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RELEVÉ

by

Lauren Stoelzle

B.A., Southern Illinois University, 2011

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Fine Arts Degree

Department of Mass Communication and Media Arts  
in the Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
December 2019

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THESIS APPROVAL

RELEVÉ

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Lauren Stoelzle

A Thesis Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in the field of Mass Communication and Media Arts

Approved by:

H. D. Motyl , Chair

Dr. Angela Aguayo

Dr. Michele Leigh

Antonio Martinez

Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
May 7, 2019

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

LAUREN STOELZLE, for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Mass Communication and Media Arts, presented on May 7, 2019, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: RELEVÉ

MAJOR PROFESSOR: H. D. Motyl

It is critical for the individual to understand the importance of their story. If we don't tell our stories, nobody will. The stories we share and how we choose to share them communicate volumes about our contexts, both intimate and at large. It exposes and surfaces patterns or perspectives we may not have been aware of in numerous categories. Categories such as political, social, gender associations and so many other arenas of subject matter. Many times we may need to examine the where, why, when, and what questions behind how our close and distant circles perform. Meaning, the roles and norms we create or become accustomed to without understanding why. The power of the image and its complexity to both challenge and falsely inform one's own understanding of who they are is crucial to study. It is important to arm each individual with media literacy and to empower them with the belief that they too are able and worth sharing stories and experiences directly related to their self and, or their beliefs. This paper follows an unconventional narrative, self-written, directed, edited, and co-filmed by myself and Carson Cates. We had a very small crew. Part of this film's purpose was to challenge what is necessary to make a "low budget" film. I wanted to use this film to awaken individuals who have often felt unimportant, powerless, or have not envisioned themselves as a hero to realize they are. I want to prove that even films directed and produced from a rural setting can compete in the film industry and are necessary. This was my first narrative film. I made the film, fully understanding and owning the importance of my role as director and the stories of those close to me that need to be shared.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank my committee chair H.D. Motyl. Thank you for all of your patience and for remaining optimistic when I couldn't see the light. I appreciate you continuously encouraging me and sharing sweet and thoughtful stories of you and Ned or whatever it needed to be to keep a smile on my face.

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Thank you to Antonio Martinez for planting seeds of critical thinking and artistic creativity in me during my undergrad. Many of my own ideas and works of art wouldn't be the same without your direct influence. Thank you for always having an open door for me when times were rough. It is teachers like you that keep students going.

Thank you Dr. Michele Leigh for your strength, your faith in women of history that no one else has had. Thank you for redefining what being a woman means for me, especially as an artist.

I would like to thank my mom, my childhood best friend, and now my kid's best friend, Lucretia Stoelzle. Thank you for sacrificing so much of your time to help me achieve my goals. I want you to know how much I love you. You are the best Grandma. I wouldn't know what love looks like without you.

Dad, Michael Lee, you are one of my rocks. When I can't find any answers, your ability to see the beauty in what some would regard as trash, reminds me there is an importance in my life and my work. Thank you. You have shown me what love looks like also. I love you dad.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to Kristin Duncan. You were one of the strongest women I have ever met. When people cast judgment on you, you would flip them off, hold your head up high, and you would claim your worth. Taylor, this is also for you. May you remember and never forget your worth and continue to grow and show love to others, even when they don't deserve it. Never forget Girls Rock Camp. Please pass on what you have learned to the next friend.

To my daughters, Beulah and Star, you are the reasons Mommy doesn't give up. You are bright shining lights of purpose. Live life to its fullest. Always, dance when they tell you not to. Always take risks. I hope you are always, genuinely happy.

I would like to dedicate this film to anyone battling with addiction. To any child who has suffered from their parents addiction. I hope, child, you see your worth. I hope child you see the beauty in the world despite the cards you're currently dealt.

Jamie Sheffer, thank you for the flowers at Sonic, being my support system through all the high and low times, your undying faith in me, and so many beautiful times laughing.

I would like to dedicate this film to my family.

Beulah Stoelzle  
Star Stoelzle  
Lucretia Stoelzle  
Tom Aldridge Jr.  
Joyce Aldridge  
Michael Stoelzle  
Theda Stoelzle  
Robert Stoelzle  
Tamara Dixon  
Rebekah Tacderas  
Curtis Vaughn  
Sarehna Vaughn  
Felix Vaughn  
Sean Tacderas

Krista Tacderas  
Rosabel Tacderas  
Zeke Stoelzle  
Tyler Stoelzle  
Koa Stoelzle  
Cody Stoelzle  
Jared Stoelzle

## PREFACE

When we are scared to share our stories due to feeling inadequate we lose the battle necessary for us to fight in owning our own importance and the cruciality of exposing how we each are impacted by the images we have already seen. The purpose of my film and this paper is to claim the value of a little girl's story, my story, and the importance of our experiences in Southern Illinois.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“You can’t describe it when you’re in the middle of it. It’s too hard. You can’t describe it when you’re so close. But, having been outside of it for a while now, it’s easier to describe and I think there are kinds of being knocked around.”

- Mas, *Relevé*

Our whole lives we are learning, being conditioned, or learning to be, or not to be, aware of this conditioning. We can be in a physical prison, a mental prison, or both. I believe innocence lasts longer than the lack of innocence we often suggest. Innocence is relative. We are innocently evaluating the world around us and applying it to our understanding of who we are and how we are supposed to behave. In the beginning, much of this responsibility of what and how we learn about the world, how we are to act, heavily relies on our parents or our immediate guardians. Influences come from all directions and avenues. What we see on the screen, social media, or how we see our peers act and react directly impact and shape our identities. My film *Relevé* is a glimpse into the way one forms this understanding of self, how one perceives opportunity, and how one digests the cycle of life itself within the limitations and relationship to capitalism, gender norms, class roles, and when impacted by the claws of addiction, both directly and indirectly.

I have always been fascinated with filmmaking. It wasn’t until early high school and college that I realized *everyone* was capable of creating it. That all you needed was access to a camera of sorts and someone with knowledge, a book, or internet access. Although I started with photography, I soon moved towards the motion picture because of sound and the relationship between sound and the moving image. It held more challenges and more room for layers of

critique, discussion, and representation of my own experiences, people, and creativity in telling our stories. Although I have, and continue to hold a great respect for documentary filmmaking, there is a special magic to the art of fictional or narrative filmmaking. The boundaries between the two have always fascinated me and have surfaced questions I still continue to ask and remain debatable in my mind.

Documentary, although it aims at creating change, and often, does indeed hold the power to do so, I would argue so does fiction. Fiction, at times, exposes audiences to realities in a way that documentary isn't allowed to. What I mean by this, is that often times, the targeted audience documentary aims to impact, won't watch the documentary. I believe this is why I am drawn to both arenas. I view the realm of fiction as a challenge to draw the audience in, to reveal to them something important that I would often approach in documentary form. How can I represent those close to me in a way that helps the audience understand a perspective that is not their own, or where they can empathize and draw connections to certain experiences that they may or may not have in common with the characters in the film?

Although *Relevé* is a fictional film, the script is written with pockets of improvisation. It is based off of my own life experiences, as well as, the lead actress's life experiences. With a background in documentary photography and documentary filmmaking, I was excited to use this pattern to allow for moments of more direct "truth." I felt like it would allow the actor moments to express their own experiences and opinions without having to directly claim the opinions as their own. This allows for them to feel safe, as well as, it allows protection from exploitation in its claim to the audience.

*Relevé* is a film that showcases a coming of age Grey's internal breakdown and analysis of the world around her. It does this by exposing the audience to her reality, her relationships,

both born into, and encountered, and her routine. The film does so by using the images as a poetic sequence and vocal expression of the way she sees the characters and the world around her. This is accomplished through visual montages and through her own narration. It highlights the challenges she faces in forming her own identity alongside her and her family's limitations from lack of money for dance education and her preoccupation with her own loss. The loss being the physical loss of her grandma and the mental loss of her mother, meaning she is consumed with her own grief, poverty, and addiction. *Relevé* is a political film in disguise. It aims to humanize the addict, the incarcerated, the dealer, the child of the addict, the "low-life", and puts the viewer in the unique position of the child who ultimately could become any of the above. I chose video production for this story after understanding the power behind media literacy I was taught and using the tools from my media literacy studies to purposely empower myself to create a film about my own experiences. Media production is a terrain necessary for minorities, or stories less told by those directly experiencing the circumstance, to expand their voice. It is a space I am comfortable with, where I am allowed to discuss crucial matters we often are told to neglect.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPOSING THE FAMILIAR

The beauty of cinema or any form of storytelling, is within the artist's vulnerability and risk they take when sharing the stories, or art pieces important to them with other individuals or an audience at large. They don't know how the art will be received, but they invest in the work and share it anyway. The beauty is also in the audience's ability to form organic reactions and connections, whether imaginary or authentic, and then to analyze why they reacted or felt the way they did. It has the chance encounter to pull on ones' heart strings; to, in one swoop, collide one world into another. The film hopes for an awakening in the audience. The hope of the filmmaker, in my situation, is to create an intended reaction, to convince the audience that my character's experiences, my character's familiar matters. With sharing stories, cinema takes something familiar or routine to one individual or one group's situation and exposes it to another group or an audience. In this exposure, there is a hope or a chance impact, which will create change, whether in an individual in the audience or the audience at large. I always hope for a ripple effect. Film is like an undercover activist. Often times driven by passion, concern, or question, it has the power to motivate reaction and change in one or many.

