

The Triangle Wars: Q & A Event

By Ka-Yin Kwok



(L to R) ASE VIC Chairperson, Cindy Clarkson and Rosie Jones, Editor/Director

***The Triangle Wars* (2011) documents the conflict between the local government, a property developer and the local community opposed to a massive commercial development - known as the "Triangle" - proposed for the Melbourne bayside suburb of St Kilda.**

Editor/director Rosie Jones gave an insightful talk about the post-production journey of *The Triangle Wars*, alongside fellow editors Jane Usher and Phil Watts.

Rosie, an St Kilda resident herself, has been editing for over twenty years and directing for ten. She came into the project two years after it had started. On her arrival, there was 180 hours of footage. Jones worked on it for eighteen months.

The Triangle Wars received a lot of community help in its production, particularly from the anti-St Kilda Triangle protestors. Volunteers - professional and non-professional camera operators - helped shoot the multitude of footage documenting the events. Although, this variation in footage contributed greatly to the dynamic character of the film, it was highly problematic in the editing process. Rushes were shot with many different types of cameras and in different formats including DV, HDV, HDV shot as 4:3, Z1, JVC progressive, etc. Although a technical nightmare, Jones had the help of an efficient edit assistant, Ryan Howard, who digitised onto the JVC system. Howard arranged the rushes in a chronological order, creating timelines of different events. At times the footage had no audio recorded and when there was audio, it was mostly bad and unusable. There were also big chunks of the story missing where no footage was recorded.

Another challenge Rosie faced initially was the lack of direction. No one had "steered" the project from the beginning, no characters were selected and no cutaways was shot. As a result Jones had the dual role of director/editor, as well as the being the researcher, and continued filming. Having three roles was challenging, as she had to keep the production going whilst managing post-production. Although Jones had wanted an editor to work on the project, there was no funding for this at the time. Working without an editor, she found that there was no one "keeping you honest" and found it difficult to "take a step back" from the editing. She edited on her own for five months before having additional editors. In that time she worked on the structure, did research and filmed.

Essentially the story is about the council in conflict with the public. Jones had to find threads within the story. Originally she aimed for a more poetic, essay form of documentary similar to *Sympathy for the City*. There was a hesitation that the film would be perceived as being too colloquial. Therefore, she focused on two main themes - the place and the recording of the event.

The earlier stages of editing concentrated on the selection of characters and learning the storyline. Jones found selecting characters a challenge. There were people whom were prominent for parts of the process but did not become characters. Mirka Mora, for example, personifies the character of the old St Kilda and interviewed well on camera. Since Mora was not featured in later footage, she was unable to include her as a character.

Jones watched the observational footage for the big scenes. An important process, as the film was “found” through these key events. The film used the observational material as the spine of the project, with interviews to supplement the story.

Rosie Jones wanted *The Triangle Wars* to be a balanced film. Presenting a three-sided story was a challenge as there were “lots of holes” in the observational footage that lacked relevant coverage. There was also an imbalance in the type of footage she had access to. For example, the protestors’ observational footage was stronger than the councillors’ footage. Furthermore, some characters interviewed better than others. Whilst Serge Thomann was charismatic in person, he was less strong for on camera interviews. Meanwhile, the developer Steve McMillan was great on camera but there was limited material on him.

MIFF’s Premiere Fund provided the much-needed assistance with the finish and grade of the film but put a lot of pressure on the post-production team with its deadlines. The editors were still cutting after lock off - the delivery deadline was in June but the film was delivered in early July and screened in late July.

On her fourth month of editing Rosie Jones sought for additional editors to be brought in. Jones felt that debate and conversation was needed to propel the film. With the MIFF funding, it was now possible to hire additional editors allowing Jane Usher to join the project.

Jane Usher is an editor of television and film productions including *Tangle*, *Bogan Pride* and *Macbeth*. In the three weeks that she was on *The Triangle Wars*, Rosie Jones was still filming additional “pretty” footage whilst Usher focused mainly on the opening sequence. The original opening sequence was problematic. The story needed to be woven in and Jones felt that with Usher’s competency in structure, she would be able to make the opening sequence work. Usher wanted the documentary to have a contemporary feel and can see the intense political stories within it. She worked on the transition between Rosie’s “pretty” footage, which sets up St Kilda, with the gritty, dirty observational footage that captured the conflict. She found matching colours an effective solution for the transitions between the different footage. The final opening sequence begins with a black and white sequence that sets up the history of St Kilda. Gradually the sequence becomes colour, leading into a gaudy 3D animation of the proposed “Triangle” development.

Initially reluctant, editor Phil Watts joined the post team five weeks before lock off. Watts has extensive experience in television drama. Previously an editor for *City Homicide*, he is currently editing the children’s television series, *Conspiracy 365*. Interestingly, Watts was not completely opposed to the “Triangle” development. When he started, the documentary was running at 95 minutes. Although overwhelmed by the volume of rushes, he found the footage to be well organised. Finding the original end sequence “shonky”, Phil Watts concentrated on reworking the end sequence. The original cut of the council’s final decision on the “Triangle” development - the film’s climax - lacked emotional intensity.

Surprisingly, the reaction shots from the actual event lacked emotion as the anti-Triangle protesters were in disbelief. In fact, the protestors initially appeared confused rather than ecstatic. Watts had to search for more cutaways, reaction shots, from shoots at other different meetings to find more emotive reactions. As well as working on the ending, Watts also went through the selection reel put together by Rosie Jones. In the end, he didn't have time to insert the new footage that he had found.

The resolution of "Triangle" development conflict came quick and unexpectedly. In the end, the community triumphed over the corporation and the local government. It is that same community spirit that helped the making of the *The Triangle Wars*.
