

Film Production Reel/Pages

IB Film Higher Level

M2021

hgp648

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I confirm that all contents within this assessment piece are original and does not include any audio-visual material that was created by anyone other than myself or my fellow student collaborators unless cited otherwise.

I consent to the examination of this assessment piece.

Clip 1: "The Elaborate and Intricate Plan (In the Retrieving of Some Crucial Documents)" (1:16)

Filmmaker Intentions

In my short film, "The Elaborate and Intricate Plan (In the Retrieving of Some Crucial Documents)," I aim to create an absurdist parody of a spy document-exchange scene when a man disguises as the document recipient. I am assuming the role of **editor** and seek to understand **montage editing** through the collaboration of visuals and audio, while imitating the simplistic and anarchist editing styles of Wes Anderson and Quentin Tarantino—the Hugo Stiglitz montage in *Inglorious Basterds* (2009)—respectively, developing a unique approach to spy parodies.

Inquiry

As the editor, working with the cinematographer to create a shot list, I assured that lengths of shot actions corresponds to the narration on the screenplay. For instance, for a "nice" to follow the "rendezvous" narration, which lasts seven seconds, we planned seven one-second shots/actions for the lookalike's preparation montage [0:50–0:59].



Fig. 1. The split-diopter shot [0:58].

Moreover, I oversaw the technical feasibility of difficult shots, such as the pedestals and trucks revealing details of the plan poster. The cinematographer wanted it shot in real-time, but knowing the limitations of post-stabilization, I proposed to capture a photo and utilize its high resolution (6000×4000px instead of video's 1920×1080px) to keyframe in post-production, with smooth, controllable camera movements. This technique is inspired by Anderson's stop-motion opening *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) for its precise editing style that I imitated (0:02:56–0:03:28). Regarding the cinematographer's concern of a photo's artificiality from lacking moving digital noise, I shot a noise sample of the sensor at various ISOs (with a lens-cap) to overlay it, injecting a subtle 'liveliness' to the photo. Plus, I planned to add motion blur to emulate an 180° shutter angle.

I gave technical advice on the split-diopter shot, where the original location was the living room. However, knowing that this requires masking, and hence lighting consistency, I changed the location to the stairway, which is less affected by natural sunlight, hence allowed control in lighting and a more realistic final image (Fig. 1).



Fig. 2. Homemade color-checker.

Action

On set, I oversaw lighting for color-correction. As the colorist, knowing the devastating effects of mixed-temperature lighting on digital sensors during color-correction, I often advised the cinematographer to not mix cooler natural lights with warmer house lights (i.e., tungsten lights) and only employ fills for severe backlighting [1:17] or when the light temperatures match [0:57], sometimes even advising the complete block-out of natural light to avoid color contamination [1:13]. I also employed a homemade color-checker (white paper taped on a clapperboard) for white balance calibration in-post, assuring that they are placed near the actors' faces to prioritize skin tones, simplifying the color-correction process (Fig. 2).

For shots with unavoidable temperature mixing, the incorrect skin tones are salvaged in-post, namely, the shot which juxtaposed the warm ambient house lights and cold fridge lights. I corrected the blue-tinted skin tone with Premiere Pro's HSL (hue, saturation, luminance) tool, where I targeted the actor's skin and warmed its color temperature, while adjusting local contrast and brightness to compensate for the luminance-shift from temperature adjustments [0:38]. In fact, I further utilized the HSL tool for recovering dynamic range by targeting the shadows and adding local contrast for a 'subtle DIY HDR effect' [1:30]—I asked the cinematographer to underexpose for highlight preservation—and extreme temperature mixing with uncontrollable lighting by targeting oranges and shifting their hue to a more muted color [1:06] (Tähtinen), making the shots more visually pleasing and consistent with properly-lit shots (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Using the HSL tool to correct skin tones (blue tints), extreme background tungsten lighting (oranges), and low dynamic range (shadows) [0:38, 1:06, 1:30].

Furthermore, I oversaw the assembly of clips. With the flexibility of a high-resolution photo, I utilized the 'steps' on the poster to drive the narrative and provide 'subtitles,' as the screenplay is already divided into three sections. This editing style is inspired by Anderson and Tarantino, where, like them, I reminded the audience the fictionality of the film, appropriate for my escapist and parodically simplistic style, while signaling a change in story (Renée; Perno). The pedestals and trucks of the poster's details are inspired by Tarantino's opening shots in the Hugo Stiglitz montage for its organic, comically-serious execution, almost embracing the 'violence' that is to come, heightening the suspense (Fig. 4). Additionally, I employed hard cuts every transition in the film, such as the transition from the planning montage to the lookalike busting his act being visually and audibly abrupt [1:16–1:18]. This is inspired by the Hugo Stiglitz montage too, where its abrupt cut forces the audience to realize the absurdity and anarchistic nature of the segment, bringing them back to the mundane and awkward reality (0:30:18–0:30:20). In fact, to emphasize that awkwardness of dinner scene, I imitated the sequence's dragged-out interaction of the Basterds and Stiglitz (0:29:21–0:30:19), which is also a trademark of Tarantino. The long silences underscore the absurdist, Anderson-like calmness of the characters, comically contrasting the chaos that precedes it [1:17–1:40] (Perno).

Moreover, I closely engaged with sound design and composing. For the former, not only did I sync the recorded dialogue, often requiring re-segmenting audio clips, I also ensured consistency of overall background noise, utilizing noise-reduction to match the noise floor of different environments. For the latter, as the composer (me) was inspired by Ennio Morricone's composition in Tarantino's Hugo Stiglitz montage, with a tempo of 120bpm, I



Fig. 4. Inspirations for poster camera movements and its role as subtitles (*Inglorious Basterds* 0:28:21; *The Grand Budapest Hotel* 0:09:19) [0:35].

made all cuts at multiples of four frames and scene transitions multiples of whole seconds—in an editor’s perspective, at 120bpm, one beat is half a second. The seven one-second shots of the preparation montage now perfectly match the rhythmic drums of the score, creating a rhythmic montage that heightens its comical seriousness. I edited critical moments of the film (e.g., the ‘nice’ [0:58] and the smile [1:07]) on full seconds, so the score can highlight it without feeling forced.

