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A Portrait of a Farm: A Short Film Documenting Small-Scale Livestock Production on Hayters Hill Farm in Byron Bay

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A Portrait of a Farm: A Short Film Documenting
Small-Scale Livestock Production on Hayters Hill Farm in Byron Bay

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Hayters Hill Farm – Byron Bay, NSW
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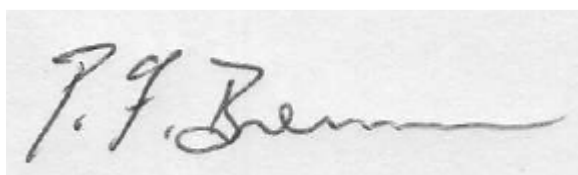
ISP Ethics Review

This ISP paper by Noah Throop (student) has been reviewed by Peter Brennan (Academic Director) and does/does not* conform to the ethical standards of the local community and the ethical and academic standards outlined in the SIT student and AD handbooks.

*This paper does not conform to standards for the following reasons:

Academic Director: Peter Brennan

Signature:

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive style and appears to read "P. Brennan".

Program: Australia: Sustainability and Environmental Action

Date: May 9th, 2013

Abstract

Over the past two-hundred years, the industrialization and mechanization of agriculture has slowly dissolved the centuries-old bond between human beings, the land and their food. Today, this disconnect threatens to exacerbate wide scale environmental degradation and a wide array of chronic diseases. However small, local farms that sell their produce directly to consumers are in a position to reverse this trend and reconnect consumers with their food. Small-scale farmers are able to see the health of the environment as instrumental to their economic and personal wellbeing and are able to be held accountable for their farming practices by their customers. It is thus essential that information regarding the work of small-scale farmers be spread to the larger public.

Film has long been used as an art form to inspire the public, disseminate information and advocate for social change. Thus my film, *Where the Food Grows* seeks to embrace these aspects of film in order foster greater discussion and public discourse on food production. To create *Where the Food Grows*, I conducted 4 interviews, compiled over 8 hours of footage and completed nearly 200 hours of work, observation and editing at Hayters Hill Farm in Byron Bay, NSW. Though my film lacks a depiction of the bond between consumers and producers at the Farmers Markets, it succeeds at accurately portraying the work involved in the small-scale production of food. *Where the Food Grows* carries the potential to spur conversation, deliver information and offer a necessary and sustainable alternative to the prevailing model of agriculture.

TOPIC CODES: 104, 602, 604

KEYWORDS: Film, Agriculture, Livestock Production, Food, Local Farming

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Introduction and Literature Review:

Brief History of Industrial Agriculture

Humans have grown food for over ten-thousand years, but industrial agriculture has only flourished in the last few hundred years. In that short amount of time, crop yields worldwide have increased dramatically. However, this rise in production was inextricably dependent upon synthetic chemical fertilizers, pesticides, mechanized labor and increasing markets for produce being produced.¹ Today, industrial agriculture continues to rely on this extensive network of energy-intensive inputs. These inputs have proven to generate considerable waste and further degrade the environment and surrounding ecosystems. Because of these widespread, serious, and damaging effects, industrial agriculture is inherently not sustainable.

The terms sustainable and sustainability are here used to imply the long-term health and survival of humanity without degrading our surrounding ecosystems or threatening the well-being of future generations. If we are concerned with the long-term health of local and global ecosystems, current industrial agriculture and livestock production is not sustainable. Likewise, if we are concerned with long-term human health implications, industrial agriculture and livestock production is not sustainable.

Impacts of Industrial Livestock Production

Of the varying forms and modes of industrial agriculture, livestock production arguably has the greatest impact on the health and wellbeing of humans and the environment. According to Leo Horrigan, Robert Lawrence and Polly Walker, the environmental harms caused by industrial agriculture become the most severe in the production of meat – “Our food supply becomes more resource intensive when we eat grain-fed animals instead of eating the grain directly, because a significant amount of energy is lost as livestock convert the grain they eat into meat.”² As greater meat demand correlates with a rise in economic growth, many modernizing nations are on track to compound the negative effects caused by industrial agriculture.³

¹ L. Horrigan, R.S. Lawrence, and P. Walker, ‘How Sustainable Agriculture Can Address the Environmental and Human Health Harms of Industrial Agriculture’, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, vol. 110, no. 5, 2002, p. 446.

² L. Horrigan, R.S. Lawrence, and P. Walker, p. 445.

³ J. Pretty, ‘Agricultural Sustainability: Concepts Principles and Evidence’, *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences*, vol. 363, no. 1491, 2008, p. 448.

