

FMP2 – Final Written Evaluation

Creating my Final Major Project has been one of the most intense and rewarding experiences of my time on the course. It tested everything I've learned so far, and even though it didn't go perfectly, I'm proud of how much I pushed myself. I set out to create a visually experimental music video for the song "Supernatural" by Barns Courtney, combining lighting design, projection, in-camera effects, and symbolic imagery based on cult themes. My goal wasn't just to tick a box — I wanted to make something that reflected how far I've come and showed what I'm capable of creatively and technically.

Project Aims and Creative Intentions

From the start, I had a clear idea. I wanted to make something that showed my growth as a filmmaker and also made my tutors, peers, and family proud. The music video was always going to be stylised and experimental, with strong lighting and abstract storytelling. My vision involved a cult leader figure surrounded by devoted followers, performing in a black-box studio space with intense lighting, video projection, and surreal transitions. I also planned to include choreographed dance sequences and use techniques like whip pans, motion control, and echo-print effects to enhance the energy of the visuals.

While the final product stuck closely to that concept in spirit, some parts had to be changed along the way. I couldn't find trained dancers, so I simplified the action and focused more on creating mood and tension through blocking, costume, and lighting. The location I used was also smaller than planned, and without smoke or haze, I couldn't make full use of the moving head lights. Still, I adapted and found new ways to communicate the themes I wanted, and I think the visuals are strong overall.

Planning and Time Management

Planning started well. I put together a detailed schedule, created a project action plan, and used a Trello board to track progress. But once things got underway, I quickly realised how hard it is to stick to a rigid timeline when tasks take longer than expected. Research dragged on, which delayed my planning, which then cut into the time I'd set aside for testing and rehearsals. I kept having to reassess and adjust the plan, and eventually, I stopped using the Trello board completely.

One of the biggest issues came during production. I had planned two days at the location. The first was meant for setup in the morning and test shots in the afternoon, with the second day focused on filming. But setup took way longer than expected. We were still sorting out the projection surfaces

when the cast arrived, which meant I lost the whole afternoon for testing. It also meant the cast's time was wasted that day. On the second day, I worked closely with everyone to make the most of the time we had left, and although it was a scramble, we managed to get everything we needed.

Post-production went more smoothly, even if it was still behind schedule. I approached editing in stages, starting with rough cuts, then fine cuts, then colour grading and sound design. I included a slate at the start and end of each draft to help track revisions. That structure really helped me stay focused and made it easier to collect feedback.

Research and Development

I'll be honest. Research isn't something I enjoy. I'd much rather be hands-on with the camera or lighting gear than sitting down reading about theory. But for this project, I knew I needed to do it if I wanted the final video to make sense and connect with audiences.

I focused my research on things I knew would directly help the production. That included learning more about cults and how they're portrayed in media, as well as how people recognise cult-like behaviour and imagery. I even ran a survey to find out how the average viewer perceives cults, which helped shape the costumes, tone, and blocking of scenes. That bit of practical research actually turned out to be really useful.

On the technical side, I learned about low-light cinematography, lighting design, colour grading, and how to use my new Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera 6K Pro. I also explored how to use the Avolites Titan lighting desk, as well as other projection and lighting gear. I wasn't trying to become an expert in everything — I just wanted to know enough to make it work on the day.

Even though I didn't enjoy the research side of things, I can see how it made the final project stronger. If I did it again, I'd probably try to do more of the testing earlier, rather than relying on research alone.

Technical Skills and Equipment

This was the most technically complex project I've done. Luckily, the technical side is where I feel most confident. Even though I was using the Blackmagic Pocket 6K Pro for the first time, I got to grips with it quickly. I also used lighting equipment from Wildfire Lighting, including the Lumipar 12UQPros, which I hadn't used before.

Lighting was split between timecoded light effects and more traditional key lighting. I think I nailed the timecoded part, but some of the shots

could have been lit better. A few moments feel a bit flat because I relied on ambient fill instead of designing a proper key light setup.

