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Pomp and Circumstances: A Film

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POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCES

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A film by
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CHAPTER 1

Sunset Boulevard: Beginnings

Since this is a thesis project about film, I thought it appropriate to acknowledge well-known films about film in my chapter titles. In their own way, each of these films enhance audiences' understanding of the film industry and the creative and technical skills required in filmmaking. Writing about making my own film has had a similar effect on me because it has made me more aware of my choices and expectations about the film, as well as the collaboration that made it all possible. My thesis project began with a desire to experience every stage of the independent filmmaking process: using an original story idea, working with student actors, and filming it with resources already available to me. Working with limited resources and a small budget was an appropriate challenge for someone who plans to work as an independent filmmaker. By taking a single film through each production stage, I have acquired invaluable lessons about my chosen profession. The film *Pomp and Circumstances* is the outcome of this undertaking.

Now that I am at the end of this year-long process, I intend to reflect on my experiences and revisit the progression of this project from an idea to a finished film. As a filmmaker I have been able to add new skills to my toolbox as well as learn from my mistakes. Most of all, I have gained a sharper foresight and a clearer sense of the director's role, both of which I will take into my future projects. The best way to narrate the experience is to examine each stage of production chronologically and highlight the particular moments that contributed to my overall growth as a filmmaker. Fused into the narrative are passages in italics, which are selected entries from the journal I kept during the year; these help to show my thought process, questions, and goals for the film while it was still a work in progress. Throughout the narrative, I also make reference to

items that are in the appendices; these are schedules, spreadsheets, and other documents that I constructed to help me plan and organize the production of the film. I know that this film has benefited my own education, but my hope is that it may also stand as an example of the kind of artistic work students can pursue at Columbus State University and will encourage others to undertake similar ventures in the future.

CHAPTER 2

Barton Fink: Writing

Story Concept

I decided over a year before even beginning to work on my thesis that I wanted to make a comedy; however, brainstorming exactly what the film would be about was a much more tortuous process. I did a lot of freewriting during this time and contemplated different story ideas, keeping in mind the limitations of time, resources, and budget imposed on the project. I was working within certain parameters, namely, that I could not spend a lot of money on the film, that I would have to use nearby locations rather than special sets, and that the pool of actors who would work for free consisted mainly of theatre department students, between the ages of 18 and 22. So this limited, or shall I say, *focused* my ideas. It was frustrating to my writer side to come up with ideas, only to have them spoiled by my producer side, thinking of pesky things like budget, logistics, and practicality.

During the summer of 2010, when I had just returned from studying abroad in Oxford, I had the ideas of travel, transition, and academics on the brain. I had also just begun working as a student assistant in CSU's Digital & Media Production Services, and one of my duties during the summer was to help with audio/visual support at the freshman orientation programs. During one

of these orientations, looking at all the freshmen from my perch in the auditorium control booth, I thought about how all of these students – hundreds of them – were at the very beginning of their college careers. It made me think about the two ceremonies that bookend a person's college experience: in a few weeks these students would sit through the pomp and circumstance of Freshman Convocation 2010, and before they know it, it will be time for the literal "Pomp and Circumstance" of the graduation of the class of 2014. So much happens to a person in between those two ceremonies: people grow, mature, make friends, lose friends, break up, make plans, face disappointments, change plans, and maybe even change majors. This, I thought, would be prime material for the film and could easily fit into my parameters for casting and shooting.

July 23, 2010

A new idea came to me the other day at Orientation. Something close to my heart is the idea of changing phases in life – transitional periods and what exactly goes on during transitions in life. [...] Something I also know a lot about is graduating – a major change in life phases. I want to take a chunk of one person's graduation day and trace a comedic plot-driven story on top of it. [...] It would be a comedy-adventure film, with lots of minor characters popping in and out. There needs to be an element of time, which would be that she has to be at her graduation ceremony at a certain time in the afternoon. Maybe it starts off that she goes for one last hurrah with her friends but something goes wrong.

Developing Themes and Characters

I wanted to create a main character who is very rooted, a homebody, and contrast her personality with her ambitious plans, which, for one reason or another, will by necessity take her far away from home after finishing school. Because of this conflict, the character has mixed

feelings about graduating. Hinging the story on graduation makes the theme of transition more pronounced. The message is about facing life transitions with a smile to the past and a smile to the future. Most people going through a major change experience strong emotions, especially if that person is transitioning out of a very fulfilling phase of his or her life into something unknown. These are the kinds of emotions the main character experiences, but they are portrayed in a lighthearted way. As the idea developed I felt that the way to do this would be to craft a very complex, strong lead character and place her in a comic situation, thus balancing the theme of transition with a comedic story. One of my interviewees was film professor Dr. Joseph Francavilla, and when asked what makes a good comedy, he said that the best ones "are *about* something" and that you can enjoy the humor but can "come back to it and see everything as significant and meaningful. If you don't have that in a comedy, it's sort of like eating cotton candy" (Personal Interview, Apr. 5, 2011). For all its zany plot twists, I hope that viewers will see that *Pomp and Circumstances* is *about* something – transition.

In any narrative film, the screenwriting stage is foundational to everything else that follows. Within a week of deciding on the idea, I drafted some dialogue and character ideas. I chose to make the main character female because I can better relate to and write dialogue for a female character. Sketching out the character's overall development, or "character arc," was one of my prime concerns because she would be undergoing this "change" during a series of challenges taking place over the course of one day. The plot points would have to add up to some defining moment in her life, some sense that she is reconciling the present with the future. In my journal I drafted some points that the character needs to learn, but they just sounded like a list of platitudes!

July 30, 2010

What the main character needs to learn:

All of life is a series of transitions.

She'll take her memories with her wherever she goes.

The memories will never change, even though her current circumstances will.

The future will be different from, but not inferior to, the present.

You can't live in the past, or you'll miss the future.

After my initial character and story outlines were intact, Dr. Becker and I brainstormed ideas together about the character's backstory, her family relationships, her boyfriend, her part-time job, and her interests. It was helpful and interesting to decide things like this about the character, even if some of these matters are never mentioned in the film, because the character then becomes more of a whole person rather than just an abstract set of qualities and quirks. We also brainstormed about the supporting characters and how the group functions as a whole. We said that the characters should not be modeled after "types," but at the same time should complement each other in their various strengths and weaknesses. The people in Sadie's group of friends have very little in common with each other, and because of this, each character adds something different to the group. Sketching out and coloring in the characters and themes was a recursive process that continued throughout the entire writing stage.

The Screenwriting Process

My screenwriting process was surprisingly structured, if not time-consuming, and I went about it much differently from how I write academic papers. At the beginning of August, I drafted in my journal the plot points of the film. I came up with seventeen separate minor and

major turning points in the plot; looking back over them now, I am surprised to see how closely the final film follows this initial outline, though some points and characters have been altered greatly. The next step was to transfer the plot outline onto 4x6 cards, one for each scene, making adjustments where necessary. It was fun to figure out how to take the plot from A to B to Z, making sure that the narrative was building up to a climax and that the comedic and serious moments ebbed and flowed in a sort of natural, cathartic progression. Using the note cards helped me move events around easily and think about how the transitions from scene to scene would work. Getting an actual, complete draft of the screenplay on paper was a long process, and there were some complicated sections of dialogue I did not even draft until as late as December.