The computer upload screen [1:12] is original, created by me in Adobe Illustrator and animated in Premiere Pro. The music is original as well, composed by me in Logic Pro X with MIDI instruments.

Reflection

My film has several strengths and weaknesses. A strength is its highly stylistic and overly-serious editing style, complementing the parody-like, anarchistic, and cartoonish story. This is from 1) the seamless integration of extra audio elements (ADR, sound design, narration, and score) to the visual elements, like the score highlights character actions, 2) intercutting poster details constructing a rigid structure, and 3) the precise editing, like the smooth pedestals & trucks and consistent noise levels.

However, one of the major weakness is its lack of fluidity and clarity in story, as relationships between shots are sometimes jarring or unclear. I can possibly justify the cuts between the lookalike’s spoon-attack, the recipient’s stuck-in-closet, and the

subsequent lookalike preparation as intellectual montages where the audience must infer the story [0:44–0:52], but with the fast-paced score and editing the audience can be easily confused. In addition, the film’s editing and pacing overly relies on its score. Sure, score-less, it still has a rhythmic quality, but moments like the poster details and the long stare of the document deliverer can appear awkwardly out of place. Even if the reliance on music is perhaps a ‘trademark’ of Tarantino, I believe a film should stand on its own (Perno).

Despite my film’s flaws, in summary, I believe I fulfilled my filmmaker intentions of creating an absurdist parody of a spy document-exchange scene that successfully explores the seamless collaboration of visual and audio, while uniquely combining the editing styles of Anderson and Tarantino. I believe I was **knowledgeable** by providing the cinematographer with crucial information that will benefit my editing (e.g., mixed lighting and shooting for HSL) and proposing creative solutions to otherwise difficult problems (e.g., plan poster), utilizing past experiences while gathering new ones. However, I will aim for more coherent methods of editing and create interest within cuts even without the embellishment of a score in my next film.

Clip 2: “In C” (1:44)

Filmmaker Intentions

In my short film, ‘In C,’ I aim to exaggeratingly depict the obsessive, perfectionist side of piano education. I am assuming the role of **editor** and seek to understand **experimental editing** by combining century-old Soviet montage theory with modern Non-Linear Editor (NLE) compositing and technical footage processing, while achieving an imitation of the unsettling and dark style of Robert Eggers’s film *The Lighthouse* (2019), developing a unique approach to experimental social commentary filmmaking.

Inquiry

My film’s experimental and montage-based nature meant editing began with shot-listing, where a deliberately vague screenplay provided immense flexibility. The shot-list included durations to ensure proper pacing and conciseness, which was crucial to the limited guerilla timeframe for production. Inspired by *The Lighthouse*, I also planned numerous ‘hallucination shots’ absent in the screenplay to blend reality and visualized emotions, which provided extra cutaways that augments the suspense [2:39, 3:01].

Due to crucial moments of the film requiring compositing, I performed practicality tests, allowing cinematography to serve editing. In fact, the pre-visualization provided vital information like the ending shot needing extra compositing for a silhouette (Fig. 1, layer 3). This also aided the final film, as compositional problems forced me composite material from the test and onset shoots together for the last shot, utilizing the best aspect of each day’s footage (Fig. 1). Furthermore, the original script included the girl’s hands disappearing during handwashing, but the test shoot showed the compositing impractical at best and cheap-looking at worst. Thus, I resorted to practical fake blood (water + starch + paint), preventing the shot from being unusable (Fig. 2). Additionally, I compared different in-camera picture profiles, choosing Canon’s VideoX (with Prolost Flat alteration) over Neutral or C-Log (Maschwitz), as VideoX attains more contrast in skin tones compared to Neutral and contains less noise than C-Log: dynamic range of skin tones should be prioritized, and shadow details that C-Log brings are unnecessary.

Action

On set, I oversaw timing for post-production syncing. With inspiration from “Mermaid Lust” scene in *The Lighthouse* (1:06:56–1:08:36), I employed metric montages to build up suspense (Stadler and McWilliam 116). Knowing that the metronome’s sound will drive most cuts, I specifically set it to 120bpm—exactly two beats per second—allowing for precise cuts and compositing. Additionally, as I recorded the piano and metronome separately for editing flexibility, I employed wireless earphones for the actress with a metronome app,



Fig. 1. The inspirations for the ending shot [3:19] and its layers (*The Lighthouse* 1:45:42; *There Comes a Knocking* 0:07:19).



Fig. 2. The dark 'reds' in *The Lighthouse* (1:43:45) and my film with HSL [3:08].

so she plays on-tempo for syncing in postproduction. In fact, most diegetic audio was recorded independently, so they can be layered with finer control during editing. In post, I oversaw the technical aspects of 'color'-grading. To imitate *The Lighthouse's* cinematographic style, besides editing in a 1.2:1 timeline (more compositing-friendly number, rounded from 1.19:1), I emulated black and white film. Film has strong noise in the highlights instead of digital's shadows, due to its negative nature (Bessette). Thus, employing Premiere Pro's Luma Key effect for masking, I selectively overlaid grain in the highlights (Fig. 3). This also minimizes compression artifacts, as H.264, the export codec, heavily compresses shadows, so strong shadow noise results in blocky artifacts. Moreover, as Premiere Pro's grain effects are pixel-level, I overlaid several grain adjustment-layers with differing gaussian blur radii to emulate varying sizes of grain, adding a subtle softness reminiscent of film. Furthermore, Eggers's utilization of orthochromatic film, with its insensitivity to red light, darkened elements like blood to make it appear more striking ("The Lighthouse" 0:07:32–0:08:23). Thus, I darkened the reds with HSL when the girl's hands bleed to make blood stand out (Fig. 2).

