Love of Choice:
A Student’s Development in Short Narrative Filmmaking

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by
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**Introduction:**

A filmmaker’s choice of setting often prompts the viewer’s first impression of a story. *Love of Choice* utilizes elements within a single location to create the story’s non-diagetic space. The confinement and isolation of characters creates a demand for interaction which leads to tension and intimacy. An audience’s immersion into a cinematic world fosters a better opportunity for the Director to utilize storytelling techniques. As a Director, exploring uncharted territory leads to both new opportunities and chances to reappropriate filmmaking styles and techniques.

**Frame of Reference:**

*Love of Choice*’s ideation began with my craving to make a film set within a single location. Films like *Rope, 12 Angry Men,* and *Carnage* inspired the endeavor. In these films, the intimacy between the audience and the film’s characters sprung to the forefront. By taking away the possibility of leaving a tense situation, the characters’ emotions are pushed to the forefront. The limitation of this basic human instinct makes confrontation inevitable. This often occurs in dialogue, but great films utilize action to show true intentions.

Finding a story that can evoke emotion in a viewer often stumps the most talented artists. Pushing such a story into one single location further narrows the possibilities; however, this is what I set out to accomplish. The script initially began as a small unit of military personnel stationed in an underground bunker. After toying with concepts of surveillance, subjugation, and ignorance, I realized this concept relied too heavily on the characters’ interaction with the outside world. My initial
inspirations did not depend on outside factors to dictate behavior and interaction. My story development needed to shift focus onto a conflict between characters.

The concept of a bunker permutated into what became my first science fiction script. I thought of different conflicts two people could experience within a confined space—falling in or out of love, physical or verbal fighting—but I never struck inspiration. I realized a better conflict stemmed from the situation itself, the urge to leave. This opened up a brand new way of thinking about both the location and the characters’ interactions. Science fiction films that rely on character interaction with futuristic elements fail to create a cathartic story. I decided the root of my story needed to build on a character’s internal conflict of whether or not to stay, and the external conflict of what he would leave behind.

The single location developed into a place someone would want to stay. This plot point depended on engineering a self-sustaining interior and an undesirable exterior. Setting the film in the nondescript future could magnify problems beginning to affect quality of life in today’s world. Issues like pollution, overpopulation, and urbanization could amplify into the factors that make living underground seem appealing. The living quarters themselves, or the “Bunker” would need to not only sustain, but facilitate joy, variety, and entertainment. Things like a treadmill and piano give the inhabitants physical and creative outlets that acted as a gateway to communicate tone and subtext. The addition of a TV provides characters and the viewer with expositional information. These factors give the Bunker a purpose and
appeal, but characters will need a more compelling reason to stay if this story has a chance at creating catharsis in the audience.

This dilemma led to the creation of a human relationship in the form of a romantic interest within the Bunker. The protagonist’s external conflict deals with not what, but who would be left behind. Given that only two characters live in the Bunker, finding creative ways other than dialogue to communicate tension became pivotal to the success of the script. Tyler Whidden, Ohio University MFA Playwright candidate, co-wrote the screenplay. His expertise helped create dialogue that delivers exposition and dramatic moments through subtext as opposed to on-the-nose subject matter. The use of props also needed to lend itself to the character’s relationship. Elements like food, the piano, the watch, and the “memory box” push the story even further without depending on dialogue.

Love of Choice proved to be an immense undertaking, but through strategic scripting, efficient set design, and careful storytelling techniques, the film tells a subtle yet eloquent story of the need to move on.

Previous Works:

My work on films completed leading up to production of Love of Choice contributed to the project’s success. Both my technical skills and filmmaking style grew with each year and developed even further during production of Love of Choice. Other films I have directed include Loose Change, Treason, and Anna. Each utilized previously unexplored aspects of filmmaking for me, giving me the opportunity to experiment with and develop tools in writing, directing, and producing.
The first film in my portfolio, *Loose Change*, laid the groundwork for further filmmaking endeavors. The story took place in a nondescript, present-day, realistic world. It needed to be grounded in reality, and raise the stakes of an everyday situation. The protagonist needs to cash his jar of change to buy a gift for his date. On his way to the bank, he sees different gifts that could impress his date and land him a first kiss. To communicate this plot point, dream sequences show what the date’s reaction would be to each gift. Through this takes the story out of reality, this technique seemed like the most immersive way to show the audience the protagonist’s motive. This led me to the realization that the instinct to blend reality with abstract should not be resisted, but embraced.

