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## **Research Question and Pre-Production Research**

Woodstock was always thought of as a dangerous area full of gangsters and drugs where you would be robbed if you walked around. Finding out about Violet's Walk and that a lot of young people are moving into the area made us wonder why they were moving there. Nothing online indicated that the crime rate has gone completely down and the fact that houses were so cheap there also did not explain it completely. So why were young professionals, mostly creative types, moving to an area that still seems to be struggling with your usual inner-city problems? We found out about other community initiatives in Woodstock, namely the Woodstock Peace Garden, the A Word of Art project that brought colour into the area through 'graffiti' and other community committees that look after the heritage of the area as well improving the safety in the area. This led to the second part of our question in that despite being situated in the middle of the city, Woodstock has held onto a community-orientated culture. Further research shows its other reputation as having resisted the Apartheid's segregation act and remained integrated. This helped to inform our research question even further in that we wanted to know why it is so integrated, is it still integrated and what aspects of it has changed and if this influenced the area's apparent community spirit. Another important aspect that also formed part of our research question is the fact that Woodstock has been renovated for both residential and business use as the area goes through a period of gentrification. Most of these changes seem to be purported by new residents moving in and wondered if this meant that the old residents were being indirectly forced out? Is gentrification always a positive and could Woodstock lose its original character?

Online research was one of our main avenues in that we were spatially restricted to do some physical field research. For the FIFA World Cup and the Design Indaba there were various videos about the street art in Woodstock in which they also interviewed some of the residents living there and this helped us to get at least some feel for the area that didn't depend written sources. Although we mostly wanted a variety of non-official sources like residents, we did find some more official sources online who we could contact beforehand about doing some interviews. This was the ward councillor for the area, the businessperson who started the Woodstock Peace Garden and the Woodstock Aesthetics Advisory Committee. Another website that appeared to cater to the residents in the area was the I Love Woodstock site, which contained news, stories about the area and its people and things to do. This site was very useful, although we still felt in our pre-production research that we were still missing the

other side of Woodstock, the more grimy, less safe side and was only exposed to the artistic, gentrified spaces of Woodstock. This is why we needed to be physically in Woodstock to do more in-depth research with the locals and is why we should have had given ourselves more time to just interact and do face-to-face research before we started filming, but unfortunately time was somewhat constrained.

## **Methodology**

Ethnography is a “research strategy that allows researchers to explore and examine the cultures and societies that are fundamental part of the human experience...ethnography aims to study life outside of a controlled environment” (Murchison 2010: 4). Forming part of our methodology (Pink 2005:22), it was intensely used in our documentary, as we were trying to make sense of a group of people of which we are not a part of.

Contextualisation and being able to “understand the world of the natives as far as possible in the way themselves understand it, as a basis for further analysis” (Eriksen 2004:53) are methodological requirements when in the field. This was important to remember when we embarked on our shooting as the whole aim of our documentary was to show the world of Woodstock as the residents themselves see it. This was one of the reasons we decided to organise accommodation within Woodstock so that we could do some ‘participant observation’ and that when we were not filming we could easily just go chat with the people we met without putting a camera in their face.

We also had a holistic approach to our methods, exploring “how single phenomena are connected to other phenomena and institutions in an integrated whole” (Eriksen 2004:37). In this case, the single phenomena would be the various initiatives that the community has undertaken, like Violet’s Walk and Tina’s bed-box, how they are connected to each other and to the ‘integrated whole’ that makes up the whole of Woodstock. Originally, our structure also had a holistic approach, but it led to the ‘wider context’ dominating the phenomena.

Unfortunately, our method of getting as much as we can in one week backfired badly as we did not put enough focus and memory space on a few selected characters which ended up having a massive lack of sequences and cut-aways for interviewees. Getting qualitative evidence would have given our documentary more meat.

## Findings and New Knowledge

In a diverse country like South Africa, one does not only encounter a variety of individuals, but also a variety of communities and societies, the former associated with traditional and rural and the latter associated with modern and urban. Sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies's distinction between 'Gemeinschaft' (community) and 'Gesellschaft' (society) would be the most useful in this case:

The *Gemeinschaft* is a local community where people belong by virtue of shared experiences, based on traditional obligations and personal acquaintance. *Gesellschaft*, on the other hand, is the anonymous large-scale society typical of modernity, where the state and other powerful institutions have largely take over the roles of family and neighbourhood.

