

ABSTRACT

In Paradise: A Feature Film

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In Paradise is a feature length live action narrative film that I wrote, directed and produced as my masters thesis. I worked on the film in cooperation with Baylor masters candidates Aaron Youngblood and Maverick Moore. The film tells the story of Leon Vincent, a high school science teacher whose fascination with quantum mechanics drives him into a destructive obsession. This written component of the thesis is an overview of the planning, production, and post-production of the film from a directorial standpoint. It explores the key stages of making this film in order to provide a look at the process of independent feature filmmaking.

In Paradise: A Feature Film

by

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A Thesis

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This film would not have happened without the work of Aaron and Rose Youngblood, who worked tirelessly in producing the film alongside me. I could not have made a film of this scope on my own. Their time and resources helped make *In Paradise* what it is.

The making of this film involved a much larger number of cast and crew than I can name, but our lead actor, Baylor Theatre professor Steven Pounders, donated an incredible

amount of time, energy, and talent to this project. It is truly overwhelming for me to think about the level of support and commitment shown by Professor Pounders and others over the past 14 months of making this film.

CHAPTER ONE

Goals

Although this film will serve as my masters thesis project for the Baylor University Department of Communication, I have plans for the project beyond fulfilling degree requirements. In this chapter, I will explore my goals for the project, both creatively and professionally.

Storytelling Goals

Theme

In writing *In Paradise*, my intent was to explore the American myth of the pursuit of happiness. My argument in the film is that following one's dream is not inherently a good thing; it depends on the dream and the motivation behind that dream. The film tells the story of Leon Vincent, a man whose dream is born from despair over the mistakes of his past, mistakes that culminated in the loss of the only person to whom he was ever truly close.

Leon's dream is to rebuild and perfect the machine that killed his beloved. Through this, he hopes to find fulfillment and understand the secrets that he, his fiancé, and their peers once sought to explore. It is a sort of "grass is always greener" scenario; Leon does not know what lies on the other side of the machine, but that very mystery is what drives him to continue his work.

Given these themes, one goal of the story is that Leon be a character with whom viewers not only sympathize, but empathize. Leon is intended to give us insight into

obsession not as a pitiable figure with whom we cannot possibly relate, but a portrait of what can happen to a person – essentially any person – who basks in the luxury of despair for too long. Leon has a very hard time letting go of something that matters to him when it does not go as he had hoped. I believe the same is true of many people who have dreams, and I want to challenge viewers to ponder this.

I did not intend to present an answer in the film to the problems its characters face. Leon's life choices are destructive, but the story should not make clear value judgments about the merit of his dream or even his ultimate decision to let go and accept a more mundane family life. It is my belief that films dealing with widely applicable themes like these can be most effective when they pose questions without presenting transparent value judgments about the solutions (or lack thereof) presented in the story. This was accomplished by presenting a more or less balanced view in which there are no perfect solutions and no character is a reliable mouthpiece for the author's ideology about these questions. The lack of a clearly pointed perspective does not mean that the film is free of philosophy or meaning. Leon's dream is, at best, questionable. The question of how his dream should be viewed is present, and that is what matters.

Chasing his dream does not bring Leon the fulfillment he is looking for. It is not clear that it could ever do so. However, there is hope for Leon in the story. He does find a degree of fulfillment in the people around him who love and care about him, and in time he comes to realize that he cares about them as well. This fulfillment does not come from something that Leon has chased, and it is my intent that the theme of appreciating what one does have will be clear in the film. It is neither triumphant nor nihilistic. *In Paradise* presents an imperfect world populated by imperfect people.

In Paradise, then, was designed to be a parable. It is intended to encourage—indeed require—the viewer to think about the questions it is presenting and process them well after the film has ended. Its meaning is deliberately veiled. Kubrick said of this approach in his own work:

If you really want to communicate something, even if it's just an emotion or an attitude, let alone an idea, the least effective and least enjoyable way is directly. It only goes in about half an inch. But if you can get people to the point where they have to think a moment what it is you're getting at, and then discover it ... the thrill of discovery goes right through the heart. (Castle 363-364)

Execution

The approach to telling this film's story was designed to make the most of available resources. In the summer of 2012, I shot a feature film titled *My Father is a Tyrannosaurus Rex*. The film focuses on a single protagonist, but it has eight prominent roles in it. The film was based on only the second feature length screenplay I have written, and it was the first feature film I shot.

While I am not disappointed in the quality of my work on *My Father is a Tyrannosaurus Rex*, writing and shooting a feature length film with a small crew and low budget was a tremendous learning experience. It has greatly informed the pre-production process of *In Paradise*, and the lessons from this film and others will continue to carry over into production and beyond. One goal in the writing and pre-production of *In Paradise* was to create something that is simpler and more focused than my past work, in order to be able to focus on getting the details right.

The first manifestation of this is that I limited most of the film to three characters. Only six characters appear in multiple scenes. I shot *My Father is a Tyrannosaurus Rex*

in 48 different locations; *In Paradise* was planned to include 36 locations. This is still a relatively large number for a low-budget film, but only a few figure into the screenplay extensively. Approximately 30% of the film is set in a single location. Because the film reflects the bottled up, claustrophobic nature of Leon's life, the majority of it was designed to be filmed in controlled, indoor environments. This is punctuated and exaggerated by the presence of key sequences that take place outdoors.

Secondly, I made an effort to avoid some trends I have found in my own writing that I think are either negative or not suitable to this story. Leon is an introvert who feels defeated by society; he is not a talkative person. Portions of the film focused on Leon's character specifically were written to use words only when images alone do not suffice. While I enjoy well-shot, well-acted dialog scenes in film, I also agree with Steven Soderbergh's assessment that images without dialogue can be a very powerful cinematic tool and one that is underutilized in modern cinema (Rocchi). There are many scenes in this film with no dialogue, and Leon's dialogue is minimal as a general rule. The exception to this rule is when he delivers lengthy lectures in class. In this case, Leon's words are used as a texture to create atmosphere much like ambient sound; the words themselves are of secondary importance.

The most central effort to maximize available resources in making the film was the casting of Baylor Theatre professor Steven Pounders. I worked with Steven on three of my previous student films, always in brief supporting roles. I was impressed by his work, and the extent to which we were able to communicate and collaboratively shape his performance. In thinking about ideas for my masters thesis, I decided early in the process to ask Pounders if he would be interested in playing the lead role. Once he agreed, the

film was written around including him as Leon. I have not written roles for specific actors before. While it is not fair to limit an actor to what you have already seen them do, having some sense of Steven Ponder's acting style and range was helpful in conceiving the character. In particular, I felt that his performance in my previous feature film had a sense of weight and tragedy, a quality I liked and sought to include this in the character of Leon Vincent. My hope was that casting an actor I have worked with previously would empower us to craft a more intricate and believable character.

Professional Goals

My goal to achieve consistent, professional quality in production values across the board reflects my commitment to making a feature film on a scope and budget that is more typical of a professional independent film than a student film.

Marketing

Marketing will be an important element of the festival and distribution process. In February of 2013, we produced a short teaser trailer for the film, titled *Meet Leon Vincent*. The video features Steven Ponder as Leon. It is a mockumentary-style short film that provides an introduction to the main character, hinting at some of the mysterious backstory of Leon's life.

We used the trailer to promote the film to potential cast and crew, and later as part of a Kickstarter campaign to raise funds for the film. We expected most contributions to be small amounts in return for advance copies of the film on DVD with an art print, and collected a list of pre-pledges in order to ensure a strong launch for the campaign.

We created a pitch video directed to actors as well. We made an effort to contact multiple actors with significant fan followings because we were interested in recruiting them for supporting roles in the film in order to boost the film's chances in festivals and distribution. The benefits of having an actor with an established audience are tremendous in raising funds, entering a film into festivals, and distributing the film after the festival circuit is completed, so the effort to explore this was an important phase of pre-production.

Conclusion

In conceiving and writing this film, I started by aiming the bar very high. In the past, I have made some short films that proved more ambitious than I was able to execute to a reasonable level of satisfaction. It was important to me that, despite its scope, this film should not fall into that category. I have enjoyed the learning experience of past short films I have made, and my first feature film, but an important part of this project from the onset was the desire to make a film that is on a higher level both dialectically and in production value than my previous work. I will address the professional aspects of festivals and distribution for the film in the last chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

While working on the concept and screenplay for this film, I consciously drew inspiration from other sources. Some of these elements work as allusions that, if recognized, add further layering to the story. Others are real-life topics that I researched in some depth during the process of writing the screenplay. I will outline the key inspirations from both nonfiction and artistic sources.

Contemporary Nonfiction Inspiration

New Age and the Metaphysical

The power dynamics and personalities involved in cults and other fringe religious groups are often fascinating. What can be surprising is how calmly rational and seemingly reasonable members of these groups sometimes sound. For every extraordinary and questionable claim, there's an element of truth. For instance, the Heaven's Gate cult, a group that committed mass suicide in 1997, has a website that includes a condemnation of suicide. However, it is then followed by the foreboding clarification: "'suicide' is *to turn against the Next Level when it is being offered*" ("Our Position Against Suicide"). Heaven's Gate was certainly a starting point for my interest in writing a story that involves a cult. I was intrigued by the idea of a story about a character who is involved a similar kind of group. The manner in which major calendar events in the Metaverse Institute's program coincide with astronomical events is inspired by Heaven's Gate.