There were some minor equipment problems. A few dodgy cables gave us issues during the shoot, but I had brought spares, so we swapped them out quickly. The camera battery also died a few times, but I'd set up a charging station and had hot-swappable batteries ready. None of it was a disaster, just small bumps in the road.

Creative Problem Solving

A lot of my original plans had to change. I couldn't find external dancers or actors, so I cast people from the course. That changed the choreography plans completely, so I shifted focus to simpler blocking and strong visuals. One of the biggest spontaneous decisions was casting Becca as the cult leader the day before the shoot. She had great ideas for costume and makeup and really owned the role. That last-minute choice ended up being one of the best ones.

I also had to work around the limitations of the location. I couldn't use smoke or haze, which meant the moving head beams were nearly invisible. I made up for that by leaning harder into colour, silhouette, and projection to give the scenes atmosphere.

Collaboration and Communication

Working with classmates as my cast made things easier. We already had a good rapport, so directing felt relaxed and fun. My dad helped with the shoot as my only crew member, and we work well together. He knows how I think, so that support was really helpful.

One of the main lessons I learned about directing is that confidence matters. Even if you're unsure, being decisive helps the people around you trust your vision and give their best. If you hesitate too much or seem unsure, it can make the whole shoot feel chaotic.

Audience, Promotion, and Response

My target audience included fans of Barns Courtney, Gen Z and millennial viewers, music video and visual arts fans, and people interested in alternative or underground culture. I released the video on YouTube and promoted it mainly through Instagram and Facebook. I planned out a day-by-day promo schedule and used hashtags and platform-specific posts to boost engagement.

The response was positive. I got encouraging comments on social media and solid engagement metrics on YouTube. Throughout editing, I asked

for feedback from peers and tutors, which helped me refine the piece. I didn't get feedback from industry professionals this time, but that's definitely something I'd try to do in future projects.

Visual Style, Structure, and Editing

The video isn't narrative in a traditional sense, but the themes of cult control and symbolism are clear. I aimed to create something mysterious and visually hypnotic. I think I mostly achieved that, although I wish I'd included more cutaways or symbolic inserts to break up the repetition of the main scene. As my tutor Darren pointed out, it can start to feel a bit repetitive after a while.

The editing process went well. I followed a structured workflow, starting with rough cuts and working through to grading and sound design. One of the challenges was dealing with the ceiling of the venue, which looked messy and out of place. I had to crop it out in post wherever possible. Some shots were underexposed too, which I tried to fix through colour correction. And the audio for the exterior intro and outro scenes was unusable, so I had to build the sound design from scratch.

Final Thoughts and Reflection

Overall, I'm proud of what I created. It might not be perfect, but it's creative, ambitious, and visually striking. I think the lighting design, projections, and titles all stand out and give the video a professional polish. Compared to last year's "Sweet Dreams" music video, this one is more complex and technically advanced, but maybe a bit less refined. "Sweet Dreams" had a raw, simple vibe that made it flow better. This one is a little overworked in places, but it still feels like a step forward for me.

What I'd Do Differently

Next time, I'd focus a lot more on pre-production. I'd create full shot lists and storyboards, secure the location earlier, and cast trained performers well in advance. I'd also build a more realistic shooting schedule and allow more time for filming. One day just wasn't enough to capture everything properly.

I'd still aim for a high technical standard, but I'd try not to overcomplicate things to the point where they become stressful or unachievable. It's a balance I'm still learning to get right.

Skills Gained and Future Goals

Through this project, I developed my low-light cinematography skills, improved my colour grading, and got hands-on experience with projection

and lighting design. I also improved my communication and leadership, and worked with two outside organisations — Wildfire Lighting and the University of Cumbria — which gave me a taste of how real-world collaborations work.

Looking ahead, I'm planning to move into the live events and lighting industry. This project helped me take a big step in that direction, and I feel more confident now about what I can bring to future creative work.