There's a book I have often read at night to my daughters called *They Say Blue* by Jillian Tamaki. The book illustrates the dyad of both the beauty and horror in the familiar associations we learn, digest, and then blindly apply as attributes to the familiar with little or no analysis of the subject matter. It discusses the constricting nature of labels we agree upon as a majority and our tendency to simplify the understanding of these definitions, in this case they use the color blue as an example. The book illustrates the labels we familiarize to the point where we forget to continue exploring, viewing or prodding the world around us. We forget to be scientists

and allow room for any and all answers that the hypothesis or experiment itself may surface.

The term *relevé* is French for “raised up.” Before the title *Releve’* existed, the title was *Coterie*. I had chosen the name *Coterie* because I was interested in the philosophical discussion that could arise from the idea of how much control one actually has on the groups they choose to associate with. *Coterie*, “a small group of people with shared interests or tastes, especially one that is exclusive of other people.” I apply this definition to groups forced into association or close relation via socio-economic class, societal constructs on gender roles and identities, and the conflicts arisen from an American capitalism system. As the film developed and as I pondered the definition, *Coterie* didn’t seem appropriate. The definition implied self-autonomy and self-determination. It wasn’t until the end of the filming and editing process that I decided on the term *Relevé* for the title.

*Relevé* was not a term I was familiar with. It is a term applied to a dance move in ballet where the dancer has to lift their entire body into the highest point physically possible, the tips of their toes. This move requires strength, determination, and effort. It is brutal. The dancer faces pain. The feet are bruised, taped. The scars are hidden from the audience or viewer by the person who worked to achieve the goal. Hiding these wounds are routine for the person who has trained to achieve this high point. This move is presented to the audience as a move of grace and ease. The work, power, pain it took to achieve the final goal is silenced, under a facade of entertainment. It may be understood only by the initiated or the curious audience member, who has an appreciation for the art of dance. This experience is familiar to the dancer.

Part of *Relevé’s* mission was to establish the familiar, the routine for a young girl Taylor who plays Grey in the film. Grey, like many who come from lower class families who are forced to either face and expose their positions and insecurities or hide them, embodies the term *Releve*.

In the film Grey longs to take dance lessons but cannot afford to. She spends a lot of her time outside of a studio watching other girls her age in dance lessons.

I wanted the audience to be exposed to her familiar. I also wanted the audience to see the familiar for her mother, Tish, a single parent battling addiction and entangled by scarcity in her mind. I wanted to expose them to the familiar of these characters by including daily routines of walking to town, or the monotony that leads to a nature of emotions that can make it hard for addicts to not want to give in to another hit. I wanted to showcase the feelings of abandonment characters may feel. We are exposed to the lead character Grey's inner dialogue as narration. We see how all of this spare time she has on her hands, can be spent comparing her life to the dancer's lives, we can see how this constant time spent thinking can either be draining or empowering.

We see the familiar with the gas station location. We know Grey is familiar with the location because she states in her narration that the "gas station has its regulars. The kind of regulars, where if one doesn't show up, you wonder if they're dead. She describes how she's, "always up before the alarm goes off," and continues by describing life without her grandma and how now she just heads to "Bears," the gas station.

Establishing the familiar is important because it represents the why and how. How and why would someone act this way? It allows us to put ourselves in their situation and examine. Often what is familiar to one person is unknown and remains un-comprehended to the next. I think this is hard for some of us to realize, but once we do allow ourselves to be open to another perspective or experience, we gain power. We gain power in acknowledging our own experience upon the exposure or contrast to another's experience.

Mas is the character in the film that represents ideas of destiny or chance encounters. He

is a mid-twenties white male drug dealer. He is an artist on the side. Mas represents that “complication and simplification” we often stumble across like the idea presented in the book I read to my kids at night. He is the stereotype and the “what if” lurking around the corner. Due to our stereotypes and unfortunately sometimes our reality, Mas’ character represents an older male whom could have bad intentions toward Grey, who could be a predator. My choice to leave Mas as a character with good intention was not meant to secure him a spot traditional hero, yet was to showcase the complications both genders face with stereotype and the effects of stereotypes on the process of forming their own self-identity.

The first time we see Mas is at the very beginning of the film. He sits on a leather couch, wearing the striped pants and shirt from a jail or prison uniform. He takes a drag from a cigarette and then addresses the audience, breaking the 4th wall, and asks them, “Do you know what I like about going to the movies?” He then proceeds to answer his own question, “I like going to the movies because you get to see some guy die and then get brought back to life. Yeah, I see y’all breathin. Then I take another drink and then get back to breathin, outside myself.”

Originally this was scripted to be part of the end of the film. I wanted to send chills into the audience. I wanted this scene to forever be Mas staring into the eyes of each movie goer and address them about death we all face and in a Brechtian way, acknowledge, “Hey, you’re in a theatre. I might be dead now. Does my story matter? And yeah, you’re going to die too.”

The second introduction to Mas is when we see him approach the gas station. Grey too, is at the gas station. We get a feel that each of the characters often goes to the gas station. We know this for sure from Grey’s narration for herself. We gain this idea from Mas because he requests the baby powder from behind the counter, warms his coffee in the microwave, and addresses the gas station clerk by saying, “What’s up, Bear?”

Grey practices her dance in a space next to the gas station somewhat isolated. When Mas decides to step to the side of the building for a cigarette break, he observes her dancing and she sees him mid-dance routine and he quickly averts his attention elsewhere and walks away. Gray decides to leave also. They both end up walking in the same direction for quite some time. The viewer, seeing this story for the first time, has no idea how well they know one another, if at all.

When forming the character Mas, I couldn't help but think of his character as representing both a burden and a breath of fresh air for Grey and stigmas in society. Mas contained all the questions and frustrations I was having with life. Mas became everything I knew eventually Taylor would or had already encountered in life. I wanted to discuss the definitions of guilt and innocence through showing one's upbringing and the challenges both the adult and child face. I wanted to discuss how someone who is known legally as a "problem" interacts with a child they actually want to see succeed in life. I wanted to discuss what that success actually means and how one without access gains consciousness on how to achieve it.

As we follow Mas leaving the gas station we hear Grey describing him, "He comes by the house once and a while but he never comes inside." Later in the film she describes Mas as blue. She states, "Mas was blue. Everything about him was blue. I didn't want to be blue. I wanted to be yellow."

Color plays a major role in how Grey paints the world around her. I use color to represent parts of familiarity. For Mas I chose blue. Blue, because like the story I read to my children at night that discusses the ambiguity of color association, I wanted to discuss the ambivalence of blue as a romantic color. I wanted to express the associations with blue that are quite dark, or complex, even haunting. Blue is the color associated with police. Blue is the color associated with Xanax. Blue is the color of the Illinois Link food stamp card for families who need cash or

food assistance due to financial hardship. Blue can also be romantic and mesmerizing. The music genre associated with the color, associating sadness to the color blue, the blues, is complicated veiled with simplicity, repetition, and lyrics some might shrug off as ignorant or childlike. Yet the blues is quite the opposite. The lyrics are relevant to all humans who have felt the emotion of love, loss, complication, and stereotype.

Mas embodies the irony of being a poor white male. He is a drug dealer, who is up to his waist in legal paperwork related to decisions from his past. He represents the burden one carries being poor and in trouble in a capitalistic society.

The film, although Grey's story, has an intersecting narration from Mas. Mas is the depressed male who doesn't talk about it. He's the friend no-one is worried about. Mas loves artwork, but doesn't pursue it as a means for making a living.

The viewer meets Grey in a very intimate setting. She is twelve years old. I have heard, for some, it is almost uncomfortable to watch. We watch the mom wash and condition Grey's hair and Grey washes and conditions her sister's hair. There is this literal passing on of responsibility. After we see the bathtub scene we hear Grey speak for the first time.

The screen goes from color to black and white. Grey is dressed in funeral apparel, but the shot is a close up. She describes her encounter with death. She describes seeing her grandma, "She was cold, ice cold." We now know, she is facing loss at a young age. The film then returns briefly to the bathroom scene, we wait a few beats, and then we hear Grey speak again. This time we hear her describe and discuss her mom. When she discusses her mom we see these swift montages, full of deep and vibrant reds, like light leaks on old photographs. Light leaks are technically mistakes, but often lend to the photos beauty.

As a visual person, the way I shot and edited the film is how I see my familiar. Not only

does the character Grey represent Taylor's familiar, the style of the film and the way it is presented is a portrait of my familiar way of viewing and examining the world.

## CHAPTER 3

### REALISM IN THE FORM OF THE FEMINIST FILMMAKER

We all face death. We face death in its simplicity and its simultaneous complexity. Can anyone say they know what to expect out of life before they experience it? Simplicity, because we know the equation of our lives has changed. Something in our story has altered. We know the body of a person we once knew is different. They are no longer with us in the form of their physical body. We lose this physical presence of someone we know. We still know them, but now they reside in a new way. We cling to an image and a feeling of the person we once knew and still know. The person we once interacted with, we touched, we memorized, is no longer the same person with us, in their physical body. This experience of death is something we all have in common. There are different types of death.

We are all born into a context. We are born into a preface of a larger whole. This preface can be equated to the next wave of history's interpretation and influence on all generations, both old and new. We are born into another's story, while simultaneously beginning our own. These other stories have infinitely been born into other's (another person's) stories, and thus the impact of each story's prior context holds a great implication for current interpretation of prior definition. The prior context being the person's background, their circle and their circles backgrounds and the history of the people and location they are born into. The person born white knows privilege without being able to define it until taught, yet they hold a close relationship to it. A lot of this idea can be contextualized as experience.