However, the primary model for the Metaverse Institute was a more contemporary metaphysical company called the Seed of Life Institute. It is one of a group of organizations based around the Flower of Life belief system. I wanted the Metaverse Institute to feel authentic, and I felt that drawing from real organizations that are similar in nature would be the best way to accomplish this. An affiliate group that shares its basis with the Seed of Life Institute, called The Spirit Science, produced a series of videos explaining their beliefs on sacred geometry and the history of the world, and Leon's understanding of crystals as powerful tools is derived in part from this set of sources. I have also researched other metaphysical sources on healing gems and found that there is consensus within these groups on abilities of various kinds of crystals (Dean). Some highly specific details from these sources present themselves in the screenplay. For instance, Leon places his crystal by the front door so that its energy field can emanate through the entire home via a field of ions that he believes it generates. This is never explained in the film, but it is consistent with my research on beliefs about the crystals.

It is important to understand that crystals, in the view of Leon and his real-world counterparts, are not supernatural in the conventional sense of the word. Instead, there exists a highly elaborate understanding that is intended to be scientific in nature, though this ideology is wholly rejected by the mainstream scientific community. This way of thinking is key to Leon's approach to the pseudoscientific; he does not see it as pseudoscience, because his experiences at the Metaverse Institute have touched him in a very deep and personal way. Leon considers himself a man of science, and the fact that few accept his scientific beliefs only adds to his frustration. This way of thinking was a recurring theme in the materials I studied while researching these groups.

The character of J. Alvin Malachi is based loosely on the founder of the Flower of Life belief system, New Age author Drunvalo Melchizedek. Melchizedek claims to be a recipient of special information about the history of the world, given to him by the Egyptian god Thoth (“Human History Movie,” *School of Remembering*). I felt that something as esoteric as Melchizedek’s belief system, presented outright, would be distracting in the context of the story I am telling. However, I have borrowed elements of his persona and the way to which groups under the Flower of Life umbrella refer to him, in the manner Malachi is revered for his special knowledge without being elevated to a god-like status. Melchizedek is not held to be infallible, and endures some criticism from people who share his general belief system. Similarly, Leon Vincent has mixed feelings about his former mentor, J. Alvin Malachi.

Because this is a film, I wanted the character of Malachi to have some eccentricity and distinction in his manner of speech in order to facilitate a compelling performance. Melchizedek himself tends to speak in a relatively matter-of-fact tone and is not in the mold of unsettling, charismatic figures that preside over some high-risk cults such as Heaven’s Gate. However, I also wanted to steer away from the obvious insanity of leaders like Heaven’s Gate’s Marshall Applewhite. In drafting the screenplay, my template for Malachi’s manner of speech and writing is New Age author Eckhart Tolle. His use of pauses between words in unexpected places and his simple vocabulary create a rhythm that is highly distinctive and memorable, and his teachings on the nature of loneliness served as a basis for Malachi’s recorded speech near the beginning of the screenplay (Tolle).

I have researched other scientific and pseudo-scientific phenomena as well. Leon's lectures on ecology and oceanography for a high school biology course featured in several scenes are scientifically sound, with the exception of a rambling speech he makes about water memory. Water memory is the concept that water is capable of naturally encoding and retaining data, or "memories," and serves as a crucial visual and thematic metaphor in the film (Langone).

Quantum Theory

The film's plot, and in particular the story's final moments, relies on string theory principles and the mathematical universe hypothesis, wherein every possible universe exists simultaneously (Schmidhuber). The nature of the relationship between these universes is not physical in a conventional sense, so attempts to travel to these other universes are rooted in quantum mechanics as opposed to physical conveyance. Leon's travel to another universe does not necessitate his removal from this universe. This is the underlying principal behind these story elements. Whether these hypotheses hold true in reality or only in Leon's dreams is not clear from the text of the screenplay, and I intended to also avoid clarity on this point in the finished film.

Drawing Inspiration from Contemporary Nonfiction Sources

In synthesizing inspiration from these sources, I have consciously endeavored to avoid complete and obvious mirroring of real-life entities. I do not want to confuse the audience with these bases in reality: the Metaverse Institute is not a representation of Seed of Life, and Malachi is a very different individual from Eckhart Tolle. I believe that truth is stranger, more interesting, and inevitably more consistently honest in the details

than fiction that does not intentionally draw from reality, and this is why I chose to draw heavily from nonfiction inspirations in the writing of this fictional narrative.

Inspirations from Literature and Art

During the writing of the screenplay, I also came back to many texts and works of art that eventually lent important thematic elements to this story. These references cover a diverse range of topics. Religion, narrative literature, film, theatre, and philosophy are all a part of the body of works I consulted while working on the screenplay and pre-production.

Narrative Text Sources

The title of the film is a reference to Luke 23:43, when Jesus is talking to the criminals on either side at the Crucifixion: “Jesus answered him, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.’” The criminals’ question of whether or not they will soon go to a better place is one that Leon struggles with, too. The mystery, and indeed definition, of paradise is a lingering question in this story.

In a similarly broad thematic sense, Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* has been a large influence in developing this story. What most intrigues me about this novel is that the protagonist is a sort of character that conventional stories often dismiss or vilify – a man who committed a savage murder without a strong motive. Instead of portraying Raskolnikov as a subhuman monster who is fundamentally different from a typical reader, Dostoevsky’s story invites us to relate to Raskolnikov on a deep level. In this film, I intended to create a similar mechanism. Leon is an obsessive member of a new age cult and embraces ideas the general public dismisses as foolish. He is a failure at adhering to

social norms or participating in society satisfactorily; when he attempts to enjoy life by auditioning for a production, he is too far gone for it to be anything but unpleasant for all parties involved. All these things are true, and yet there is another side to his character. *Crime and Punishment*'s Raskolnikov has kindness, empathy, guilt, and lives the breadth of human experience. Leon does the same, and through this humanizes a sort of person that might otherwise be stereotyped and dismissed. In the same way, all major characters in the story are intended to deliberately set up and knock down stereotyped expectations.

The works of two Spanish-language authors, Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar, also provided inspiration for the film. Borges' story "El Jardín de Senderos que se Bifurcan" ("The Garden of Forking Paths") tells of a labyrinthine garden contained inside a book. The garden is constructed of various pathways that lead to an array of different, coexistent realities and outcomes. Cortázar uses similar themes in his short story "La Noche Boca Arriba" ("The Night Face Up"), in which a man slipping in and out of consciousness is unable to tell which of two lives is real and which is a dream. The end reveals that more ostensibly dreamlike of the two scenarios is in fact his reality. I find these approaches to dreams refreshingly different from well-known Hollywood films that involve similar subject matter, such as *Inception* or *The Matrix*, and I aimed to craft a story that shares more with these stories than with Hollywood convention.

Film and Television Sources

In screenwriting, I draw from text sources and life experience than from film and television, and *In Paradise* has been consistent with this trend. Nonetheless, the visual and audio aspects of the medium are unique and call for inspiration from film and television. Because these are primarily matters of style and aesthetic, some of this

inspiration is subconscious and unintentional, but the script draws intentional influence from some sources. Two of the most prominent influences for *In Paradise* are the television show *Lost* and the film *The Master*.

If there's one primary lesson from *Lost* it is that, in the control of the right cinematographer, rustic, weathered locations outdoors and indoors can lend a great deal of beauty and production value to visual storytelling. The show's use of worn down, often abandoned-looking interior locations has left an impression on me and influenced the kind of locations included in the screenplay.

Furthermore, a defunct, pseudo-scientific organization called The Dharma Initiative plays an important part in *Lost*'s story ("Orientation"). The organization experiments with time travel and other abstract speculative science concepts, not unlike the Metaverse Institute. The styling and aesthetic of the Dharma Initiative also provided some inspiration for the Metaverse Institute, mostly in areas where research on real organizations does not develop a complete picture suitable for cinematic storytelling. Ultimately, I found myself trying to differentiate from *Lost* with this aspect of the story where possible because I became aware of the inspiration.

Paul Thomas Anderson's *The Master* inspired the film visually and thematically as well. In the film, cinematographer Mihai Mălaimare Jr. steers clear of traditionally harsh backlight and hard shadows common in film noir and other movies with high-contrast lighting. Nonetheless, the film's lighting has dramatic contrast and many interior scenes are shadowy and chiaroscuro in style. The film, however, softens the shadows in scenes such as these in a way that allows for a more naturalistic, even antiquated appearance that mirrors that film's time period and setting.

The Master's story also deals with the nature of cult. The film presents a character (Freddie Quell, played by Joaquin Phoenix) whose involvement in a Scientology-esque group called 'The Cause' brings him hope and fulfillment at first, but ultimately frustrates him and breaks his heart. The group's leader is a broken and conflicted man as well. This struggle, in which the cult leader is portrayed as a fallible human being who must do his best to put on a face of confidence before his organization, fascinated me. It provided some insight into the approach Malachi's human side; that is, the real person behind the mask he wears as leader of the Metaverse Institute.

Other Art Sources

Elsewhere, a song from *The Pirates of Penzance* figures prominently in the film. I chose "The Major-General's Song" as Leon's audition piece because of its absurdly whimsical nature, but also because its lyrics are a commentary on how it is possible to be highly knowledgeable in a variety of fields without knowing anything that is actually relevant to succeeding in what matters. This is much like the case of Leon.

The painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* has also provided important imagery the film. I was introduced to the painting in a course on art and philosophy, and the iconic nature of the painting has stuck with me. It is an image that has been prevalently mimicked throughout cinema history; in particular, a large percentage of posters for major Hollywood film releases are based loosely on this painting (Britt). However, *In Paradise* alludes to the painting in a manner very true to the form of the original work; I intended for the film's final image to be a near facsimile of the painting brought to life, with Leon playing the role of the Wanderer. I sought to approximate the image as closely

as possible in order to retain its significance and power, which I believe holds important philosophical implications.