Furthermore, I oversaw the assembly of clips. The screenplay stopped the metronome right before the 'hallucination sequence' [2:35]. However, to maintain the driving-force quality, I continued it over the hallucination sequence [3:10]. This decision has several benefits. First, the closer incorporation of the metronome and its continuing sound makes it an integral part of the film, reminiscent of the unsettling horn sound in *The Lighthouse*. This allowed me to intercut the metronome with hallucinations, keyframing the shot's rotation [3:02] to mirror the lighthouse-rotating shot, blending reality and hallucination like *The Lighthouse* (1:07:41). Second, the metronome is now a symbol of musical perfectionism that haunts the girl, 'justifying' her descend into madness. Thirdly, as the audience gets complacent with the repetitive metronome, its stopping creates an unease that makes the final shot—the girl's head decapitated—extra striking and horrifying. In fact, the metronome's prominence provided me creative freedom when editing the montage, as the repetitive sound provides a backbone. Thus, I split certain hallucination shots, like the girl's hands bleeding [2:36; 3:05] and her writing [2:41, 2:48], where the intercutting elevated the sequence to an intellectual montage: now, musical perfectionism (represented by the metronome) associates with insanity (Stadler and McWilliam 117). Furthermore, I also exploited repetition's highlighting of differences during the piano-playing sequence. As it was shot with coverage, I could cut between different angles, timing the cuts to be similar (relative to the metronome) for the girl's all three attempts of playing (Fig. 3). Thus, edits 'disappear,' and the audience subsequently focuses on the unnerving subtle differences, like changes in camera angle [1:56, 2:06, 2:19]. Afterall, the best editing is invisible.

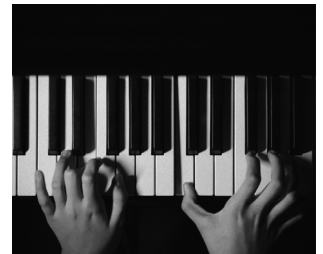


Fig. 3. A repeating composition. Notice the film-like noise in the highlights, emulated with Luma Key [2:26].

Additionally, I closely engaged with sound and composition. Due to the drastic volume differences of the musical elements (i.e., piano and metronome) and diegetic audio (e.g., breathing), they must be processed separately. The differing mix volumes and compression created varying noise floors jarring in quiet moments. Thus, whenever the diegetic sound has 'blanks,' I filled in ambient noise, with minor gain adjustments for consistent noise floors. Moreover, with inspiration from the ending shot of *There Comes a Knocking* (2019), my score complemented the hard cut of my film's ending shot, heightening its abruptness and horror. Furthermore, for the metronome sound to always pierce through, I deliberately avoided its fundamental frequency of (~1100Hz) and mainly employed extremely low or high frequency instruments, avoiding conflict in sound.

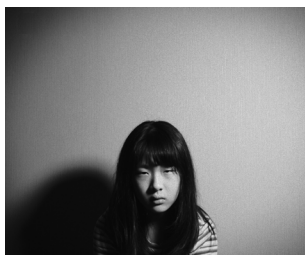


Fig. 4. A visually interesting yet narratively 'blank' cutaway [3:39].

The film music is original, composed by me in Logic Pro X with MIDI instruments. The piano music, inspired by Mozart's K. 545 Piano Sonata (a popular beginner piece), is also original, composed by me and recorded on-set. The sheet music [2:50] was originally created by me in MuseScore, and the notes reflect the piano music as well.

Reflection

My film has several strengths and weaknesses. A strength is its highly experimental approach to editing, where it not only achieved difficult cinematography (e.g., ending shot lighting) but also elevated the film to an intellectual montage, planting criticisms of musical perfectionism through deliberate clip assembly. Additionally, my close collaboration with cinematography and sound design makes the film feel coherent despite its narrative chaos, making it not only technically refined (e.g., film emulation, noise floor consistency) but also cohesive, where all aspects of filmmaking serve to complement each other and achieve my filmmaker intentions. However, the film's major weakness is its over-reliance on style. The hallucination montage does not necessarily convey anything meaningful, where it just creates a vague sense of criticism and social commentary with the 'mess' that is edited together. In fact, some of the cutaway shots only serve to augment the tension and uncanny atmosphere of the sequence, not contributing much to the narrative (Fig. 4)—perhaps this separates my experimental film with those of professional filmmakers, where intentionality and story are prioritized over flashiness and 'style.'

Despite the flaws in my film, in summary, I believe I fulfilled my filmmaker intentions of depicting the twisted musical perfectionism of Chinese piano education, successfully exploring experimental filmmaking through Soviet montage theory and NLE compositing while imitating the unsettling editing style of *The Lighthouse* to create a unique approach to film social commentary. I believe I was a **thinker** by assuring most my editor decisions were deliberate and tightly links with the cinematography and sound design to serve the film. However, I will assure that my future editing does not value style over content and injects intention to shots in my next film.

Film Production Role 2: Director

Clip 1: "Meet My Phone" (1:30)

Filmmaker Intentions

In my short film, "Meet My Phone," I aim to capture my addiction of my smartphone and metaphorically represent how people have tried to save me from it. I am assuming the role of **director** and seek to understand storytelling through montage filmmaking, creating new meaning through **match cuts**, while maintaining the clean, comedic visual style of Wes Anderson to craft a light-hearted story about my daily mishaps with my phone.

Inquiry

The simplest method of match cuts is graphical, and Wes Anderson's signature top-down shots allows me to assemble clips of smartphone usage in various scenarios seamlessly, while creating a sense of coherence [3:39–3:50]. This symbolizes how my phone always occupies the center of my attention. What is more, the 1:2.4 aspect ratio also includes more background to further achieve verisimilitude (Fig. 1) (Lannom).

Further, I employed audio and movement match cuts to transition between scenes. For instance, I planned to cut the dropped phone to my falling into my chair (symbolizing the interconnected of my phone and I, a sign of severe addiction) [4:50–4:55], so as the director, I annotated mini storyboards to note the matching of framing and sound for the cinematographer and editor. I also utilized annotations to establish center wide-shots and eye-level framing, characteristic of Anderson's visual style (Fig. 2) (Lannom).

