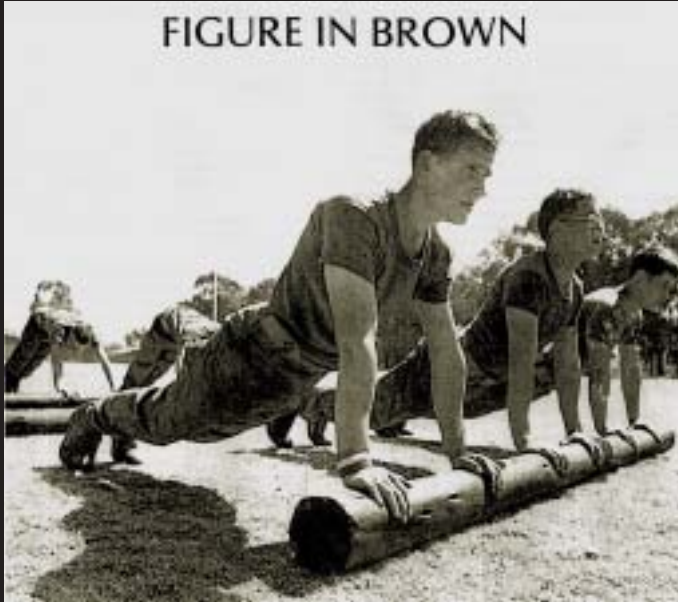


On Making 3SAI: A RITE OF PASSAGE

A 15 minute presentation delivered
by Paul Emmanuel
at the

*On Making: Integrating Approaches
in Practice Led Research Colloquium*
at University of Johannesburg
on 16 October 2009

FIGURE IN BROWN



You are still at school. Next year, or the year after, you will probably begin your National Service. Then you will step out of the shoes of a child, with the responsibilities and privileges of a child, into the shoes of a man ...



... A man who will suddenly learn a whole range of new skills and assume new responsibilities, but who will also – precisely because of these responsibilities and skills – gain the recognition and privileges synonymous with being a man ...



... The father, mother and girlfriend of such a man are naturally proud of him for he is a man who can always be depended upon to do his share. It always remains a very gratifying experience to feel yourself part of a group – to feel that you are doing something worthwhile and to know: my people are proud of me ...!

This text was extracted from a *National Defence Force Pamphlet* handed to white South African matric school boys during the eighties. I found it at the National Military Archives in Pretoria. It was also one of the starting points for the making of a short film – the process of which I am going to share with you today ...



This is closest I've ever gotten to
wearing a uniform ...

... and holding a weapon ...

well ... that kind of weapon ...



... Oops!!! How did that get in there ...?



This is a work I made in 2004 called *after-image*.

I took a photograph of a staff sergeant's uniform from the Second World War, cast it into the empty landscape at the *Cradle of Human Kind* and then spent 6 months scratching the image into a huge 5 by 2 metre piece of solid black, exposed photographic paper with a tiny blade. I wanted to overwhelm the viewer's field of vision somehow, as I had felt overwhelmed by an experience of loss and absence ...



I was fascinated by romantic ideas around capturing moments – and losing them, and how projected impressions can form and influence. I loved the potential metaphoric and metaphysical connections between that which is sensitive to the light and sensitive to the touch ...

Tensions between intimacy and alienation seem to converge within the enormously influential institution that is *The Military*. Men's clothes and the symbols they convey, how notions of masculinity and beliefs about ourselves are constructed and perpetuated are at the heart of my work at the moment ...



... The idea of capturing moments of shifting masculine identity ...



... led me to the *National Military Archives* in Pretoria, where I found a series of gorgeous photographs of military head shavings from the past ...



... dating from the First and Second World Wars ...



... I too found myself compelled like so many others ...



... to document this Rite of Passage ...



... and it couldn't be staged ...

... I wanted it to feel "real" ...



First trip to Kimberley

Third South African Infantry Battalion
(3SAI)...

... After a few phone calls, I discovered that *The Third South African Infantry Battalion* or 3SAI in *Kimberley* ...



... was one of only two remaining battalions in South Africa which still perform the "ritualistic" head shaving of recruits *en masse* on their premises ...

... *Another interesting shift* ..., I thought as I introduced myself to Colonel Grobler over the phone:

"Hi ... my name is *Paul Emmanuel* from Johannesburg ...", I explained...

"... Yes ... *Paula* ... what can I do for you ...", he replied ...