The Kantian Sublime

The Wanderer is nothing before the great expanse of rock and fog in front of him. Likewise, Leon (and by extension humanity) is miniscule before the great mysteries of existence that Leon explores in the film. This does not indicate that science is evil and these mysteries should not be explored. The intention is rather that, in a manner similar to how Kant defines the sublime in *Critique of Judgment*, the mystery and awesome scope of nature cannot be fully comprehended by man. These limits of human ingenuity and strength play critically into the plot of the film, and this understanding of the sublime in nature is a crucial part of that process.

Conclusion

While I have tried to avoid overdoing the number of references included in this film, the film inevitably draws on inspiration from many sources. It includes deliberate allusions to a variety of works. It is my hope that allows the film to be a richer and more layered experience, one able to dialog with the works from which I have built many of its concepts.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

In this chapter, I will explain the process by which I planned to carry out my goals for production of this film, as they reflect the execution of specific elements of the screenplay. These goals fall chiefly into two categories: the process of casting and directing the film, and the aesthetic portion of the film, which is both an artistic and technical process. In both aspects, decisions must be driven by the story.

Actors

Although I have directed actors in a live action context before, this film presented new challenges. I aimed for a level of complexity and dramatic depth with some of these characters that goes beyond what I have attempted in previous films. I took the challenges of this into consideration in developing my plans for how to cast and direct the actors in this film.

Casting

After the initial casting of Steven Pounders in the lead role, work began on the script without contacting any more actors first. As such, the actors were cast on the basis of the characters I created while writing the script, as opposed to the somewhat inverted process involved in the development of Leon. I placed casting calls in the Baylor University theatre department and contacted some actors and actresses directly to audition as well; all auditions were recorded on camera. The intention in recording the

auditions was to judge auditions from the videos themselves instead of in person, as I have found in past productions that there is a difference in the way performances feel on camera compared to the in-person impression I get from the audition. The way the audition and final performance plays on video is ultimately more important in casting a film.

Directing Actors

I made some effort to formally study the process of directing actors after my previous live action projects in preparing for *In Paradise*. I aimed to spend significantly more time preparing for this aspect of the directing process for this film than I had in the past, including some scheduled rehearsal time during shooting. On some previous projects, I have found myself unprepared for actors' questions – whether about the nature of the character, or about the internal thought process behind a particular action or piece of dialog on the part of that character. In order to be able to fully deliver what the actors needed, it was necessary to maximize my mastery of the script and understanding of the internal logic of each character prior to rehearsal and filming.

My primary aim in directing the actors was to do my best at acquiring a thorough understanding of what makes these characters tick so that I could do the most to help the actors shape their characters. The character of Leon was in development well before the screenplay was written, and I had the opportunity to discuss the character with Steven Pounders during the filming of the teaser trailer, as well as several other times before production. I felt the most challenging aspect of making the character feel real would likely be his superficialities, such as mannerism and speech pattern. It can be difficult for an actor with a great deal of stage experience to break away from the conventions of

clear, well-projected speech, and one aspect of this character that Steven and I discussed from the onset was that Leon is soft-spoken, barely muttering many of his words. This is a reflection of his lack of confidence in interacting with other people.

Leon's niece Caroline enters the story in an emotionally shattered, confused stage of her life. One key element guiding the direction of this character was balancing the negative with the positive; Caroline is flawed, but ultimately moves in the direction of redemption and growth, even if it does not fully come to fruition before the story's end. She was supposed to live up to the self-absorbed, wealthy California girl stereotype. Over the course of the film, Caroline grows and comes to feel for Leon's plight, eventually leading her to seek out help for him.

Dakota is an important part of that process. His journey is somewhat similar to Caroline's, only he is more eager to accept any family he can get because of his own abusive family. His parents are thoroughly a stereotype, so that he is established as a part of this archetype, too, and can transcend it by embracing his ability to protect and support others in a way his father has not. Dakota's demeanor was an important point of how I wanted to direct the character: Dakota has a very casual, unaffected manner. He is one of the most authentic characters in the film in how he deals with other people, holding little concern for what others may think of him or his situation.

I felt that Michael would be a challenging character to direct, because of the character's highly animated and often comedic presence in the film. While I believe that there is absolutely a place for all-out comedy in the midst of dramatic storytelling, it was crucial that this character does not stray into some sort of distracting parody; she is

eccentric, but she carries an underlying wisdom. If she is a fool, then she must be a “wise fool” in the sense of *King Lear*’s fool.

If Michael is a wise fool, then Malachi is perhaps best characterized as a foolish wise man. He loves the sound of his own voice so much that he has produced many tapes of himself talking endlessly about various generally difficult to decipher topics. For much of the film he is built up to a god-like status off-screen, so that he can fall as far short as possible when we meet him at last. Malachi’s ego is deeply bruised by the events of 1992; he is a broken man and wishes for redemption but is too wounded to pursue it actively of his own volition. There is a nascent potential for change in Malachi when he finally enters the film, but he is holding on to his fears. The catalyst of Dakota and Caroline’s arrival is necessary to help him turn the corner. Malachi, like all of the film’s primary characters, needs to let go.

Aesthetics

I try not to approach any aesthetic choices made in a film as simply a matter of taste. Each decision should be a marriage of the artistic and technical decisions with the story that is being told. I will examine how decisions in crew selection, locations and production design, cinematography, editing, visual effects, color grading and filtering, sound design, and music were shaped in pre-production by the narrative in order to construct a framework for understanding the methodology behind all artistic decisions made for the film.

Crew

On *My Father is a Tyrannosaurus Rex* I shot with a crew of only two people. For a short film I shot in the fall semester of 2012, titled *Voices Wake Us*, I worked with a

crew of four people. For *In Paradise*, we had 14 crew members slated by the time we began filming. While I was enthusiastic about the benefits of keeping film crews as small as possible without cutting corners, the technical complexity of this film led us to decide that we would like to have a larger crew on this film than I had in past projects.

A larger crew allowed for more sophisticated technical work. Because we knew we would not be spread thin while shooting this film, we counted on being able to put more hours and ultimately more attention to detail into lighting setups, camerawork, production design, and many other aesthetic choices during the film's production stage.

Larger crews also mean that there is more division of labor, which can help cut down on errors made during production. While I have been mostly successful in achieving the results I intended during post-production on my first feature film, it has been challenging because I have sorted through large amounts of footage with problems, and live audio capture was poor in some scenes, requiring a larger amount of post-production audio work. With a larger crew, we wanted to make sure that each crew role is performed correctly on a more consistent basis. As a director, I will be able to focus more on creative decisions with the cinematographer and actors, and less on making sure technical details are in place.

Locations and Production Design

The design of this film covers several aspects of pre-production and production, but chiefly they are the selection and design of locations, the design of costumes, and the design and use of makeup. Color palette serves as a bridge between these areas. We wanted to control the look of everything that passes in front of the camera in this film the

best that we can, and the production design process was intended to ensure that this would be considered throughout production.

The color palette of this film was to be conscientiously controlled. With the advent of digital video grading technology, it has become very easy to heavily tint footage to a particular color palette during post-production, but it is my opinion that this results in a very unearthly, garish look that is rarely beneficial to the film, outside of a handful of films where such effects are clearly used to further the story, such as *The Matrix* or *Minority Report*. Franchises including *Transformers* and *The Transporter* haven't taken digital grading to the extreme where few colors are visible besides shades of teal and orange. Of course, color grading can be used to more subtle effect, and we will use grading to achieve the final look of the film, but in general I believe that less dramatic color grading will result in a more organic and believable image. Roger Deakins offers insight into the balance of using digital grading to its full advantage without abusing it:

It's the 'over produced and over perfect' images that are at fault not the recording medium. You see films shot on film that have gone through a DI and they can, and quite often do, look synthetic. You can also get other films recorded digitally that look like they were shot in the classic days of 'film'. It's the over manipulation of images, that false gloss of over saturation, the pushed contrast and extreme sharpness, which is really at fault. (Deakins)

The primary way I wanted to control the color palette was not in post-production, but in the production design process before and during filming. The color scheme for *In Paradise* was designed to be dominated by shades of brown and yellow. Leon's life has become deadened; given the prevalent motif of plants featured in the screenplay, these colors suggest death implicitly. Green serves as a prominent secondary color, but in Leon's real world this is limited to sickly, yellowy hues: indications of a struggling life

that could be stamped out at any moment. Even the lush trees of the cypress swamp are yellowy in hue when Caroline and Dakota visit them. We planned to accomplish this by filming at dusk and adjusting color temperature as needed to drain the image of its cool, blue undertones without yellowing the entire spectrum of colors in the image.

In Leon's dreams, however, green is perceived quite differently. The swamp landscape becomes a cool, bluish-green paradise in the mind's eye of our protagonist. This represents a more serene, growing, alive paradise like what Leon is searching for. His preoccupation with water is reflected in this sparing use of blue as well.

Finally, I intended to use red very sparingly in the film. Leon keeps a model of a red Isetta like the one his deceased fiancé Mariana drove. It is a lingering symbol of the passion she incited in him, a passion that has decayed into obsession. Everything associated with Mariana is red. This is not because red represents Mariana, but because Mariana, for Leon, has come to represent the fiery and destructive passion he now has for his work. Mariana is dead. What is left is only a symbol.

Selection of locations was a major consideration in the development of this film, with these color palette choices in mind. Caddo Lake State Park was selected early on as a key location that would serve as Leon's visualization of paradise. While the woods of Caddo Lake are beautiful, they have a haunting quality to them. Brown, dead Spanish moss hangs from the trees, and the water is blackened with algae and silt. Leon's image of paradise is decidedly askew from the normal human imagination and contrasts the more traditionally idyllic waterfall setting shown at the end of the film. This sequence was planned from the early writing stages to be shot at Gorman Falls in Colorado Bend State Park.