I also aimed to employ as little dialogue as possible, so symbolisms of on-screen elements become crucial. For example, I determined the costume color for the protagonist and his sister to be red and yellow, respectively, as besides being common colors in Anderson's palette, red symbolizes addiction and depression, while yellow alertness and freshness, metaphoric of the characters (Fig. 3).

I chose the Sigma 18–35mm f1.8 lens for Anderson's aesthetic of wide-angle shallow-DOF, creating an intimate, dreamy look. The slight barrel distortion also further imitates aberrations of anamorphic lenses, a common tool in Anderson's films.

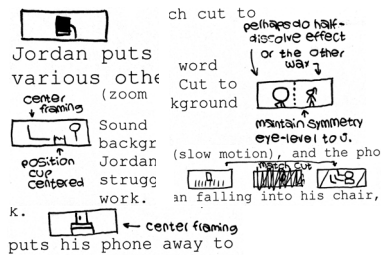


Fig. 2. A 'collage' of snippets of my script, with annotations and mini storyboards.

On set, as the director, I oversaw camerawork and actor-directions. Working alone, I often used a tripod with a horizontal center column to achieve perfectly top-down shots, employing sandbags to prevent fall-overs. Anderson's spirit of compositional perfection continues in my center shots, where achieving symmetry often required constant tripod position adjustments and utilizing camera frame guides for reference, along with minor adjustments in post. I fully appreciated the labor behind visual styles that looks as deceitfully simple as Anderson's (Fig. 4) ("Film & Design – Wes Anderson").

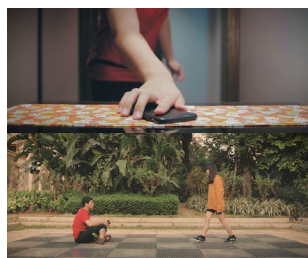


Fig. 4. Examples of symmetry and power differences through blocking and acting [4:15, 4:40].

When working the actress, I repeatedly stressed the importance of maintaining a child-like seriousness and performing actions with absolute precision—Anderson's adults often act like children, and vice versa (e.g., *The Royal Tenenbaums*). These directions portrayed the sister as more mature than the protagonist is, with the on-set decision of sitting the protagonist in Fig. 4 further emphasizing the power differences (Lannom). As the director, I also asked to record separate audio of actions on-set (e.g., footsteps and shuffling [4:39–4:46]) to enhance the immersiveness of the film. In addition, I overlooked the props, as the film requires a phone model for a convincing phone drop. In post, I oversaw general directions of editing and composing. As script annotations contained most editing directions, the process was relatively straightforward—after all, the best montages are created in the script. However, I learned to 'cover up' mistakes in lighting with color-grading. The overcast lighting of the phone-throwing scene produced odd magenta tints, very unlike Anderson. Hence, I color-graded a Sepia look by desaturating and warming the image, which suits the dreamy, hallucination-like atmosphere of that scene (Fig. 3 and 4) [4:35–4:52]. In addition, for various shots where the camera cuts to closeups of the same subject, I added a fake zoom effect with the transform tool in Adobe Premiere Pro [3:57–4:01, 4:32–4:36], imitating Anderson's iconic, precise zooms. Deciding to achieve this in post grants me precision without expensive lenses. With composing, I aimed for a light-hearted score that has its melancholic moments, taking inspiration from *Plant vs. Zombie* music and Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto. I decided that note timings should match the film's rough cut, elevating the soundtrack's coherence and seamlessness alongside the montage.

The music is original, composed by me in Apple Logic Pro X with MIDI instruments. The photos in the Instagram-like interfaces on the phone screens [3:43, 4:32] were taken by me in the past. All non-original visual content is appropriately blurred out.

I encountered a logistical issue when shooting the Apple Store scene. My crew were essentially kicked out of the mall, which is reasonable, as normally productions require licenses to shoot in public locations. We scrambled to get the last wide shot handheld (the tripod was the main issue), which was stabilized in



Fig. 1. Modeling after W.A.'s top-down shots [3:46] (*The Grand Budapest Hotel* 0:01:41).



Fig. 3. Juxtaposition of red and yellow almost always contrasts beautifully, no matter how heavy the grading is [4:38] (*Moonrise Kingdom* 0:04:34).

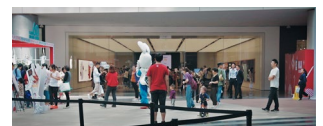


Fig. 5. The 'imperfect' wide shot [5:01].

post—the shot, though decent-looking, is thus not as precise as Anderson symmetry shots (Fig. 5). From their logistical complexity, I probably will not write public locations into my script in the future.

Reflection

My film has several strengths and weaknesses. A strength is that my film conveyed a clear story without employing dialogue, which is reminiscent of Anderson’s approach, conveying emotions via costumes, cinematography, and editing, ultimately making my film stylistically rich. A weakness is that my vision as a director was simply too broad, as I tried to achieve too much in 1:30 minutes. The film could have been more effective and tighter if I simply focused on how I used my phone everywhere. Plus, I have several missed opportunities, such as the sister not being more aggressive when taking the phone away (sudden outbursts of anger is common in Anderson films) or using low-angle shots instead of eye-level ones when she throws the phone to accentuate the flying phone.

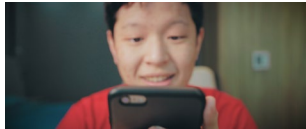


Fig. 6. The camera visibly refocusing from the phone suddenly appearing and disrupting tracking [4:26].

Additionally, my film exhibits some technical problems. For instance, I accidentally left my camera on Long-GOP instead of All-I compression, and the lower bitrate created more prominent compression artifacts when I pushed the colors in HSL, worsened by the fake C-Log profile I employed, capturing more dynamic at the cost of color-depth from the 8-bit codec. Also, being mostly a one-man crew, I relied on auto-focus for the film, which led to a visible re-focusing shot and severely degraded the precise aesthetic. Manual focus would have been a better choice if I were the camera operator (Fig. 6).

However, in summary, I believe I fulfilled my filmmaker intentions of capturing my addiction of my smartphone and metaphorically representing how people have tried to save me from it through an (almost) no-dialogue montage short film. I believe I was **balanced** between maintaining a stylistic Anderson aesthetic while exploring match cuts. However, I will aim for more precision when directing on-set in my next film.