The following journal entry is an exercise from Syd Field's *The Screenwriter's Workbook*, in which I drafted a three-sentence description of my concept for the film, which could also be considered the film's "pitch":

September 4, 2010

My story is about a college senior on her graduation day who is reluctant to leave college and all the great people and experiences college represents. In the hours leading up to her graduation ceremony, she has to battle every possible circumstance that could keep her from making it to graduation. Ultimately she spends her last day as an undergrad revisiting all the things that have defined her college experience, and she meets graduation with newfound excitement.

The point of this exercise is to focus the elements of the screenplay down to bare-bones concepts: what is the character arc? What do the plot points lead up to? Essentially, what is the "spine" of the film? During the fall I continued plowing through the first complete draft of the screenplay. All of December and part of January were dedicated to revising and polishing each

scene and each line. I even made minor revisions or changes to the dialogue while rehearsals were progressing. A section from my journal will summarize the revision experience:

January 5, 2011

I've been busily revising the screenplay over the last several weeks. The process has been long and filled with many instances of staring at the screen for hours and doing nothing more than switching out an adjective and deleting a character's line. In my experience with this screenplay and also with A Tale of Two Writers [my first film], *the more time you spend focusing on the script, the better. The script is the foundation, and I'm beginning to feel pretty good about this one.*

Challenges

When I asked television writer Akela Cooper what the biggest challenge of her job was, she said it was "breaking the story... Working through all the aspects of a story can take many hours and can be exhausting mentally when you're doing a full 22 episode season" (Email Interview, Mar. 31, 2011). For me, the most difficult scene to write was the climax, and I conceived several different variations of it before arriving at the final version. In my journal I complained that: *I've gone from making Sadie's monologue into a prayer, to a break-the-fourth-wall moment, to a dream sequence, and to a soliloquy* (January 5, 2011). In the first draft of this scene, I envisioned it as a dream-sequence – a this-is-your-life type of intervention (and it must be noted that I wrote this when I was jetlagged). Once the jetlag wore off, I realized that the sequence did not match the tone of the rest of the film at all. The other parts of the scene have a much more realistic feel, so I tried re-envisioning it as a monologue by Sadie, in which she could verbalize her inner thoughts, perhaps as a prayer, perhaps by thinking out loud. The problem

with this was that it would be difficult to do what essentially was a theatrical soliloquy on film, and maintain the realistic tone. I considered bringing in one of Sadie's friends who she could talk to and play off of, but decided against that idea because I wanted this to be the one challenge that Sadie goes through totally alone, apart from any direct support from her friends. At the time I was drafting this scene, I had already cast Jarred Wiehe and Joey Davila in the film as unnamed characters and had wanted them to improvise comic-relief dialogue somewhere in the film, but I did not have a specific place for them yet. In the version of the climax that I decided on, I used Joey and Jarred as two slacker freshmen who dislike Sadie's favorite professor, Dr. Lane. To Sadie, they are apathy personified, and she sees shades of her own frustrations reflected in them, which scares her. I really liked the contrast these characters would provide to Sadie, and the interaction with them gave Sadie – and the actress who plays her – the proper motivation to get back on the horse and go to graduation. And of course, her determination to go to graduation symbolizes her readiness to march into her future with a smile on her face.

Reflecting on the Screenplay

Some people have asked me if the film is a biopic or is autobiographical in any way. While I did draw on my own experiences and on people that I know for inspiration, I did not intend this film to be autobiographical. Yes, the main character is a fifth-year senior who has studied abroad, but other than these plot details Sadie Lucas is her own person! As far as the supporting characters go, many of them are reflections, but not replicas, of people I know. Like basically every writer, I have drawn on real life and tried to blend aspects of reality and invention into the story.

Now that I have the added perspective that comes from being at the end of the production process, I see the themes in their fully-realized condition. Seeing my ideas converge with input from others, I have noticed aspects that emerged that I did not originally intend. *Pomp and Circumstances* presents a cross-section of the student population, which naturally comes with various perspectives on college. Sadie is a person who enjoys school and works very hard because she knows it will prepare her for her future. She has become so comfortable, however, with life as an undergrad and is so connected with her circle of friends that she almost does not want to leave. She is at a point of transition in her life and equates graduating with having to leave behind a very fulfilling time in her life. Melody is a professional student, and the film reveals that she has at different times majored in English, Philosophy, and Car Mechanics, but suggests that these are only a few of her many previous majors. She is interested in everything, and for her, college is a means to explore all of her varying interests. Grant has not yet declared a major and is taking a disparate set of courses. He represents the valid notion that college is a time in a person's life for figuring out what direction one wants to go. Hal and Renee are extremely smart and tech-savvy, and Renee finds her freshman and sophomore classes boring because they do not present enough of a challenge. These two characters represent students who want to finish college as quickly as possible in order to move on to a fast-paced career world. The two freshman slackers seem to have no business being in college and are probably only there for the parties and an excuse for not getting a job. They represent the antithesis of Sadie, in that they do not value an education nor do they appreciate how beneficial the college years can be to the whole person. The views of college represented in the film range from sarcastic to sentimental, and the film overall celebrates the life and times of college students everywhere.

The film also tries to tackle the theme of transition. Sadie has mixed feelings about moving into a new, unknown phase of her life, and this translates into her ambivalence toward graduation. On a structural level, the disasters that befall her on graduation day – and almost cause her to miss the ceremony – represent her own resistance to the change associated with graduating. The film spans the length of one day, so that in the background we know that morning is fading into afternoon, and afternoon into night. Visually, the theme of transitions is also represented by the main characters' wearing different costumes in the climactic final scene, once Sadie's character has undergone a change in attitude.

The theme of transition is also suggested in the development and nature of the trials Sadie goes through and in the fact that as the film progresses she has fewer and fewer people around to support her. At the beginning of the film she is surrounded by her friends, but by the climax, she is alone. In the hospital scene, everyone takes care of Wright as a group, but in the confrontation with Grant, only Melody is present to support Sadie. Grant, who is described as being "rooted firmer than a weed in a rose garden," symbolizes resistance to change, and the confrontation scene at the gas station illustrates how Sadie is breaking away from the people she holds dear, even if it is painful. In the research article scenes, she has Melody, Hal, and Dr. Lane to help, but then Hal has to make an exit because of a prior commitment. In the scenes at home, she has her Mom to help her with the graduation robe, but then her Mom has to leave as well. On a day that started out so well, surrounded by friends, she ends up having to drive to graduation on her own; in Sadie Lucas's world, people really do "come and go so quickly here." At the climax, she is still alone, except for the two slacker freshmen who, through their willful ignorance, inadvertently hold a mirror up to her own frustrations and weaknesses. Only after the confrontation with the freshman is she reunited, all at once, with her friends and is able to receive her diploma. To put it

in "quest narrative" terms, she has to fight the final battle on her own, proving herself worthy of the conquest: graduating.