*Relevé* begins with death. *Relevé* begins with a child forced to face death. The image we see when Grey discusses death is a close up where we are forced to look into Grey's eyes. We are forced to contemplate her. We are forced to make a connection between the audio and visual,

deciphering the character's feelings. We then flip back and forth from the present bathtub scene, with Grey bathing with her sister, and her mom conditioning her hair to another image of a graveyard, to another image of the grandmother's dead feet.

Length of time we spend with certain moments in the film becomes very important. Where some would argue, you will lose the audience's attention, or why are you staying in this moment for so long? The reason is this was my tool for a realist approach. It was my attempt to force the audience to contemplate that exact question, why are we sitting here, in this moment for so long? It was also to put us in the position of the character with so much, yet so little time on their hands.

The bathroom scene is so important in the film. It is bookended and reappears at the very end of the film. The first time we see the bathroom scene is when Grey is first introducing herself and her family. We see before us generations. We see a mom conditioning her eldest daughter's hair and her eldest daughter conditioning her younger sister's hair. There is no one there to condition the mother's hair. We don't know if anyone ever did. All we do know is that she is the one sitting on the edge of the tub, only her feet left in the water, and she is conditioning her daughter who sits in front of her. The youngest does not have the responsibility to condition another's hair. There comes a point in the child's life where they now have to take care of themselves. They are now their own caregiver. They are responsible for the maintenance of their mental and physical state of being. Grey is in the middle. She is acting out the responsibility she has been taught.

Andre Bazin defined realism as, "Art that uncovers reality's hidden essence..." He considered art to count as "'true realism' by elevating an aesthetic commitment to revealing essential reality above the psychological need for illusionism's duplication of superficial reality."

I uncover reality's hidden essence by making the viewer sit with moments. I make them uncomfortable in the audience.

In my film, the essential reality I commit to, the one I find critical to be discussed, is the addict's experience, the single mom's experience, and most importantly, the child's experience born into the complicated context. I also believe it is important that my story is told by a female filmmaker, lower class, and close to the situation. By having an aesthetic commitment for the majority of the film to be told through the inner consciousness of Grey by montage, narration with pockets of improvisation, long takes and long speeches, the film reveals itself as a true realist film.

I am arguing that the key to the aesthetic that can accomplish uncovering an essential reality lies in handing the female, the lower class, the outcast, the minority, or the one who thinks their story is not important the camera and all the decision-making controls in production and in post-production.

The primary aesthetic has been driven by the male cinematographer and storyteller, I argue that one of the essential realities is the need for more works produced by feminist-conscious filmmakers. The potential of Bazin's concept of true realism cannot exist without attention being given to the amount of people who do not have access to film production. Reality's hidden essence cannot completely be fathomed if there are those being excluded from production. I am asking that we take Bazin's concept of a "true realism" and apply it as an analysis of the predominant film production process, identifying that the only way to uncover reality's hidden essence is to give those silenced the tools to share their experience.

My argument equates all feminist filmmakers to realist filmmakers. At this point in our history of filmmaking, it is time to empower a true low budget or no budget film, it is time to

create classes that purposely tell the history of cinema through the eyes of the minority.

*Tangerine*, a film shot on an i-phone 5 in 2015, written and directed by Sean Baker is considered a low budget film. (*Tangerine*, IMDB) *Tangerine* had a budget close to 100,000 dollars. I tend to always try to empower my students by telling them a film shot on an iPhone won Sundance film festival, but I don't normally mention the budget of 100,000 dollars. I understand how 100,000 dollars can easily be spent on the creation and distribution of a film, but something has to change. If people who have access to expensive equipment and money are the only one's telling our stories, they are stealing from us and our stories.

The application of the idea behind "true realism" is critical in the decision-making process the editor and director face. What does it mean to uncover reality and its hidden essence? I think of this process as the elevation or extraction within the filmmaking process with a conscious desire to reveal a "hidden essence" referred to as true realism, in this case Taylor, her family's, and my own experience. It is the voice unheard. The history untold. The angle, take, lighting, and sound used with purpose. All of these add a layer to the human experience expressed and discussed within filmmaking. A process, drawing to the surface a specific concentrated concern or concept that brings into question how this topic or subject matter has been discussed prior to and how and why we are approaching it the way we are now. It can be the act of controlling the audience's attention with a strategy aimed at revealing a new way of thinking about the world. It can be a process intentionally creating a space for a character's story to be heard, a character that hadn't been able to access a microphone or way to tell his/her story. This process will hope that the audience leaves with an image or a story to contemplate or one that complicates their current world view.

When women first organized in groups to talk together about the issue of sexism and

male domination, they were clear that females were as socialized to believe sexist thinking and values as males, the difference being simply that males benefited from sexism more than females and as a consequence less likely to want to surrender patriarchal privilege. Before women could change patriarchy we had to change ourselves; we had to raise our consciousness. (Bell Hooks, 8)

How do we change ourselves? How do we raise our own consciousness? Laura Mulvey in “Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema” used Freud’s psychoanalysis to show how the Cinema is a space for audience members to get their “fix” through looking and obsessing over images in the theater. She evaluated the way women, time and time again were the main subjects, reduced to objects of the male gaze. In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (Mulvey, 62) With headings such as, A Political Use for Psychoanalysis, Destruction of Pleasure is a Radical Weapon, Pleasure in Looking at the Human Form, Women as Image Men as Bearer of Look, Mulvey identifies how deep a male-dominated culture indulged in scopophilia, that is, finding sexual pleasure looking at erotic objects, , just as, in the converse , there is pleasure in being looked at, (Mulvey, 59) with men’s primary lust focused toward women and how the identities of women have been taken advantage of by the human eye. She claims, “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.”

The transformation of the feminist movement is crucial when thinking about how it can progress in application to film production. Bell Hooks timelines the feminist movement in

*Feminism is for Everybody.*

“Early on in contemporary feminist movement, consciousness-raising groups often became settings where women simply unleashed pent up hostility and rage about being victimized, with little or no focus on strategies of intervention and transformation. On a basic level many hurt and exploited women used the consciousness-raising group therapeutically. It was the site where they uncovered and openly revealed the depths of their intimate wounds. This confessional aspect served as a healing ritual.”

(Hooks, 7, 8)

She then identifies the challenge when it comes to the discussion of feminism in application to class by referencing,

“Each essay emphasized the fact that class was not simply a question of money. In ‘The Last Straw,’ Rita Mae Brown (who was not a famous writer at the time) clearly stated: Class is much more than Marx's definition of relationship to the means of production. Class involved your behavior, your basic assumptions, how you are taught to behave, what you expect from yourself and from others, your concept of a future, how you understand problems and solve them, how you think, feel, act.” (Hooks, 39)

Even in the telling of the history of feminism, there tends to be an attitude, that constricts the potential and power its history holds. One of those issues being the way it's production

history is archived and limitedly shared or accessed. Films disregarded for not being the recent wave of feminism are forgotten or are not shown enough. Claire Hemmings notes how in Western feminist's telling of its own recent history it tends to tell, "its own story as a developmental narrative, where we move from a preoccupation with unity and sameness, through identity and diversity, and on to difference and fragmentation...A shift from the naïve, essentialist seventies, through the black feminist critiques and 'sex wars' of the eighties, and into the 'difference' nineties and beyond, charts the story as one of progress beyond falsely boundaried categories and identities." I believe she cautions us to not take any of the work for granted, even if the thoughts behind the feminist movement are in continuous development. She claims,

"It oversimplifies different areas of feminist thought and the contests over meaning that characterize feminist debate at all points of its history. In particular... it either fixes racial and sexual critique of feminism as decade-specific, as a necessary but temporary stage in the movement towards a more generalized notion of difference, or it places the blame for feminist theory's ills singularly at the house of the already beleaguered feminist academic. Neither tack can be satisfactory, surely." (Hemmings, 116)

Many struggles and experiences we face in reality are surreal. There is a complicated relationship between realism and surrealism, "The surrealist, according to Bazin, marries psychological "pseudorealism" to aesthetic "true realism" by erasing "the logical distinction between what is imaginary and what is real". The evidence for this marriage can be seen in "the

fact that surrealist painting combines tricks of visual deception [a hallmark of ‘pseudorealism’] with meticulous attention to detail [a hallmark of ‘true realism’]... The result is that Bazin’s most complete formulation of realism in “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” emerges as a version of surrealism, where the rational and irrational meet, while Sartre’s notion of reality is constituted by maintaining strict divisions between the levels of rational perception and “irrational” imagination... Bazin continues, “Hence photography ranks high in the order of surrealist creativity because it produces an image that is a reality of nature, namely, an hallucination that is also a fact ...By the power of photography, the natural image of a world that we neither know nor can know, nature at last does more than imitate art: she imitates the artist. Lowenstein, 16, 17.”

Many of our experiences, Taylor’s experiences in lower class, as females, with loved ones with addiction problems, our own addiction problems, or any of our traumas understand the marriage between surreal and realist realities. We ourselves are art. We are the products of our society and contexts. The act of making art can form consciousness. Equipping ourselves with a media literacy consciousness can help us create realist art to examine our ordinary, surreal experiences.

## CHAPTER 4

### HOW GREY AND TISH ARE EMPOWERING CHARACTERS FOR FEMALES

“I had to invent Alice Guy before I could find her.”