... And so, after numerous failed attempts to *correct* my gender identity, I arranged to fly to Kimberley as *Paula* – the artist from *Cape Town* to take some photographs of their January intake having their heads shaved ...



... I was extremely nervous ...



... no matter how hard I tried, it seemed as if everything about me was a confused misrepresentation ...



... What would be the reaction when I got there ...?



... this was the military for goodness sake ...!



... Experience has taught me that some people don't respond well to being confronted so directly with their preconceptions ...

... as it turns out, the giggle was on me ...

... they were all extremely sweet and cooperative ...

... and I got *wolf-whistled* ...

... *four times* ...



... the result was a series of drawings ...

... again obsessively scratched into photographic paper

... the red tone derived by abrading only the surface of the photographic emulsion with little more than the weight of the blade...



Thinking about Rites of Passage ...



... I decided to scratch more drawings that document shifting male identity ...



... I was immersed in a
universe of birth and
death ...



... solitude, and memory ...











Then ... thinking about *liminality* and a desire to map *change* led to the writing of an original treatment for a short film.

By introduction of a mutual friend, I walked into Matthew Kramer's office next door to my studio next to the Media Mill, in Milpark.

When I briefly explained my mad idea to Mat, who had had a little film production experience in the past, his face *lit* up and his reply was instant:

"Let's do it!" ...

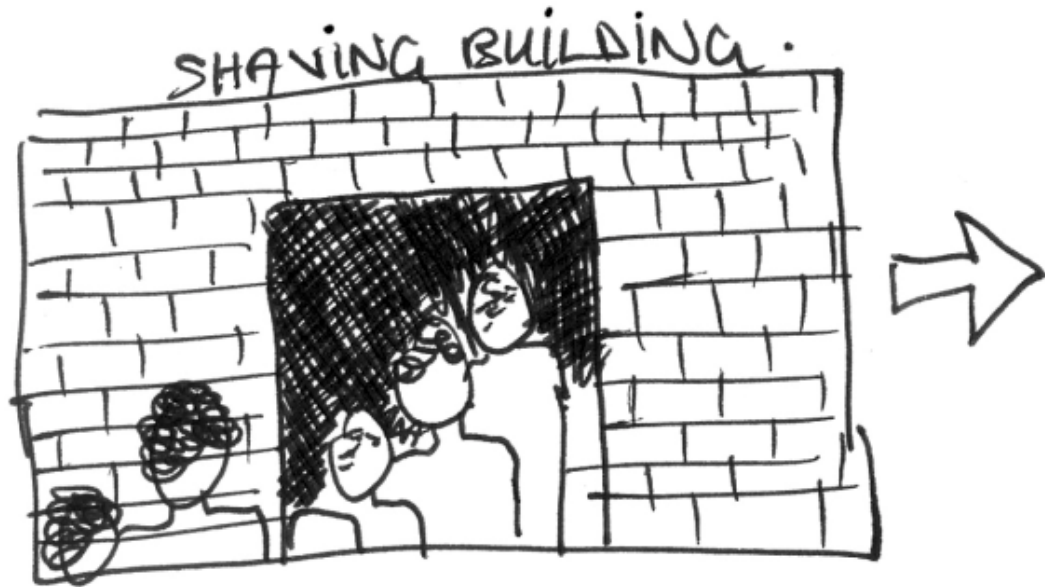
... I felt like some sort of evangelist ...

Second trip to Kimberley with Format Digital Productions

The Kimberley Shoot

... Matthew Kramer ... the second of my "*converts*" ... was to accompany me on my journey – as I had never held a video camera in my life – my *first* convert being my agent, project manager and friend Les Cohn of Art Source South Africa.

It was Les who encouraged me to write down all my thoughts and feelings from the very beginning ...



... but getting one's thoughts and ideas into the heads of a production crew is quite a challenge! *Words* are not enough. And so to do so in the film world, I learned, we have the *Storyboard*, a series of rather embarrassing little drawings I had to make.

... Please note: I CAN actually draw ...!!!