The other prevalent exterior location in the film is the nameless Texas coastal town in which the film is set. We intended to shoot at Surfside Beach, where I shot portions of my previous feature film. There is a certain spartan quality to these small beach towns that is fitting for Leon's isolated lifestyle. Equally, it is frustrating for a California urbanite like Caroline.

While natural exterior locations can generally only be controlled by selecting them, interior locations allow for a greater degree of control, including active production design that includes dressing the set with props, furniture, and paint to create the desired appearance. Leon's house was always intended to be a rented location furnished for the purpose of the film, to fit the requirements of the script: a house with prominent exposed wood or paneling, an outdated kitchen with avocado green accents, and a tiny study piled to the ceiling with paperback books. The claustrophobia of Leon's life was conceived for dramatic effect in the production design process by filling an already small space until it appears difficult to navigate.

Costuming was also intended to be used to contribute to color scheme and visual style of the film. A Baylor theatre design student, Victoria Felton, joined the film crew during pre-production as costume designer, and we worked together to design wardrobes for the cast that reflect their characters but are also in keeping with the color palette of the film. Leon's fashion taste is decidedly dated and uncoordinated but will be dominated by browns and yellowish greens. Other characters include these colors as well, but in more moderation and with more 2003-appropriate clothing styles.

I have concluded after experimenting with makeup on multiple films that I prefer the look of actors wearing as little cosmetic makeup as possible, provided that character

would not be wearing makeup within the world of the story. Sharply lit and focused shots tend to reveal makeup, and with good lighting it is quite possible to produce flattering images of actors (if that is the desired effect) without relying on heavy makeup. There is can be a natural beauty to properly lit extreme closeups without makeup, as the minimalistically shot film *Upstream Color* powerfully demonstrates.

I did intend, however, to use makeup effects for certain purposes in the film. I wanted Caroline to wear makeup for much of the film as an element of her character. There were wounds in the film that we anticipated would involve latex makeup applications. Most prevalently, however, I wanted explore the possibility of applying makeup to Steven Pounders to make Leon appear more pale, gaunt, and sickly as the film progresses, reflecting the fact that he is suffering from cancer. In order to work well, these effects had to be subtle enough that they are not distracting.

Cinematography

Heavy-handedness is an element we intended to avoid in cinematography as well. Well-designed cinematography needed to be a critical element of this film, necessary to create the tone we wanted to achieve, but it must contribute to the film on an implicit level, rather than detract from it by being overly spectacular, or showy, in style. Cinematographic decisions in the film included lighting, as well as camera selection, lens choices, and shot composition.

As I have touched on in earlier discussion of cinematography from *The Master*, the goal was for this film to have a dramatic, chiaroscuro approach to the lighting of its interior scenes, but to retain a soft, organic feel to the light sources. A similar approach was carried over to the film's dusk and night scenes, which account for the majority of

the film's exterior sequences. The small number of daytime scenes, primarily at the end of the film and in the dream sequences, will contrast the rest of the film with their high-key look. This is suitable to these scenes because of their figuratively illuminated nature relative to the rest of the film.

Leon's home serves as sanctuary for much of his story. Director of photography Aaron Youngblood and I intended to use a combination of practical lights, LED lamps, and, when necessary, traditional ARRI incandescent lighting to create the unevenly textured, shadowy environment of the house interior. The rest of the film's interior scenes were planned with a similar approach, even when this is not realistically true to the kind of location; for instance, we intended for Leon's classroom to be lit in a subdued but shadowy, chiaroscuro manner as well. This serves to visually reflect the darkness in Leon's life, and the loneliness he experiences. I imagined his students being shadowed in the back of the classroom as Leon stands alone at the front, giving his lecture.

In accordance with the film's frequent use of dimly lit interiors, footage needed to be shot with a camera that performs well in low light. We have explored a number of different options, before settling on a camera that we will be able to use courtesy of Baylor Film and Digital Media: the Canon c300, which performs uncommonly well under low-light conditions, admittedly largely because it was the best cinema camera available to us for free. Using this camera in conjunction with fast lenses would allow us to film in conditions darker and more naturally lit than would have been possible with conventional film technology and can generate a quality image at relatively low light levels.

Speed will not be our only consideration in selecting lenses for this film, however. From the onset, I wanted to shoot *In Paradise* using anamorphic lenses. Anamorphic lenses were developed in the mid 20th century as a way of fitting a widescreen image onto traditional filmstock without being required to matte off the top and bottom of the image. In contemporary digital filmmaking, anamorphic lenses are increasingly unnecessary for the achievement of a widescreen image, but the unique set of distortions and lens flaring effects created by anamorphic lenses have resulted in continued popularity among some filmmakers. I own a vintage anamorphic adapter lens made by Møller for old Bolex film cameras, which I purchased for this project and have tested on a few smaller projects over the past few months, including the *Meet Leon Vincent* teaser trailer. There is a painterly quality to the thin, elliptical bokeh and soft edges of anamorphic photography that I find appealing. But beyond my own taste, I believe that anamorphic photography is especially suited to this film because of the film's motif of nostalgia and the plot's deep roots in the bygone past of its protagonist. Leon is fixated on the past while pushing forward into new horizons. Shooting this film digitally using lenses manufactured decades ago provides a striking corollary to this theme by fusing the new with the old.

I planned on including the use of some unconventional lens techniques, in cooperation with the film's director of photography Aaron Youngblood. In order to exaggerate the claustrophobic nature of Leon's home (as well as most other interior settings in the film) we wanted to favor longer lenses in order to make the space feel physically and visually compressed. By contrast, we intended to favor relatively wide lenses when Leon is out of his element, in order to exaggerate how vast, strange, and lonely an experience it is for him.

The director of photography and I wanted to carefully plan the composition of nearly every shot in the film during pre-production with the help of storyboards. This is to ensure that the shooting process is as well-planned as it can be, so that we can have confidence we are filming all of the footage we will need to edit the film together successfully during post-production. Planning shots during the pre-production phase will allow us to conceive shot compositions with their underlying meaning in mind, instead of being focused simply on getting the shot, as can often be the case during improvised shooting on a production. I believe that great artistic decisions in cinematography often have a strong narrative-driven reason behind them, and this is a goal for us in planning this film's cinematography. The storyboards were not to be used to limit ourselves in filming; they would, instead, be used as a minimum amount of necessary coverage. It is important to leave room for new ideas in shot composition and selection during production, because actors' performances, lighting conditions, and unforeseen characteristics of a given location can negate certain storyboarding decisions or suggest new, possibly better options. Having this kind of organizational structure during the production process is of enormous benefit during the editing process.

Editing

I planned to edit some portions of the film. Specifically, I intended to edit some sequences that are heavy on visual effects work because I was to be completing the film's visual effects myself. However, the majority of editing was planned to be left to other members of the crew, following the storyboards that the director of photography and I would have drafted as a guide. I intended to supervise editing, but felt it would be helpful to have other voices involved in judging the performances and the cuts. It was important

to me that the shots in the final film be composed in the way that genuinely flows best, as opposed to just what is closest to my original conception of how it would be edited. In cases where it seems advantageous to differ from the storyboards, we will discuss options and experiment with the edit until we can find common ground. I have worked in a similarly collaborative fashion during the editing process on three short films in the past, and I did not anticipate this being a particularly troubling process.

It is not unusual for filmmakers to talk about editing as a third stage of reinventing the film, after writing and production. Perhaps because of my background in animation, I tend to plan films out in a relatively specific way. Occasionally I will cut small scenes in a film or make small changes to the sequence of some shots, but by and large my completed films, at least in terms of editing and narrative, fall very close to what I intended during production.

Visual Effects

I originally estimated that *In Paradise* would contain approximately 100 visual effects shots. This is only a fraction of the number of effects shots in some of my past short films, but I am also aimed for a higher standard of excellence on this project. The movie features a wide variety of different kinds of visual effects and that challenged me in several techniques I have not used previously. The visual effects in this film, as I planned, fell primarily in two classes: matte paintings, and miniature photography.

A number of the film's locations are fictionalized to a degree that no suitable filming location exists for establishing shots of these places. In these cases, I planned to create images called matte paintings, elements stitched together from photographs, drawing, and computer-generated imagery and combined seamlessly with video footage.

The Metaverse Institute headquarters exterior would be created in this way, as well as Michael's fantastical wind farm. The script necessitated a large number of matte paintings in the film, but they are relatively easy to execute well and can be a very effective way of expanding a fictional world without overly complicating the post-production effects process.

The most challenging and complex visual effects shots in the film are those involving miniature photography. In order to maximize the realism of Leon's machine, and the destruction it causes near the end of the film, I intended to build a scale model of the machine itself, as well as a model of the warehouse in which it is housed. The warehouse exterior in the film would have been realized as a matte painting for the entire film. When the warehouse is destroyed at the end of the film, I wanted to use stop-motion animation to create a shot of the building imploding in a highly unnatural way, characteristic of the quantum singularity that is pulling it inward. After this, the matte painting would have simply not been used in the final scenes set at that location. The building is now gone.

I have some fairly limited experience in building models, and I intended to use 3D printing technology to draft precise prints of the necessary parts. I wanted rely on older techniques such as stop motion and miniature photography instead of purely computer generated imagery. By and large, I believe well-executed miniatures tend to look more lifelike than well-executed computer generated imagery. This is not to detract from the usefulness of modern computer effects; I would still have used digital compositing technology in completing these shots, and add computer generated motion blur to stop motion footage in order to made it look more lifelike.

Video Grading and Filtering

While I generally prefer digital color grading that is subtle, it is still a very helpful tool in the digital post-production workflow. We wanted to be able to carefully fine-tuning the color palette and the light and dark values of the footage in the color grading process to create the exact look we intended for the film to have.