*Loose Change* fell into the silent film genre—sound effects and music were of the utmost importance. Communicating the story with action, facial expression, and score allowed me to develop an ability to show the audience changes in emotion as opposed to telling those changes through dialogue. The conceit of silent film supported this aspect of the story, and gave me more flexibility to experiment with this new storytelling approach. Utilizing the implication that silent films rely totally on non-dialogue queues to indicate emotion and motivation, the story found its whimsical, comedic tone. This realization of the film’s comedic potential came during editing. The importance of manipulating not only what is seen, but the pace that it is shown, completely changes the tone of the final product. Score and sound effects further reiterate what viewers see on screen, but pacing truly brought the story to life.
With *Loose Change*, I developed basic on-set practices that would become second nature in later projects. Shooting the movie on sixteen millimeter film demanded a consideration for each shot’s importance. Improperly measuring the light on set turned into a learning experience as I discovered different looks produced by over- and underexposure. While this seemed like a mistake while watching dailies, I later realized the pros and cons to each. These mishaps in exposure were a direct result of rushing on set. A lack of pre-blocking scenes and rolling before a shot was ready led to a shortage in film stock, incorrect timing, and unsatisfactory performances. This taught me that proper execution on set was the offspring of diligent pre-production. My next project would utilize these lessons as well as present its own learning experiences.

My first period piece, *Treason*, pushed me out of my comfort zone and demanded extensive pre-production. Immersing the viewer into the Civil War era would only be possible with immaculate production design. The importance of using convincing props, costumes, and sets turned into new challenges to explore. I reached out to the Athens Historical Society and discovered a local hobbyist, Cyrus Moore, that participated in war reenactments. Moore provided uniforms and the necessary accessories to transform the Ohio University students into Civil War soldiers. Moore also consulted on various nuances in the era’s dialect and formalities.

This pushed the production quality to a new level, demanding that I as the director do the same. Lead actors were brought in long before production to make sure they felt comfortable using accents and moving around with their costumes and
props. The next step was ensuring proper shot design. Given the gritty nature of both the story and setting, Director of Photography Wenting Deng recommended taking advantage of handheld shots. These shots were carefully placed at the moments where the protagonist felt panicked, which significantly added to the story’s intensity.

*Treason* also exposed me to directing an action scene. Blocking and editing a convincing action scene turned out to be far more difficult than any previous work. Though there were thorough schematics and storyboards were made, my lack of experience with shooting “ins and outs” led to an unconvincing product. “Ins and outs” refer to when a director chooses to start and end a take. Overlapping action, entrances and exits, and continuity in performance are all needed for an action sequence to properly come together. Luckily this gave me the necessary hindsight to better accomplish such scenes on future projects.

The time spent on a demanding pre-production for *Treason* was perhaps the most beneficial aspect of the film. This began with my first script breakdown, a series of documents that guides the producer in preparing the shoot. Seeing what props and actors were necessary for each scene led to efficient scheduling. Given that all locations were exteriors, the schedule included a contingency day, which ended up being used due to inclement weather. Completing these tasks in pre-production allowed for more focus on what was in front of the camera during shooting.

Unfortunately, not all things happen according to plan, and a lack of crew members turned into a significant issue. During almost half the shoot, Deng and I were the only members on set. This meant I needed to run sound, wrangle props, and work the
sync slate, all while still directing the shoot. The importance of adequate crew would never be underestimated again. *Treason* also facilitated my first night shoot. This meant creating a lighting setup that imitated moonlight while maintaining proper exposure for the sixteen millimeter film. I worked with contrast ratios and background fill lighting to create a look that evoked the scene’s mood while also establishing the time of day. All of these skills gave me confidence to further explore cinematic style and tackle new film elements.