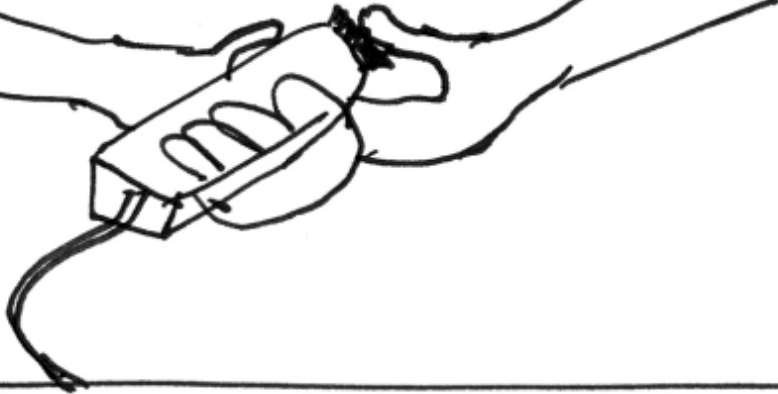
... armed with suitably indoctrinated film crew we set off back to 3SAI Kimberley to capture docci footage of the 2006 intake ...

... we would stand outside the shaving building and queue with the recruits as if one of them ...



... we would see a close up of the barber ... preparing his "weaponry" ...

Adjustments.....



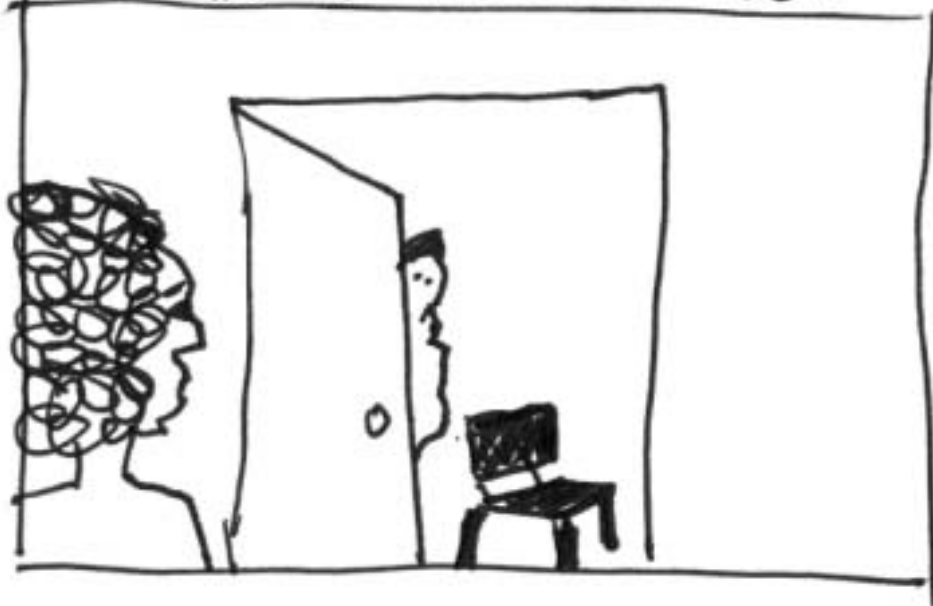
... we would hopefully create a sense of *tension* ... perhaps a little fear of the *unknown* ...



MAYBE WE WAVE OR GREET OTHERS
IN THE QUE.-ACKNOWLEDGE OUR
PRESENCE.

... as we became part of a seemingly *endless* ...

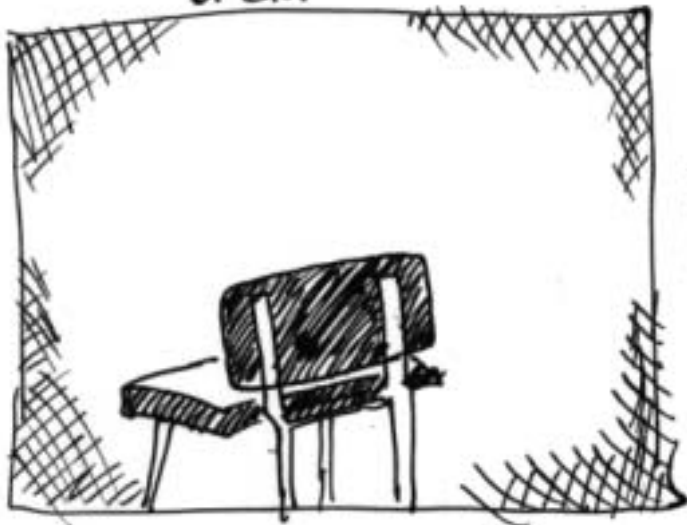
AT THE BARBERS DOOR.



... head-shaving production line ...

PROCESSION

OPEN.



... with all the sounds of droning shavers ...



... loud voices and barked orders echoing inside a confined space ...