CHAPTER 3

Fame: Casting

Planning and Preparing for Auditions

Though I was still adding to the script, by late November I had a fairly firm grasp on who my characters are and was certain that I would not need to create any additional characters, besides the fourteen I already had! To help me put the characterizations into concrete terms, I wrote a paragraph-long description for each character and then wrote a one-line description for each to include on the posters. Appendix A is the character breakdown I had prepared by the time of the auditions. (Comparing some of these descriptions with the actual portrayals seen in the final film is a testament to how much a character is shaped by the actor and by the rehearsal process, often altering the character from what the writer originally intends. My discussion of the rehearsal stage will elaborate on this.)

I advertised the casting call with posters (Appendix B) and emails throughout the Theatre Department, through connections in community theatre, and by word of mouth in theatre classes. I planned to hold the auditions in late November, which would be after the Theatre Department announced the casts for their spring shows, so that the students who auditioned for *Pomp and Circumstances* would know their availability for the next few months. Having very limited audition experience myself, I was unsure how the casting process would work from a director's standpoint. Besides wanting to learn about how to structure auditions and callbacks, I also wanted to learn how directors make quick, gut decisions about casting when all they initially see

of an actor is a brief monologue from a random play or film. What are they looking for in that monologue that helps them decide whether or not to call the actor back?

I directed these concerns to Dr. Becker and also to Professor Haley Rice, a professor of acting in the Columbus State University Theatre Department, in my interview with her:

> Danielle Thompson: As a director or a casting director, how do you judge from watching a one-minute monologue, if you don't know that person and don't know their work, if they're going to be right for a role, or potentially right and you'd like to call them back?
>
> Haley Rice: You have to know what you want in the role. What are the essential qualities of the character? The problem with casting – and it's not so much with theatre, but with film – people often cast based on looks or type instead of internal qualities. So you may have someone with the right internal qualities, but maybe they don't look right for the role. I would go with someone who has that natural quality, just because it's so much easier to work with nature rather than against it. So talk to them, get to know them. Ask them questions. (Personal Interview, Nov. 17, 2010)

I planned to video tape the auditions and the callbacks for closer review afterwards. Professor Rice suggested that the actors look into the camera as they deliver their monologue, as if the camera is another person. This would help me gauge how comfortable they were in front of a camera and also how well they could act with an imagined partner. (Often the logistics of shooting a film require a performer to do counterintuitive things for the sake of a shot.) Even though I would only have a one minute monologue to represent each actor's abilities, I was able to gain a better idea of what to look for in that monologue beforehand by having a firm grasp on my characters and an understanding of what particular qualities and abilities I needed in actors for a comedy film.

I have heard actors talk about being asked to do unusual things in auditions or callbacks – such as being instructed to walk across the stage, once as comedy and once as tragedy. Dr. Becker advised me to use improv games during the callbacks to see how willing the actors were to be spontaneous and to work as a team. She said to be looking for how well the actors can adapt theatrical training to film acting – to see that they can reign in their performance if necessary so that it is stylistically appropriate for film. Professor Rice also told me how valuable improv can be to a director in getting to know the styles and ranges of the actors, especially if the director does not know the actors' previous work. On this subject, Professor Rice said, "I think when you use improv in auditions, it's to test the imagination and the willingness of the actors, to see how far they will go. Because as a director it's always easier to pull back than to get them to go further. If you use improv, it tests their level of commitment. You can work with that, whereas if you have someone who's really reticent and won't make a bold choice, then...you don't want to use them for [the role]. But it's a little different for film, in that, they still need to make bold choices, but the externalization of those choices doesn't have to be as big" (Personal Interview, Nov 17, 2010). Professor Rice and Dr. Becker suggested games that involved listening, adapting, and working off of a partner, because these are skills that are particularly necessary for good comedic film acting.

Per my conversations with them, I decided to use two games, one called Ruin My Day and another called Taking Directions. In Ruin My Day, one person is seated on a bench and another person enters the scene and does whatever is necessary to make the first person leave the bench willingly, such as by behaving oddly or annoyingly. In Taking Directions, two people act out a scene with a given scenario, such as being guests at a party, and a third person stands to the side and periodically gives the pair a direction about a style, situation, or character. For example,

the "director" might tell them to perform the scene like it is a film noir thriller, or with a Scottish accent, or like circus clowns – or all three. Professor Rice said that this game would help gauge how well they adapt to new scenarios and take direction on the spur of the moment.

The Audition Process

The audition process was broken down into two stages; for the initial audition I asked each person to prepare a one-minute comedic monologue, and for the callbacks I asked everyone to be prepared for cold readings with other actors. I asked each person to fill out an audition form (Appendix C) listing their contact information, relevant experience, and conflicts during the next couple of months. One actor even brought a resume, although I did not specifically ask for one. In watching and reviewing the tape of each audition monologue, I made notes about my immediate responses and wrote down which character(s) I might see that actor playing.

In total thirteen people auditioned, and I ended up calling all thirteen back. I did have some reservations about two actors, but I decided to call them back anyway since it would only add two more people to the callbacks process. (Interestingly, I wound up casting both of them.) Not enough men came to the audition, so before callbacks I looked for reinforcements, and Dr. Becker and Professor Rice notified some of their male students about the opportunity.

I chose two scenes from the screenplay to use for cold readings in the callbacks; one was the diner scene, which would show me how well the group could work together and off of each other in a lighthearted situation, and the other was the car chase scene, which would require the actors to shift to a more intense, angry mood. (There was one actor whom I ended up not casting because she was not able to show much variation between character moods, so it was informative to have contrasting scenes for the actors to work with.) I had so many roles to cast, and several of

the actors I was considering for multiple parts, so I wanted to see them read at least once for each of these different characters. Before the callbacks, I listed the actors in groups and grouped them according to who I thought would work well together. I also noted which parts I wanted them to read for.

At the callbacks I gave each actor a personalized packet that included a copy of the character breakdown and copies of the two scenes I asked them to perform, which listed for them which character or characters they should be ready to read for. At the beginning of the two-hour session, I sat down with everyone and told them a little about myself, the project, and the characters. Then we did the two improv games, which, in addition to helping me get to know them, also helped them warm up and prepare for the readings. Then I called back groups of five at a time to have them perform each scene at least two times, sometimes as different characters.

The dynamics of auditions and callbacks are extremely different. At auditions the actor has had time to polish and perfect an audition monologue, and the director may or may not be familiar with the play it is from. But in callbacks, the actor no longer has the upper hand because he or she is reading unfamiliar lines and has to depend to some degree on the other actors in the callback group. I found that some actors are quicker to adapt to cold readings than others; some actors who had performed fantastic and engaging monologues were fumbling through the cold reading, whereas others took to the cold reading and the character they were playing quite naturally and swiftly. I had to bear in mind that a bad cold reading does not necessarily signify a lack of acting talent, and therefore not judge solely on their reading. I had to look for potential, rather than instantaneous success. I paid attention to nonverbal aspects, such as their engagement with the other actors – are they really listening, or are they just waiting to deliver their lines? Do they seem to be imagining the environment and reacting to it? As I watched them, I was looking

for the character relationships – does this group of people seem to mesh with one another? Is it believable that they hang out together? I was thinking about the group dynamics but also trying to assess them individually – does the part this actor is reading for 'fit' him or her? I was often surprised that the actor I had initially pegged for a character during the audition was not always the actor I found myself leaning towards for that role when I watched the callbacks.