*Anna* presented the challenge of conjuring a cinematic world within a realistic, familiar setting. The film dealt with a boy whose younger sister attempts suicide. The scriptwriting process spanned over a year, with thirteen different drafts. The extended time and revisions allowed for trial and error with plot points, character arcs, and pacing, until the story was “firing on all cylinders”. The chance to spend that much time with a script showed the importance of not becoming attached to scenes or characters, and finding out how different elements can work together in different ways. I quickly realized that the film’s success hinged on quality performances. Extensive auditioning gave me experience in finding subtlety in dramatic moments, gauging the talent’s ability to take adjustments, and finding chemistry with different ensembles. I completed casting two months before the shoot, which allowed the cast and me to work together during rehearsal time. From a director’s standpoint, rehearsals meant experimenting with different approaches to each scene. The dynamic could completely change based on the motives for each character. Giving the cast chances to improvise dialogue led to naturalistic
performances and comfort with their characters. I never realized that the writing process truly overlaps with directing in this regard. I also held one-on-one meetings with the leads to discuss the script. They questioned aspects of their character that I had never thought about, it creating an even greater character development and deepening my knowledge of the story. With a confident cast and compelling script, I moved on to other aspects of pre-production.

Anna demanded a technical complexity and thematic depth during its extensive pre-production. British exchange student Marina Bussandri joined the project as Production Designer. With her came new opportunities to communicate theme and boost production value. Bussandri’s work on makeup and effects gave a chilling realism to the scene where Anna tries to cover her cut marks, and where Greg fights Doug in the parking lot. Her experience with makeup also kept actors looking their best, and helped sell Anna’s exhausted look in the hospital. Costume design opened up an opportunity to explore color theory. This was an exciting way to symbolize the characters’ moods within a scene. Shot design and lighting were the next elements that needed consideration.

Collaboration with Director of Photography Jorge Samson Blaires led to a visual style that evoked tone, utilized setting, and above all told the story. Most of the film carried a somber tone and slow pace which called for clean, still frames with realistic lighting. I worked with Blaires to determine how the use of frame weight, position on the right or left of the frame, and background would supplement the story unfolding on screen. Frame weight complimented the characters’ emotions by
utilizing long shots when the audience did not know what a character was thinking. Close-ups accented emotional peaks for characters. Lighting needed to push the mood of a scene while not breaking the conceit of a realistic environment. 

Traditional three-light setups served as a blueprint with a focus on low ratios and practical sources that could motivate additional sources. The complexity of shots and quality of lighting would not have been possible without location scouting and detailed plans. Extensive set schematics and lighting diagrams allowed for a fast and smooth moving set. A Director of Photography with a clear idea of the Director’s ideas allowed for more time spent with actors. Many shots in the film required complex rigs for lights and the camera. Online research along with trial and error allowed for these shots to be pulled off safely and successfully.

Anna presented invaluable experiences in producing. With an average of ten crew members on set and a lean budget of $500, transportation and kraft services required careful planning. Carpooling not only alleviated parking issues but saved gas and ensured that crew and cast members arrived on set at the same time. To address the issue of kraft services, I sought out donations from local vendors which included Chipotle and Donkey Coffee, as well as hired local cooks to prepare homemade meals. Saving money in this department meant art direction was able to acquire all the necessary props for maximum production value. While all these lessons contributed to my development and the success of Love of Choice, the greatest takeaway from Anna was the importance of audio recording. I brought in a first time audio recordist, and gave him a setup that was not appropriate for the
locations. The subsequent recordings came out unsatisfactory, and led to countless hours attempting to fix the mistakes in post-production mixing. The value of quality audio recording will never be underestimated in the future, and the experience gave me a chance to see firsthand that audio recording requires as much time and attention as camera, lighting, acting, and art direction.