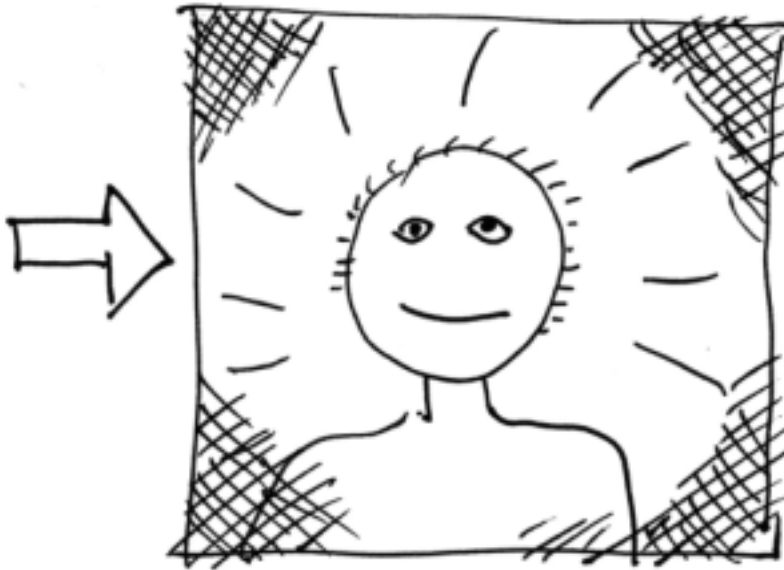


... I imagined a claustrophobic environment, packed with activity ...

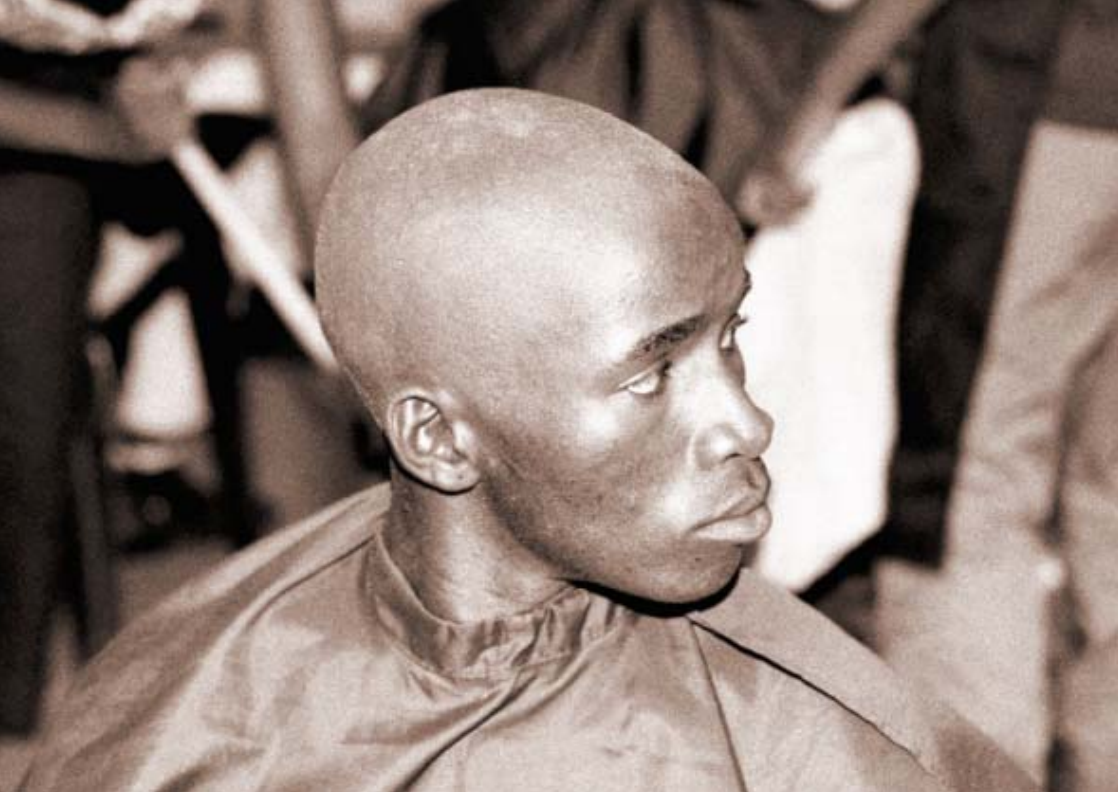


... we also needed a combination of intimate close-ups and indifferent angles, taking enough footage to satisfy all the requirements of the original treatment in just that single day ...

