



Open College of the Arts

Formative feedback

Student name	Peter Owden	Student number	515724
Course/Unit	Digital Film Prod.	Assignment	3
Type of tutorial (eg video/audio/written)	WRITTEN		

Overall Comments

This film works really well. It communicates various meanings clearly and in interesting ways. In such a story, the essential event - the central character is suicidal - is only one facet of the emotional maelstrom they're in. And it's this maelstrom - the causes and effects - that you've focused on. That makes a small film much deeper. So in terms of implied meaning, you're working on different levels, trying to express the characters emotions, largely without showing their face, and the motives of the character. There are a few moments this becomes 'heavy handed' or literal as you say, and that's the use of the gun too often and when he puts his head in his hand. But in the context of these emotions it is plausible.

It would have been nice to see more camera movement, but I realize that was impossible if you were filming yourself. You could try subtle pans by scanning within the existing frame, but that takes a bit of extra keyframing work.

Feedback on assignment

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

Firstly, when I read the script, I felt it was quite heavy-handed, but you've managed to turn the words into images that fit nicely together. Your sound design is also quite extensive and layered, with a good choice of music and non-diegetic accusing voices (not as explicit as the script) mixed well with mundane sounds.

Shot 1

The "Best Dad in the World" cup begins to tell us a story about children. It establishes the male body as the protagonist. Here you've done something nice with the transition: the simple act of stirring tea is made sinister by the cut to:

Shot 2

The extreme close up. Of course, the music is helping here - those extreme low and high notes

on a piano. The almost unintelligible chatter which suggests ruminating thoughts.

Shot 3

Here you cut to a slanted shot of the cup. Again, in this context (the non-diegetic sounds) you're suggesting something wrong. Just then the song starts - "It's cold outside" - it's a really excellent choice, not the original Gary Numan, but a simpler piano rendition of "Are friends electric".

Shot 4

This shot feels really explicit - the .38 revolver lying there tells the viewer that something violent could happen.

Shot 5

You cut to a shot of the man writing a suicide note, presumably to his daughters. Here you've suddenly placed the bank letters and bills much closer, so they are visible and give the impression that insurmountable debt is a motive. You're using visual short-hand, which is fine. It's up to you to judge whether it is heavy-handed and you're *telling the audience to think something!* In a short film like this, you kind of have to get information across in less subtle ways than you would in a longer movie.

Continuity errors - like the jumping bills - sometimes don't register and you can get away with it. But you're always better off being consistent!

But I like the use of writing here - it has its own pace and grabs the attention of the viewer.

Shot 6

I thought you could have focused on a telling foreground object and had the man, out of focus, in the background. That would have felt more natural, whereas this feels a bit contrived. You're not justifying or motivating the soft focus. It's a deliberate effect. But it's okay, and it does suggest a blurring of perception, a lack of clarity, which again suggest the mental state of the protagonist.

The head in hand thing does say "despair" in a very silent movie kind of way. I know it can be hard to rely on the actor (yourself!) giving you more subtle signifiers - posture, the action of taking off his glasses could have been enough.

Shot 7

Revolver comes into shot over stairs. For some reason, I thought he should be going down rather than up stairs - down to dusty death! I'm not sure you needed the revolver in any of this film. Think about that, would this film still express what you wanted to without it?

The dropping dressing gown is a nice touch. It's somewhat incongruous, but then you think of babies being born into the world naked and suddenly it resonates.

Shot 8

The cut to the POV shot of the gun doesn't quite work. Firstly you cut too soon. Let the frame go empty in Shot 7 first. Wait a beat, then cut. But this new shot is so dark and grainy and sort of doesn't fit with the others. And again, the gun is too obvious. On the other hand, using a POV shot was a good idea. But think about what he would look at. He's in a state of regret about his whole life and what it's become. He's going to miss his "girls" so you could

have shown him looking into their bedrooms. But you could equally remove this shot and cut straight to the slamming door of Shot 9. The cut to Shot 9 is pretty blunt. Why? Because it's almost a match-cut, so it jumps.

I also don't quite understand why a first person computer game fits into your theme here. *Tomb Raider* etc are really action games and the state of mind of the protagonist is definitely not suicidal.

Shot 9

Maybe this is the only place you could use the gun *subtly*. Perhaps because it's been covered or otherwise concealed in earlier shots. This is a nice shot. The idea he's going into the light as well as the walking away suggesting a moving away from his problems. Although you don't use camera movement much in this film, you do move within the shot, and this is a particularly good example.

Shot 10

The final shot of tea whirling around works really well as a symbol of the protagonist's emotional maelstrom. I like the push-in, even though it goes soft and the lens gets steamed up, it's fine. (In *The Revenant*, the protagonist breathes on the lens at one point!)

Research

Context, reflective thinking, critical thinking, analysis

Your research into non-diegetic sound and moving camera are really good. Try to explain something of the dramatic meaning of the shots - like the moving camera that creeps under the swing following Pam in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. It's about placing the viewer just behind her knowing full well that she's heading into the lair of the maniac.

You are free to experiment with using newsreel footage instead of your own shot material. If the idea is strong and you are inspired, then go with it. The course is open enough to you exploring different methodologies and outcomes - particularly now it's developed into a Moving Image degree.

Learning Log

The log is fine.

Suggested reading/viewing

Context

You could try to see *The Cove* - a film about dolphin fishing. But BBC iPlayer also has plenty of free to watch documentaries. Good *Storyville* programs and Adam Curtis's *HyperNormalisation* and *Bitter Lake* are interesting for their extensive and original use of archive material.

Pointers for the next assignment

The key to getting the documentary right is to identify your subject clearly at the outset and then shoot a lot of diverse 'coverage' of the subject. It really helps if you can choose a subject which you have a) an interest in, and b) good access to it.

Tutor name	Robert Enoch
Date	20th January 2017
Next assignment due	10th April 2017