(Eriksen 2004:24)

In Woodstock's case, this definition appeared to be quite a contradiction. When asked why they lived in Woodstock, our interviewees answered along the lines that Woodstock provided the best of both worlds: a community spirit where everyone knows each other (and they really do) and helps each other out, but you are still able to live in a city close to wherever you need to go. The environments seemed to have an impact on this closeness, as houses usually share walls, front walls are quite low and garages are a rarity so most cars are parked in the street. This almost pushes people out into the open where they interact with each other daily, and when we did interviews on the street our interviewees would always be saying hi to someone walking past.

When we formed the integration aspect of our research question, we were not expecting to experience such an extremely diverse community as Woodstock. We met people of all races, class, ethnicity, religions (mainly Christian and Islam) and was most surprised by the amount of international people living in Woodstock we met. Another aspect of this 'rainbow nation' area was its proximity to District Six which we did not realise in our pre-production research. One of our interviewees, Shamiel Abbas, told us that he grew up in District Six and this is what he loves about Woodstock, because it reminds him of the same community love that they had in his old neighbourhood. The ward councillor also mentioned this connection and it appeared that was their reasoning why Woodstock is so integrated. However, we did have a lack of interviewees who were black South Africans living in Woodstock and unfortunately we did not have the space or time to explore why this is so.

Change in Woodstock had a variety of replies, especially in regards to crime and gentrification. Most said that crime had gone down exponentially, although residents who have lived there longer, like Violet, seemed to disagree when they compared to how it was when they were young. We also found disparity between those who live on the street and those who live in houses. Jacob and Ricky, both who live on the street, didn't think crime had gone down in the area, although daylight crime seems to have dropped. There were also various positions on gentrification, some arguing that it is uplifting the area and others saying it is ruining the heritage value. Ricky Lee Gordon, art activist and the artist who headed the street art project, saw his campaign as a way to bring in colour to the streets and to give lower Woodstock residents access to art that would previously only be available in art galleries. Interestingly, Gordon and the tour guides Juma and Willard did not see the art as graffiti, but as murals and this distinction was also made by the councillor. This led to tension about the legality of such street art, something that was not in our initial research, which is very important in analysing the viability of such a type of renewal project.

### Analysis of *The Art of Living*

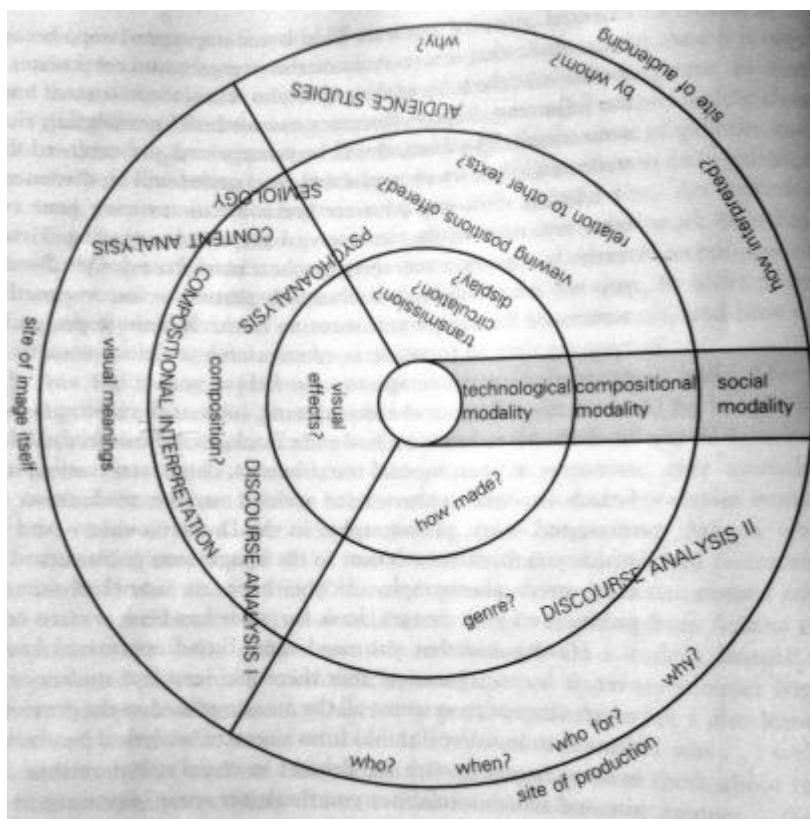


Figure 1 (Gillian 2001:30)