Decision Time

I was not alone in making the casting decisions; my mom, Pam Melissovas-Thompson, and my close friend, Brooke Cosby, were also present at auditions and callbacks to lend opinions and viewpoints. Their perspectives were very helpful because, unlike me, they were not intimately familiar with the screenplay and therefore had no preconceived notions as to how the characters should behave, sound, or look. After the callbacks, the three of us went to Cracker Barrel for some dinner and decision-making. We discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each performer and by process of elimination narrowed down which actors should play which characters. Some roles were easier to cast than others; for example, there were only six men who came to callbacks, and I had six male roles to cast. Luckily they represented just the right variety I needed to cast each of the male roles appropriately, and we simply had to decide who was best for which role. The female roles were a bit harder to cast, and choosing who to eliminate was difficult. (Then actually having to *tell* them they were not cast was even harder!) The actress I cast as the lead did well working with the unfamiliar material in the callbacks and was very funny and spontaneous in the improv games. Based on what I had seen from her, I had confidence that she would be able to adapt to the various emotional states Sadie goes through in the film.

Casting Anomalies

There were two roles, however, that I was unable to cast at that time; these were the roles of the Sadie's Mom and nine-year-old brother Mark. I wanted to find an actual mother and son pair so that the parent-child relationship would be real and would show through in the film. I knew that it might be a challenge to find a mother and son acting duo who also would have the time to be involved in a film project. I decided to wait until rehearsals had begun to cast these roles so that I could audition the pairs alongside the main actress and cast them based on who had the best family chemistry with her. When the production got to this point, I was lucky to find two mother/son pairs through theatre connections, and I auditioned them both and then made my decision. Both of these characters are only in one scene, so the fact that they were not cast until much later in the process did not hinder their having enough rehearsal time.

Interestingly, there were two other actors I cast but whom I did not have parts for! Joey Davila and Jarred Wiehe are very talented at improvisational comedy, and I wanted showcase their talent by involving them in the film, even if it was just as unnamed walk-on characters who do or say something funny in the background of a scene. I had not yet written the film's climax scene at this point, and as it turned out I wound up writing these two actors in as the obnoxious slacker freshmen who bring Sadie back to her senses when she is ready to throw in the towel. I wrote only bare-bones dialogue for them, knowing that they could improv the rest of the scene much better than I could write it for them. These two actors had known each other since high school and had even been in a play together, so they easily established their chemistry and comedic banter on-screen.

Reflecting on Auditions

I got very lucky with the cast, because they have gone on to exceed my expectations and make their characters into fully realized people. The talent pool was big enough to find the people I needed, but for the next time I hold auditions, I would like to be able to reach a wider audience in advertising my casting call. Social networking is a powerful tool, and a single Facebook group has the potential to be seen by many more people than a single poster would. Certain informational websites for actors have a section for casting calls, and this is something I could use as well. Dr. Becker told me that nearly every city has a list-serv where casting announcements are posted. I intend to research how to post listings and how to make the most of the resources available for casting directors.

The audition process seemed to go by very quickly and I did not fully soak up the observations that I could have, had I been more experienced about the process. Professor Rice's advice was to talk to the actors and get to know them as people, not just as performers, and the next time I hold auditions I would like to also build in a mini "interview" portion (but not tell the actor it's an interview) and ask some standard questions to people auditioning, so I can interact with them more informally. Dr. Becker also advised me to watch how the actors interact with each other during auditions and callbacks: do they seem like team players? Do I detect any "diva" attitudes? Are they positive about the experience? Because I was so concerned about the smooth running of the auditions and about making the right decisions, I was not as sensitive to these observations as I would have liked. Next time, however, when I am more familiar with the logistics, I want to be attuned to everything going on during auditions and callbacks – not just the moments when actors are performing.

Having friends and advisors present during the auditions was extremely helpful, and in future auditions I plan to ask people to come to lend their opinions and give feedback on what they see. It is like having a test audience at the very beginning of the production. People who will be candid and tell me their responses to what they have seen is perhaps the most valuable resource for a casting director.

CHAPTER 4

The Player: Rehearsals

Discovery Process

The entire rehearsal process took about three weeks, and though it would have been great to have more time, we were able to squeeze everything in and fully explore each scene during that time period. I was amazed to learn that many films, even big-budget professional films, do not allow time in the schedule for rehearsal. Perhaps it is the influence of my theatre background, but I cannot imagine directing actors on the day of the shoot without having had time to collaborate with them through the discovery process of rehearsal.

In January, I called a meeting with the entire cast to do a table reading and to give everyone their scripts. The table reading was really helpful for getting everyone on the same page and for starting the cast bonding process, over doughnuts no less. It also gave me a chance to get to know them aside from the tense atmosphere of auditions and callbacks. They did a cold reading of the entire script, which was everyone's first time seeing the script in its entirety. As it was their first reading of the script, they of course read the lines exactly how they were written on the page. Hearing my script read aloud was really strange, to say the least. I thought my dialogue sounded dry and wordy, and I was worried that I had done a terrible job writing it! I

also knew that it was just a cold reading and that once the actors got into character, the dialogue would come to life and sound more natural, and that I could always make changes to the script if something absolutely was not working. At the end of the meeting I gave each one of them "actor homework": for example, to the actress playing Ruby I suggested that she think about what happens when (if ever) her character gets mad. I asked the actress playing Sadie to explore how she might balance the comedy with the serious emotions her character experiences. This homework served as a springboard for our conversations about characters at the following rehearsals.

During the first week we worked on getting to know characters – feeling them out and growing accustomed to each character's particular quirks and personality attributes. At the beginning of these first few rehearsals, I would take a few minutes to sit down and talk with the actors about their characters, asking them to describe the characters from their own perspective and what they see as the character's objectives. This gave me a chance to see if the actors, in their reading of the script, were getting from the characters what I had intended.

During the second week of rehearsal we experimented with blocking and character choices and worked on refining the significant, nuanced "moments" of comedy, conflict, and romance within the script. I tried to provide as many rehearsal props for the actors as I could, so that they could get used to how the scene would actually feel when it was shot. I also tried to give an accurate representation of the size and layout of the actual shooting locations when we would arrange furniture and props in the rehearsal rooms. For the car trouble scene, we even rehearsed in the parking lot of the rehearsal hall, using my mom's car as a prop!

During the third week we worked to set in stone all blocking and ad libbed lines, so that they could later be reproduced consistently for the various takes of the scenes. Since the cast was

made up of theatrically-trained actors, they were not used to the technical constraints on performances for film. When a scene is shot, things like blocking, hand gestures, facial expressions, and lines must be the same from take to take so that when the shots are edited together, there are no inconsistencies. (Otherwise, the scene will have the kinds of "flubs" that show up on the trivia pages of the Internet Movie Database.)

It worked out that on the Saturday of our last week of rehearsals, everyone was available for a massive rehearsal of the entire film. We ran the film, for the most part, straight through from the first scene to the last, breaking for pizza. I called this rehearsal so that everyone could get on the same page and see the film as a whole, and therefore gain a better sense of how their scenes function in the overall structure of the film. We had not had a rehearsal that had the entire cast in one room since the table reading, and I dare say the film had come a long way since then!