Clip 2: “On the Run” (1:30)

Filmmaker Intentions

In my short film ‘On the Run,’ I aim to create a fast-paced, comical chase scene when a man must retrieve his precious phone stolen by a lady. I am assuming the role of **director** and seek to understand **visual comedy** through camera movements and character directions instead of dialogue, while imitating the entertaining, witty nature of Edgar Wright’s *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), developing a unique approach to visual action-comedy.

Inquiry

As the director, I wrote a general premise and ending for the film. However, being a chase scene, the film required extensive spatial planning, so the story, camera, and characters will serve the location instead of vice-versa. Hence, my cinematographer and I settled on an accessible location—my school—and scouted around with a notebook to contextualize plots and actions in the screenplay. Thus, we could create new and innovative visual (camera) approaches that utilizes the location’s architecture (e.g., the whip-tilt and crash zoom [5:46–5:51]). Furthermore, as chase scenes require precise character performances and camera movements, we then shot a pre-visualization to not only test shot practicality but to also convey the acting expectations clearly to our actors before shooting, which a storyboard cannot achieve (Fig. 1).

While creating the shot-list, as the director, I constantly imitated Wright’s comedic camera techniques. For instance, as chase scenes often require rigorous attention to continuity, I utilized the characters’ entering and existing the frame to create subtle comedic moments (e.g., the man first enters the female’s bathroom and the lady immediately exits the male’s bathroom via a whip-pan [5:25–5:28], the lady runs past while the man appears behind the bench and fails to climb up via a crash-zoom [5:55–6:00]), a motif in Wright’s films (*Every Frame a Painting*).

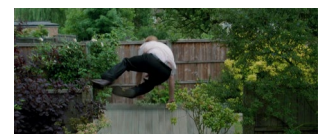


Fig. 2. Pedestaling from first to second floor. The similarities in character position and framing makes the difference (the principal and characters’ forced walking) more jarringly comedic [6:00–6:07].

Furthermore, I utilized Wright’s character-motivated camera movements (e.g. whip-panning with the character(s) running [5:54–5:56], pedestaling past floors by using foregrounds while the characters run [5:59–6:15]), which creates comedy from the repetition of actions in different contexts that Wright often employs (e.g. Shaun’s morning strolls before and after the apocalypse) (*Shaun of the Dead* 0:07:26) and evokes the illusion of one-takes that positions slapstick natural and subtle (e.g. the man accidentally tripping while chasing the lady [6:01–6:03]), as now it does not seem additional. In fact, my cinematographer and I constantly utilized whip-pans, whip-tilts, and crash zooms to emphasize the one-take nature of certain shots (see [5:25–5:28] and [5:47–5:52]), revealing unexpected plot points that create comedy. Plus, the illusion of one-takes also preserves screen direction—visual continuity. This rigorous pre-planning allowed me to create a chase scene that flows, making the visual comedy an integral part of the film instead of a supplementary one (Fig. 2).

Action

As the director, on set I oversaw actor directions and assistance. Besides directing actors by referencing the pre-visualization, I also gave improvisation opportunities for their creative freedom. For instance, the idea of the lady chasing the man and the two quickly realizing they flipped the chasing order (as part of the subtle slapstick) [6:03–6:08] came from the actors ‘failing’ the first take when they mixed up the order while improvising. Also, the principal stopping the two from running [6:04–6:07] came from the actors joking about ‘no running in hallways’



tries to flip over rea. He falls.



Fig. 1. The journey of inquiry (pre-planning): inspiration (*Shaun of the Dead* 0:57:05) → screenplay → pre-visualization → final film [5:59].

during a practice take. This ultimately resulted in cartoonish, comedic, and almost “gloriously anarchistic” action-violence shots (e.g., the man attempting to grab his phone from the lady), which is signature of Wright’s comedy in violence (e.g., Shaun and Ed using vinyl to kill zombies) (Colwill; Fig. 3; TIFF Originals). Additionally, I gave the actors regular breaks (as running is demanding) while my cinematographer and I (also as the camera operator) practiced certain camera movements (e.g., pedestalling with electronic gimbals, precise whip-pans with crash zooms) to prevent camera-error-induced outtakes that wastes unnecessary time and at times good performances. However, due to our diligent pre-planning, most outtakes were due to acting mistakes instead of errors in experimentation.



Fig. 3. Random, cartoonish/naïve actions of characters (*Shaun of the Dead* 0:34:13 [6:20–6:23]).

Furthermore, I oversaw the ‘technician’ role on-set, managing cameras, gimbals, microphones, etc. By assuring the functionality/stability of equipment (e.g., gimbal balance, microphone levels, tripod leveling), my cinematographer could focus solely on perfecting the creative camerawork. This collaboration allowed the film to have the extra edge of precision in its visual style, so the quirks of the camera-based visual comedy (e.g., camera shakes in a crash zoom) appear to be purposeful and effective.

In post, I constantly worked with my editor to let the editing not only assist the comedy but also create comedy. For instance, inspired by Tom Tykwer’s *Lola Rennt* (1998), my editor employed split-screens for fast pacing, where I assisted him to create comedy from (similar or creative) simultaneous actions.

Additionally, I oversaw the film score composition. I assured close collaboration between the editor and composer (me) by the latter constantly gaining feedback from the former. In fact, the score’s inspiration—the track in *Rick and Morty*’s episode “One Crew over the Crewcoo’s Morty” (S4E3)—is a suggestion from the editor, as the editor is the most familiar with the desired mood of the film from the rough cut. Working as a composer in Windows (Premiere Pro) with a Final Cut editor, I transferred project files with an intermediate program, Davinci Resolve, as the composer often needs to tweak the timing of cuts to sync to the music. In fact, as the director, I purposely highlighted the actions of the characters with instruments (e.g., a horns soli to the man’s head turns [5:40–5:42] and later to his footsteps [6:09–6:12], a horns chord to the man’s “hey!” and the later crash zoom [5:48–5:51], crescendo & diminuendo horns chords to the camera’s pedestal & truck [5:59–6:13]), a common Wright technique (e.g., Shaun, Ed, and Liz beating the pub-owner zombie, synced to background music) (*Shaun of the Dead* 1:11:51). This makes the score serve the film and highlight comedic moments, replacing sound effects to blur the line between diegetic and non-diegetic audio.