Anthony J McMichael, John W. Powles, Colin D. Butler and Ricardo Uauy have reported that nearly 22% of global greenhouse emissions are produced by industrial agriculture – livestock production accounts for 80% of that total.⁴ This is due in large part to the potency of methane and nitrous oxide – two gases that are byproducts of livestock production and accelerate climate change at a much faster rate than carbon dioxide.⁵ Furthermore, as the demand for meat rises, an increasing expansion in livestock production is fueling massive deforestation (for grazing land and grain production), a loss of biodiversity, soil erosion, the disruption of major elemental cycles (by artificially doubling the amount of nitrogen on Earth in order to grow the grain needed to feed livestock), antibiotic resistance in humans (due to the proliferation of antibiotics in animal agriculture), and rising levels of chronic degenerative diseases such as heart disease, type II diabetes and colon, breast and prostate cancer.⁶

Upon examination, it becomes apparent that the current production, distribution and consumption of food is inherently dangerous and unsustainable. Further evidence, if necessary, is beyond the scope of this report. My purpose is to explore an alternative to the current standard of industrial agriculture.

Exploring Nonconventional Agriculture

Sustainable agriculture, by comparison, is designed to ensure that the inputs on which it depends are maintained and protected at constant and healthy levels and do not degrade the surrounding ecosystems or threaten the well-being of future generations.⁷ Sustainable and local models of agriculture also naturally foster relationships between producers and consumers of food. Mechanized, industrial agriculture is unable to bridge this divide, as the production of food is generally far removed from its final destination in the grocery store. As Andrew Kimbrell writes in his book, *Fatal Harvest: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture*,

⁴ A.J. McMichael, J.W. Powles, C.D. Butler, and R. Uauy, 'Food, Livestock Production, Energy, Climate Change and Health', *Series on Energy and Health 5*, National Center for Epidemiology and Population Health, 2007, p. 1.

⁵ E. Englekaupt, 'Do Food Miles Matter?', *Science News*, 16 April 2008.

⁶ L. Horrigan, R.S. Lawrence, and P. Walker, 'How Sustainable Agriculture Can Address the Environmental and Human Health Harms of Industrial Agriculture', *Environmental Health Perspectives*, vol. 110, no. 5, 2002, p. 445.

⁷ R. Gopalan, 'Sustainable Food Production and Consumption: Agenda for Action', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 36, no. 14/15, 2001, p. 1208.

“Over the last century, we have been transformed from a nation of farmers with our hands and minds linked to the soil, to a nation of consumers lined up in supermarkets to buy an array of slickly packaged food products about which we know very little.”⁸

This reality is both disconcerting and a difficult barrier to overcome in the quest for sustainable agriculture. However, small-scale, local farms represent a necessary force in challenging the agricultural status quo and the severe disconnect between farmers and consumers.

Introduction to Hayters Hill Farm

For this project, I created a film based on my experiences and interviews at Hayters Hill Farm, Byron Bay, in northeastern New South Wales. Hayters Hill is a small-scale livestock farm which raises cattle using rotational grazing in an environment free of synthetic chemicals and grows pasture-raised chickens to produce eggs. These products are then sold to local cafés in Byron Bay and at the Farmers’ Markets in Bangalow, Byron Bay and Mullumbimby.

Small, local farms have the ability to approach agriculture in ways that modern, industrialized farm systems cannot. Because Hayters Hill is a multigenerational family farm, each family member has expressed a serious interest in maintaining the health of the land for future generations. In this way, the land is not regarded as a tool but as a living, thriving ecosystem that must be nurtured and cared for in order to continue providing for their children and the success of the business. Hayters Hill Farm has thus recognized that their economic wellbeing is intrinsically linked to the environmental wellbeing of their soils, waters and pastures. The farm is able to look beyond the mere production of beef and eggs for profit and engage in systematic thinking about the health and nourishment of their local ecosystem, the microbiology of the soils, the rivers and water catchment areas and the management of their grazing pastures. Currently the farm is working on reintroducing native rainforest species along the banks of the Byron River that flows through their property and looking at establishing a large worm juice composting system in order to fertilize their pastures.

⁸ A. Kimbrell, *Fatal Harvest: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture*, Foundation for Deep Ecology, 2002.

Creative and time-flexible measures such as this are difficult on a large, industrial scale which relies on sheer volume and throughput to continue operating.