Developing a Directing Technique

I made it clear to everyone that it was alright if they ad libbed or substituted different wordings of the lines to make it feel more natural to them, as long as at a certain point they became consistent in what they said from run to run. I value performances that seem lifelike, over absolute adherence to the script, even if it is my own script. This is a major factor of my directing philosophy; to me, the characters are a joint product of the writer, actor, and director; as such, the characters' dialogue should be negotiable between these three partners (or two partners, in the case of a writer/director). This being said, there are a few lines for which I asked the actors to stay close to the script, especially when much of my revision had been on word choice! But there were many more times when the actors' body language or ad lib of lines contributed much more to the comedy of the scenes than I had originally conceived. For example, in the first scene,

the actress playing Melody added a line at the end when she tells Wright to get Sadie's purse. This moment, and Wright's reaction to her, was a perfect, funny note on which to end the scene. Professor Rice said that "Eighty or ninety percent of your job as the director is to cast the show well. So then you just let your actors do their thing" (Personal Interview, Nov. 17, 2010), and that is definitely the case with this cast.

I was relatively new to directing rehearsals, so I tried to draw on the kind of feedback and direction I have seen modeled by my professors in acting classes and by directors I have worked with on plays. In each rehearsal, I had a copy of the script with which to follow along, and while watching the actors do a run of a scene, I would scribble notes about the adjustments I wanted for the next run, about what was working well or working poorly, and about the kind of emotions and motivations that needed to become clearer in the performances. Sometimes I would watch a run and focus on only one actor, or on the specific interactions between two actors. I usually would not interrupt a run of a scene unless something major was not working, such as awkward blocking or skipped lines. Often I would walk around the actors as they were running the scene, sitting and standing, so that I could view them from different angles just as the camera would. After each run I would tell the actors my notes, but often I would preface the note with a question to see what impulse the actor was working from or to see the underlying choice they had made. Asking them frequent questions helped me stay in touch with each actor's development of their character and helped me gauge whether the actors understood how each moment fit into the overall flow and progression of the film. One thing I wish I had done better is, after giving a note, to pay closer attention to whether or not the actor applied the note in the way that I intended. Usually, I would watch the subsequent run poised to take down new notes about other things.

A Practical Handbook for the Actor outlines an acting technique developed by playwright/director David Mamet. Directing these guidelines toward actors, the authors state, "Don't censor or judge your impulses; do whatever occurs to you and don't worry about whether it is appropriate for the scene" (Bruder, Cohn, Olnek, Pollack, Previto, & Zigler 41). I tried to not censor the actors but create an environment where they could experiment. Instead I would give them clear directions about what needs to happen in a given scene and how the character's mood is changing based on circumstances. For example, I would remind the actress playing Sadie that in the scene with her professor, she has just had the confrontation with her boyfriend Grant, and is already emotionally upset before she hears the bad news about her article. Ultimately my goal was to manage the rehearsals so that there was ample space for exploration but that we also stayed on track for a smooth transition into the shooting.

Sanding the Rough Spots

During weeks one and two, we also had to troubleshoot certain parts of the dialogue that were awkward or did not work with the blocking or actions the actors and I had chosen. In the diner scene, I noticed a major problem. It is a dialogue-driven scene, and the actors would frequently ad lib with each other to make the dialogue more natural, but Hal was the only character who did not have someone to play off of. Wright and Ruby had created some non-verbal comedic moments, and Melody and Sadie chit-chatted with each other at times, but Hal seemed like the fifth wheel, and that was not at all how I intended his character to be. The character Renee is Hal's girlfriend, and I had written her in only two shorter scenes later in the film, envisioning her as a comedic contrast to Hal's nerdiness. My mom, who attended most of the rehearsals to give feedback and advice, suggested adding her to the diner scene, and this

wound up being the perfect solution to the problem. I worked on developing her dialogue further to show she is equally knowledgeable about computers and video gaming as Hal. Working her into the dialogue of the diner scene gave Hal a partner to work off of and brought much more humor into the scene as well.

When it was necessary, I would remind the actors that for film they have to dial down their performances – including volume level, facial expressions, and movement – so that they would be appropriate for the intimacy and confinement of the camera. Given their theatre backgrounds, the actors are used to abiding by certain cardinal rules, namely, to project their voices, to cheat out to (or turn to face) the audience, and to exaggerate their movements and expressions, so that they can be seen and heard even by the back row. In other cases, we had to work on bringing more presence to the performance. With Ian, the nine-year-old actor who plays Sadie's little brother, we had to work on diction and eye contact; while he was very enthusiastic about the process, he had a tendency to rush through his lines and to not project them very well. I had to coach him on the lines, sometimes modeling how the line needs to be said – something I did not usually like to do for the actors. We also worked on his interaction with Sadie and Mom by using his eye contact and glances to direct his focus. Working with a young actor was great for helping me learn how to communicate effectively with actors of different levels of experience – something that will help in future projects.

Reflecting on Rehearsals

I truly appreciate how well the cast functioned as a whole and how the five principle actors – who play Sadie, Melody, Wright, Ruby, and Hal – complemented each other in their natural personality characteristics. As I have recently been reviewing the footage and choosing

the best takes for the final edit, I appreciate their performances all the more. They fulfilled the goal that I had for the ensemble to function as a whole while expressing their own unique quirks.

If I could go back and do anything differently in the rehearsals, before each rehearsal period I would spend more time reflecting on the scene or scenes that we were going to cover and make notes about how that scene develops and extends the overall themes, plot, and subplots of the film. I spent a lot of time analyzing the film as a whole during my revisions of the screenplay, but I wish I had continued this analysis process more during the month of rehearsals, in light of collaboration with the actors. I plan to continue reading and learning about directing actors and guiding the rehearsal process because these skills are just as valuable and important as screenwriting or editing.

CHAPTER 5

Cinema Paradiso: Style and Design

Design Concept? What Design Concept?

Near the beginning of the rehearsal process, a point came when I realized I was still thinking like a writer, making endless minor revisions, and not yet visualizing like a director. I needed to let go of trying to perfect the text, tweaking plot and character elements, and fully transition into a position from which I could objectively analyze the screenplay and the style it was projecting.

January 7, 2011

My conception of the film doesn't have its own style or design concept yet, and I think the reason I don't yet have a grasp of it is that I've been focusing on the verbal – character and plot – elements of it. I spent a lot of time tweaking dialogue and thinking about many of the technical

elements. I need to make myself start focusing on the non-verbal aspects of the storytelling. I'm going to approach the script now as if I'm not the writer. I need to approach it objectively, as if it's a piece written by someone else, and find my own visual interpretation of the material. In order to do this I have to let go of the urge to keep trying to improve the script, and instead accept it for what it is and think like a designer and a director. My immediate goals for developing my visual concept are to come up with some concrete ideas about costuming, musical motifs, an overall editing style and shooting style. Do I want to keep things more naturalistic, or do I want to draw more attention to the cinematography and editing?

Answering the questions posed during my journaling session was a process that continued even through the editing stage. In fact, we did not choose any of the music until the editing stage. I was certain of the themes the screenplay represents, but I was unsure of how to represent these themes visually and aurally.

In my interview with Dr. Aaron Sanders, he said that in his practical experience, "The one thing I've learned, [film] is a visual landscape, and so you really have to think in terms of images. So in some ways, it's like poetry in that way, where you do have to think of images and how you string the images together to move the story along. So I think you have to see it that way." I did try to conceptualize in this way, but I was still not exactly sure how to put the ideas on paper or into practice.