In the editing room, it quickly became apparent that almost every scene followed the same structure. A character enters the scene, talks with another character, and that interaction causes one of those characters to leave. Even the scenes not following this formula revolved around the spoken word as opposed to character action. Things that seemed to pack a punch on the page and during shooting became bland during editing. Implementing a score boosted emotional impact that was initially lost in the rough cut. Dissonance, syncopation, and synchronous diegetic score came together to facilitate suspense, anticipation, and world-building.

**Influences:**

Extensive research and analysis of plays, literature, television and films guided the evolution of *Love of Choice*’s story. Isolation, a single location, and non-diegetic world-building penetrate a variety of artistic mediums. As the script evolved, so did my need for references that show what resonates with an audience.

Isolation within a space can occur with a singular character or an ensemble. South Korean film *Oldboy* displays how a man’s involuntary imprisonment without explanation leads to insanity. After viewing the film, it seemed unlikely for any other
result. In order for isolation to be tolerable, characters must have a clear understanding of why they are there. *The Twilight Zone* episode “The Lonely” uses exposition and art direction to show the viewer a prisoner has been banished to isolation for a horrible crime. The police officer’s visitation to the planet inspired the visitation of the Myriad Representative (Thomas Daniels) delivering housing extension contracts. This scene clues the audience in to how Myriad works as a business, and to John’s (Jim Ownes) discontent within the space. “The Loney” also shows that a character is only content in isolation when they have everything they want. As soon as something is taken away, or an element’s absence is realized, it immediately makes the isolation unbearable. This idea became the core conflict for *Love of Choice*.

*The Twilight Zone* episode “Time Enough At Last” effectively creates conflict with a single character in isolation. Director John Brahm quickly establishes main character Henry Bemis’s (Burgess Meredith) motivation to be alone in the opening scene. Henry simply wants to be left with his books, and his wife Helen (Jacqueline deWit) nags him about his aloof attitude and obsession with reading. The absent minded Henry wanders into a vault at work and finds himself safely sheltered from a nuclear attack. What would devastate most people actually comforts Henry. After finding the remains of a library, he realizes he finally lives in the ideal reading environment. The tables turn when his clumsy demeanor causes him to fall and break his glasses, turning a bookworm’s paradise into the punishment of Tantalus. This
simple change flips Henry’s view of his isolation. An element’s absence would drive the story in *Love of Choice*.

Jean-Paul Sartre’s play *No Exit* explored the confinement of three individuals with conflicting personalities. The play evokes a version of hell in which three people are stuck in one room with each one despising the other two. The characters never feel hungry or thirsty, and the lack of a mirror in the space means the only faces they look upon are two they despise. The theme of the play—hell is other people—becomes clear when the occupants have nowhere to turn from isolation. *No Exit* shows an interesting approach to how character chemistry feeds the audience’s impression of the space. To be in a space with two friends would not evoke the feeling of hell—it is through the characters’ disdain for each other that the play finds conflict. Sartre’s writing showed me the importance of character compatibility and the importance of a story’s setting to facilitate a character’s will to stay or leave. In *No Exit* the audience learns the rules of the space and characters’ dynamic entirely through dialogue. Since the final product of *Anna* relied heavily on dialogue, I knew I needed to find a different way to establish exterior space in *Love of Choice*.

An audience’s understanding of the complex world within *Love of Choice* would depend on quality exposition. After the shortfalls of dialogue in *Anna*, I felt I needed to craft an interesting and visual opportunity that gave the viewer a wealth of information in a short period of time. As I searched complex sci-fi television shows for inspiration, the solution came not during the program, but in the commercial breaks. Advertisements by design present information both visually and aurally, and
current trends show an increasing saturation of advertisements in media. Following this trend seemed like not only an effective form of exposition, but a useful commentary within the film world. Panos Cosmatos’s *Beyond the Black Rainbow* begins with a diachronic advertisement for an experimental research facility. The commercial not only gives clear exposition of what the laboratory does, but also establishes the dark tone of the film. The advertisement for Myriad Inc. could also be an opportunity to set the mood for the film. I consulted Brett Peters, a Junior Account Executive at the advertising agency Energy BBDO, for guidance on voiceover rhetoric. Art Director Jenisa Jeblee consulted on the visual content, striving for a strong relation to the film’s color palette and mood. With this piece of exposition established, the next step addressed what kind of story would engage the audience while maintaining an appropriate scope.