What's more, the farmers at Hayters Hill Farm sell their products directly to consumers at Farmers' Markets within the region. This allows for close communication between producer and consumer and a greater comprehension of where food grows and how it is grown. This transparency has lasting benefits that far outweigh the convenience and cheap price of industrialized food in a supermarket. Consumers are able to make highly informed purchases by speaking directly with the producers of their food. They are also able to enter into a broader dialogue with both family members and the local community that encompasses notions of personal health, environmental health, the politics of food and the joys of eating well. Ultimately, as Jason Houston maintains, "Issues of personal health and global hunger, the instability of oil-dependent economies, growing agricultural trade surpluses, genetic engineering, the loss of regional crop varieties, the ethical treatment of animals, and the impact of farms on our environment are all part of a daily dynamic we participate in every time we eat."⁹ Small-scale, local farms which sell their produce directly to consumers can assist in exposing these realities and placing them into the public domain.

Project Outline

My film attempts to create a portrait of a farm and the individuals who live and work there. Through filming and working at Hayters Hill Farm, I wished to gain (and film) a greater understanding of local food production, nonconventional farming practices and the barriers faced by small businesses to achieving sustainability. I also aimed to explore whether non-industrial, local agriculture is sufficient to provide for the community and foster a relationship between consumers, producers and the food that binds them. Ultimately, I sought to harness the transformative power of film in order to foster greater public discourse on food production and I will work towards using my film to achieve that end.

Using film to document small-scale, local agriculture practiced without the use of chemicals and energy-intensive inputs can be very helpful in fostering an understanding of true sustainability. On the consumer end, I believe a solid connection to local agriculture and a deep comprehension of where food comes from and how it is produced are key features

⁹ J. Houston, 'The American Farm', *Gastronomica*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2007, p. 24.

towards generating sustainable agriculture. On the producer end, I believe sustainability eventually emerges from practices which avoid the use of synthetic chemicals, genetically modified technologies, and petroleum-based inputs. I also believe that growing food with care and compassion (rather than treating food as a commodity) is an integral component to producing sustainable, healthy food. Having observed and worked with Hugh, David, Owen and Julie, I feel Hayters Hill Farm embodies these conditions and is a good example of the alternative to industrial livestock production. Documentary film can act as a social change agent by informing the public, sharing stories and portraying beneficial alternatives to industrial agriculture.

History of Australian Films Promoting Sustainability

Over the past ten years, there has been a considerable increase in the number of internationally produced documentaries produced which have directed the public's attention towards commercial food production and industrial agriculture. Films such as *Food Inc.* (U.S., 2008), *King Corn* (U.S., 2007), *Supersize Me* (U.S. 2004), *The Future of Food* (U.S. 2004) and *Our Daily Bread* (U.S., Germany 2005), have all had a vast impact on widely-held perceptions of food. Though Australia has not significantly contributed to this well-known body of work, there have been numerous Australian independent production companies and film foundations that have sought to further sustainability and environmental movements through the use of film.

For example, the Documentary Australia Foundation (DAF) is a not for profit organization which aims at providing and donating grant money to fund independent film projects. In their own words, the DAF “provides information and resources to philanthropic grantmakers, charitable organizations and documentary filmmakers in order to explore, share and enhance their mutual objectives of creating a better society.”¹⁰ To this end, they have provided money for a vast number of films on environmental topics ranging from sustainable corporate office design to Australia's Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife to global food security and sustainable agriculture practices.

¹⁰ Documentary Australia Foundation, *About Us* (online), 2013, Available: <http://www.documentaryaustralia.com.au/about>

In addition, the city of Melbourne recently hosted *The Transitions International Film Festival* through the month of February, 2013 which focused on screening films to the public that are “positive, solutions-focused and inspirational.”¹¹ The films aired were very diverse and highlighted an array of environmental themes, from sustainable architecture to the history of American environmentalism. Each film also held a forum afterwards with local leaders in the sustainability movement and drew on audience participation to fuel discussion.¹²

How Film is used to Further Sustainability

Australian foundations and events such as those listed above have recognized the power of film in advancing sustainability. As Hillary Inwood, a lecturer at the University of Toronto, states “[...] by better connecting art to the realities of daily living [such as environmental concerns], art can be used effectively as an agent of social change, one that capture[s] the public's attention through its creative, innovative approaches to society's problems.”¹³ The internet and social media have amplified our ability to communicate and minimized the degrees by which we are separated in a significant way. This has allowed for the possibility of sudden explosions of interest surrounding an idea or cause to grow exponentially.¹⁴

Filmmaking has thus become a powerful force in furthering environmentalism and sustainability. Well-made films possess the unique ability to transport viewers around the world, challenge social norms and facilitate social change. For example, documentary films such as *An Inconvenient Truth* and *Gasland* have demonstrated this capacity by bringing environmental concerns to the forefront of the public’s consciousness and exposing viewers to new environments, people, ideas and thoughts. As Lisa Smithline, executive director of Brave New Films, contends, “By spotlighting powerful and emotional personal stories seldom tackled by the media corporations, film offers a much-needed outlet for people to listen up, speak out and take the initiative for positive change.”¹⁵

¹¹ T. Parish, Transitions Film Festival, *About Us* (online), 2013, Available: <http://www.transitionsfilmfestival.com/about-2/>

¹² T. Parish, Transitions Film Festival.