The music is original, composed by me in Logic Pro X with MIDI software instruments.



Fig. 4. The highlights look stylistic in frame one (contrast to shadows) [5:07] but severely purple-contaminated in frame two [5:56].

Reflection

My film has several strengths and weaknesses. To begin, a strength is its highly-stylistic nature, which serves the chaotic and cartoonish story incredibly well. The effective collaboration between my cinematographer and I (director) ensured that both our creative visions (exciting pacing and visual comedy, respectively) are achieved and complements each other. In addition, the meticulous pre-production work (location-scouting and pre-visualization) made for a film with a high level of precision in most aspects (camera, editing, score, etc.), fulfilling my goal from Clip 1 of this role. However, a weakness is color, which is mainly due to the cloudy/rainy weather and lack of lighting preparations on set—as the director, being in charge of the logistics, I could not afford to change the production date. This resulted in a lengthy and difficult time collaborating with my editor to achieve the muted look that we used to comfort ourselves. The hard truth for tiny-scale film productions is that bright, sunny days just look more visually pleasing. The wider variety of colors from the sunlight being a

blackbody radiation means that the color-grading can be creative (HSL) without looking amateurish or overdone—one can always take away colors (desaturate), but not create colors out of nowhere. We lastly settled on a Super-16mm film look (hand color-graded), where the highlight is purple-tinted (DSLRguide). This tint looks decent on most shots but made some look purple-contaminated, resulting in a less visually-pleasing film (Fig. 4).

Furthermore, I believe the story can be more captivating. It did serve the purpose to be comedic, but the premise could have been deeper and included meaning like most of Wright’s films, instead of just ‘she stole my phone.’

Despite so, in summary, I believe I fulfilled my filmmaker intentions of creating a fast-paced, comical chase scene that successfully explores precise visual action-comedy, imitating yet not copying Wright’s approaches to comedy. I believe I was a **communicator** by successfully conveying my creative vision to my collaborator (cinematographer and editor) and actors while still ensuring that everyone has their own creative freedom and areas of expression. However, I will aim for more attention to on-set lighting and a more thought-provoking story in my next film.

Film Production Role 3: Cinematographer

Clip 1: "Beyond the White Paradise" (3:00)

Filmmaker Intentions

In my short film, "Beyond the White Paradise," I aim to explore the implications of one's prolonged social and digital façade in his/her relationships. I am assuming the role of **cinematographer** and seek to understand **humanist-orientated cinematography** through naturalistic/practical lighting and dynamic composition, imitating the tranquil visual idiosyncrasy of Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* (1975)—the cinematographer being John Alcott—developing a unique photographic approach to experimental filmmaking.

Inquiry

During preproduction, I overlooked camerawork planning. One of my first cinematographic decision was the constant, static camera, as early experiments with my director revealed that camera movements are jarring for the film's dream-sequence-like nature. Inspired by Alcott's slow zooms in *Barry Lyndon*, I utilized how static shots display the scene "without fragmenting the space ... [or] the time" (Nelson, qtd. in Morrow), allowing the audience to explore the composition themselves rather than drawing attention the camera, especially from operational imperfections. I did not want to motivate the camera but rather to craft an objectivity that maintains the tranquil, slow-paced nature of dreams—when the camera moves more than the characters (who are largely static), it feels unnatural and forced. I approached cinematography like photography, where every frame can both stand alone as a painting-like image while maintaining coherence together, akin to Kubrick's approach in *Barry Lyndon* (Kubrick). With this, I could employ a slow zoom at the last shot of my film [9:37], where the stark contrast of movement fittingly augments its importance and emotion as it reveals the close relationship between the protagonist and his friend.



Fig. 1. Confrontational shots blurring the line between objective and POV shots. Notice the symmetry and metaphoric elements (treetop and tree trunk) [7:13–7:27].

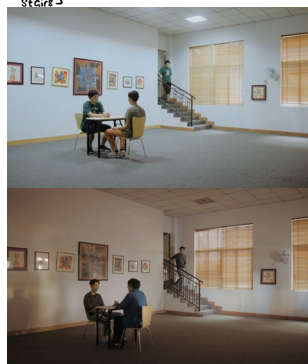
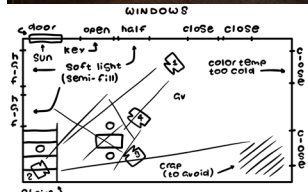


Fig. 3. P1-2 inspirations from *Barry Lyndon* (1:14:59, 2:24:00); P3-4 lighting & camera floor map and alternative lighting design; P5 final shot, notice the offset camera and table-stair complement [9:12].

Thus, I compensated the camera's stillness with dynamic composition. Inspired by Alcott's imitation of "painting by one of the Old Masters" (Alcott)—Baroque paintings—throughout the film, I emphasized natural symmetry by consistently providing a complementary point of interest besides the subject. I planned this by offsetting the camera relative to the locations, where diagonal lines inject an energy and visual interest into my compositions, while utilizing light and/or objects to create visual balance [9:12] (Tarr). These are often accompanied by excessive headroom to employ the setting itself as said subjects [7:39], inducing a sense of claustrophobia within the audience while visually and metaphorically diminishing the size of the characters living under the tumultuous world—a fitting theme for the digital façade.

Even with more symmetric, frontal shots, I utilized them sparingly yet purposefully. There is a confrontational boldness with frontal, eye-level medium shots which are rather dramatic, perhaps even crude, for the dream sequences: again, they draw unnecessary attention to the camera. Therefore, I soften the drama by altering the height of the camera to blur line between objective and point-of-view shots, while still maintaining the confrontational essence of straight-on shots fitting for the particular scenes in my film (e.g., when the protagonist confronts his façade—the camera—and when he first discovers its implications via the confusion of his friend) (Fig. 1). Thus, in the scene of the large room, I made character closeups non-frontal and eye-level, implying the scene's decreased confrontational atmosphere (as it is a heart-to-heart scene) and the disappeared power imbalance (Fig. 2).