Ironically, digital post-processing would also be beneficial in creating the vintage look that I wanted for the movie to have in keeping with its atmosphere. There is a plugin called FilmConvert that does an excellent job of approximating the look of various industry-standard 35mm film stocks. It can subtly adjust the look of digital footage to help lend colors, especially flesh tones, a more filmic look. The plugin can also generate film grain, which will be helpful in marrying the visual effects work to the C300's clean, low-noise source footage. Like most high-end 35mm film stock, this grain is very fine and very subtle, but its presence is nonetheless detectable and lends a familiar, analog texture to the footage.

Sound Recording, Design and Mixing

Audio can have a dramatic influence on the perceived production value and quality of a low budget film, and it often does. Recording and producing a great audio mix for a film takes time and attention to detail to accomplish, and this process starts with planning during the pre-production stage of filmmaking. After good live audio has been recorded successfully, it must be complemented by creatively motivated, detail-oriented work in the sound design and mixing stages of post-production. Good audio work takes time; we intended to devote nearly half of the post-production schedule to perfecting the film's audio.

Capturing as much quality live audio as possible during production was a high priority on this film. ADR (Automated Dialog Replacement, the process of re-dubbing voice work after production) tends to have a detrimental effect on the quality of actors' performances, creates hassles in scheduling, and requires the extra time commitments for both cast and crew after principal photography has wrapped. Fortunately, very little dialog in this film took place outdoors, which simplified the process of capturing good live audio for dialog purposes. We considered a number of ideas to improve the audio workflow, such as using a wireless headphone configuration with a short range FM radio transmitter attached to our digital recording unit so that key crew members including the director, boom operator, and production audio mixer would be able to monitor the audio mix on set at all times. This would resolve some issues of the boom operator not being able to listen closely enough to the audio mix while attempting to follow actors' movements in the space with his or her boom microphone.

In post-production, I intended to supervise sound design and mixing to some extent, though I was not the primary person responsible for this process. We had one crew member working on sound editing and mixing during post-production, as well as a sound designer who specialized in crafting the film's more fantastical, otherworldly sound effects. The film's sound was to include a large amount of quiet ambient sound in the background of the mix at nearly all times in order to lend the film's atmosphere a sense of wonder and mystery on an audio level.

Music

The score is another central element of strengthening the film's sense of atmosphere. Music, for me, is one of the more prevalent early conceptual elements of

most of my film projects. It often begins to take shape alongside the initial writing process. I composed an original score for the film, as I have for all my previous films.

The main theme of the film was composed during pre-production. It is a simple melodic leitmotif, a repeating phrase that is directly associated with a particular idea. In this case, this is the idea of paradise, both as Leon understands it and in a larger sense. In order to give this primary theme a tremendous sense of power and resonance, I intended to mostly avoid a traditional melodic approach for the rest of the score. Instead, I planned to focus on creating atmosphere through use of repeated chord progressions, dissonance, and at times nontraditional percussive instrumentation such as water glasses, flower pots, and bowed glockenspiel.

I wanted the score to be a combination of the familiar and the alien, with some elements that are notably unfamiliar. I intended to use more conventional instrumentation for most of the score. As the film's subject matter evolves from the mundane to the increasingly spectacular and ultimately otherworldly through the course of Leon's journey, I would have the score mirror this evolution. Accordingly, I considered having the film begin with a focus on acoustic instruments prevalent in folk music. As the film progresses chronologically, it would graduate into a more ethereal, electronic rock sensibility along the lines of songs such as Faunts' instrumental piece "Das Maletfitz." Though instrumentation would vary widely, the score was to be unified by shared chord structures and progressions, and the singular, overarching paradise leitmotif. This approach changed somewhat during post-production, as I will address in the final chapter.

Conclusion

I did not take lightly the fact that this film is a highly ambitious undertaking. I considered dismissing the concept early in pre-production in favor of something less logistically challenging, but I decided that in order to grow as a filmmaker it would be better to push myself a little further. I felt confident that with the cast, crew, and other resources available to me at Baylor University right now, it would be possible to accomplish a project of this scope, and also knew that I may not have a similar opportunity again for quite some time.

CHAPTER FOUR

In Paradise

To watch *In Paradise*, please visit the following URL. The password is *baylorthesis2014*

<https://vimeo.com/87308347>

Philip Heinrich and Aaron Youngblood. *In Paradise*. 2013.

CHAPTER FIVE

Analysis of the Completed Film

In order to examine the making of this film as a director, I will discuss three stages of the process: pre-production, production, and post-production. I have made enough film projects that I can honestly say some of them go smoothly and turn out how I hoped with no major complications along the way. Though I have done so on other occasions, I do not always have to learn from mistakes in a major way on my films. While I am satisfied with the end product of *In Paradise*, it was certainly a major learning experience and one from which I will be able to grow and improve in the future. I will explore the major aspects of these three components of the filmmaking process, in order to draw conclusions about what this means for the film itself and my future filmmaking endeavors.

Pre-Production

In preparing this retrospective paper, I found myself amused at times by my seemingly confident prospectus, in which I laid out a perfectly prepared plan for making the film that seemingly could not help but lead to a painless production process. Admittedly, this was a *prospectus* and I was aware at the time that whatever happened, it would inevitably fall short of my proposal in some areas. However, in retrospect, I think I found the pre-production process the most trying. The largest cause for this is that I was inexperienced at real, egalitarian creative collaboration, where equal weight must be given to a single co-director's input on the film. Fortunately, we were able to come out of pre-production with a creative vision for the film that was largely unified. I will briefly explore

what this process was like in the most prominent challenges during pre-production: the screenplay and storyboards, casting, and obtaining filming locations.

Screenplay and Storyboards

While the third chapter of this document outlines much of my thought process in developing the screenplay, there are a couple of additional points to be addressed. The first is how feedback from my co-director Aaron Youngblood helped shape the story and screenplay, which continued to undergo extensive rewrites after the prospectus meeting. The interesting thing about feedback I received on the screenplay was that it mostly reflected all my own issues with the script, so it was helpful in verifying my suspicions about what needed to be improved.

Youngblood and I have different storytelling sensibilities, and this provided some challenges during story development. The simplest distinction I can draw is that I was very enthusiastic about the fantastical and at times supernatural elements of the story, setting, and characters, and Aaron often wanted to push things toward a more realistic, grounded approach. We tried to find ways to satisfy both of us in the writing process, and for the most part I think we succeeded in arriving at mutual satisfaction with the screenplay.

The biggest element that I intended to approach differently outside of Youngblood's influence was the nature of the Metaverse Institute, which was originally more overtly religious; in conjunction, Leon's character spoke about God and faith, in a negative manner, on several occasions in early drafts of the script. While I liked the more blatantly cultish aspects of Metaverse, Aaron felt that it made the science of their work seem too absurd. In the end I toned it down quite a bit. The other religious aspects were reduced mostly to implicit metaphor, though Malachi's crucifix is more overt. I would have liked to expand on

Leon's complicated religiosity more if I were not sharing creative influence, but I also was aware that these elements of the early drafts of the script did not work well, anyway, and there were probably too many ideas floating around in the screenplay. I do feel, in retrospect, that the story has too many sets of ideas competing in it, and it would have served us well to take the distillation of these ideas further.

Professors who provided feedback on the screenplay also made a significant difference in shaping revisions. I sought as much feedback as I could get, and during this time took two months off from working on the script itself in order to focus on other aspects of pre-production, and to gain some distance from what I had written before returning to it for a final round of revisions.

Dr. Toten Beard was especially helpful in pinpointing the nature of some of the very specific shortcomings of earlier drafts. In particular, Dr. Toten Beard felt that a climactic breakdown in which Leon trashes his study was cliché and not in keeping with the character's off-kilter nature. While I wanted something with that kind of energy to it for that part of the film, I had been concerned that it might play as a tired trope, and strangely it was actually a replacement for my original idea, which was more unusual. After receiving this feedback, I rewrote this part of the story to match my original concept, a scene in which Leon tears at his clothes and wallows in the mud in something reminiscent of Biblical mourning rituals or a performance art piece by artist Olivier de Sagazan. I originally was unsure if this would be distracting from the story, but I now feel it was the better choice.

After my prospectus meeting, I retyped the entire screenplay, changing many elements of it as I rewrote it. Because of this approach, there were countless small improvements and optimizations, but the largest shift in the screenplay was that the

character of Caroline was completely rewritten. I felt that the original character had no sense of personality beyond a California teenager stereotype, and I wanted to integrate some quirkiness and surprise into the character that would, as I saw it, better parallel Leon. I envisioned the new version of Caroline as introverted, stammering, and slightly awkward in general, and I think that these changes did help to make the character somewhat less flat than in earlier drafts of the screenplay.

It is difficult to try to examine what I would do differently in the screenwriting process if I had the hindsight I have now about the film. There are small improvements that I know could be made, but I also see it in a larger sense. I would write a completely different story with many of the same ideas and some of the same characters. I know I would limit the scope further in order to ensure we could get the details right; I attempted to do this with the screenplay we filmed. It had less characters and locations than the previous feature film I shot, but I think it could have benefited from being simplified further.

Storyboarding was also a large point of emphasis during pre-production, though we were not successful in storyboarding the entire film as we had planned. Part of the problem with our plan to storyboard the whole film was that we did not have locations secured very far in advance, so it was not possible to know what the spaces we were filming in would allow us to do with the camera. We storyboarded several key scenes set in Leon's house, which we had access to well in advance of filming, but we did not have this luxury in other locations.

Fortunately, Youngblood and I were able to discuss the cinematographic approach for every scene of the film extensively during pre-production. We were mostly unified on how we wanted to approach shooting the film stylistically. I think the main area we could

have benefited in by having the ability to storyboard the full film is shot selection; we were forced to play it safe in many cases, because we didn't have time to come up with more creative camerawork that would help communicate the story most effectively.