... I didn't have the money for a second shot ...



... as each recruit was finished, with a flash I would imprison a still reflection of his "new self" on monochrome film ...



3SAI: A Rite of Passage

promotional film
using research docci footage

... I paid for the costs of this first shoot with savings I had built up over the last few years as I couldn't let the opportunity pass and I somehow knew it was worth going for broke.

... and broke I was ...

Using the footage from this shoot, we put together a 1 minute promotional video, which, combined with carefully thought out proposals and visual treatments would hopefully help us to raise the funds needed to complete the project ...

... how naive I was ...

REJECTION

... despite these efforts, funding from both art and film government channels were not forthcoming ...



14 April 2008

Mr Paul Emmanuel
Paul Emmanuel
Private Bag 323
Auckland Park
Johannesburg
2008

Dear Mr Paul Emmanuel

RE: Project Number 10801 Project Name: S-54

We regret to inform you that your application to the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) for funding was unsuccessful.

Attached you will find some notes regarding your project that were gathered during the evaluation process. It is the NFVF's hope that these notes will help you in further developing your project.

We look forward to receiving your next application and wish you all the best in the future.

Yours sincerely

Dylan Rautema
Production Executive, Development & Production

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Private Bag 323, Auckland Park, 2008, South Africa

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... The National Film and Video Foundation (N.F.V.F.) rejected the proposal because it was "*art*" ...
... not "*film*" ...

Office Comment

REJECTED - The NFVF is in the business of funding story and found it difficult to support a purely art piece.

Production Executive

This was a beautifully put together proposal. The applicant is a visual artist of immense talent. I loved seeing the selection of his work he included in the package.

Despite all of my praises for the artist and for what will surely be a wonderful visual art piece, in the end I couldn't figure out how the NFVF could get involved in this project. We are set up to tell stories, whether told through the medium of fiction or documentary, but we're not set up to get involved in shepherding or funding art pieces. I just couldn't figure out how to even assess it. We're geared up to assess story and this just doesn't fit the mould.

I suggest the applicant look at the National Arts Council of South Africa.

Panelist 1

The visual treatment contained in this proposal is superb and it clear that the author has a keen understanding of what he is setting out to do. However, I believe that Paul needs to outline a clearer narrative structure for he is attempting to address some weighty social issues. I am sure that he is capable of bringing the screen evocative images but I believe it is incumbent upon him to explain how he is going to do this.

"REJECTED: THE N.F.V.F. is in the business of funding *story* and found it difficult to support a purely *art piece*."

... "I suggest the applicant look at the *National Arts Council of South Africa*." ...

... and from the N.A.C. we got ...



Reference Number: N12005

30 November 2005

My First Cinema
LdB 7
The Refinery
Private Bag 1031
AUCKLAND PARE
2004

Dear My Cinema:

Re: Application for funding

The National Arts Council of NZ acknowledges receipt of your application which reached our office on 15 September 2005.

We regret to inform you that your application was unsuccessful. The application is not within our scope of funding. Since its film and we are aware that you have applied to NFPF. You are also advised to approach Auckland Filmfest.

Should you need further clarity you are welcome to contact the NAC office.

Yours sincerely,



Angel Mielke
For National Arts Council of NZ

"We regret to inform you that your application was unsuccessful. The application is not within our scope of funding. Since its *film* and we are aware that you have applied to N.F.V.F."

Working with Art Source South Africa

... We needed around R 400 000-00 to make this film ...

Pay-now-art-later plan

... In desperation I devised, with the help of Art Source South Africa, what we saw as a unique *Pay-Now-Art-Later Plan*, which we later discovered is described in business terms as an *Initial Public Offer* (an IPO) or *Futures Option* ...

Each Member

... The scheme was a HIT!

Not only did we raise the money – *with* bridging finance to finish the film on time – but the entire show of original drawings for TRANSITIONS, which I was doing while making the film – was sold to the Spier Collection before it had even been made ...



At last, we were in business!

... one of the shoots involved travelling to the Gariep Dam in the Karoo. I wanted a few very simple shots of the dam taken from the Dam wall shot in 16 mm film for its special, grainy quality ...



... a later shoot involved setting up a digital stills camera at the water's edge to automatically capture one photo of the seemingly unchanging vista every thirty seconds to create a time-lapse sequence ...

... we recorded the dam in all its shades and nuances from sunrise to sunset ...

... and in the edit suite reduced an entire day to a matter of seconds ...