Furthermore, I overlooked lighting preparations. To achieve a humanist visual style, I planned the lighting to be as organic as possible, perfectly complementing the dream-like aura of the film. Therefore, highly inspired by Kubrick's use of "real daylight from the windows" (Kubrick), I utilized sunlight to achieve a natural look. For instance, shooting the scene situated in the large room—though I did not have access to high-powered filmmaking lights to "[bank] lights outside the windows and diffusing them with tracing paper taped on the glass" (Kubrick)—the plethora of window blinds meant I could simulate strong sunlight (to increase the stops difference between highlights and shadows) via subtraction, that is, closing these blinds. By conducting prior



Fig. 2. Test vs. final, observe how eye-level frontal shots appear too harsh compared to a 'side-shot' (three-quarter front) [8:57].

tests and experimentations in the room (after location scouts of other possible rooms for the scene), I planned out a floor-map of window blinds, camera placements, and character blocking (Fig. 3).

Additionally, to assure that natural and/or practical lighting would correspond with the colors and lighting style of particular scenes, I planned out the shooting times and locations of all scenes from prior tests. For instance, the park confrontation scene is shot during an overcast blue-hour (to retain sky details and capture blue-hour colors earlier unlike clear-day sunsets to minimize noise) [7:04–7:29], the living room scene is shot during a clear late

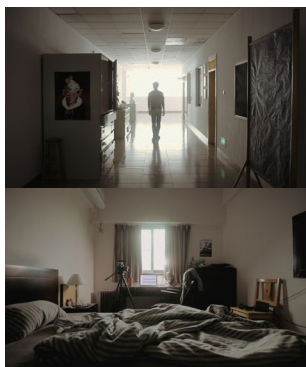


Fig. 4. Blooming highlights from my 'black-mist filter,' softening the blacklights and simulating more realistic human vision [8:15; 9:27].

blue-hour (to add a subtle blue shade to the window) [8:16–8:27], and the large room scene is shot during a sunny early afternoon (the sun's direction enables the Kubrick-like natural lighting) [8:39–9:14].

When rescreening *Barry Lyndon* during preproduction, I immediately noticed how Alcott's use of vintage lenses and the famous NASA f0.7 lens produces a characteristic highlight bloom (Alcott). Thus, to simulate the lens-created dream atmosphere and surrealist visual style, I created a makeshift black-mist filter by purposely smearing a very thin layer of Vaseline over a scratched UV filter, with rather realistic results (Fig. 4).

Action

On set, as the cinematographer, I oversaw camera operation. Specifically, I worked closely with the editor to set camera settings suitable for postproduction. For instance, as a vast majority of the film is shot in extreme low light, either from dim practical lighting or uncontrollable outdoor brightness (e.g., during blue hour, exposure can rapidly decrease up to four stops in fifteen minutes). To address the high noise, I borrowed techniques from photography—slowing down shutter speeds and frame stacking. For the former, since both the camera and characters are relatively static, violating the 180-degree shutter rule is largely imperceptible, gaining one stop of light. For the latter, since CMOS noise (gaussian noise) is largely random (Stephens), stacking the same video footage, offsetting each layer by one frame, and setting the opacities of the layers as 100%, 50%, 25%, and so on, CMOS noise can be largely canceled out. Thus, I kept the camera as still as possible for the editor to be able to perform stacking without extraneous alignments and stabilization, while making masking around moving subjects (to prevent tailing) easier, providing up to two stops of denoising. Combined with overexposing dark scenes and bringing down the exposure when color-grading, as CMOS noise typically concentrate in the shadows (Butler & Sanyal), surprisingly clean images can be produced even under low light (Fig. 5).

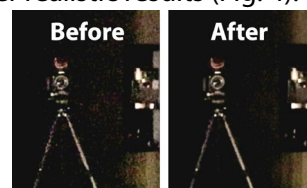


Fig. 5. Effect of video-stacking noise reduction, exposure boosted to exaggerate difference [8:23].



Fig. 6. P1 inspiration from *Barry Lyndon* (1:20:51); P2–P3 shows exposure blending at work, recovering details (lamp colors and computer screen) while retaining the highlight bloom [8:17; 6:55].

Additionally, as I was highly inspired by the use of practical (candle) lighting in *Barry Lyndon* (Alcott), I aimed to imitate the lighting approach with a modern twist, that is, lighting scenes with entirely electronic lamps or monitor screens, echoing the theme of a digital façade while maintaining the naturalistic approach. However, while high noise problems are addressed with the previous method, the camera's poor dynamic range at high ISOs meant that the light source itself and the subjects cannot be properly exposed simultaneously, which *Barry Lyndon* addressed with multiple small light sources (forming a soft source) and the higher dynamic range of film. To address this, I employed exposure blending borrowed from photography, where I recorded shots in two exposures (seven stops apart) and asked the editor to recover clipped highlights of the normal exposure with the lower one, something otherwise impossible to achieve in-camera. This not only increased the film-like visual style, but it also made practical lights appear more natural and purposeful. As practical lights no longer distracted the audience, the strange, uncomfortable atmosphere gets to project itself freely (Fig. 6).

Moreover, I employed composition to perform edge-patrol, that is, to remove unnecessary and distracting elements from the frame. This is crucial, as my editor's decision (during planning) to prolong takes and create a slow pacing meant that any oddities, such as a half-cut-off or jarringly placed objects, can be distracting to the audience. For instance, the POV-like composition of the wide room, during testing, included many distractions difficult to be moved

when working under time constraints. Thus, in the final film, I employed a longer focal length to not only drastically clean up the shot but to also heighten shock, as my editor planned to use it to reveal the mysterious voices throughout the film (Fig. 7).