- Alice Guy Blaché : Lost Visionary of the Cinema, Alison McMahan

“The only dream I have at night is one of you, Mom. I think of you when you were a child and how you were when you were free. Before dad, before the blues. Every day you walked on water. You walked on water even when you tried to drown yourself. I don’t know how you stayed afloat.”

- Grey, *Relevé* ’

Alice Guy Blaché was the first woman filmmaker. (MacMahan, 2014) The above quote is from the author who, in order to discover the history of Guy, had to act on her faith that it was worth investigating. She had to believe, and like she says, ‘invent’ Guy before she could find her. Isn’t that true of ourselves? The difference here is that Guy lived and accomplished so much, yet was left out of history. Her story became dependent on outsiders to investigate. That is why when someone asks me why my film is worth watching or why I am telling the story I am, I know the importance of Taylor’s experience and my own, told from our perspectives, our control.

The other quote, included above, is important because it is telling of the mother’s experience. The mom, Tish, in the film is a single parent, lower class, has an addiction battle, and has become the sole caretaker for her two children after the grandmother’s passing. This is a story we have heard, but I would argue in passing and not as the sole focus. It’s a story we must pay attention to and we must take seriously, not brush over. Tish’s mental stability is on the fritz. She needs support, but does not have it. Her daughter recognizes her mother’s struggle and

imagines a time when her mom was happy and free. These types of challenges, whether you are the child or the parent become increasingly more difficult when you are faced with scarcity. Scarcity in their studies, Mullainathan and Shafir define as, “having less than you feel you need.” (Mullainathan et. al., 4) Their book, titled Scarcity, conducts a study on the effects of scarcity on an individual’s ability to function, or simply how “scarcity captures one’s mind.” (Mullainathan et al., 8) As a single parent myself, this makes perfect sense.

To show the effects of scarcity in the film I made sure to include small details that express the everyday routine and emotions in Tish and Gray’s lives, as well as, include moments of montage expressing the chaos of the internal. For example, the first time we see Tish, we see her washing Grey’s hair and conditioning it in the bathroom. Grey does the same, except to her sister’s hair sitting in front of her in the tub. The next time we see her, it’s a montage sequence with Grey’s dialogue describing her mother. We see her picking up laundry from an overly messy house, we see her smoking cigarettes, we see pill bottle, we see a stationary portrait of her staring into the camera with bright red lipstick. Grey speaks about her beauty, how she “doesn’t believe it.” She then talks about how, “some damage can’t be undone.” We see a repetitive image, overlapped, to express its repetitive nature, of a woman lighting up a pipe and smoking meth. Right after those images, we see an animation, it is hand held on notecards, Grey’s hands flip through it. There are two colors, blue and red, they bounce off of one another, separate, come back together, then are entangled and become a knotted mess, not blended into one color, just tangled.

This montage sequence is empowering to Grey, and of a child’s experience and the experience’s importance. We then go to the next scene which is Grey, Tish, and her sister in the kitchen. Tish holds her younger sister, Emory, on her hip and is dishing out food. The counters

are littered with dirty dishes, McDonalds Happy Meal boxes, and Tish is on the phone, multi-tasking. Her phone conversation goes as follows, “I’ve been clean for a few months now, but I could really use a pack.” We do not get to hear the other side of the conversation. Instead, we are privileged only to Tish’s words and Grey’s placement in the scene, sitting at the table listening. We get to see her responses to her situation. Tish proceeds to talk about how the internet is vital, more important than the electric, because they can, “always go to the neighbors’ house to keep warm.”

My hope with the inclusion of this moment is to show how vital it is for people, no matter where they are to have some type of social interaction or connection to the outside world such as the news both local, national, and international. The need for this in Tish’s situation displayed with her joking about how she prioritizes paying for the internet or phone bill over the electric. The film doesn’t go deep into this topic, but speaking on behalf of my own experiences, in extreme weather conditions, your electricity will remain on by law, meaning if you’re poor you may pay for your phone minutes, internet, etc. instead of your electric bill. You’ll figure that out later.

The other way that Taylor, I, and women’s stories are empowered through my film are through the relationship between script and improv, as well as, our relationship as actor and director/cinematographer. When I met Taylor it was a bright deceptive day, the cold was brisk, and it was difficult to remain outside for long periods of time. I had ventured to Murphysboro, Illinois because I was experiencing a lack of motivation for what my next grad project would be. As I roughed the cold, taking photos with my phone to edit on Instagram, I heard the sound of children playing. I was at an abandoned school photographing the pattern of bricks in one of its walls. The school housed a playground that was still popular with local kids.

When I heard the children playing, I looked over to find two kids. One boy, one girl, no parents. They seemed to be around 9 or 10 years old. Both were carrying neon orange and gray water guns the size of their bodies. The girl was running barefoot, apparently immune to the chill and the warm organically from her youth and her childhood play.

I wanted to take their portraits, but almost decided not to interrupt their fun. I got in my car. I got out. I hollered over to them. They came over eager to know what I wanted. When I asked if I could photograph them, they were more than happy to. Well, the little boy was hesitant at first, but with the girl's enthusiasm, he decided he would be okay with it also.

I photographed each in front of the entrances with their water guns. One entrance was labeled girls entrance and the other was labeled boys entrance. I then asked to speak with their parents to get permission. This was when I first met Taylor.

Taylor lived with her mom and grandmother at the time. The little boy I soon discovered was one of her cousins, she referred to as a brother. The grandmother had guardianship of the little boy and his brother. The mom and grandma seemed eager to have the little girl participate in any type of art or projects associated with the university. Terry, the grandma, encouraged to, please contact them anytime. She couldn't express more that Taylor needed healthy activities to keep her busy when not in school. I left my phone number with them. I told them I would be in touch. That I was sure another project would come up. In fact, I was ecstatic because I had always wanted to write a fiction script with a kid's perspective. Now, I just needed to figure out what.

We started filming projects almost immediately. I let her know when I met her that I would be more than excited if she wanted to be a part of my thesis, some way, somehow. Taylor and my journey started out with simple hang outs. I began asking her what her interests were and

slowly got to know more and more about her and her family's lives. Her grandma began to open up to me more about the family hardships and goals.

Taylor's dad was in prison on Meth charges and her mom struggled with addiction as well. At the time it was the grandma, mom, Taylor, her little sister, her little brother, and her two cousins living in the house they were renting.

Taylor told me she loved singing and dancing. I had an idea. Why not help her reach some of her goals while addressing the complications both real or perhaps imaginary that come with pursuing your goals despite coming from a rural extremely low income family. I pitched an idea to Taylor. Let's write some music. Let's have music videos and let's perform and project the videos in Murphysboro, as well as other nearby towns. Taylor grew excited. I started trying to encourage her to write her own music. I would send a camera home with her and told her to practice and then we would review the footage at a later meeting.

Well, what soon transpired was that the songs Taylor was writing, were famous songs off the radio. She "wrote" Two Black Cadillacs, Contemporary Christian Songs that were popular at the time, as well as, several Johnny Cash songs. I couldn't help but smile. I soon learned that Taylor exaggerated a lot of stories, fibbed and/or had a vivid imagination. It often seemed this was her way of exploring and understanding her surroundings and situations that occurred in her life.

As I collected the videos in which she was supposedly developing her new songs, I began to see how instead the recordings began to be Taylor's space for venting or more of a daily diary. She would sometimes sing, grow frustrated, turn the camera off, etc. Another video would be her and some other neighborhood children choreographing dance. We then thought about changing it to be a story about dance where we would work on the soundtrack together. All of this was a

year before I began working on my thesis. Time went by. This would coincide with me meeting my second daughter's father, birthing my second child, and Taylor and I would continue to grow in our relationship of knowing one another.

One of the critiques I received when showing the videos Taylor had been recording was that the videos may be too exploitative. I thought about this for some time and decided to hold on to the footage and wait. Taylor and I were both experiencing hardships due to loved ones fighting or succumbing to addiction. Unfortunately, I feel as though my troubles began to distance Taylor and I.

In the midst of hardships, my frustrations with feeling like a failing mom, student, mentor, and wanting to still discuss the difficulties Taylor and I faced, I questioned what to do. During this time, we had visiting artists at the University for the Big Muddy Film Festival. I was able to show my work in progress, some of Taylor's videos to the artists and then discuss my ideas for a fictional film. Some of the advice I received was from a juror, whose name I cannot remember and don't have documented, had heard of a film that discussed the loss of a friend to suicide through the lens of fiction, however everyone in the film basically played themselves with a false name.

This, she had concluded, allowed the friends who had found it difficult to discuss their friends suicide room for them to express whatever they needed to. The audience wouldn't know if what they discussed was true fiction or the complete true account of what they had experienced.

This was when I decided to script the film and include moments for improvisation. The moments of improvisation in the film include moments in the narration, the diner scene where Grey overhears two men discussing justice and policing, and in the argument scene between

Grey and her mom Tish towards the end of the film. The narration moments were so Taylor could add in her own interpretations of moments and relationships in her life. The diner scene was to discuss the question of how does one start having deeper analysis of their own situation and context. I cast a lawyer I had met working at a bar and an activist I had met through a friend. I asked them unscripted to discuss law, the pros and cons, and what justice means. I only chose to use a moment of the conversation. The last improvisational element was part of the argument between Grey and her mom before she runs away from home. This moment was important for me, because often when we are in a rough place, our buildup of anxiety and anger is awkward. Allowing the actors to attempt to get worked up and letting them fill in moments with their own words allowed for that awkwardness, a realness.