The Johannesburg Sturrock Park Shoot

... another shoot took place on a hill in the middle of Sturrock Park at Wits University ...

... here, we needed to shoot an intimate close up of a head shaving ...

... creating the illusion of a close-up at 35mm ...



... we had no money for lighting and so made clever use of the sun and reflectors to produce the required atmosphere ...



... why this location ...?

... for once we found a site nearby that had to have maximum exposure to the sun without any interfering shadows from nearby trees or buildings ...

... to squeeze as much possible filming time into the daylight hours ...



... I remember
marvelling at the
number of people
and expertise it took
to operate the single
35 mm camera ...

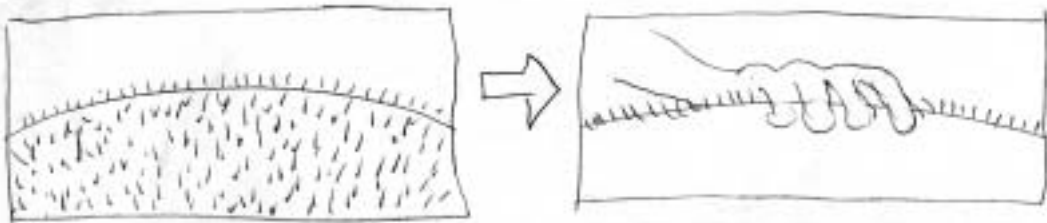


... which was attached precariously to a mini crane on a Dolly and tracks to get the smoothness of movement that I wanted, as if the viewer is gliding over the scalp in an intimate, dream-like state ...



... we were shooting at 200 frames a second to slow the action down and actually see the shaver blades slicing the hair in a scissor-action ...

... I remember how the camera sounded like a screaming banshee at that speed ... we were really pushing the technical envelope and at that stage, I didn't even know that ...



... I was wisely told only afterwards that there was a real possibility that the camera could have failed to capture anything ...

... without any of us being aware of it ...

... and we certainly had no money for insurance, and definitely no money for a repeat performance ...



... we were extraordinarily lucky

The Free State Shoot

... The biggest, most expensive and final shoot was to be done in the winter Free State grasslands on a private farm just outside Brandfort ...



... a location chosen specifically for its empty, sweeping, honey-coloured vistas ...



... On this site *The Lightweights*, an installation of a thousand white T-shirts hung on ten "washing lines", each 100 metres long, was to go up ...

Once again, we only had enough money for a single day shoot ...

... everything had to be planned to the letter before hand right down to the menu for a film crew of 12 and 20 farm workers who helped us put up the installation ...



... the single trial-run to work out all technical eventualities happened at Emmerentia Dam one cold winters morning. Here you can see Ricci Polack, one of our initial investors who did the steel work for *The Lightweights* setting up with his staff that morning ...

... we joked with curious passers-by saying that we were working on *The Gautrain* ...



... by the time we arrived on site in the Free State, as in previous shots, everything was ready ...



... One of the shots I wanted involved literally blowing a T-shirt off its washing line with a wind machine ...

... and to construct the shot and explain the movement to Eran Tahor, the D.O.P. I made a little film and animation to explain



... I have such fond memories of Matthew's and Eran's disbelieving expressions when I first described the shots I wanted ...



... here was a totally inexperienced film-maker – who had never even held a video camera in his life – demanding radically difficult shots ...



... almost impossible to manage with our limited budget ...



... and yet we did ...



... we were also working with such extraordinarily enthusiastic and generous people ...

... we even got the crane for next to nothing ...



Finally, working with Wilbert Schubel on the soundtrack was a great experience ...

... to work with someone who can “hear” the emotional underscoring behind the images, and then carefully construct an aural “landscape”, is very rewarding ...



... I remember phoning Wilbert early one morning wildly exclaiming that I had woken up in the middle of the night to the sounds of the Train Station ...

... I thought it was the perfect liminal space of arrival and departure for the film and moving in and out of the worlds of the "real" and the "imagined" ...



"Sounds from a Train Station" he stated blankly, " ... for a head shaving?" he asked ...

" ... Ewkey", he said finally ... and our story began ...

3SAI: A Rite of Passage is a 14 minute interpretive film which took four years to make. It has been an extraordinary experience for me both professionally and personally – one which I will never forget. A few years ago, I would have laughed at anyone who suggested I make a film, thinking it completely impossible, and tantamount to financial suicide, but now I feel that it was absolutely worth the risk!