Conflict that engages an audience entertains in the moment while also providing intrigue of what is to come. Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rope* demonstrates how this can be achieved within one room. The film opens with Brandon (John Dall) and Phillip (Farley Granger) murdering David (Dick Hogan). They believe they committed the perfect murder and invite David’s family and friends to indulge themselves. As the story progresses we learn that Brandon (John Dall) seems eager for Rupert (James Stewart) to find out. The audience receives the largest piece of exposition right away with the murder, but the conflict of the film becomes whether the party guests will find out that David (Dick Hogan) is inside the trunk at the center of the room. *Love of Choice* operates on a similar motor. The viewer discovers that
John (Jim Owen) and Sarah (Deborah Barton) live underground in isolation, but the conflict of the film becomes how John will deal with his discontent. By slowly indicating this more and more, the audience finds the subtext in his decisions. In *Rope*, Phillip’s heavy drinking becomes the embodiment of his guilt. In *Love of Choice*, John’s discontent communicates his desire to leave. This conflict pushed John’s relationship with Sarah into an interesting dynamic of a slow breakup.

The dynamic between John and Sarah in *Love of Choice* would unavoidably need to contain dialogue. After the dialogue in *Anna* lacked the necessary subtly to engage viewers, research led me to find films that utilize subtext in dialogue that causes the audience to figure out the true meaning themselves. Research led me to Roman Polanski’s film *Carnage*, starring John C. Riley, Jodie Foster, Kate Winslett, and Christoph Waltz. The film takes place entirely within an apartment, when Nancy (Winslet) and Alan Cowan (Waltz) stop by Penelope (Foster) and Michael Longstreet’s apartment to amend a fight their sons had at school. The scenario quickly descends into chaos as the couples’ incessant bickering transitions from spouses arguing to a full-blown free-for-all. The hilarious film, adapted by Yasmin Reza from her play *Le Dieu du Carnage*, uses subtle jabs at occupations, clothing, or taste to create conflict within the scene. It is not until the end of the film, after the characters have gotten drunk, that they come out and say how they really feel.

Dialogue in *Love of Choice* fed off this style. A discussion about food hints at John’s displeasure with the repetition of life in Myriad, and the gift of a watch evokes the notion of living without a real concept of time.
Comparing the stories of *Anna* and *Love of Choice* shows the continuing development of my writing process. Where *Anna* relied on dialogue to move the story, *Love of Choice* utilized the tool to add subtext to the character’s relationship. In writing, *Anna* seemed like a solid screenplay, with each scene logically leading to the next, and a story being revealed through cause and effect relationships between characters. This lined up with a concept outlined in Alexander MacKendrick’s book *On Filmmaking* that “anticipation is our sense of expectancy about what has just happened and how it is likely to produce a new event we suspect is likely to follow” (MacKendrick 48). I believed my script utilized anticipation to guide the audience through the story; unfortunately, I was only utilizing half of MacKendrick’s concept. The entire idea is that drama comes from “anticipation mingled with uncertainty,” and I was missing the uncertainty. MacKendrick explains “uncertainty is our sense that even though we have an idea as to what will happen next, we cannot be sure of precisely how it will turn out” (MacKendrick 48). My screenplay for *Anna* was missing surprises. I effectively utilized a cause and effect relationship between each scene, but that relationship was so clean that it dispelled any mystery of what is to come. This became a challenge in the editing room, but was only one of the issues *Anna* presented in cutting.