In this moment Tish scolds Grey for “hanging out with junkies,” she attempts to discipline her child, but she is full of hypocrisy. Grey realizes this and reaches a breaking point when the mother continues to be aggressive verbally and repetitively asks Grey if she wants her to die too, like the grandma. Grey responds, “No! I don’t want to be like you or this family. At least that junkie walked me home. At least that junkie cared. You want one less thing to worry about? You got it.” After she says this, and begins to leave, Tish responds with, “Fine! Leave!” We see Grey exit the home, we see her running. Nina Simone starts to play as the soundtrack.

Many moments we spend with Grey are intertwined with music from Nina Simone. The words spoken by Simone become the thoughts or feelings we associate with Grey. When we first see her dance outside of Bear’s gas station, we see her close her eyes and the imagery changes from her regular dress apparel and the gas station parking lot, to Grey in a beautiful gown in a different space with deep purple lighting. The song we hear accompany her imagination as she dances is Simone’s song, *Isn’t It a Pity*. The lyrics go,

“Isn't it a pity  
Isn't it a shame  
Yes, how we break each other's hearts  
And cause each other pain

How we take each other's love  
Without thinking anymore  
Forgetting to give back  
Forgetting to remember  
Just forgetting and no thank you  
Isn't it a pity

Some things take so long  
But how do I explain  
Why not too many people can see  
That we are all just the same  
We're all guilty”

While the song plays, the image breaks back out of Grey’s inner conscious and shows Mas enter the screen, coming around a corner smoking a cigarette. Both characters see each other right as Simone says, “we’re all guilty,” and Mas turns away and walks off the screen, walking away from Grey. Simone is used to further showcase the strength Grey has, as well as, her wisdom. By using Simone, an African American icon, who embodies the strength and intellect of women, as Grey’s emotional advocate and her conscious, it adds another intellectual layer to the film that begs the audience analysis. It asks us why Grey’s character relates so much to Simone’s words. Simone’s words provide a path for us to see how Grey feels.

Grey mentions in the film that Nina Simone is one of her idols as she discusses her passion for dance and wanting to be like the girls in the dance studio. She states, “I was always on the outside looking in. I thought they might let me in with no cash, but I wasn’t sure. Being like Misty, dancing to Nina was my goal.” The Misty she refers to is Misty Copeland, one of the most prestigious ballet dancers of our time. At this moment Grey narrates about her daily routine going from Bear’s Gas Station, to Cindy B’s Cafe, to the studio to watch the dancers. When we

hear the above quote we go from seeing the dancers in the studio performing dance moves that take great strength and focus. We see one girl lift herself from the floor to rising, using her legs to a relevé position. The images move swiftly as Grey speaks. When she states the above quote we see a silhouette of Grey against a background of fireworks exploding with her silhouette filled with the image of Nina Simone in live performance. Simone is singing the song *Ain't Got No, I Got Life*. Simone expresses the part of Grey that keeps going despite her inability to afford lessons. She sings,

“Got my hair, got my head  
Got my brains, got my ears  
Got my eyes, got my nose  
Got my mouth, I got my smile...”

When editing the film, I contemplated my exposure to Nina Simone. I couldn't remember how I first heard of her, but I then contemplate the ties education has to exposure. I wanted to use my film and Grey's character as a device to expose people to Simone and to analyze how and why young girls or people in general have the idols or respect for the role models that they do hold as important mentors.

Music plays such a vital role in the film for empowering and explaining all of the characters. For the mother, it is lack of music that is important to express her current state of mind and existence. In the introduction to the mother, in the montage sequence where Grey introduces her, Grey describes her mom as, “She never listened to her music anymore. She put on headphones but the music wasn't heard. The music wasn't young, but it was. The music was young and it could make her young again, but only to a degree. Some damage can't be undone.”

Tish always wears a band t-shirt through-out the film. We see other moments where she is more dressed up, but that is only when Grey envisions or thinks back on her mom and describes her. This is another way to hint at who the mom is underneath the current stress she

faces. I wanted to show different layers of the mom. To express the youth of the mother in contrast to her present responsibility role. The type of band t-shirts she wears are punk rock and indie music, but we never hear it. The only music we do hear with Tish, besides ambient with narration, is at the end. After Grey has fled from home, and it is implied days have passed, we see Tish waiting on the porch growing impatient. Her anxiety is displayed through her constant shaking of her leg, smoking back to back cigarettes and then she stops and has a lightbulb moment. She immediately rises, drops her housecoat, and runs. This is when we hear a new soundtrack addition. It is an original score by Ken Clifford on piano. The music plays from beginning to end of the song. The images we see are of Grey stressed, sad, and flip from morning to night. The mom searches for her daughter. She goes to a place she knows Grey may be. Where the Grandmother used to live. The use of the piano here is strong to me because it is the bare minimum. It's reduced, like the moment, to a solo focus. The piano is passionate, desperate, and crescendos, like forming an argument for the emotions the characters feel. The mom stops in her tracks and rubs her face. We see a memory of a baby just born. We hear Grey's narration, "My mom thought I was dead that day. It was the only way I could see her alive. It was the best hug she ever gave me. If you want to cry, cry for the people dead but breathing. If you want to live, bury yourself in the dirt." It pauses for a moment and then she continues, "The only dream I have at night is one of you mom. I think of you when you were a child and how you were when you were free. Before dad, before the blues. Every day you walked on water. You walked on water, even when you tried to drown yourself. I don't know how you stayed afloat." While she speaks this, the visual is played in extreme slow motion. The audience, although informed that Grey is alive, is still somewhat hesitant to believe it. Tish holds her limp body in the dirt, moving the hair out of Grey's face. Grey continues, "Where does grace lie? Is it in the traffic ticket

forgiven? Is it the person who walks away from meth? Or, is that even possible? Or is it how you loved me? How when you felt so weak, you still washed my hair.” When she says this last statement we see the opening image of the film. All of a sudden, this image holds significant meaning, and the image we were tired of seeing or felt like we rested on for a great length of time, embodies everything Tish felt while washing her daughter’s hair, and holds great significance to Grey as well. It is a payoff, a tribute to the act the mom pursues even in her weak mental state, to try and care for her kids. Grey, her child recognizes this, also giving her character empowerment by showing the audience she is aware of her context and environment.

Grey and Tish’s characters empower women and individuals in situations like theirs by showing strength through vulnerability and simply by existing as the central characters in a film and story deemed important enough to be shared.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

My work has always tended to revolve around the outcast and those close to me. It seeks out the odd and asks why is it odd. My work has been aimed at exposing the contradictions of what we as a society deem as insane, unacceptable, and is meant to through juxtaposition reveal a hidden understanding or to expose the reasons why these perspectives exist. My work hopes to surface factors that lead someone to be in the position they find themselves in. It evaluates each individual's relationship with capitalism and how capitalism has influenced their perspective of self or has impacted their decision making capabilities. Ironically, while working on this film and through my graduate school experience, I have come to realize *I am the outcast* when it comes to filmmaking. Film has been dominated by male perspectives. It is time, it *has been* time for the person in poverty, the female, the minority storyteller to grab the camera, to grab the mic, and to share their stories and tell them the way they choose to do so. If we don't tell our stories, nobody will. If we don't claim their importance, others will say they are not important.

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APPENDIX A  
COTERIE SCRIPT

Black Screen

YOUNG GIRL V.O.

FADE IN:

Abrupt close-up of GREY staring straight into camera lips not moving. She is wearing mourning clothes; specifically a veil.

GREY V.O.

I saw her there. Cold. Ice cold. Her feet were ice cold. Grandma was cold.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

COTERIE

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE UP:

Hands conditioning hair. The conditioning goes on for quite some time. (opening credits?)

CUT TO:

Medium shot. G

REY sits in stark bathwater. The bathroom is consistently salmon colored. The bathroom is excessively bare besides a washcloth Grey's mother TISHA, who sits by the tub on the toilet, hands Grey.

Cut to:

A medium shot - all warm tones.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

TISHA looks at her reflection in a mirror. She notices the dark circles under her eyes. She lifts her shirt slightly and examines her stretch marks. She leans in and eyes the few gray hairs on her

head. Studying them seems to take more energy away from her. She is wearing a baggy Black Flag T-shirt.

Seeing that her body is reflecting the way she feels, tired, she applies red lipstick anyway.

GREY V.O.

My daddy was like an addiction. That's what my mom said. He had the power to turn one day into 1 year or 2... or 3. (pause) I never saw him.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

While GREY talks we follow TISHA through the house with a laundry basket, picking up clothes. Picking up things here and there and going about her business.

EXT. YARD - DAY

GREY stands at the side of a YOUNGER TISHA and FATHER'S relationship as it crescendos into an abusive relationship.

Cold tones - the scene turns into a flip book where GREY'S HAND begins to flip through the beatings. Black and blue flashes.

GREY V.O.

She said to my grandma she knew she was old when she met her addiction, birthed two kids, and it wasn't from birth, but the stress. Lucky she was still alive. She never listened to her music anymore. She put on headphones but the music wasn't heard. The music wasn't as young. But it was. The music was young, and it could make her young again, but only to a degree.

CUT TO:

TISHA continues to gather and pick up clothes.

CLOSE UP:

White hairs on head.

CLOSE UP:

Mother's face. Eyes looking off screen.