According to Rose Gillian (2001:32), “visual imagery is never innocent; it is always constructed through various practices, technologies and knowledge”. She provides a schematic of sites, modalities and methods for interpreting visual materials (see Figure 1), similar to that of Fairclough, Wodak and Van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Analysis. I will be using this to develop an analysis of *Woodstock: The Art of Living* in regards to the three sites where meaning is made, namely production, image and audience (Gillian 2001:16).

Firstly, comes the site of production. This documentary is situated within the expository genre, in that it seeks to persuade the audience of a specific argument, in this case our research question, by using rhetoric (Nichols 1981:174). Nichols’ primary concern when analysing these arguments was invention, which looked at the kind of evidence used to support the documentary’s argument. This is then divided into inartistic and artistic proofs. Inartistic refers to the hard facts in a documentary that cannot be disputed. In *The Art of Living*, we had little hard facts as we focused more on opinion of the various interviewees and the conclusions we came to using suggested evidence, or artistic proofs. The ‘who’ of the documentary is the residents of Woodstock, their lives, their community and the ways they have tried to help each other and the wider community out. The ‘when’ is the various periods that Woodstock has gone through, from its Apartheid years, to its current gentrification years. The ‘why’ of documentary is less clear cut and something we struggled with and it shows in our structure, showing how “circumstances of [visual representation’s] production may contribute towards the effect they have” (Gillian 2001:17). I do not believe we have fully enclosed the ‘why’ into our documentary, as it was originally a very disjointed structure and we just barely got it together into a cohesive one, not giving an answer to why people should watch it.

The next site is that of the image itself and looks at visual effects, visual meanings and composition. We attempted to have the colours in our piece be very vibrant, so as to show the colourfulness of the area and its people, almost metaphorically so. This could have ended being a bit jarring as our interviewees were not as colourful and we had really bad lighting with our councillor interview, which ruined the visual flow of the piece. Another aspect of our interviews were that our official sources had very formal interview settings whereas our other interviewees were either interviewed outside in the street or in the environment of their workplace, for example the ambience noises from their workshop in Luke and Edrooi’s

interviews helped to situate them. The documentary's images are also made of the various proofs that Nichols mentions, namely ethical and emotional proofs (Nichols 1981:174).

In our documentary we relied the most on emotional proofs, like the interaction between Jenny Pedersen and Tina, one an art teacher, the other a person from the streets, and the laughter they show when talking about the first time Sina saw her bed-box. Another emotional proof was our use of graffiti throughout the piece and the streets shots of shacks and children playing in the streets and in the park also helped to get the audience more involved in how the Woodstock residents live. Because of the lack of interviewee sequences, we had to use orphaned shot that appeared randomly over interviews this continued the disjointedness of the structure.

Ethical proofs look at the credibility of the sources used in an argument (Nichols 1981:174), namely the narrator and the interviewees. They are the most important part of our piece as they give evidence for our argument. "By giving us access to 'ordinary people', the narrator's own moral status rises: their testimony invariably bears out the narrator's thesis" (Nichols 1981:202). We aimed to provide mostly 'selected ordinary people', but in the end we needed that extra credibility that they have to give to our argument. Our three official source was the ward councillor, the head of the Woodstock Community Outreach Forum and a member of the Woodstock Aesthetics Advisory Committee. They were used in the sections where an aspect of Woodstock was discussed in-between the stories, namely danger and change. However, conflict or obstacles for the characters to overcome were not visible in the images and this could make the audience a bit bored, but I believe the visual elements and other emotional proofs make up for that and will keep the audience's attention.