¹³ H. Inwood, ‘Shades of Green: Growing Environmentalism through Art Education’, *Art Education*, vol. 63, no. 6, 2010, p. 34.

¹⁴ B. Stelter, ‘From Flash to Fizzle’, *New York Times*, 14 Apr. 2012.

¹⁵ L. Smithline, ‘Telling Stories, Building Movements: Can a Film Change Wal-Mart?’ *Social Policy*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2005, p. 6.

Methodology:

Hayters Hill Farm Overview and Practices

Hayters Hill Farm is an intergenerational family business divided into three main operations – eggs, beef and live cattle. Hugh Trevor-Jones oversees a flock of around 2,000 egg-laying hens, which are a cross between a Rhode Island Red and a Leghorn. He also has four large chicken tractors and uses rotational grazing practices – every fortnight the birds are moved onto a new patch of grass in order to eliminate manure buildup, parasite and disease related issues and allow the grazed land to recover. Each week he collects and packages around 11,000 eggs which are sold at local cafés, restaurants and regional Farmers' Markets.

David Trevor-Jones is Hugh's brother and he operates a butcher shop on the farm as well as manages some of the cattle herd. He spends the majority of his time butchering and preparing meat for the regional Farmers' Markets and local cafés. On Tuesdays, David will break down the beef carcasses and work at preparing typical cuts of meat – steaks, roasts, rumps, tenderloins, mincemeat, etc. On Wednesdays, he prepares his value-added meats – breaded schnitzels, honey-macadamia nut sausages, garlic-pepper sausages, etc. David works with a longtime friend and experienced butcher and the two of them create new recipes and determine the final product line.

Julie and Owen Trevor-Jones are Hugh and David's parents. They own the majority of the cattle herd on the farm and maintain a breeding stock which produces calves for slaughter. David buys the calves from his parents, has them butchered and processed at the Casino stockyards by the Northern Cooperative Meat Company Limited and delivered to him every Monday night. Julie and Owen also practice rotational grazing methods and spend time each day moving the cattle from one paddock to the next.

Daily Responsibilities

Before I began intensively filming for this project, I spent a considerable amount of time immersed in the work done on the farm. I continually worked at the Farmers' Markets in Bangalow and Byron Bay, helped with cattle herding, moved chicken tractors with Hugh, collected eggs and assisted in the butcher shop, among many other things. Having this intimate and well-versed understanding of my subjects, their work and daily schedules before stepping behind the camera is an essential aspect to producing a successful film.

On a technical level, familiarizing myself with my subjects and their work allows me to brainstorm where I should set up my camera and tripod. I was able to visualize the best angles and shots for filming and keep a list of camera-worthy moments. I also paid close attention to the moments and areas where it appeared difficult for me to maneuver my tripod and not interfere with any work being done. I then had to spend time discussing these dilemmas with my subjects and thinking through ways to get around any perceived obstacles. The butcher shop was a very complex and difficult environment to film in as the work done there is fast, practiced and methodical. The room itself is also exceptionally small and David works with three other men who take up the majority of the space. Having invested time in observing this environment beforehand, I knew the areas I could position myself so as to least interfere with their work while also getting the shots I needed.

I also took note of daily routines and patterns so that I was able to have my equipment up and running before work began. This was especially important on the farm, as the work done is constant and uninterrupted. If I was oblivious to my subject's schedule and came late to the butcher shop or did not make it to the gate as the cattle were herded through, I risked missing the shot I was looking for. In one instance, I woke up unprepared at 5 AM in order to capture footage for the introduction to my film, only to find that I had forgotten the memory card to my camera and could not film. Spending time observing and participating in the daily work on the farm allowed me to prepare in advance (recharge batteries, make sure my equipment was in order, etc.) and minimize lost opportunities such as this.