Casting

Of course, decisions about casting are of equal importance to how the characters were ultimately be portrayed in the film. I think the casting was the best we could do within the limitations of available resources, and I'm very grateful to the cast for all the time and talent they contributed to the project. Having access to Baylor Theatre's students and professors was a tremendous asset to this project.

The compressed time schedule for pre-production did create some challenges in the casting process; for instance, we had to cast before the screenplay was fully revised. As a result, we cast an actress on the basis of the original version of Caroline, and I think she did not always suit what I had written in the new draft. As a result, many of the quirky moments I had included for the character did not play as believable or even in keeping with the character, and we ended up cutting them from the finished film, meaning that the depth of the character was reduced to a point not much better than the earlier drafts.

A major part of the casting process that did not ultimately shape the film was my effort to recruit name talent for supporting roles, specifically those of Michael and J. Alvin Malachi. I was interested in making this happen because having actors with some fan base is very helpful in acquiring funding, festival acceptance, and distribution. This was a very educational process for me and I learned that it is absolutely viable to get the kind of names I was interested in to act in a film within an affordable budget, but the logistical process involved in making it happen takes extra time to resolve. Two film and television actors

expressed interest in acting in the film (Linda Park of *Star Trek: Enterprise* and *Jurassic Park III*, and Tobin Bell of the *Saw* franchise) and one of them arrived at a verbal commitment, but ultimately we were the ones who had to back out of negotiations because the tight pre-production and production schedule proved too problematic.

Perhaps this amounts to time wasted that could have been put toward fruitful pre-production work on the film, but the process taught me a lot and will be valuable in future endeavors. I also have to admit that filming was not nearly as smooth as I had anticipated, and in retrospect it is a good thing that negotiations with these actors did not work out. I had expected relative smooth sailing compared to my previous collaboration with Youngblood, a 20-minute short film titled *Voices Wake Us*. I'm not sure we could have maintained a professional work environment or stayed on schedule with the limited time these actors had available.

Obtaining Filming Locations

Our efforts to find good filming locations were, in my opinion, the most successful aspect of pre-production. Rose Youngblood was instrumental in this process, which was a large undertaking. During pre-production, we secured the rental of a house for two months and obtained access to film at 37 other locations. While this was probably too high a number of locations for our own good, the large number of locations in the film lends it a sense of impressive production value, and all of the film's locations look authentic and cinematic in a way that was very gratifying.

Leon's house was the location we were able to prepare and customize the most. We were fortunate to be able to find a house with outdated appliances, wood paneling, and avocado green carpets; essentially, the house was exactly what I had in mind while writing

the script. In fact, it was so specifically right that it was closer to my mental image of the house than what I was comfortable writing into the screenplay. Because a third of the film takes place in Leon's house, it was important to me that this location have a look that embodies the character of its owner. I oversaw the collection of hundreds of props, many of which ended up in Leon's study. When I wrote that Leon's study was filled with walls of paperback books, I did not think about how logistically challenging this would be to carry out, but we were able to make it happen. I think the look and feel of Leon's study and the house as a whole was one of the major successes of the film's pre-production.

Some of the film's other locations required great ingenuity. In particular, the Metaverse Institute and surrounding grounds are depicted by five different locations. In one scene, Dakota and Caroline run around a corner of a building shot at Caddo lake, and up to the front door of a cabin constructed in the same style but filmed in the historic village at Baylor's Mayborn Museum complex. We were able to match the lighting and costuming, shooting these two shots several days apart, and I think the result feels completely seamless.

Filming included many other diverse locations, such as a high school science classroom, an abandoned slaughterhouse, a doctor's office, a mechanical penthouse, and two trailer parks. Every one of these locations presented its own challenges, but we were able to work through them without having to compromise the film's production value.

Production

Film producer, Rose Youngblood, described the experience of the film's production as "the most stressful experience of my entire life, and it's not even close," but also said that it was a rewarding and enjoyable experience. While I've put myself under similar levels of pressure in making large film projects before, the truth of Rose Youngblood's observation

never ceases to amaze me each time. I will look at the key aspects of this process, both logistical and creative: scheduling, direction of actor performances, and cinematography.

Scheduling

We scheduled to shoot a 118 page screenplay in 23 days, for an average of five pages per day. This would have been a very challenging schedule regardless of other factors. To complicate matters, scheduling conflicts meant that we had to film about 90% of the film in a span of two weeks. We were constantly playing catchup during production, and we rarely succeeded in honoring our schedule with the cast and crew, something I spent the entire duration of filming feeling horrible about, which did not help with the stress levels associated with simply getting the film shot. I never want to push cast and crew on a film this hard again. Because our schedule was so tight, we were not able to hone the details of the film's cinematography and performances to the extent I had hoped. There were many times when nobody was completely satisfied with the results we were getting, but perfecting one scene would mean having no time to film another of equal importance.

The problem began in the overall schedule. It was not wise to try to film a 118 page screenplay in only 23 days, working seven days a week. I have hit similar page rates on other projects before, but not for such an extended period of time. I think the best option would have been to trim the screenplay before production by a significant amount such as 15 pages, and also find a way to have another week on the filming schedule. Admittedly, for me it is much easier to see what can be cut after shooting a film than before it.

It is also important to have clarity about actors' schedules. In the context of an unpaid student film it is difficult to hold actors to a strict schedule, especially when we were consistently keeping them past the scheduled hours. We thought the schedules could be

made to work, but having only two weeks to film most of the movie crippled our ability to work carefully, because we had to shoot eight to ten pages per day on several occasions.

Finally, fatigue was a problem. We were filming seven days a week; having even one day off per week would have been very beneficial to the cast and crew, and only required three extra days in the schedule even if we had stayed with 23 days of filming. I know for my own part that I was already exhausted by the third day of filming, and was not able to do my best work in directing because of this.

There was a final wrinkle in the schedule complications: a few days before he was going to wrap his portion of filming, Steven Pounders injured himself at home, requiring large stitches across his forehead. We were unable to film several key scenes, because efforts to hide the wound with makeup did not work. Fortunately, Pounders as well as actors Fletcher Inzer and Devin Perry were able to wait until November, once Pounders' wound had healed, to film the remaining scenes over a weekend. This also allowed us to conduct some rewrites of the material we had not yet filmed, and film two small new segments that fixed a transition problem we had encountered during editing.

Direction of Actor Performances

The compressed shooting schedule undoubtedly was a blow to the quality of performances in the film. We held readthroughs with most of the cast members before filming, but it was still necessary to hone the performances on set, and we did not always have time to do that. Furthermore, I was not always able to judge performances very well, partly because I was exhausted all the time. I am sure the actors did not benefit from the exhausting schedule either.

I am fascinated and challenged by the blurry line between how much of a performance is owing to the actor, and what the director can claim credit for, or take responsibility for. In no way do I believe that performances which disappoint me in the final film are solely the responsibility of the actors. I was there and frequently I coached them to do specific things I do not like in the end product. Also, I cast them in the first place on the basis of auditions I was pleased with.

I consider directing actor performances to be the area of filmmaking that I have the least experience in, and the most need to grow in. I succeeded at achieving a thorough understanding of the characters for this film as outlined in the prospectus, and this was valuable during filming, but schedule and my own inexperience led me to overlook some issues with the performances that I only became fully aware of during post-production. I will look at the process of directing the three lead actors in the film, as well as some of the supporting cast.

Leon. Steven Pounders is a very experienced actor, and it was an honor to work with him even though I felt very challenged by directing a lead actor who has far greater expertise than I do in directing actors. As I outlined in chapter three, a key emphasis for me in shaping the performance was Leon's indistinct speech, which is a stark contrast to Pounders' clear enunciation.

During pre-production meetings, Pounders expressed enthusiasm toward the challenge of *not* projecting his dialog for a film role. However, during filming it became clear that it was very challenging for him, and we struggled to keep it consistent from one scene to another. There are moments in the film when I think it worked as intended: Leon's classroom lectures and conversation with Michael are the best examples. However, at other

times the speech pattern either disappears completely or becomes a stilted, unnatural pattern that, in my evaluation, does not work well.

I think I tried too hard to push this performance outside of what Pounders was comfortable doing. I began with the premise of wanting to tear down a quality of Pounders' acting, the way he speaks, and I think that this was a bad idea. While the enunciation and clarity present in the teaser trailer was not satisfactory to me, the alternative of inconsistency was a worse one. I should have seen early in filming that this was very unnatural for him and resulted in a less believable, natural performance than he could have otherwise delivered. I see this as an example of my preexisting vision for the character getting in the way of crafting the best performance possible.

During production, Aaron and I were mostly very unified on the nature of Leon Vincent's character and were able to reliably predict each others' assumptions about his behavior and motivations. We never arrived at this level of mutual understanding of the character with Pounders. I sincerely wanted to give him as much creative freedom with the role as possible while producing something in the vein of what I had imagined, and aimed to do this during filming, but I believe he ended up feeling confined by the piecemeal nature of film acting as well as my particular ideas about Leon's speech.

Caroline. I have already addressed the issue of how the actress, Devin Perry, was cast on the basis of an earlier version of the character before I made major rewrites. That having been said, I think that Perry delivered a believable performance and did a good job with the material.

One issue we grappled with during filming was that Caroline is constantly in the shadow of her parents' recent death. It was important to me that this not result in a character

who is utterly joyless and unpleasant to watch. Ultimately, I think the failings of this character owe more to my writing than to any other factor. Caroline was my most weakly conceived character in the film. She comes across as serving the plot without having as clear an arc in the story as Leon, Dakota, or Malachi.