Furthermore, I gathered video material for the editor to remedy non-ideal lighting situations. For example, I originally planned the closeup of the protagonist's friend during the large room scene (Fig. 2 floor map, camera 3) to have the sun flare through the door windows, as it mystifies the protagonist's friend which contributes to the dream-like atmosphere. However, during production, to achieve a balanced composition, the sun could only shine through one of the two door windows from its differing position. Thus, I gathered the same shot at a slightly different angle to allow the editor to mask in the flaring sun, making the final shot much more refined (Fig. 8).



Fig. 7. Edge patrol via clever compositions can evade distractions effectively [8:52].

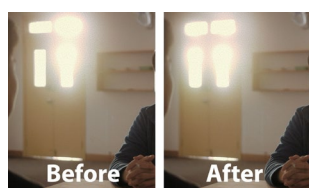


Fig. 8. Effect of utilizing masking to remedy lighting problems [9:00].

Lastly, during postproduction, I oversaw color-grading, creating the final visual style of every scene before sending them off to my editor for his finer adjustments and clip assembly. I aimed to not necessary render strong emotions but rather to evoke a sense of unease from the audience via motivated color-grading. To elucidate, though most scenes of the film is rather warm, their lower color temperature is justified by the setting—that is, the practical lighting and/or natural lighting already created a warm, organic look (e.g., the living room scene with warm practical lights [8:16–8:27] and the large room scene with wood-colored blinds tinting sunlight [8:39–9:14]). However, for

the two confrontational scenes, the colors appear somewhat unnatural, usually from a deliberate offset of skin

tone (e.g., the park scene with its unnatural green tint [7:04–7:29] and the dining room scene with its overwhelmingly warm color temperature [7:29–8:05]), allowing me to subliminally manipulate the audience's emotions and perceptions of scenes just from subtle color changes (Fig. 9).

The audio editing software displayed on the computer screen [6:50, 9:31] is original, created by me in Illustrator. The phone lockscreen photo [9:37] is original too, taken by me. The music is original as well, composed by me in Logic Pro X with MIDI instruments.

Reflection

As the cinematographer, I worked closely with my editor to provide feedback on the rough cut of the film. For instance, I suggested certain clips' reordering and duration adjustments, as I wanted to emphasize certain compositions over others for their more appropriate emotional affect. For instance, I suggested to place the wide shot of the large room (Fig. 3) at the end of the scene [9:09] instead of immediately following the POV-like composition (Fig. 7), as the uncertainty and suspense constructed by the closeups further amplifies the emptiness of the wide shot. Though the subjects are physically smaller, the audience better experience the significance of the protagonist's decision to escape the prison of his digital and social façade.

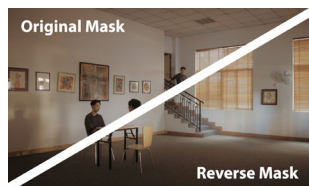


Fig. 10. The empty room shot from reverse masking [9:23].

Additionally, both my editor and I felt that the transition to the last morning scene felt abrupt, so my editor suggested adding a shot of the same composition as Fig. 3 but with an empty room to symbolize the escape or to hint that the protagonist's friend is merely a figment of his imagination. Though we did not have an empty shot of the room, I employed the masking performed on the wide shot (for the protagonist to be duplicated) and simply inverted the mask, creating the important empty take which strengthens the film's narrative completeness (Fig. 10). Moreover, I regraded some shots as their exposures appear inconsistent when edited together. Although I used

Premiere Pro's waveform to maintain technical consistency (by masking around objects with consistent exposures over different compositions, like human faces or walls), I forgot that it does not translate to visual consistency. For instance, Fig. 2's exposure should be technically higher than Fig. 3, as though the latter contains highlights that visually balances the dark exposure of the subjects, the former's lack of it makes dark exposures unnatural.

Overall, my film has several strengths and weaknesses. One of its strengths is its full utilization of each location, as thorough prior experimentation with my director (especially of the large room) ensured a clean, organic visual style which explores the possibilities of dynamic compositions. The major aspect is my attention to lighting, as the relatively few shots enabled careful placements of each practical light (e.g., the opening and living room scene), compositions that best compliment the natural lighting (e.g., the park scene), or a combination of both (e.g., the large room scene). Additionally, although the shots span a variety of locations and thus created many lighting styles and colors, there is a surprisingly coherence throughout the film, likely from the consistently static camera and humanist approach to cinematography. However, shots which lacked prior experimentation, in comparison, immediately displays an amateurish look, typically due to poor lighting. This is especially dreadful as the last shot of the film—the closeup of the protagonist's phone that conveys his relationship with his friend—was shot in a hurry on the bedroom's bedside table which lacked both proper lighting and pleasing composition. Even though the high-ISO noise was largely mitigated via frame-stacking, the shot looks out of place among the more polished cinematography of the rest of the film. Furthermore, there were plenty of missed-opportunities, such as better utilizing foreground objects and employing a fog machine for the large room scene (imagine the beautiful light rays!), the latter I wanted to experiment with but could not do so from poor planning and the subsequent logistical issues.

Despite the flaws in my film, in summary, I believe I fulfilled my filmmaker intentions of capturing how prolonged social and digital façade affects relationships, successfully demonstrating humanist-orientated cinematography through naturalistic/practical lighting and dynamic composition while imitating the tranquil filmography of Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* to develop a unique photographic approach to experimental filmmaking. I believe I was **knowledgeable** by assuring that most compositions are with careful deliberations from experimentations while incorporating my experience from photography to polish less-than-ideal footage. However, I will assure that my future cinematography will not compromise from poor planning with better time-management.



Fig. 9. Before and after of color-grading the scene to look 'unnaturally blue & green' [7:09].

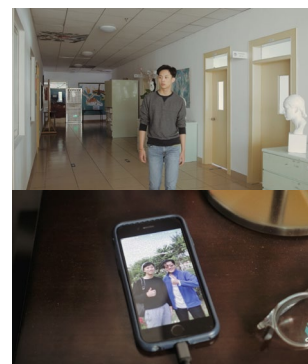


Fig. 11. Shots lacking polish in lighting and composition compared to the rest of the film [8:54; 9:37].

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