On a deeper level, having time to work with my subjects helped to establish an initial rapport with each member of the family. As my film required me to scrutinize and document every aspect of their work, getting to know my subjects beforehand allowed for much greater ease during filming. I moved with them rather than against them and I gradually introduced the camera into their work as time went on. This then gave the filming process a much more natural and less invasive feel.

Interviews

Creating a documentary portrait required that I blend both important factual information with an introspective look into my subjects' lives, emotions, thoughts and beliefs. Successful documentary portraits are able to paint a person's character through film and offer thoughtful

and provoking insights into the life of another individual. Therefore, my interview questions needed to be written and designed in such a way as to gradually elicit introspective and sometimes emotional responses from my subjects in a respectful manner. This aspect of filmmaking ties back into the establishment of a good rapport with your subject before filming begins – because an interview can have the feel of an interrogation, an in-depth understanding of your subject and their behaviors and tendencies is especially important during the interview process.

Editing Footage and Creating the Final Film

Editing the film was what consumed the majority of my time for this project. I filmed and compiled nearly eight hours of footage and created detailed plans to organize and evaluate all shots taken in order to produce a final film with a running length of thirty-five minutes. I spent a large portion of my time designing various storyboards and brainstorming outlines for the film. This allowed me to have a template for which to categorically organize all of my raw footage according to the various sections I wished to cover. I then spent a significant amount of time piecing together the shots I had taken into organized sections – one with the butchery footage, one with the chicken footage, etc. These would then form the foundation upon which I would layer the interviews and voiceovers.

The most demanding and intensive aspect of my work was listening through three hours of interviews, dividing up the dialogue of each subject into small sound bites, organizing each sound bite into a category and extracting twenty total minutes of only the relevant information necessary to tell a story. When creating a film in which the subject's narration directs the viewer and provides the underlying pulse, I make a substantial effort to have the end result appear as though what the viewer hears is one succinct, uninterrupted conversation. In reality, the final result is a complicated amalgamation of sound bites and clips from all four hour long interviews, strung together in such a way so as to create flow and logical sense. I am therefore also charged with the difficult task of paying close attention throughout the interview to the underlying flow of the words being spoken by my subjects if I wish to remain true to their message and their story. I then had to spend time analyzing what each person was saying, find patterns between and across all four interviews and piece together sections from each subject's interview in a way that created flow and made logical sense.

This process took many days and is extraordinarily time-consuming, complex and difficult to organize. Because of the vast amount of interview footage, subdivided into around three-hundred sound clips that could not accurately be labeled, this process of editing resembled the card game Concentration, where a deck of cards is laid face down on the table and you must try and find pairs of cards by flipping over one card at a time. As seen in the film, the voiceovers and subjects in the film fit well together and play off one another based on what they are saying. In order to create this correlation between four separate interviews, I'd listen to a sentence spoken by Subject A and recall it being similar to something Subject B and C also said. I then had to go back through all of Subject B and C's interviews to find that sound clip and put it in a group with Subject A, until all of the audio was organized in this way.

Once I had the rough draft of my film completed, I then went back through all of my footage and color corrected each shot, checking exposure, contrast, white balance, and saturation levels. Since all films are heavily reliant on sound, I also had to continually go back into the film and adjust the volume levels for all of my footage and make sure that the audio was neither too loud nor too soft for both the voiceovers and the stock footage I took (the sound of the chickens and the cattle, etc.). For each of the interviews, I had to capture noise prints and scrub the audio of all ambient noise. All microphones pick up ambient noise in a room, whether it's the low hum of a refrigerator in the background or noise in the room that is inaudible to the human ear. Capturing noise prints allows you to take a copy of the ambient sound (a point in time during which there is no interview speech), isolate it and allow the editing software to remove this sound from the entire audio clip. You are then left with clean, noise-less audio.

Challenges Faced

I faced significant challenges and obstacles that needed to be extensively managed and overcome while filming the interviews for this project. Because I have limited access to decent camera and microphone equipment, I had to record the audio and video independently of one another. The microphone embedded within the camera I use produces low quality sound, so I used a studio microphone wired up to a laptop to record only the audio from the interview. I then used my camera to capture video and during the editing process, I synced both the audio and video together to produce the final result. While this allows me to achieve a quality end product, it creates an environment with many wires, recording devices and a

camera relatively close to your face. It is thus inherently difficult to create an atmosphere conducive to an insightful and emotional interview while also controlling all other factors and variables.