It was not until I sat down in the editing lab that I realized the Achilles’ heel of my screenplay—each scene revolved around expositional dialogue. MacKendrick also presents the idea that “information forthcoming through dialogue is dramatic only when it involves the exploration of character through tension” (MacKendrick
I knew dialogue would play a huge role in the exposition of *Love of Choice*, so I used this idea as the blueprint. I needed to keep the tension of John’s desire to leave and Sarah’s desire to stay prevalent in every scene. In the scene before dinner, John’s dissatisfaction with the meal plan contrasts directly with Sarah’s attachment to the consistency the Myriad Living Facility provides. This tension leads to Sarah revealing they have been in the Myriad Living Facility for eight years. By masking this reveal in tension, the audience takes it as a piece of the scene, not the point of it. MacKendrick also states:

“…the trick of inventing a scene with effective exposition is to devise a supporting characters who are involved in a dramatic situation where specific questions have to be asked or certain pieces of information offered in order that the tension is (perhaps temporarily) resolved and the audience dramatically satiated” (MacKendrick 25).

Establishing these two points of view makes the Dinner and Contract Renewal scenes dramatic and expositional. During the Contract Extension scene, the Myriad Representative (Thomas Daniels) asks Sarah how she and John are doing, how long they’ve been living there, and if they like their Myriad Living Facility. Sarah’s answers to these questions, along with John’s detached presence in the other part of the room, clearly shows the audience John’s dissatisfaction along with Sarah’s nervousness about her partner’s state of mind. These subtleties could only be achieved through a deep understanding of the script and story.
Sidney Lumet’s direction on *12 Angry Men* and his book *Making Movies* provided me with invaluable lessons on directing, shot design, and pre-production. In *Making Movies*, Lumet goes into detail on how rehearsal time transforms performances. Lumet states he begins the rehearsal period with “two or three days around a table, talking about the script. The first thing to be established is, of course, the theme. Then we’re into each character, each scene, each line” (Lumet 62). I utilized this process on *Anna*, bringing in my three leads and speaking with them about the context and subtext of the screenplay. From there, I took individual meetings and discussed character motivations, scene objectives, and the nuances of each part. Additional time with each actor gave them a chance to prepare questions that they would not usually think of on set. Fleshing out these specifics brought out better performances, and subsequently showed where rewrites could improve the story. Lumet then moves on to blocking:

“Each interior we’ll use in the movie has been laid out in tape on the floor in it’s actual dimensions. The tapes are different colors, so everyone can see which rooms they represent. Furniture is put in the same places where it will appear on the actual sets. Phones, desks, beds, knives, guns, handcuffs, pens, books, papers—all their” (Lumet 63).

This step turned out the most helpful as far as time efficiency. We spent hours working with different kinds of movement within a scene; deciding characters’ relationship to proximity, gaze, and props made actors more comfortable to try new things and evoke more emotion. Theses specifics also contributed to shot design. By
knowing what blocking worked and when moves would occur, Blaires and I were able to make informed and strategic decisions on where to place the camera. *Love of Choice* could not afford the same rehearsal time as *Anna*, which forced me to ask myself character questions and make blocking plots ahead of time.

*Love of Choice*’s tight shooting schedule limited development every step of the way. Due to a fantastic crew and talented cast, the shooting pace allowed for rehearsal of each scene before rolling. Lumet still contributed insights that I implemented while shooting *Love of Choice*. *12 Angry Men* and *Love of Choice* each take place in a single location, and as the films progress, the size of that location becomes more and more constraining. Lumet's description of “a “lens plot” occurred to me. As the picture unfolded, I wanted the room to seem smaller and smaller. That meant that I would slowly shift to longer lenses as the picture continued” (Lumet 81). This concept hugely influenced the shooting strategy Blaires and I laid out during shot list meetings. As we approach the climax of the film, telephoto lenses evoked John’s (Jim Owens) feeling of confinement within the Myriad Living Facility. To contrast this concept and present a new feeling in the closing shot, we switched back to the wide angle lens for his final close-up. This positions John (Owens) in a vista of clouds, evoking the limitless open space he now occupies. The sudden switch from constrained to open framing ensures the final beat of the film lands with the viewer.