It was not easy to find creative and varied ways to play the character's several emotionally intense scenes, and Perry was very willing to bring ideas to the details of her performance that I had not expected and was grateful to have in the film. One specific example is when we were filming the scene where Caroline and Leon arrive home for the first time. The storyboard and blocking we had planned involved her crossing the living room in a fairly unnatural manner, for the purpose of framing both characters in the shot in a particular way. While cheating with spacing like this is common in films, it did look strange when we actually had her play it out. Perry found a way to make the process of getting across the room motivated by setting a bag down, then going over to look through it, as opposed to simply hitting the necessary beats in the blocking. Similarly, she added touches to the blocking in a scene at the beach with Dakota, playfully shoving him after a joke he makes. To me, it feels natural and unplanned in a way that I could not necessarily have gotten by telling her to block the sequence that way, even though she planned it and did it the same way in every take. Having ideas for details like this be generated by the actors is clearly an effective way to improve the believability of a performance. I appreciate when actors are able to surprise me with the details of their performances like this, and I will be sure to encourage this in the future.

Dakota. Of all the actors on the film, Fletcher Inzer was the actor who adapted most naturally to the subtlety of film acting, despite relatively little experience in acting for the

camera. On set I felt that he was playing things under and often tried to get him to heighten what he was doing, but in post-production I came to appreciate the subtleties of his performance, and saw that he was delivering greater nuance than I had realized during filming. I think he struck a balance of confidence with a guarded, wounded interior better than I had imagined while writing the screenplay, and I'm glad he brought this to the role.

The fact that I had such an unreliable reading of Inzer's performance during filming is interesting to me as well. It may truly be owing partly to my fatigue during filming, but it has also taught me that there is a difference between watching a closeup on a small portable monitor during filming and seeing the finished performance on a big screen with proper color and audio. Learning how to mentally compensate for these differences so I can help my actors deliver the best performances is something I want to work on.

Supporting cast. In directing supporting cast members, I generally tried to give each character something distinctive about their characterization in order to keep them interesting. I wanted them to feel as real as the main characters in the movie, and avoid having characters who feel like they are strictly there to progress the plot.

I went too far with this quirkiness. While I had asked Sam Henderson to play his character as slightly effeminate after writing the character with my own high school theatre director as inspiration for the character, I think what we ended up with was excessively flamboyant. I liked it during filming, then realized afterward that it was probably about 75% too extreme. I don't blame this on Henderson at all; I got what I asked for, but my judgment on set was flawed.

Similarly, I directed Rob Yoho to play the role of the doctor with the underlying idea that he is apathetic about Leon's fate, and mildly annoyed more than anything. It was

important to me that nobody in Leon's life, in this first act of the story, appears to care about him, emphasizing what Leon himself feels about the world. However, I think the end result in the doctor's office sequence feels odd in a way that I would not have gotten if I had not pushed Rob in this direction. The characters are essentially on the same page: they do not care if Leon gets treatment, which is problematic for driving conflict. The writing alone was probably sufficient to show that while the doctor has professional obligations, he is not going to exert himself to save an obstinate patient.

Some of the supporting characters felt much more "right" and believable to me, however. While Michael was not the bubbly 30something I had in mind when I wrote the screenplay, I think Dr. DeAnna Toten Beard's performance as a slightly mellower character who is Leon's own age actually makes a lot more sense and probably is better than what I wanted. Dr. Toten Beard's performance is warmly human and the chemistry between the two actors is some of the best in the film in my opinion. If there is a caveat to this, it is that the character, under my direction, never seems as extreme as Leon, when I originally intended it to be the other way around. This is not necessarily a problem, though I liked the idea of a character who seems less sane than Leon offering him common sense advice.

Dr. Stan Denman's performance is nearly exactly what I imagined, moreso than any other performance in the film. He captured the bizarre self-importance of Malachi's words without crossing into something that was exaggerated to a point of losing believability, which would have been easy to do with this character. I think the key to the success of his approach is that Stan was able to include ideas from the references I gave him, in particular interviews with Eckhart Tolle, but he used these inspirations to a subtle degree that was just enough to give the character a sense of uniqueness and intrigue without feeling like a

contrived performance. This nuance is what allowed the performance to achieve the believability we wanted, even though I initially felt he was perhaps underplaying Malachi's strangeness.

This reflects a recurring theme in my direction of actors' performances: I tended to underestimate the value of subtlety in these performances. If I had been asked, I certainly would have said I was looking for subtlety, but this was not reflected in my ability to gauge performances on set. I rarely asked actors to play things up further, but I also did not go far enough in encouraging subtlety.

The other conclusion I can draw is that I should cast actors on the basis of what I actually see in their auditions, and what they bring to the role, instead of what I can imagine them doing, when that is well outside of what the actor is already good at. Pounders has an interesting and distinctive way of speaking, and I should probably have been willing to include that as part of the character if I was not going to cast a different actor. Focusing on playing to the strengths of the actor cast in a role, instead of trying to make them something they are not, is the way to achieve a naturalistic performance.

Cinematography

Though I enjoy screenwriting, I have never been able to separate writing a story from the visual aspects of it while developing my ideas. As such, I had very particular ideas about how I wanted this film to look early in the process. Aaron Youngblood and I worked to find common ground on the cinematography for the film so we could craft a look we were both happy with.

Youngblood was the director of photography and for the most part I tried to respect his creative liberty to shoot the film as he felt was best, after we had established a mutual

understanding of the style we wanted to achieve. I did not have a lot of influence on shot selection or camera work. However, there were certain aspects of the film's visual style that I influenced heavily in pre-production and into filming. In particular, I pushed for the use of anamorphic lenses and a dramatic, chiaroscuro approach to the film's lighting.

Anamorphic Cinematography. I became interested in anamorphic lenses about a year before starting work on *In Paradise*, captivated by the distinctive look of the footage and the fact that it is possible to achieve this look, often associated with big Hollywood films, by using affordable adapter lenses. In practice, it was a significant amount of extra effort. The lenses must be focused both vertically and horizontally, slowing the process down and sometimes resulting in softer focus than we might have achieved with conventional lenses. Also, the de-squeezing of footage during post-production results in higher resolutions and a more complicated editing workflow.

In retrospect, I am not sure that Aaron wanted to use anamorphic lenses, but I am pleased with the look of the footage and I do think that the lens choice made a significant impact on the look of the film. In particular, closeups on people benefit from the unique elliptical bokeh of anamorphic lenses, suiting the vintage and dreamlike aesthetic of the film. The distinctive streaking lens flares of anamorphic lenses are also interesting, and I think they helped give the climactic and visual-effects intensive sequence involving the Paykel Device a weight of cinematic realism that conventional spherical lenses would not have achieved to the same extent.

Lighting. While I was directly responsible for the conception and framing of probably no more than one in ten shots in the film, I had more consistent ideas about what I

wanted us to achieve with the lighting. In general, our discussions in pre-production led Youngblood to arrive at something in line with what I wanted, so this was not a trying process. Because creative decisions during pre-production and Youngblood's work during filming are responsible for most of the lighting decisions made during filming, I will look at three instances where I worked to shape the images in a specific way based on my own ideas.

The first is the lighting of Leon's study. While Youngblood and I agreed on how we wanted it to look, during filming I devised the idea of having green light on Leon's face, as though from the green lamp on his desk, in order to convey the sickly, warped nature of the character. Aaron and I worked with the crew to find a way to create this look; the lamp was not sufficient, so we used an Arri light with a funnel of blackwrap and green gels on it, aimed to produce a slice of green light across Leon's face (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Leon's study with green accent light

Secondly, there were occasions when I felt we had an opportunity to do something distinct stylistically that would aid the dark tone of the film's third act, and I suggested several shots that I thought of on set because of this, often playing with silhouettes (Fig. 2, Fig. 3). While it could become melodramatic to use shots like this too frequently, I think they work well in context to establish the increasingly dark path Leon travels.

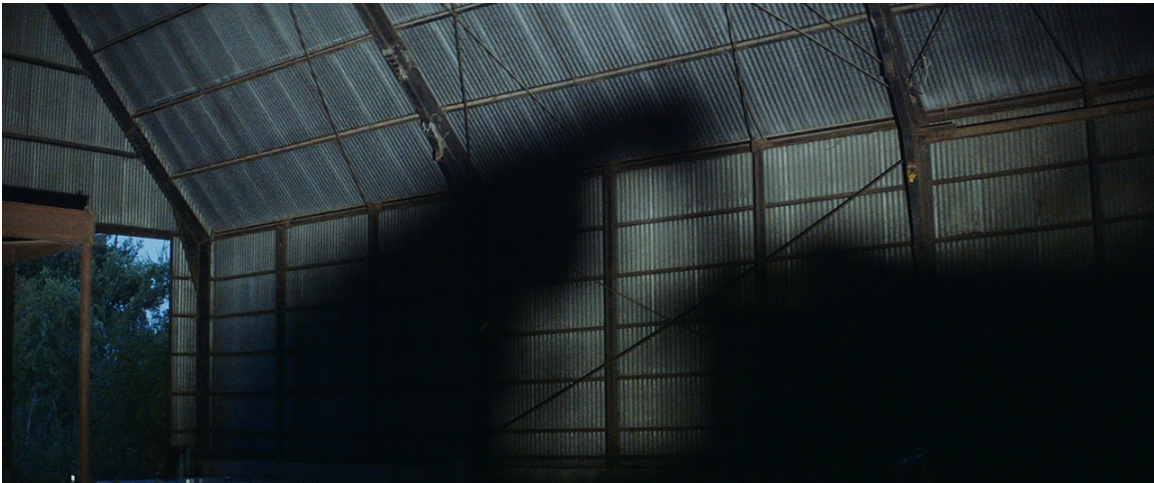


Fig. 2. Leon's shadow in the slaughterhouse



Fig. 3. Leon's silhouette as he removes his necklace

Finally, not all lighting choices were about artificial lighting. Youngblood and I originally went to Caddo Lake before principal photography with the intention of shooting all the nature footage for the dream sequence. However, we were not happy with the generally dreary look of the cloudy daytime footage. As a result, we drove to Caddo Lake the night before principal photography there and shot new footage shortly after dawn, giving us the dramatic, high-contrast look that we wanted for these scenes (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Morning on Caddo Lake

Post-Production

In my prospectus, I mentioned that I usually do not see much change from conception to end product as far as the plot and editing of my films. However, likely because of the collaborative nature of this film, the final product is more different creatively than I imagined, especially with regard to editing. I will examine the editing process for this film, as well as the two other points of emphasis for me, the film's visual effects and music. I will also explore the future of the film with regard to film festivals and distribution.