For the majority of individuals, this set up is not difficult to overcome. As filmmaker and interviewer, I am aware of the psychological effects of a complicated set up in front of your face. I did what I could to amend this discomfort during my four interviews with Hugh, Dave, Owen and Julie. I stated that it is best to ignore all of the equipment and to concentrate on having a natural, unscripted conversation with me. Most interviews were conducted without a problem. However, one subject expressed an initial discomfort when I reminded them after a few weeks that I would need to conduct an interview whenever possible. They made it apparent that, although they were still willing to participate, they were nervous about doing an interview on camera. We set aside an afternoon of free time and after concluding an amazing interview in one hour, the audio file that I had created experienced a computer error and no longer functioned.

I therefore was faced with a serious dilemma – attempt to use the low quality on-camera audio or conduct a second interview and make sure the equipment worked correctly. I spent nearly ten hours trying countless methods to get the on-camera audio to function properly and sound acceptable. This was a frustrating period of time because successful sound quality in a film is crucial and this interview would stand out markedly different from the others once they were all put together. After three days of discussion and debate with my subject on the pros and cons of a second interview, we determined we would set up and record again. I did what I could to eliminate their nerves during this second recording process and it worked to some effect, but made editing much more difficult.

I have since discovered and reinforced my understanding of how critical it is to field and know your subjects before you begin to do a documentary portrait on them. You must know their behaviors, traits, personalities and tendencies if you wish to create an intimate portrait that seeks to reveal a part of their life on film. In the case of my subject, their nerves and unwillingness to be on camera were a considerable risk and jeopardized the final outcome. If the subject does not want to share their story or thoughts in a documentary portrait, or appears hesitant in any way, the film risks losing its ability to tell a story and emotionally move an audience. It is easy to tell on camera if somebody wishes to be interviewed and

share their thoughts or if they are cowering beneath their skin and not enjoying the process. It is thus of the utmost importance that your subjects are cool, calm and collected throughout the interview and feel as if they inhabit a space where their thoughts and emotions are safe, valued and respected.

Documentary Work:

Description and Explanation of ISP Project

As Michael Bomford writes in his article, *Getting Fossil Fuels Off the Plate*, “In a society where less than 1 percent of the population grows most of the food for the other 99 percent, it’s easy to feel removed from the food system, or disempowered by decisions that appear to be in the hands of others.”¹⁶ This quote became a source of inspiration for my project and I ultimately worked towards producing a film which provided a holistic and multidimensional picture of the lives of these farmers, the work that they do to produce food for their customers and the personal and environmental struggles they face on a daily basis. I cover a wide array of issues, ranging from in-depth looks at specific operations on the farm (for example, cattle herding and egg packaging) to the work done at the Farmers Market in Byron Bay. I have allowed for the Trevor-Jones family to narrate and guide the focus of the film, rather than include my voice in any of it. I felt that it was their story to tell and I pursued a distanced, observational approach to my filmmaking.

I do not carry broad ambitions regarding the potential of my film to rewind the clocks on industrial agriculture and encourage all consumers to alter their diets and consumption behaviors. Rather, my film is meant to invigorate viewers to reenter a lost dialogue between themselves and their food. Currently, industrial agriculture and modern food production have placed significant barriers between consumers and their food. The production of industrial food is far removed and disassociated from its final destination on the supermarket shelf and in people’s houses. As Bomford argues, there exists a severe disconnect between consumers and producers. Many modern consumers understand very little about where their food comes from, how it is produced, who produces it and how it arrives point A to point B.

¹⁶ M. Bomford, *The Post Carbon Reader: Managing the 21st Century’s Sustainability Crises*, Healdsburg, CA: Watershed Media, 2010.

How ISP Film Furthers Sustainability

As previously illustrated, when individuals are removed from a personal and communal discourse on food, they default into a system which degrades the environment, accelerates climate change, poses a variety of health and safety risks and is inherently unsustainable. Thus, I chose to portray the lives and farming practices of the family at Hayters Hill Farm because I sought to harness the transformative power of film in order to foster greater public discourse on food production. Many films have been produced which portray the dark side of industrial agriculture, but very few well-known films have examined small-scale farms that are a model for the future of agriculture. My film seeks to portray a largely underrepresented model of agriculture in order to spark an interest in the production of food, inform consumers and encourage a conversation on sustainable food production. Achieving sustainability is not a quick, simple process but rather a messy, convoluted progression in which good conversation, information and inspiration are necessary forces – I believe my film furthers sustainability in these three ways.