CLOSE UP:

INT TO EXT. BED TO FRONT LAWN - DAY TO NIGHT

YOUNGER TISHA putting on headphones and falling backward onto bed that turns into her lying under the stars on the grass.

CUT TO:

GREY on grass looking up.

GREY V.O. CONTD  
Some damage can't be undone.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

GREY in passenger seat. Looking out window at sign that reads: "Your Decisions Today are Tomorrow's Results"

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP:

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Back to GREY in bathtub

TISHA  
Are you going into town tomorrow?

TISHA sits on the toilet with a CIGARETTE dangling from her lips. While sitting on the toilet, she grabs a towel from the floor. She begins drying GREY'S hair unaware that the towel covers GREY'S face.

She continues drying GREYS hair in a frantic motion and spots her lighter on the countertop near the sink. Standing, she simultaneously dries Grey's hair and reaches for the lighter.

GREY takes over the drying and rises from the bathtub. TISHA walks to the doorway and turns off the light. She lights her her cigarette.

TISHA  
Oops, Sorry.

TISHA turns on the light. Exits. GREY in silence gets out of the bathtub and gets dressed.

INT. BEDROOM NIGHT -

GREY is in bed with her eyes open. Lights off. She closes her eyes.

FADE OUT:

Sound of the morning. (experimental silence)

FADE IN:

INT. GREYS LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Medium wide shot of the interior of GREY'S trailer. One would guess she is lower class. A tube t.v. sits in one corner and the walls have a few holes with paintings purchased from Goodwill scattered around the home as decor. The living room is a neatly organized mess.

CUT TO:

EXT. GREYS TRAILER PORCH - MORNING

GREY walks down the steps.

EXT. PAVED ROAD - MORNING

Grey walks down a country highway. No cars can be seen for miles. Fields stretch out for miles on each side. The trailer park she walks away from, sits in isolation. An intersection can be seen ahead.

EXT. INTERSECTION - MORNING

Grey approaches the intersection and turns right down a gravel road. She continues walking as the road becomes slightly more shaded by a few trees here and there.

EXT. GRAVEL ROAD - DAY

A small town can be seen in the distance. A GAS STATION SIGN is one of the few businesses that stand out. Grey looks at her feet. She looks at the leaves on trees. She looks at the fields. She begins to sort of skip. She begins to do a weird walk-dance. She takes a moment to just dance - humming her own tune/ singing her own song. (one off the radio)

EXT. PETES GAS STATION - DAY

GREY approaches the gas station.

INT. PETES - DAY

GREY roams the aisles. She decides on Laffy Taffy at the counter.

INT. CAFÉ - DAY

A small locally owned CAFÉ that functions as a diner and a local highlight of the town is pretty vacant besides a few regulars on the opposite side of where GREY chooses to sit. A

WAITRESS,MISTY, a teenage waitress with make up foundation that doesn't quite match her skin tone approaches GREY, confidently pouring coffee into a coffee mug she's chosen for GREY for that day.

MISTY

You still want some coffee?  
I still say you're too young.  
BUT you are a paying customer.  
You still helping at Petes?

GREY

(Nods yes)

MISTY

Okay sweetie. Lemme know if ya  
Need something. Stay safe!

INT. CAFÉ - DAY CONTD.

GREY stirs her black coffee. Two MEN enter the CAFÉ.

MAN 1

You know the state of Illinois  
Alone has # of people incarcerated.  
But the real problem is the divide in income...  
If I get a DUI and I'm broke I'm screwed.

MAN 1 looks over at GREY as they are seated at a table nearby. MISTY walks over to their table.

MISTY

Coffee?

MAN 1

Yes

MAN 2

Yes, please.

Misty pours the men coffee.

MAN 1

Johnny paid...

MISTY

I'll give you two a sec.

MAN 1 nods and continues talking.

MAN 1 CONTD

600 bucks, got to walk that day...while Dennis over here is a poor ol' homeless boy who, might suck at life, But! just the same as Johnny, but! ain't got a chance...

MAN 2  
A voice.

MAN 1

A voice! As far as we know there are hundreds of good men that we've forgotten, have just left in jail due to their paycheck... or lack of.

MAN 2  
Well, not quite.

MAN 1

Right, right. Well, you know what I mean.

CUT TO:

EXT. DANCE STUDIO EVENING

GREY approaches the dance studio on her walk home. She stops to observe the dancers. Trophies line the windows of the studio like sprinkles on a cupcake in a town that is mostly in poverty.(shots of the town (Murphysboro)) The studio almost feels out of place.

The girls are young. GREY watches as the teacher calls for their attention and the girls follow the teacher's every move as they watch their own reflections in the mirrored walls. Grey continues walking. It is getting late.

INT. GREY'S KITCHEN NIGHT

TISHA holds a heavier-than-she-looks MADISON, GREY's two year old sister, on her hip with one arm, while she attempts to tend to the surrounding kitchen environment. She tries to clean, as well as, heat up a meal for MADISON.

She holds the cell phone between her ear and shoulder and MADISON is eating off of the dirty plate. TISHA eats off of the clean plate before putting it in the microwave.

GREY is sitting at the table, ignored. TISHA is on the phone with a close friend.

TISHA  
It's either cable or rent. Yeah...

TISHA catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror that sits above the kitchen sink. She sets MADISON down on the floor and messes with her bangs.

TISHA

I need a haircut... what? Oh, sorry girl. I can see the benefits and the downsides, though. It's kinda fucked up.

TISHA still on the phone, walks toward the table where GREY sits, WINKS at GREY and grabs her cigs. She pulls one out. Lighting it at the table and continues through the living room.

GREY stares at her food. She stirs in a circle.

CLOSE UP:

The food being stirred in a circle

CUT TO:

GREY looks at MADISON. Grey's face is serious. Talking can be heard in the background. TISHA is still on the phone.

EXT.PORCH NIGHT

CLOSE UP:

TISHA's face stares into the camera. The phone sits beside her on the porch. She smokes a cigarette. The light from the cigarette casts a warm glow on her face.

The interior illuminates the screen door behind her causing her to be mostly silhouetted and creating a glow behind her. GREY is seen passing by behind her. TISHA remains facing forward deep in her own thoughts, unaware of GREY'S passing.

INT. BEDROOM NIGHT -

CLOSE UP:

Flash of GREY laying in her bed, the covers pulled to her chin. GREY stares past the camera toward the window where moonlight pours in.

EXT. GRAVEL ROAD DAY

GRAY walks down a gravel road toward town. She kicks at the gravel.

INT. PETES - DAY

GREY stands at the counter ready to purchase some Laffy Taffy. PETE, a mid-thirties Indian man, waves his hand in dismissal of Grey having to purchase the Laffy Taffy. He is used to her routine. Pete always talks pretty loud.

GREY  
A slow day today Pete?

PETE  
Eh, not too bad.

GREY heads toward the door.

GREY  
See ya Pete.

PETE  
Have a nice day Grey. HEY! keep your chin up. You'll see Granny soon enough. In here. (Pete taps on chest over his chest pocket on his shirt.)

Grey attempts a smile. The bell DINGS. Grey walks out.

EXT. PETES GAS STATION - DAY

GREY heads to the back of the building. PEOPLE don't seem to care or pay attention. GREY leans against the building and props one foot up against it.

CLOSE UP

She slowly begins to peel away the wrapper of the Laffy Taffy and begins to eat it.

CLOSE UP

GREY'S FOOT begins brushing the gravel dust in different shapes. The motions slowly build from a boredom brushing the dust, into a sort of tap-dance step. The tap-dance step becomes the beginning to a self-choreographed dance.

MEDIUM WIDE

GREY dances in an abandoned back-of-store lot.

WIDE SHOT

MAS is seen walking up to the front of PETE'S store, behind which GREY is dancing.

INT. PETES - DAY

MAS enters PETES. The door DINGS. MAS is clean-cut. He is both streets and class. He wears a BAGGY CLEAN T-SHIRT.

MAS  
Hey-ya Pete.

PETE is counting money. He nods in recognition.

MAS  
Bag of TOP and give me one of those black and milds will ya' and these.

MAS lays some cigarette roll-your-own papers on the counter to purchase. PETE rings up his purchases and cashes him out. There is a container of BABY POWDER visible behind the counter.

MAS  
Pete can I grab that for a sec.

Pete, who is back to counting down a drawer, grabs the BABY POWDER, and tosses it to MAS.

MAS  
Thank-ya

#### INT. PETES - DAY RESTROOM

MAS stares at himself in the mirror.  
He takes a piss. He sits on the closed toilet and begins to roll his own cigarette. He is staring at himself again. He has his boots off and is pouring baby powder in them. He has his shirt off and is squeezing out baby powder onto his chest and underarms. His shirt is back on and he is standing in front of the mirror and places the cigarette behind his ear. He seems to approve of his "new" appearance.

#### EXT. PETES GAS STATION - DAY

(Back in time) Grey begins to rub her foot in the dirt.

MAS walks to the back, as he usually does and lights his cigarette. BOTH at first are unaware of the other, then MAS keys into what GREY is doing. DANCING. He just observes. GREY hasn't noticed he's there. He retreats to the side of the building.

THEY both exit at the same time.

THEY both walk in the same direction. Grey knowing of Mas's presence, doesn't acknowledge him. After a block of silence.

MAS  
So, you like to dance.

GREY doesn't respond. MAS shrugs and takes a puff of a cigarette. He has a pack of pre-rolled cigarettes in his pocket as well.