January 5, 2011

I haven't just been thinking about story and dialogue but also thinking visually in terms of blocking, camera placement, and editing. I've begun some storyboarding. I'm not a good artist, so sometimes my effort to express what I envision is stunted by my limited drawing abilities. So I'm trying to also describe in the script the technical elements that I'm seeing.

Ultimately, the design concept grew out of a combination of my rudimentary visual ideas and Providence.

Costumes

To get the design process rolling, I created the costume memo (Appendix D) and sent it to the actors around the second week of rehearsals, giving them guidelines and asking them to bring in pieces to show me at rehearsals. I tried to also communicate my rationale for each costume, so that even if the actors did not have exactly what I wanted, they could bring in an alternative that was still in keeping with the same concept. I did not want the actors to have to purchase anything, nor did I have much room in the film's budget – my budget – to purchase special costumes. I did purchase and/or modify a few items and accessories that were absolutely essential for certain characters. For example, Ruby's shoes were a $5 pair of black flats that I decorated with glitter glue, beads, and press-on jewels. I also purchased black jackets, $5 each, for characters Melody, Wright, and Hal for the first scene, because Wright says of their plan to kidnap Sadie, "I was going for more of a *Mission Impossible* look, but somebody had to break protocol," referring to Ruby, who is wearing a black jacket with purple sparkly butterflies emblazoned across it. In this case, having the right costumes was necessary for the comedy of the moment. Costumes were some of the things I did plan, but the way that they came together with other visual elements was more a case of serendipity

Color Palate

After the actors and I decided what the final costumes would be, I noticed that between the costumes and the locations we would be shooting in, there were a lot of bright colors. Sadie

wears a bright magenta sweater, the walls in the diner scene location are bright yellow, the truck used for Grant's truck was red, the room used for Sadie's bedroom is bright blue, the outdoor scene would show green grass and sunny skies, the clinic location has a green reception desk, Dr. Lane's office is very colorful and eclectic, and the centerpiece of everything – Sadie's graduation robe – is decorated colorful jewels, candy, glitter, and ribbons. Many things, like the wall colors in locations, could not be planned for but worked nicely with this emerging design concept. Many of these things I cannot take credit for, because the locations were chosen based more on logistics than design, and it was a blessing that they all, for the most part, complemented the "bright colors" palate that was presenting itself. I rationalized that the vibrancy of the colors would reflect the vibrancy of the characters' personalities and would make Sadie's trials all the more ironic. During the editing we were able to accentuate the vibrancy of the colors by digitally increasing the saturation and brightness levels. We did this only slightly, because the more manipulation at that stage would begin to decrease video quality and would also give it a more stylized, non-natural look, which was not what I was aiming for.

Environments

A funny thing happened on the way to shoot the scene with the freshmen...it rained. As if we had prayed for rainy weather, the day we shot the sequence leading up to Sadie's decision to go to graduation was a dreary, gloomy day, which was absolutely perfect for setting the mood of these scenes. Because the earlier scenes had been shot on sunny days, it would seem as if the weather grew stormier with Sadie's worsening circumstances towards the end of the day. She delivers her monologue of despair in front of a plate glass window, and behind her is a grey, cloudy sky stretching out towards the horizon. Her bright, colorful dress seems to mock her self-

pitying mood. The freshmen's costumes are a flash-back to 1990s grunge, with dull plaid shirts and ripped jeans. They are the only characters in the film who wear drab colors, and it is fitting because of what they represent. Everything came together – the weather, the costumes, the ad lib – to create a climactic moment much better than I had envisioned it.

Reflecting on Design

Seeing the final film, I am so happy with how the visual elements came together to project a consistent feel and mood. The characters' costumes reflect their personalities, and the bright environmental colors lend an overall cheery optimistic tone to the film. Most of these elements are things I cannot take any credit for, because they were not the result of good planning on my part. Having a clear concept of the themes and tone I wanted to convey helped, but because of the serendipitous design aspects, I have gleaned things that I can mindfully apply to future films. Dr. Francavilla said that the idea of a film's style "can be broken down to visual elements, verbal elements, narrative elements, and performance elements. [...] Of those four elements, the verbal is probably the least important...the best filmmakers have a sense of how to convey the meaning and emotion of a scene with as little dialogue as possible" (Personal Interview, Apr. 5, 2011). With such a high premium on visual design, on my next project I want to put more planning into visual and cinematographic ideas, hopefully finding innovative ways to tell a story through the lens.

CHAPTER 6

The Producers: Logistics

Staying Organized

In the month leading up to the shoot, I was busy finalizing the visual elements, such as costuming, props, and locations. This also meant planning for how these elements would be realized and making the necessary phone calls/emails/Wal-mart trips to ensure we would have everything we needed. To keep track of all the design and technical elements of each scene, I made a production analysis (Appendix E). This is a type of spreadsheet that I learned how to create in a Stage Management class, which I took a few years ago as part of my Theatre minor. The purpose of a production analysis for a play is so that the stage manager can organize and quickly reference technical requirements for each scene; thus it helps the stage manager keep the director, actors, designers, and crew informed of what needs to happen throughout the play. For my purposes, the production analysis spreadsheet was very helpful in planning and prioritizing my ideas for the look and feel of the production. Later I based other organizational tools on it, such as the location list (Appendix F), costume memo (Appendix D), and rehearsal schedule (Appendix G). In my journal I expressed the stress of all this organizing:

February 1, 2011

I've been doing a lot of logistical planning for the shoot. The last three weeks have been really stressful because everything on the to-do list was converging – and the list is growing. We've been rehearsing since January 19th. In that time I've been compiling props, and thinking about costumes. Today I finished the costume memo and got it out to the actors, and I've asked them to bring in some pieces along my guidelines. I've also been choosing locations and seeing about gaining access.

Coordinating schedules was one of the most laborious tasks. After determining the actors' availability for the shooting period, determining the availability of locations was the next most important thing to do. To meet the film's schedule, I had to stay on top of things and always be thinking about the stages of the process that were ahead; things needed to be continuously in motion, because getting behind on one part would cause all the other parts to get off schedule. Travis Maruska, a film and TV writer/director, said that the schedule "is your life while you are shooting, but if you can devote yourself to it, it is an exciting hurricane in which you are the eye. Of course, seeing the finished result is the biggest perk, assuming you didn't totally screw up your project" (Email Interview, Apr. 5, 2011). Indeed, at times it felt like the process was moving of its own volition, and I was just along for the ride!

There were two special props that factor into the film...and they both have wheels. I wrote Grant as a southern boy with a big, loud truck; unfortunately the actor who plays Grant drives a white sedan. However, he was able to borrow his roommate's truck for the car chase scene. (Contrary to how it looks in the film, the truck and the car were only driven at 15 miles per hour, tops, during the chase sequence.) The other special prop was a wheelchair for the hospital scene. For this, I contacted the CSU Theatre Department, thinking that they might have a prop wheelchair we could use, and they did. There were also some special costumes we needed, namely, the graduation robes for Sadie and the extras. Sadie's robe was donated – sacrificed – by a friend, Brooke Cosby, and the others were temporarily lent to the film by other friends. The PhD robe that Dr. Lane wears in the film was lent to us by CSU English professor Dr. Angela Green. The first rule of independent filmmaking is that you have to become comfortable asking people for favors.