The Film's Intended Audience

Ideally, I hope my film will be utilized as a source of information and inspiration for all – I hope that what I produce will be internalized by viewers and used to generate discussion and debate among family, friends and local communities. I am in the process of attempting to connect with The Byron Movement, a Community Unification Program which seeks to “inspire more independence and a more enriching quality of life through connection to a coexisting, sustainable and balanced business and environmental society.” Their website hosts videos, artwork, music, and articles (among many other things) all sourced from local community members. I also plan on giving my film to the Hayters to disseminate to their friends and clients, as well as producing a short 1-2 minute promotional video for their farm.

More broadly, I wish for my film to be utilized as a tool or source of information by general mass audiences (by sharing through websites such as Vimeo and YouTube). I am sharing my work with family and friends and attempting to market my documentary through social media platforms. If feasible, I am also planning on entering my work into local and regional film contests in the Northeast United States.

Critical Analysis and Evaluation of Film:

Further Difficulties Encountered During Filming and Editing

I encountered countless difficulties during the course of this project and the creation of my film. This was predictable – I filmed on a low budget, my work was dependent upon the weather, technical problems are inevitable, and the nature of filmmaking is not constant, but subject to continual change and variation.

As previously detailed, I faced great difficulty during the interview process with one of my subjects. These difficulties also continued to cause a significant amount of grief and challenge during the editing process. A person's character is highly transparent when captured on film and their personality remains static. I cannot edit, alter or delete emotions, fear and exasperation. Thus these issues cause friction while editing and must be alleviated in one way or another. In many instances, this required that I use more voiceovers, rather than show the subject's face, in order to mask what their face was unable to hide. In other instances, I was forced to delete or not use footage because it would have been overtly obvious that the subject's response was hesitant or nervous.

One consistent goal throughout the filming process was to capture the communication between the consumer and producer at the market and portray this bond in the film. Due to my own error and lack of initiative, I was unable to follow through completely on this. I adopted a paranoid filmmaking persona at the Farmers Markets due to a fear of capturing individuals on camera without their consent. The regulations on creating a film for this project required that I obtain signed consent forms of any subjects depicted in my film. Rather than work with my supervisors to determine a way to ease this burden, I chose the safe route and ultimately sacrificed potentially powerful footage. This was a challenge and difficulty that I sincerely regret.

While assisting with and observing the agricultural practices on the farm, I took note that – due to the challenges of running a small business – there were many inherent Catch-22's in the work done at Hayters Hill Farm. In one instance, I helped to capture and cage nearly four-hundred old laying hens which were brought to a large, industrial processing plant outside of Brisbane to be killed. As the laying hens are a commercial breed, they have a laying span of only one year, after which their egg production drops dramatically. This requires Hugh

Trevor-Jones to eliminate a quarter of his flock once each year. While he does butcher and process some on the farm (which are sold as soup chickens at the Farmers Markets) and composts others, he has neither the time nor the space to warrant butchering the vast majority of the older birds himself. Hugh is therefore cornered into delivering the birds to a large processing plant in order to free up space for new hens. This complex situation presented a few challenges during the course of my filming. It added a new dimension to the portrait of a farm I was trying to portray on camera and I therefore had to determine a way to reconcile what I participated in with what I felt the overall message of the film should be. I determined that these agricultural dilemmas that I identified were as essential to the story of this farm as their soil and pasture management. However, I failed to capture the event on camera (due to the weather and a severe rain storm) and thus had to elicit information from Hugh during the interview. While not ideal, having him describe and account for a few of the hardships he faces was the best and most practical solution I could identify (short of attempting to stage and act out the capture and storage of four-hundred birds in the rain).

Film Successes

On the whole, I believe that my final film reflects the amount of time and effort I invested into the project and is successful in a number of ways. I believe I was able to accurately portray the range of activities and work done on the farm in an artistic and aesthetically pleasing manner. The shots I managed to capture were varied, unique and provided valuable insights into the daily rituals and routines at Hayters Hill Farm. I felt that I was able to navigate between the many different lines of work on the farm, maintain a balance in the film between David and Hugh Trevor-Jones (the main subjects of the film) and establish an ease of flow and coherency throughout the piece without complicating matters or confusing viewers. I feel I have truly succeeded at creating a portrait of Hugh, David, Owen and Julie Trevor-Jones and Hayters Hill Farm. I also have confidence that I am able to employ this film to good effect and follow through with my intentions to utilize this video as a source of conversation, information and inspiration.