Another piece of our ethical proofs is our narrator. Without her, the structure and argument of our piece would not be visible to the audience and I do wish that we had focused more on one or two characters that could have provided us with a sort of narration. The fact that our narrator does not come from Woodstock and is not even a character that you see does give the narrator a disembodied voice and appears almost voyeuristic like the old style of documentary photography (Gillian 2001:20). However, the narrator's voice does not appear that often and becomes the "contextualising voice capable of introducing perspective independent of any character's" (Nichols 1981:198). Mainly, without her it would have been a documentary made up of vox pops with no coherent structure.

What is a documentary without an audience, and this is the last site that my analysis will look at. At this site “a visual image has its meanings renegotiated, or even rejected, by particular audiences watching in specific circumstances” (Gillian 2001:25) and we found this to be very true in our representation of our characters and how the audience perceived them. Jenny and Luke Pedersen, a couple that has been living there for eight years now, were viewed by those we showed our piece as being upper class white ‘hipsters’ who are doing their good deed for the day and almost patronising, but that was not who they were at all. We experienced them as a down-to-earth couple who happened to have good taste, but not the money that people seemed to think they have. They also had genuine relationships with the people they helped and this was community driven in that they give what they can, which is their time and skills mostly. The way we portrayed Tina and Sina was also a difficult representation to grasp in that Tina never gave us her surname and we struggled to think of a politically correct term for her subtitle, which we finally decided on was ‘street neighbour’, which still sounds somewhat condescending. Also, Sina was fine with us filming her bed-box and her story but she did not want to be on camera at all and we ended up not having a voice that is criticised for being missing in most media texts. I think in the final structure of our documentary this still alluded us as we struggled with the social work our representation did and the naturalised social categories of race and class that our audience makes use of in interpreting our documentary (Gillian 2001:11).

## **Self-reflection**

[An ethnography] does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers’ experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced. (Pink 2005: 22)

This documentary of Woodstock does not claim to show the whole of Woodstock’s character, but rather how we experienced it and we tried to share that experience with the audience. We carried our social positions and interests to the documentary which helped to construct the meaning of the visuals (Pink 2005: 10), although in the beginning of the post production



process we completely got lost in it. We were so focused on trying to show the diversity of Woodstock that we ended up with too many voices and not enough character build-up. This took us a while to get back to what we wanted originally, but sadly was at the cost of cutting some favourite interviewees. This cutting was also as a result of our lack of sequences with our interviewees, which was something we sacrificed so we could get more interviews in our limited timeline. “The methods should serve the aims of the research, not the research serve the aims of the method” (Pink 2005:4).

I am quite nervous how the people of Woodstock will respond to our documentary, as we will be sending them copies but will not be there to see their reactions. We had filmed so many but because we had to cut many out some might be upset that we did not use them.

In regards to filming, I have learned the importance of sequences and that when you shoot interviews shoot enough shots of the interviewee in order to build character. I also learnt patience with outdated equipment, because in the real world you will not always have the most top-notch technology at your disposal and should be able to adapt.

Personally, I learnt a lot about what people define as a community and the fact that I have never really lived in a city made me very unaware of the isolation that city-dwellers feel. To find that people like living in Woodstock because they did not feel as isolated as they did in other city suburbs was something I did not expect. It showed me that communities come in many shapes and forms and that you cannot judge an area based on what other people tell you; only by living there do you have a say about the area. It was also refreshing to experience these community projects that were started by people in the area, not by outsiders who go somewhere else to do their ‘charity’ work, but that one should start in your own area.

## **Conclusion**

In the end what our audience got from the documentary on a superficial level was that Woodstock is a cool place to live. Deeper than that, I believe it also showed that people can live in a city without having to be isolated from their neighbours and that a community spirit depends on the people who keep it alive. As meaning can never be fixed because of social, cultural and linguistic conventions (Hall 1997:23), our documentary’s meaning will also change from viewer to viewer, differing between those who live there and those who do not. Our own positions in discourse also influenced the documentary, especially in that meaning is produced through language (Hall 1997:16) and in this case that language is our images and

the positions we offered the audience. We exerted our power as media producers over our characters (Hall 1997:46) and by maintaining that power we ended up silencing others, like that of those living in the street and other, more long-term residents of Woodstock.

Although our structure and sequences are badly left wanting and the various readings it got from test audiences, I do believe we managed to get at least a small chunk of the Woodstock community, available to be explored more fully by those who come after us.

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