Equipment

All of the video and audio equipment we used was borrowed from CSU's Digital and Media Production Services. One of the perennial questions that film students ask other film students is, "What are you shooting with?" Here are my answers to this question... I wanted a camera that had manual focus and controls over visual settings so that I could manipulate these settings for more acute artistic control. Also, the better the video looks when it is captured, in terms of color and brightness, the less that has to be done to it in post-production, and any post-production manipulation of video will reduce its quality to some degree. The primary camera was a Canon GL2 and the secondary camera was a Sony Handycam 1000, though most scenes were shot using only the primary camera. Audio was recorded separately on a Zoom digital recorder, which captures audio as Mp3 or Wav files which later can by synced with the video. In my previous films, I had gotten burned by audio problems because I used professional-quality microphones connected to consumer-quality cameras, which caused audio interference that had to be digitally minimized as much as possible in post. Recording audio separately eliminated this problem, and we were fortunate to have access to a high-quality recording device that did not require any corrective measures when we reached the editing.

Another perennial question film students ask other film students is, "What are you editing on?" I have long been a user of the non-linear editing (NLE) program Sony Vegas Platinum, which is the pro-sumer (semi-professional, semi-consumer) version of Sony Vegas Studio Pro. I collaborated with Steve Roach, a professional editor and Media Specialist at CSU's Digital and Media Production Services, for editing all of my films, including *Pomp and Circumstances*, and Vegas is his NLE of choice. I did pre-editing work with my version of Vegas at home, and then we used the full professional version to edit the actual film. Vegas offers extensive controls over

video and audio in a user-friendly format. Working with the pro-sumer version while watching Steve work with the professional version has been a great learning experience for me.

Legal Matters

I wanted to make sure I modeled professional filmmakers in every detail, including the legal minutia. I researched release forms for performers and adapted the examples I found into a wording that would work for this production. The commonality between all of the release examples I found was that they need to provide for using the performance in any medium (not just the film at hand), even those yet to be invented, and that they need to clarify whether there is any pay involved in return for the performance. I needed a standard performance release (Appendix H), but also a minor release for the one child in the film, as well as a location release for the locations we used. If there had been a camera person other than myself, I would have needed to get them to sign a videographer release form as well. I had each person involved and extra sign a release form, and I will keep these in my records.

Budget

The list of things we got for free is, luckily, much longer than the list of things we paid for in the film. The actors worked for free, the filming crew consisted of myself and my mom, the editor is an employee of CSU, the equipment belongs to CSU, most of the costumes were the actors' own belongings, we did not need to pay for permits to use any locations, we used CSU classrooms for rehearsal halls, music was either written and produced by the editor or was royalty-free music found online, and most props either belonged to me or the actors or were made for the film. The few items that did have a cost were video tapes, batteries, and a few

costume pieces and props; a future cost will be DVDs and packaging materials, in addition to film festival entry fees. I applied for and received a grant of $255 from CSU's Undergraduate Research and Experimental Learning grant program, which will go towards these costs.

Were this not a student film, it would not have nearly as many of these luxuries. In that case, personnel and equipment would be the two major costs, not to mention the other costs for using locations, renting rehearsal halls, gaining rights to use copyrighted music, and traveling to shoot in non-local locations or building special sets. Working with a microscopic budget, however, on this and my other two films has taught me a lot about doing things inexpensively. An important thing to bear in mind as a writer/director is to think about budgetary and logistical concerns during the screenwriting, but to not let it hem in creativity and invention. A time and money-saving technique used by any professional film crew is to shoot B-roll (which is any footage that does not have actors in it) separately from the principle shooting with the actors; this is what a "second unit" does on a professional film. College theatre departments and community theatres are great places to look for actors who are willing to do film work for free in order to build their résumés. Another lesson is to simply ask for things – ask to use a location, ask friends to lend props – but most importantly, be a paragon of responsibility with anything that is borrowed. And always send a thank you note.

Reflecting on Logistics

Paperwork is a necessary evil in filmmaking. Creating tools – spreadsheets, lists, directories – that allowed me to quickly reference and record information helped me keep track of ideas and keep the production on schedule. On my next film project, I will have the benefit of having templates already made for organizing logistical details. A binder with sections for all the

different production areas with all of these tools was the single most important thing I had with me at all rehearsals, shoots, and editing meetings. The twin skills of planning and organizing are two of the most essential abilities that a filmmaker can work on developing.

CHAPTER 7

La Nuit Américaine: Shooting

Storyboarding

So often have I heard it said of great directors that they have the entire film in their heads and can mentally watch it before the first frame is ever shot. This is the kind of foresight that can only be developed over the course of a career. But there are many effective steps I can take to help the shoots go as well or better than I intend. Storyboarding and making a shot list, even if they are rough, are essential for having an efficient shoot. Addressing independent filmmakers, director Robert Rodriguez says that:

> before shooting anything, you should really watch your movie in your head. Play it in you head, watching it while imagining the actors and angles you've chosen. [...] See what cuts you would make if you were editing it together. Would you stay on one actor the whole time, or would you cut mid-scene to something else? [...] List each shot you need to make the scene work. (205)

Before shooting began, I intended to storyboard everything, but it was a time-consuming process made even worse by my lack of drawing skills (Appendix I). (Dr. Becker later suggested I take a drawing class in the future to improve my skills, so that I am more comfortable with the storyboarding process.) So I abandoned my efforts to storyboard all the shots, until I experienced

the first few shoots and saw just how much more complicated it was to get coverage of all the action without a concrete plan on paper first.

Scheduling

All of the shooting was done in the same amount of time that rehearsals had taken – three weeks. Scheduling the shoots in advance was of most importance because I had to make sure there were absolutely no time conflicts with either the cast or the location reservations. On top of class and work schedules for fourteen people, I also had to keep in mind that one actor was in rehearsals for a Theatre Department production, another had practice for Orientation Team, and another (who was in the majority of the scenes) was cast in a scene for a Directing class right before we began shooting. There were other concerns that shaped our shooting schedule, chiefly, what time of day we needed to shoot outdoor scenes, the amount of traffic on campus, and the fact that all the shooting needed to be done before spring break began (March 5). We had a complete schedule on paper (see Appendix J) before we began shooting, though I had to make some adjustments to it as we went along.

The first few shoots took longer than I expected: I scheduled three hours for the diner scene, and it took nearly four; similarly I expected the outdoor/car scene to take three hours, and it wound up taking three and a half. These were two of the first scenes we shot, and after that I was better at estimating how much time it would take to shoot things, judging by the amount of dialogue and the variety of shots needed. During these shoots, I thought about how much more complicated and time-consuming they would be if we were using lighting equipment. Professional films would re-light for each different camera set-up and have to ensure that, just

like booms and crew members, none of it was visible in the shots. Thinking about this helped me understand and appreciate why films often take so long to shoot.