**Conclusion:**

My first experience in filmmaking came in high school, editing a “Freshman Orientation Video.” The assignment involved combining interviews from various
school officials with b-roll to make a video explaining various resources available to freshman. I went out and shot clips of students eating lunch, utilizing the writing resource center, and socializing with advisors, but I found the task unengaging. It was not until I sat down in front of the Final Cut 6 workstation that I realized what an amazing art I had stumbled upon.

That was sophomore year. It was actually freshman year that I first engaged in visual storytelling. I took the school’s animation class, and found the process inspiring. The freedom to create stories that amused and captivated my classmates gave me a sense of accomplishment. My mother was the one that encouraged me to make the switch to filmmaking, and for that I am forever grateful. Many people spend years looking for what they want to do with their life, but at the ripe age of fourteen, sitting in front of a Final Cut 6 workstation, I found just that.

Editing hooked me immediately. I was enthralled by the idea of taking these puzzle pieces and finding a story that I could piece together. All my classmates were cutting from the same video clips, but my teacher realized I had a knack for finding the best moment in each clip and matching clips to narration. My experience in animation helped me learn the technical side of the editing program quickly, so that I could begin creatively exploring the craft. That moment marks a significant point in my journey as an artist. I began watching movies not for entertainment, but out of curiosity. I would see how one shot influenced the next, and the different ways changing a shot could affect the mood. This new way of watching movies informed
me on the subtleties of the editing. Here, my knowledge of the craft would plateau until I began taking classes from Tom Hayes.

They say, “a wise man knows he knows nothing,” and if that is the case, I became incredibly wise during my time with Tom Hayes. What many would call “tidbits” of knowledge opened the doors to an entire side of editing I had never realized existed. Choosing shots not only for their aesthetic appeal, but also things like the subject’s position in the frame, their movement in and out of the cut, and the relation of where the viewer is looking on one shot to the next are only a few of the many points Hayes would teach me. These concepts took my skill in editing to the next level while influencing the way I write, direct, and shoot films.

The use of clever transitions often becomes the work of the editor, but Hayes emphasized “the best cuts are written cuts.” I always took this to mean a great scene transition is anticipated long before the camera rolls. A great cut feels written into the screenplay because it services the story at such a deep level that it seems premeditated. This principle found its way into my writing on Anna. The first scene transition of the film moves from the boys talking about their dealer being caught by his mom, to Greg (Ike Riesbeck) being caught by his own Mom (Marlo Tinkham). Hayes also taught me about the concept of a “sweet spot” in film. Films often establish the right and left sides of the screen to mean different things. This profoundly changed the way I view films, after analyzing films through this lens I found frame position and weight communicate a significant amount of the story’s subtext.
Finding new ways to analyze films provides constant development in my implementation of the craft. As I grow as an artist, my understanding of how different techniques can determine or destroy the style and quality of a film aids me in every step of the process. I strive for new ways to write characters that tie into the theme, subplots that reveal main plot exposition, and unique stories that will engage and evoke personal experiences with my audience. My directing has evolved from fleshing out issues on set to preparing during rehearsals and meetings with actors and crew. These steps ensure shoots run on time and facilitate opportunities to experiment with the material. I find work as a Director of Photography improved alongside these other skills. I now recognize the frame can communicate more than action, but also gives subtext and mood to the subject. Expanding my horizons into different shooting and lighting strategies taught me to approach every project with a fresh palate. I am too young to pigeonhole myself into one particular style or equipment package. My editing process has become dynamic and adaptive as well. I now recognize the pros and cons of different cutting styles, and assess each script before I decide an approach to a film.

This most valuable piece of my education instilled the desire to develop my understanding, to dig deeper into films. I now discover new things about a film even after three or four viewings. Recognizing the depth of the craft showed me how important collaboration is to success. One person can’t possibly be expected to consider all the nuances of writing, art direction, actor performance, lighting, shot design, budgeting, sound mixing, and editing on a single film. Successful films
require utilizing colleagues and expanding projects beyond my own ideas. As I move forward in my career, what I look forward to most are the opportunities to experiment with different perspectives on filmmaking. Finding my voice and cinematic style will probably take years, but I feel reassured to know my education and experiences have prepared me to jump in head first.
Works Cited