THEY both take a turn on a street and are awkwardly still headed in the same direction.

GREY looks over at him.

Mas is quiet for a while. Takes a drag of a cigarette.

MAS

I wanna show you something.

GREY looks at him while they are still walking. MAS tilts his head to the side telling her to follow him down a side road.

Mas turns down a side road. GREY follows. The two walk in silence again. Mas says something more to himself.

MAS

a quote from someone MAS admires that has to do with how one should live their life and has to do with Grey's dancing.

They approach a GARAGE. A few cars being taken apart sit in the garage. There are few lights on. They make their way into a LOBBY area that is only lit by the sunlight streaming in from the windows.

A vinyl black futon sits facing the entry way with windows above it. Everything is covered with dust. Not dust from the place sitting too long, but dust from work being done, or a lack of cleaning.

A COFFEE TABLE sits in the middle of the tiny lobby. A CHAIR sits on the opposite side of the FUTON. A very-much-used ASH TRAY sits in the middle of the coffee table and random books and zines litter it as well.

MAS approaches the futon. GREY approaches the chair. THEY both sit.

The room is dusty and smells of gasoline.

Both GREY and MAS sit in the room. They both look at each other in silence. MAS continues to smoke his cigarette.

PAUSE

MAS

What do you think of this world kid?

Mas stands up from the futon. The lights dim. GREY stands up and approaches a light and turns it on. MAS stands in a blue spot light. NEXT MAS is in all blue light. He surrounded by drifts of baby powder. Baby powder fills the air. Shots of baby powder being dusted on his back.

CLOSE UP

MAS's face cold blue. Very intimate.

GREY V.O.

Mas. Mas was blue. Everything about him was blue. He thought in blue. Lived in blue. I wonder if he ever had a life outside of blue. I used to imagine him outside of this world. This world of heroin and cocaine. This world of coffee houses where all we stood for was a form...

MAS's face cold blue. Starts "free-styling" poetry more happily to himself.

MAS

of entertainment. I don't give a fuck whattchu think about me. I just want a different fucking destiny. One with less red and white and black and more blue... The U.S.A. where it's not just fuck me. for you... and yours and our benefit...Am I really fit for this? Was I destined for a destiny behind the bars of fortitude where my attitude is that of an ignorant, "he has such an ignorant view"?

PAUSE

Mas back to straight at the camera. Mas blinks. He takes a puff of a cigarette.

GREY V.O.

I wonder if he ever experienced a world of color and smiles. Potlucks, sunshine, and grandmas.

CUT TO:

MAS and GREY sit in their opposing chairs.

MAS

Hows your grandma?

GREY (SURPRISED BUT DOESN'T SHOW IT)

She died.

Grey just stares blankly at him.

MAS

Your dad.

GREY

I don't have a dad.

Mas leans forward and stubs out his cigarette. MAS re-positions himself somewhat and looks out the dusty window behind him for a second. He faces forward again and begins to roll his own cigarette.

MAS  
Tell you a story?

GREY  
Sure.

Mas lights another cigarette. With a slow exhale, eventually talks. GREY seems to not mind too much. Mas leans forward and really looks at her.

MAS  
So, there was this lion once.

GREY  
Are you serious?

MAS  
Just listen.

PAUSE  
MAS CONTD

There was this lion once and he was born in the wrong neighborhood. (Mas seems super serious)  
PAUSE And people beat the shit out of him... No, I'm just kidding. (MAS SMILES)

Mas studies GREY'S reaction. Grey smiles slightly but still seems serious.

MAS (IN A DEEPER DARKER TONE)  
So, this lion. He was born in the wrong neighborhood. He didn't know how to be a leader. He was raised by a pack of wild dogs. Hyenas. Those dogs were harsh.

MAS  
Anyway, those wild dogs, (Those hyenas) taught that lion everything he needed to know. How to FIGHT, how to EAT, how to survive...

(After each word he pauses and looks at GREY.) or MAS doesn't look at GREY but puts emphasis on each word.

Grey nods her head.

MAS  
But the lion was a lion. He was born for something different than that.

Mas leans back in the futon.

MAS CONTD

After some years went by however, the lion was a hyena. I mean he looked like a lion to everyone else. He knew, I mean he was, a wild dog.

Mas pauses and seems to drift off into his own thoughts

It wasn't till later the lion encountered another lion. By this time, in his reflection, in his mind...

MAS taps on his temple.

MAS CONTD

He saw a wild dog. His mane disappeared and all he could see were those canines.

MAS shows his teeth to GREY. He ashes a cigarette.

So one day him and his dawgs. D-A-W-G-S. they watched a lion attack some prey. The prey was one of them. The lion was conflicted. He felt love for the lion. He felt love for the wild dog.

GREY seems confused.

MAS

So, who was the bad guy? PAUSE Well, when the wild dogs and he saw this lion attack and kill one of their own, they were howling like crazy! Mourning... But how were they supposed to feel...

Mas stands. He begins fiddling with some items in the room. His back is toward GREY.

MAS CONTD

He's got a choice.

MAS

The library or the pool hall.

Mas turns to look at Grey. Mas approaches Grey. Grey is almost scared, but for some reason trusts Mas. (Mas towers above and looks down at her.) He kneels down beside her as if he were in a proposal stance, he puts his hand on her knee and looks deep into her eyes.

MAS

You should take some dance lessons.

Mas begins to hand Grey a wad of CASH. Grey just stares at Mas.

A voice off screen is heard.

PETEY

Yo, Mas!

Mas stands up and puts the CASH back in his pocket.

MAS  
Be right back.

INT. GARAGE DAY

GREY rises from her seat and begins inspecting the location. There is a curtain that acts as a door off to the side. She eventually moves it to the side and walks into the other room. The room is filled with paintings.

It is a gallery space.

INT. GALLERY SPACE DAY

GREY walks slowly admiring the paintings on the wall, on easels, some loose scattered on the floor. Everything is blue. (Experimental way of showing artwork.)

Mas enters.

MAS  
Eh, they're not that good are they? They're good aren't they.

Uses his confidence to mask his insecurity.

GREY  
I like them. (pause) Why are they all in blue?

MAS  
I don't know. Consistency. (or Everything is blue.)

EXT. ROAD EVENING

Mas walks Grey home.

EXT. GREY'S DRIVEWAY LATE EVENING

TISHA comes out and gestures for Grey to go inside. GREY goes inside. MAS and TISHA stand facing each other near PORCH. TISHA holds out her hand as if expecting something. MAS reaches in his pant pocket and hands her the pack of cigarettes.

While taking a cigarette out, handing the pack back,

TISHA  
How are you trouble?

Mas continues to smoke his cigarette.

MAS

How's my number one bitch?

TISHA'S smile fades to disgust.

TISHA

Stay away from my daughter.

She turns to go inside and stubs out her fresh cigarette on the porch railing. She stops on her way inside with her back to him.

TISHA

You have any 25 blues?

MAS

You have a good kid. She's talented.

Tisha looks back at him. She seems embarrassed. She doesn't say anything.

MAS

25's at 50

Tisha turns and goes inside.

#### INT. GREYS BEDROOM NIGHT

GREY is in her bed. She watches TISHA come inside. TISHA leans her back against the front door. She lights a new cigarette. GREY just watches TISHA. TISHA turns to walk into the living room.

GREY

Mom.

Tisha turns and takes another drag of her cigarette then stubs it out and enters her daughter's room. She sits by her side on the bed. MADISON sleeps sound on the other end of the room.

TISHA

YaYa, what are you thinking walking home with him? You can't just keep trailin around town not thinkin ain't nothing's going to happen to you...

GREY

I don't

Grey repositions herself to turn away from TISHA. TISHA grabs GREY's arm.

TISHA

I'm talking to you. You're cut off from goin' into town.

Grey doesn't reply. TISHA with unreasonable anger.

TISHA

You want me to die from a heart attack too? Mamaw's not here anymore and you gotta cut the shit and talk to me.

Grey turns over immediately. She sits up in the bed. This is the most emotion she's ever shown. She has tears welling up in her eyes. A tear rolls down her face. Hurt is all that shows in Grey's body's stance. She pushes her mom out of her way. TISHA just lets her pass. She runs out of the house.

EXT. DRIVE WAY NIGHT

CLOSE UP

Grey is running. She reaches the main road headed out of the trailer park. She stops. She feels anger and sadness but can't quite express it. She "falls" to the ground and clutches her knees. She begins to try and force herself to cry. It feels very un-natural. When it doesn't feel right, she stands. She begins to sketch out a dance, figuring out the moves as she goes. The dance is her way of expressing her anger.

EXT. PETES DAY

GREY stands at the side of Pete's anticipating MAS's arrival. No one comes.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFÉ - DAY

GREY sits at her table drinking a coffee.

EXT. SIDEWALK DAY

GREY heads towards MAS's studio. She walks inside. No one is in the space. Seems like a cigarette has just been put out. She proceeds to the gallery space. No one is there. There is a new painting on an easel behind her. It is all yellow. She walks back through the space to exit and notices the wad of cash sitting in the chair she had once sat in. She grabs it. She puts it in her pocket. She glances around and EXITS.

INT. GARAGE DAY

Mas sits alone on the vinyl black futon. We are unsure of who he is conversation with. Grey is implied.

MAS V.O.