Editing

The plan I outlined in my prospectus was that Aaron Youngblood, Maverick Moore, and I would share the workload of constructing an initial edit of the film. This was largely a consideration of schedule; I wanted to edit the film's major effects sequences in early September so that I could have plenty of time to complete the effects work. However, it later became clear that Moore wanted to edit the whole film, likely in order to validate using it as his thesis project. This was a positive change to me; I liked the idea of having a somewhat removed third party edit the entire film for the initial pass, because I felt somebody with this distance would make more accurate judgments about the performances and pacing than me, and I have been impressed with Moore's work in the past.

Moore edited the film to a rough cut state that was about 160 minutes in length; it was intentionally paced as slowly as possible so that we could shape the pacing of each moment as needed during revisions. Together, the three of us fine-tuned the editing of the film over a series of meetings until we had a more concise 113 minute cut of the film.

After taking a break from the edit process to work on color grading and visual effects, we reconvened and began to assess the overall pacing of the film. We shared the feeling that the first act was simply too slow to maintain interest, a concern that our thesis adviser Professor Hansen shared after viewing a 108 minute cut of the film. After looking over the film thoroughly, we cut several minutes of material, mostly from the first act, resulting in the 98 minute version presented as this thesis.

I think that trimming the film's first act was beneficial; I would not want to put the content back into the film at some later date, even if I had the right to do so unilaterally. Most of the scenes cut were redundancies in Leon's house, especially regarding Caroline and Leon's early interactions, which did not work especially well to begin with.

Moore's greatest contribution to the edit, however, was something he suggested for the beginning of the film. None of us were happy with the way the opening scene had turned out, partly because technical constraints prevented us from shooting it the way we had planned. It was not as gripping as I had imagined, and the movie needed a stronger opening. Moore mocked up an alternate edit that opened on Leon's audition, and it was unquestionably a more striking way to open the film and establish Leon's character.

The change does have some downsides to it. The meaning of the intercut montage of Leon's daily routine at home that occurs during the audition is not as clear without the context of scenes that now take place after the audition. Also, the audition is emphasized in a way that is not ideal considering its secondary relevance to the film's plot. However, I do feel that it is the best possible way to open the film given the material we had to work with in post-production. I am very satisfied with how the scene itself turned out, and it is one of my favorite sequences in the film, though I regret that it is not integrated into the story as well as it should have been.

Editing was not without challenges. As a result of a series of large delays on starting the edit and the fact that Moore wanted to create the rough cut on his own, I did not receive something that I could begin visual effects work on until late November, which made the logistics of the post-production schedule far more challenging than I had anticipated. If our editor had stayed with the originally scheduled start date for editing, the schedule would have provided enough time. It did not seem to be an issue of the time frame being unrealistic, but rather that the work was not started until a month later than it needed to be. Such is the nature of collaborative endeavors in an academic setting. In a professional working context where paying people is an option, I would probably have made the decision

to find a new editor who could work on the necessary schedule. In this case, I felt my hands were tied by the framework of the collaborative thesis project. Despite our best efforts, the post-production schedule never fully recovered from this delay.

I think our communication with Moore about logistics during pre-production was not very good; clearly, he did not realize the schedule was truly necessary in order for Youngblood and I to be able to complete our part of the post-production process. However, Moore poured a phenomenal amount of time and effort into editing the film, and I think the end product benefits from his contributions.

Visual Effects

I originally projected that the film would have about 100 effects shots; after the edit was completed it became clear that this figure would be doubled. A majority of these additional shots required simple fixes, like replacing license plates or parking stickers from Leon's car, fixing flicker issues and times on Leon's many digital clocks, or erasing unwanted elements from shots. Additionally, we decided in post-production that we needed to change the color of Malachi's robe, which was intended to be a deep royal purple but ended up being dyed lavender at a point in the schedule when we did not have time to correct for it, resulting in every shot the character appears in requiring additional work (Fig. 5, Fig. 6). I was able to outsource about half of the more tedious grunt work to a friend with visual effects experience, but with about a month less working than I had anticipated, I still ended up in a major time crunch.

Beyond these minor effects, there were a number of matte paintings in the film; one of my favorites was the matte painting for Michael's house. Initially it came across as exceedingly fantastical, but after conferring with Youngblood and Moore I was able to make

something a little more close to the real world. I think that having some imagery like this in the film lends it the sense of just-beyond-real that I wanted for the film (Fig. 7).



Fig. 5. Malachi before color correction



Fig. 6. Malachi after color correction

I used a miniature model of an Isetta for the shots of Mariana's car. In fact, it was a digitally retouched version of the same model that Leon has on his desk in the film. This lent these shots a level of realism that would have been difficult to achieve otherwise (Fig. 8).

I was not able to use miniatures for Leon's machine as I had planned, for a number of reasons. I came to realize after further research that I am not skilled enough in this kind of work to have confidence that I would pull it off well. However, I am very experienced in 3D modeling and texturing of computer generated images. Furthermore, I came to realize in looking at the footage we shot that the infinite flexibility of CGI to match lighting, camera angles, lenses, and other factors would be conducive to better compositing the images.



Fig. 7. Michael's house

Although I was not working with physical models for the Paykel Device, I was able to make use of traditional “kitbashing” miniature model techniques similar to those used by modelmakers for films like the original *Star Wars* trilogy, who used conglomerations of preexisting models to create details for the spaceships and machinery in those films. I found

royalty free stock digital models of various machines to populate the details of Leon's contraption, resulting in something far more intricate than I could have modeled on my own. This helped to sell the idea that Leon has been building the Paykel Device out of junk for the past ten years (Fig. 9).



Fig. 8 Mariana's Isetta



Fig. 9. The Paykel Device

Music

The music of the film worked along lines similar to what I had originally intended, with a few changes. I had initially planned to make some of the music melodic and traditionally beautiful in an easy-on-the-ear way, and had devised melodies tying to several character motifs on this basis. However, once we finished a cut of the film's edit, it became clear that at times, the tone of the film is difficult to interpret.

Because of this, I had a new goal for the music: to aid in clarifying the tone of these sequences, without resorting to sappy "sad" or "happy" melodies. Rather than pointing to specific emotions, I wanted to focus instead on creating an atmosphere of weight and unease with much of the film's score, in order to parallel what Leon is feeling. This begins with a warmer, subtle variation in the form of a Rhodes piano melody introduced shortly after Leon's audition, which gradually evolves into the hellish clanging sounds of his reprise of "Modern Major-General" during the film's third act.

In creating this atmosphere, I wanted to opt for unconventional and thus uncomfortable sounds wherever possible. The musical suite during the film's opening credits features diverse elements including a Steinway piano, a Rhodes piano, a celeste, mallets hitting water glasses, a ringing wine glass, and bowed gong sounds, in addition to traditional orchestral elements.

While researching for the film's score I also discovered a concept called a "Shepard Tone," a set of pitches which create the illusion of perpetual descent, without getting any lower. The sound is very unnerving to listen to. I constructed a descending Shepard tone from the sounds of a pipe organ, which became one of the layers of sound in the film's dreams sequences.

My intention is that the music of this film, while at times intentionally grating and unsettling, should be hauntingly beautiful in its dissonance and chaos. I see this as a reflection of the film's themes of brokenness, despair, and Leon's journey toward overcoming these struggles.

Festivals and Distribution

I intend to submit the completed film to festivals and explore distribution options seriously, using the film as a launching point for future work. I have competed in film festivals worldwide in the past with animated short films, including some top-tier festivals such as Cannes Lions. I am very familiar with the festival process. However, I have never competed in a feature film division, so this will be a valuable learning experience. The film will be completed too late for most major festivals in the Spring 2014 cycle, but I intend to eventually submit the film to major festivals with a history of supporting independent film, such as the Slamdance Film Festival, the Venice International Film Festival, and South by Southwest. I will also submit to a larger number of smaller festivals.

The distribution market for independent filmmaking has evolved rapidly over the past several years; digital distribution is an increasingly viable platform with a much simpler entry level for independent filmmakers than traditional theatrical or physical media distribution options. I intend to distribute the film digitally, but we will also explore other options. There are a large number of factors to consider, and an expanding array of options in the world of digital distribution. Our approach to distributing this film will require additional research, and it will depend on the film's reception in festivals.

Conclusion

In Paradise has proven to be an overwhelming undertaking, but I am grateful for the experience and I'm sure that the lessons I have learned in making this film will shape my future projects in major ways. Though I do not think the film is as good as I had hoped it would be for reasons I've outlined, I am satisfied with the film as a professional project I can share and learn from. Perhaps it is for the best that I am not satisfied by the film; I always desire to always make work that is better than my last, and I am motivated to make better work in the future. I hope that what I take away from working on this film will empower me to make more refined films that live up to my tastes in the future.

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