

FIRESIDE STUDY

Chronic boredom illustrated

Film: **The Wall**

Director: Nick Spunde

Introduction:

If you've ever been bored at work, this short film is for you. Documentary filmmaker Nick Spunde exposes his personal struggle with this very modern subject of boredom. It's a *private and internal space* most eloquently visualised in a *public and external way*.



Key issues:

Honesty

One of the most striking things about this documentary is its honesty. Nick shares his true feelings about his old job and the internal struggles he faced; and it's *not* a story you'd put on your CV. Then he goes further, exploring similar 'walls' he faced in making this very film. Nick even suggests this may have been an exercise in filmmaking-as-therapy.

It could be argued that such internal explorations are self-centred and narcissistic, but we must accept this work as a wonderful opportunity to examine the very big issue of motivation and boredom. These strike at the heart of society.

Depression

According to Australia's national mental health initiative, Beyond Blue, "Depression is the leading cause of non-fatal disability". Nick describes a slide into this disability as caused by boredom at work. "I came to hate the job," he says. He refers to a term "rust-out", which is an organisational psychologists' term to describe under-stimulation.

The inner sensation is one of isolation, where it seems that everyone else is rushing past you, getting on with things happily, while you are not. The documentary's recurring imagery of standing still amidst the rush displays this beautifully.

Nick's guilt about under-performing is also illuminating. His admission about staying back late to do a basic day's work presents a different perspective for those who might argue that over-work is caused by financial or status-driven greed.

Finally, Nick identifies the mental patterns that can become unwittingly established by our thoughts. As 19th century Transcendentalist R.W.Emerson wrote: "sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit..."

Meaning

The Wall touches on a deeply spiritual issue – the question of meaning. After all, behind all drives of motivation lies an ultimate sense of why – why do we do anything? As Nick packed up his bags from his old job, he did so with a deep yearning, "trying to make it so the time there *meant* something".

"It's like there's something that I want out of myself or out of the world that is on the other side of a wall... a translucent wall that I can't quite push through... I'd like to think that there was actually some way of breaking through it."

Suggested questions:

- What is "the wall"?
- Have you ever felt what Nick describes? What did you do to overcome it?
- When does honesty and the focus on one's own problems become narcissism?
- Is this a spiritual or a psychological issue that Nick deals with?
- Is it possible to break through these walls? How would *you* advise filmmaker Nick?
- What does your religious, spiritual or ideological view offer by way of hope to this situation?