I also believe that their spoken thoughts regarding their own work are a powerful force in the film and give the entire work an underlying strength and direction. I feel that the messages and story arc throughout portray a somewhat sad and difficult, but extremely rewarding line of work. The film's strength lies in how it captures the reality of the work involved in the production of food. I believe that a romanticized notion of the "rural farm life" exists among

many – a notion which does not accurately reflect the amount of constant, demanding work involved on a daily basis. My film has intentionally challenged this misguided notion. The implications of this will hopefully have a direct impact on how viewers comprehend their food and the processes taken to produce their food. As Hugh Trevor-Jones expresses in the film, “[The consumer] starts to understand what we go through, what we have to do, how we do it, and it’s much better that they have an idea of where their food comes from – they’re not just picking it off the supermarket shelf. They’re meeting their farmers each week and that’s great.”

Areas for Improvement:

Given the opportunity to readjust my approach and redo this project, there are a few areas I would fine tune and alter. If there is one weak spot in my film, it is the footage taken at the Farmers Markets. Both Hugh and Trevor-Jones speak directly and passionately about the connections and interactions they have with their customers at the marketplace but my film is entirely devoid of this connection. I would have significantly changed my approach with regards to this dilemma. Rather than approach the markets timidly, I would have sought the advice of my advisor and academic director and put in place a plan that could address the issue of obtaining consent forms from passing customers at the market. I would have also personally identified creative ways in which I could film this connection without exposing the identity of any customers.

I would also choose to limit the scope of my film. I feel that I tackled too large of a portrait with too many moving parts and characters. This presents a serious difficulty in arranging the space to allow for all their voices to be heard, as well as the time and energy invested in editing all four interviews and lines of work. I might have instead focused solely on one operation on the farm and examined the aspects of that work much more in depth. I would have also been much more cautious before signing on to work at a farm and taken the time to know the individual and their operations in depth (or find somebody who could vouch for their character). This would have helped alleviate many of the numerous problems faced when I encountered a subject who was hesitant to be interviewed. It would have also potentially prevented me from encountering any significant Catch-22’s that I felt needed to be reconciled in the film, or at least expected them ahead of time.

I would have additionally considered attempting to network with individuals or organizations that may allow me access to better recording equipment. This investment would have paid off during interviews (allowing for a more relaxed interviewing environment) and during editing (saving me time from having to edit both sound and video separately for the entire film).

Conclusion:

What Was Learned?

In the course of creating this project, I have greatly furthered my passion and interest in using film as a medium to initiate change and bring about social awareness regarding environmental issues. Film possesses the unique ability to emotionally move an audience and give voice to individuals and stories that are worthwhile telling in a visually pleasing and informational way. Film acts as a magnifying glass to expose substantive issues and challenge widely held conceptions. And film captures and portrays events in a unique way, specific to the filmmaker and his interpretation of events. According to David Trevor-Jones, what I saw behind the camera and constructed on film was an entirely new perspective to the work done on Hayters Hill than what he saw in his work on a daily basis. He described a feeling of importance and self-worth after finishing the film and stated that it helped to reinforce his confidence in the work he was doing and to strive to better his work in the future. This feedback is inspiring and encouraging for me as a filmmaker and motivates me to continue pursuing this line of work.

Film does pose a danger when attempting to convey sustainability messages – as with all work, it is easy to quickly lose an audience if your film appears boring, bland, drawn out and unfocused. But overcoming this danger is inherent to the art of filmmaking and allows for the creative process to flourish and discover ways of overcoming these obstacles.

Filmmaking also continually offers new and unique challenges that have allowed me to grow as an artist and as a person. I was forced to think on my feet and develop strategies to create a comforting atmosphere for my subjects, especially when they were unwilling and hesitant to speak. I observed and learned that if an individual feels as though their voice is heard and that their work has value and importance, they begin to open up and lower their defenses. I practiced keeping pace with each subject – moving, speaking and breathing at their individual rate in order to prevent subtle imbalances in the filming process. Learning and adopting

behavioral flexibility skills such as these has had a vast impact on my communicative abilities and my capacity to tell a story with a camera.

Suggestions for Future Projects

While preparing for and filming this project, I noted that there was a serious lack of popular, mainstream films on sustainable agriculture in Australia. I found this odd, considering the history of permaculture and other small-scale Australian endeavors into sustainable agriculture. I feel the general population would benefit greatly from a continued series of “Where the Food Grows” short documentary portraits, detailing the production of food and the lives of the producers and farmers. These could be thirty-minute long films that would go from farm to farm investigating and highlighting different forms of agriculture along the way, in an effort to reconnect people with their food.

There is also the potential to create a film detailing the effects of regulatory policy (at a local, state and federal level) affecting small-scale farmers in Australia and how this policy impacts their quest for sustainability. While this is a broad topic in itself, a few policy measures could be identified and investigated as the focus for the film.

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