

Directors commentary for touching the void essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

I'm really delighted to be here with another brilliant film after the success of my last film One Day In September which I won an Oscar for best documentary which I would say was one of my most proud moments of my career. When the opportunity came up for me to direct this film, Touching the Void I grabbed it because it's a gripping true story of friendship between Joe Simpson and Simon Yates, they were trying to climb the Siula Grande in Peru. Whilst climbing a canyon Joe felt the rope tighten and his only thoughts were that Simon was dead at the bottom. Thinking that he couldn't get back by his self he cut the rope in hope of falling to his death. In reality Simon hadn't died and Joe suffered fatal wounds but touching the void shows the struggle that both men went through to get to safety.

I decided to direct this because of the fact that it was based on a true story and the friendship about it. I thought this film would be good to produce because not only would it target one audience of men, for the adventure aspect of it but it would also appeal to women for the loyalty and friendship part of it. I chose to begin the trailer with really slow, close up action shots but it then turns in to quick rushed shots as Simon falls through the cavern. The main idea of these shots were to be used to give the audience a feel of what the film is about, as most of them wouldn't have first hand experience of climbing mountains. The first extreme close up is to show the frosty conditions and again, to give those in the audience who would not have had first hand experience the reality of how cold it actually could be.

Another shot which would also help the audience to realise how bad the conditions are is another extreme close up of one of there helmet which shows the snow on it blowing in the wind. Me and my team also all agreed

that showing bare skin would show a physical sense of being there. Many people would think that remote environments are very quiet when in fact the noises there can be quite earry, to show this we used diagetie sounds of the wind and snow cracking to link it to the story. We also decided to mix in a non-diagetie sound of a deep drum beat noise to increase the tension that the audience are building up. The final sound that you could hear was that of one of the men breathing this leaves the trailer at a cliff hanger and tension would have raised further.

I decided to follow up an extreme close of the face with an extreme close up of the drill to show the labour and precision goes in to be able to put in the crampons. This gets the audience involved in what happens. Gives a sense of mystery because you can't see what's actually going on. I then decided to move to an extreme panoramic shot of the mountains to show the misty mysterious alien world of what they are going in. I knew it was important to put this in because I felt the need to show the audience the scale of the climb the two men would take.

The fact that it almost touching heaven becomes relevant to the film as the tasks they face relate to it. It makes the audience sympathise with them as they can now see what they had to face. I come back to this shot later on in the trailer but it is turned and slightly distorted to relate to how their lives have been turned upside down, and no longer is it a place that you want to explore but somewhere a bit surreal. Another strong technique I chose to use was contrasting colours. I chose to use an underground shot that Simon fought through as a motif to consciousness the idea of the tragedy. The

darkness of the lagoon represents the change from heaven to hell and how Simons faced a crawl back to civilization.

I deliberately made it unclear to link in with Simon later and to withhold information from the reader and link in with the mystery and the confusion later. The music that is then used, Peruvian music, is non-diegetic. It is in a minor key which makes it more negative and daunting. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Alex Heffes for the time and effort he spent with me talking through the music; I know I can be fussy. Throughout the trailer I have used a sense of time, starting with an optimistic day break through to the night, to show that as it gets darker things become harder and they begin to struggle more.

Although the audience may not realise they know, but the mountains in the shots are the same mountains but create a different atmosphere. To make the audience realise that this is really a true story in the trailer Joe and Simon are narrating small parts of their adventure; if you can call it that. As one of them says 'we just lost control', I used the hand held camera to show unsteady movement which fits in with the phrase before. This also contrasts with the still images at the beginning as they were calmer talking at the beginning but as their voices become tenser the camera shots change. I then use a point of view shot from Joe, he says 'I was just convinced (pause) he was dead'. The image of his legs hanging links with this and also gives the audience the image of the gallows from the olden days.

From this the viewer can see that there is a contradiction to what Joe thinks to what Simon is experiencing. I wanted the audience to be unsure to why he

was there. This is in the middle of the trailer and is also the key point of the whole story. The whole film is based around the fact that Joe thinks Simon is dead when he actually isn't. Another key phrase that one of them says is 'as soon as I saw it, I knew it had been cut.'

" This also forms the main part of the film, this fits together with Simons point of view but is actually contrasting against it. A really subtle technique I use was when Simon was dangling you hear Joe and when you see Joe you hear Simon. This shows that they are dependant on each other, as most mountaineers are. I then used a close up. Right in the middle of the screen was the knife that was used to cut the rope, this fits with the phrase " as soon as I saw it I knew it had been cut" this also give the audience the idea that Simon may have been murdered and whether it was an accident or whether it was purposely done, this leaves the audience unsure and wanting to see more.

It also leaves them a bit confused as the murderous colours and the glint on the knife suggest it was a murder but the precision at which it is done suggest that is wasn't and accident. Having raised all the questions with slow actions I changed the tempo to engage all those who wanted to see an action thriller. I love the fact that the sound used it almost army boot camp sound, it is non- diagetic but to give a sense to the audience of pace and drive. Also relate to how Joe and Simon, but particularly Simon is driven to survival.

My heart felt thanks go out to Joakim Sundstrom for the sound director, for his cleaver and inventive ideas that I chatted to him about and he made

realistic. The sounds suddenly drops away as Joe drops to his un-known fate giving the audience the sense of the drop. I interspersed the sequence of actions shots with the values I wanted to bring out between the two friends. I tied in both genders by blending the harsh reality of the climb with the deep emotions involved in such a difficult environment. I then draw the viewer back to the image I set up at the beginning of the trailer, where now Simon has come to hell. I mean why does hell always have to be related with fire, can't it be icy? I deliberately then try to create that area of doom using the two images of Joe laid on the floor and the dark underground cavern shot to make the viewer ask themselves whether Joe will die or not.

I then carry on with the dark and deathly environment. The next and final shot is then a plain black screen, while Joe calls out for Simon which gives the reader a huge clue that Joe isn't actually dead. I am hoping for this film to be as big of a success as my last, and would like to also thank all the actors and actresses, producers, costume design and everyone else who made this brilliant film a possibility. Thanks again for watching and I hope you enjoy the film.