, assisting the user to interpret our material (Luers, 2013).

The interface works well to highlight the visual diversity of our project - no two feet look alike, and there is always something interesting and aesthetically different to look at. We

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decided against using text, both in the preview displays and in the main viewing window, as we thought this resulted in a more nuanced and poetic user-experience. Our K-Film is all about surprising the user with the sentimental, philosophical, or practical words that our sixty subjects impart. We did not wait to 'spoil' the content by summarising it with words. It also adds a sense of excitement to the clips, as the users do not know what is coming next, and they select preview clips based on the image, shoes, or colours that appeals to them most. Also, we agreed that text often means nothing without context, and we did not want to give our viewers a curated set of phrases to use as they make relations amongst our content.

The strongest element of our interface design is the 'gutters' we have created in between the preview windows. As McCloud (1994) tells, these small areas of negative space give the eye time to process and reflect, resulting in ease of viewing, and helping viewers participate in the act of closure more effectively. These are the spaces where sense-making and meaning-creation happen.

Connections

Our content, pattern and interface compliment each other to provide the user with a glimpse into the personalities of sixty individuals who impart their knowledge and advice about life, as well as how they learnt this lesson.

Our K-Film is strongly influenced by Bogost's conception of ontography, which he defines as "the revelation of object relationships without necessarily offering description or clarification of any kind" (p.38, 2012). Our final K-Film acts as a list or catalogue of the human experience. Our ontographical cataloguing, which sees feet from an object-oriented perspective, "[abandons an] anthropocentric narrative coherence in favour of wordly detail" (pp.41-42, 2012). In other words, it prompts the viewer to look at feet using a new lens. This allows "rich rewards via deep speculation of an object's existence" (Wood, 2013).

Our K-Film aligns quite closely with Sobchack's (1999) conception of a "memory box", which collects and preserves selected moments, or memories. Similarly, our project reads almost like Shields' idea of the antinovel - "the novel is dead. Long live the antinovel, built from scraps" (p.111, 2011) - which sees collages, and spatial montage, as "an evolution beyond narrative". Our K-Film, like feet themselves, represent a part of the whole. We used Shields' "law of mosaics" to focus on *parts*, creating a distinct absence of *wholes*. The beauty is when the fragments of our K-Film collide to present a poetic commentary about something much larger.

Interactive documentaries are tools for allowing users to begin understanding our society through an engaging format. They free the author from the restrictions of traditional storytelling. The audience receives a unique kind of fulfilment knowing that they have explored a concept quite differently than many others have. Frankham's (2013) discussion of poetic documentary affirms that this style opens up the opportunity for reflection on the work in a space where viewers can engage and interpret the content of each fragments. More powerfully, they can then make relations between them and arrive at a distinct comprehension of the fragments when they are unified as a whole. Our K-Film *Finding Your Feet* is a poetic exploration of the human experience, prompting contemplation of appearances, life lessons, and our place in the modern world.

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