There are no words for when something knocks you off your feet. However, there are different types of knock outs. There's the type of contentment, bliss, maybe beyond contentment... A natural high in life, like when you experience youth and friendship and moments of escape where mortality is in its place and everyone in your cortie is invincible. Then there's the type of knocked off your feet like kissing the love of your dreams. (Pause. Looks down.)

Then...

Then there's the knocked... out. Where it's a black out. God is on the sidelines. The realization that you're skin and bones and your breath is fragile, that even the deepest breath feels like it's not deep enough and you have dreams about drinking water because you realize you won't always be alive. here.

I don't know what it is. What clicks, what doesn't. but I think it's hard to realize this might be it.

that's why art consumes me. Running consumes me. You know I used to enjoy knocking guys out. Just BAM! Slamming them in the face. Blood and teeth knocking together.

In county guys bonded like that. Like it was HEY you're human too!? Here's some blood for ya. And who gives a fuck.

But then you see the kids. Yeah, real kids and it's like they bring out all your tarnish. All your trash and your personal little kid, buddy, comes out of your soul and is like hey! Remember me? I fucking exist... accept he wouldn't say fucking or maybe he would.

Anyway.

Hey. We all die.

That's why I like going to the movies. I get to see some guy breathe even if he's dead. But I see him on the screen breathin, I drink a pop, and then go back to breathing outside.

Lights from the set come on. Showing that Mas, himself is a character on screen. Then it returns to the set lighting.

EXT. SIDEWALK DAY

(While he speaks we cut in and out of seeing the following.)

Grey walks down a sidewalk toward the dance studio. She consistently picks up pace until she's in a dead sprint. Her emotions grow with her speed of step.

EXT. GREYS TRAILER NIGHT

TISHA sits on the porch smoking. Same way as seen before. Seems worried. Shakes her knee as she smokes.

FADE OUT

EXT. GREYS TRAILER - MORNING

Tisha sits outside smoking. Seems even more anxious. She walks to the driveway still smoking her cigarette. She starts walking away from the house. She slowly starts running. (Same build up as Grey)

EXT. GRANDMAS TRAILER - MORNING

Tisha comes to a slow stop at the beginning of a gravel driveway. Dew is on the grass. TISHA approaches the abandoned lot of property where a trailer used to sit/sits.

CLOSE UP:

TISHA is out of breath. She SPOTS GREY'S FEET visible through some grass. TISHA's world grows still. She picks her pace back up; she is suddenly not tired and runs in a dead sprint toward Grey's body.

INT. WHITE SPACE - BRIGHT

MAS, TISHA, AN ELDERLY WOMAN, and A MAN stand in a row facing outward. They are lit in a bright light almost celestial. No words are spoken. Each person seems to know each other.

GREY V.O.

They say that life is a gift. Sometimes it just feels so much more like a burden. I think that's just because we face death. We face the reaction. And if the action is just that good. The people we love are loved just that much, then the equivalent of their loss causes loss, not of them, but of ourselves. It may seem ironic, but I think the only way to recover what we've lost is to push through it to the other side of who we are.

medium shot/grey's view

EXT. GRANDMAS TRAILER - MORNING

TISHA clutches GREY in her arms and has tears rolling down her cheeks.

MAS V.O.

The only dream I have at night is of you mom. And I hope to God I won't let you down now that I'm here. And it feels good to be where I should be. But in accepting punishment, perhaps deserved... where does grace lie? Can walls really be knocked down. And if they are, can I ever enjoy some fresh flowers with friends that I love? And if the friends I love have all passed ... can I be granted the ability to move. just to move? To keep moving? And fuck these little pills.

CUT TO/ TISHA'S PERSPECTIVE:

Grey's eyes open. Quiet awkward talk. Only natural sounds/breathing can be heard.

GREY

(Something about dance? something about stop smoking in the house? what should i put here?/ nothing?)

EXT. SIDEWALK DAY

GREY walks to the dance studio cash in hand. The girls are dancing in the studio. She looks at the money in hand. She looks back at a FLASHBACK.

Mas is getting arrested with blue paint on his handcuffs. The police officers start throwing blue paint on him as one officer continues to help him get in the car. GREY imagines throwing the money in the air. As money falls down on her she begins dancing. The little girls in the studio see her and they exit the studio and begin dancing with her in the street.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK DAY

Grey's fist holding the money.

CUT TO:

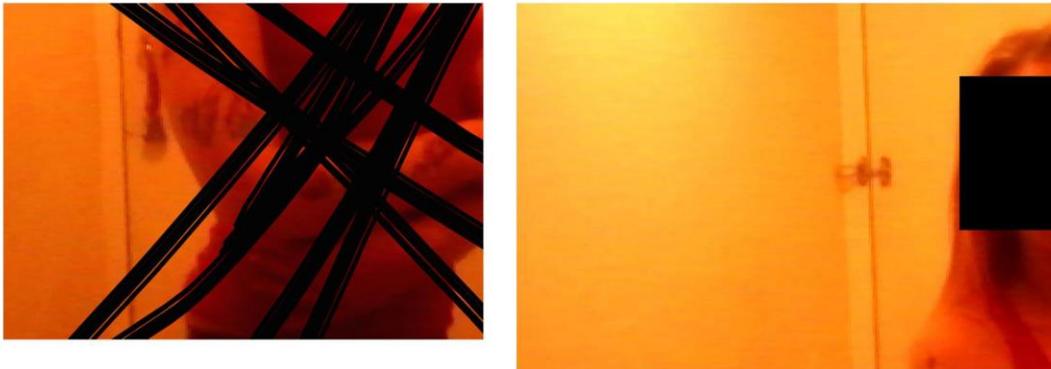
Grey's face "watching the memory". Grey decides to enter the dance studio with her money.

END.

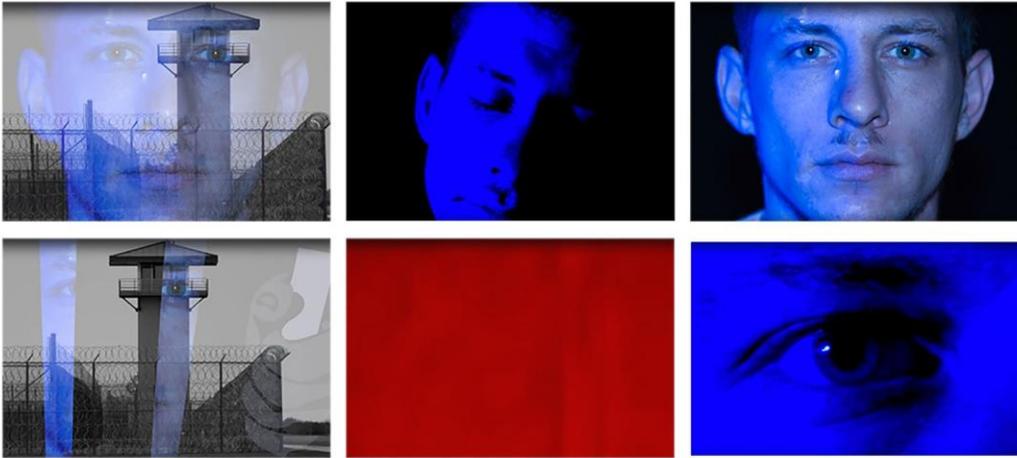
APPENDIX B  
VISUAL STORYBOARDS



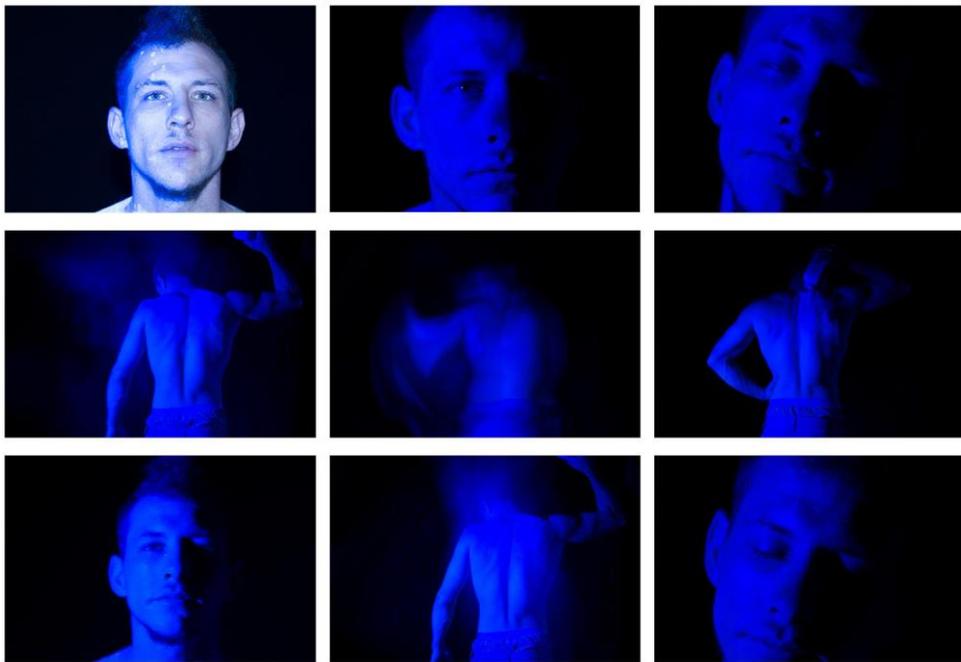
GREY, 1



THE MOTHER- TISH, 1



THE FATHER, 1



MAS, 1



THE GRANDMOTHER, 1

VITA

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