Monday Morning Quarterback

After the first weekend of shoots went by very hectically, I saw the necessity of the storyboarding process that I had previously abandoned. During these initial shoots, I had to make judgments on the fly about shot framing and composition, and not having the cinematography mapped out on paper made this much harder. I misjudged my ability to take what I had envisioned in my head and make the camera, actors, and locations conform to that vision, while dealing with the hiccups and unexpected problems of location shooting...and it was all location shooting. I found it helpful to do storyboards and sometimes even to make a list of the individual camera set-ups and angles I would need for a given scene.

We shot the diner scene on the second day of shooting, and getting this shoot finished right away was helpful because I learned some things about planning later shoots. This is a dialogue-driven scene, and for the most part, the characters are all seated around a table for the entire scene. Not much action happens, but the dialogue is essential exposition for the events that follow. I wanted the composition of shots to help reflect the contrasting senses of community and isolation that Sadie feels throughout the film. In the opening scene and the diner scene, I tried to compose the shots with two or more people in the frame, so that no one was ever visually "alone," since it is a film about community. Because I did not want this scene to drag on for lack of visual interest, we made sure to shoot it from several different camera positions. We shot wide, high-angle shots, eye-level close-ups, and everything else in between. My mistake was in shooting the wide shots first and the close-ups later, near the end of the four-hour shoot. Because

we were running short on time, when we finally got to the close-ups and two-shots, we had to rush through them and only get one or two takes of each character from that angle. At that point in the shoot, the actors were getting tired and hungry, and their energy was not as high as it had been at the beginning. This is something I kept in mind when planning the rest of the shoots; we tried to plan it so that the parts of the scenes that required the most focus and energy from the actors were the parts we shot first, and the wide shots and cutaways of props were shot later.

The hospital scene was an especially rushed shoot because we only had one hour to shoot an entire scene. The nurses at the CSU Health Clinic allowed us to use their waiting room as our hospital location, but we had to schedule the shoot towards the end of their business hours, specifically from 5 – 6pm because this was one of their less busy times. We had to be finished promptly by 6pm because we did not want to make the nurse on duty stay late. Under these filming conditions, storyboarding was an absolute necessity. I sketched out what kind of shot I wanted for each part or line in the scene, and we shot it one part at a time, moving the camera accordingly. This meant a lot of stop and go for the actors, and I commend them for their ability to stay in the moment and not lose focus. Any situation in which there is a time crunch will almost by definition be stressful, but there are some things that can be done to help the shoot go smoothly. I phoned the actors about fifteen minutes before we were set to start filming to ensure that everyone knew where the meeting point was and that everyone would be on time. Similarly, it was also helpful to go by the Health Clinic a few hours in advance to make sure the nurses remembered that we were coming. For every shoot I asked the actors to come already in costume so that we could shoot right away. Double checking that we had all the props we needed and that all the logistics were in order freed me to focus on getting the shots that we needed in a timely manner.

Some scenes were complicated to shoot for other reasons, such as the scenes that take place inside cars. The orthodox way to shoot a scene in a car would be to use a car window mount or hood mount, which can cost upwards of $200 for a secure, good-quality one. So we did it the guerilla-filmmaking way: for shooting the driver, I sat in the passenger seat and held the camera steady as far into the front corner of the dash as I could, in order to get a wide enough angle on the driver. My mom sat in the back holding the audio recorder on a pole, and the other actor was also in the back to give his/her cue lines. For shooting a character who was supposed to be riding in the front passenger seat, my mom had a fantastic idea, which was to seat that person in the back, directly behind the passenger seat, and I held the camera in the seat behind the driver. The actor then looked beside the camera, as if she was looking at the driver. Another trick was to use my mom's SUV as the interior of Sadie's car because it had more space and allowed me to get a wider angle. We used the actress's actual car, a small sedan, for the exteriors. To get motion shots of the car chase, I held the camera out of the trunk and passenger windows while my mom drove in front or behind the two cars in the chase.

While it was much more straightforward to shoot, the scene in the professor's office was always a little awkward and stilted in rehearsals, perhaps because the scene actually begins in the middle of a tense situation, and in the middle of a conversation. My mom had an idea to have the actors improv the beginning of the scene – to start it as if Sadie and Melody had just arrived at the professor's office, and then to work their way into the written dialogue. This was a big help, and something I wish we had done in rehearsals. Once they did that a few times, the dialogue felt more natural and the emotions driving the scene more appropriate. Their improvised dialogue was very good, but I chose not to use it in the final edit because I still wanted the effect of the audience jumping into the scene in the middle of the conversation.

Multiple Hats

Thinking simultaneously like a director, a cinematographer, and an editor is one of the most challenging necessities of a shoot. To do this effectively one has to be open to suggestions and new ideas and must be quick to adapt to unexpected situations. In each shot I had to be aware of the actors' blocking, the camera's movement in response to that blocking, the secondary camera when we had it, and the location of the boom mic and boom operator. Just as Robert Rodriguez said, I also had to have at least a rough idea of editing, because sometimes I would only want a few lines to be shot from a certain angle. Rather than shoot the entire scene at that angle, I would shoot only the part I wanted. The danger of this lies in potentially missing coverage of something or not having as many options once we are in the editing booth. Not only did I need to pay attention to technical elements but also to the performances; this is something I wish I had learned to do better. I suppose I was trusting that they had refined their performances in rehearsals and would consistently perform at that level in the shoots, but I need to keep a sharper eye on performances so I can better give directions on the spot. I also needed to judge how many takes we should shoot of a certain part. On our first day of shooting, when we shot the scene in Wright's dorm, I asked the actors to do take after take (twenty-two total) of the first part of the scene; when I reviewed the footage to choose shots, I realized that this many takes was overkill, though some of the initial takes were repeated due to a faulty tripod head. Many of the takes were essentially the same, and in hind sight I am just thankful that the actors had not lost their energy by the time we got to filming the latter part of the scene.

Reflecting on the Shoots

Shooting the graduation scene was perhaps the most stressful because there were so many facets to this complex scene – many props, borrowed costumes, and freshly-recruited extras. Plus there was an unexpected disruption that taught me the meaning of the expression "Sometimes it's better to ask forgiveness than to ask permission." In the middle of the Lumpkin Gym lobby, the space I had reserved weeks before for filming this scene, there was a ten-foot tall, tri-paneled, aluminum framed vinyl CSU sign, which was emblazoned with the school logo and various photographs of the campus. I did what any self-respecting independent filmmaker would do: I moved it out of my shot. Actors began to arrive and we were busy setting out props, but then an employee of the Lumpkin Gym came looking for who was in charge. He informed me that the sign we had moved had been placed there for an event the following night and that it cost $10,000 and was not to be handled by anyone. He said that his boss had found out that we had moved the sign and was very concerned. We went into his office, and he asked for my student ID number and said that he would give it to his boss. I assured him that my mom and I were the only two people who had handled the sign and that we used extreme care in moving it. I also assured him that we would carefully move it back into its exact original location once the filming was finished. Without much apparent faith in us, he let us proceed with our shooting but gave me the warning that I would be held liable if anything happened to the sign. We did indeed move the sign back when we were finished, though this time with much more trepidation, knowing exactly the cost if the flimsy aluminum frame broke. I took a photograph of it so that I would have proof that it was put back – and not broken – at the time when we left. The next day I wrote a diplomatic email to the man's boss and explained the situation, in hopes of smoothing things over. He replied, saying that all is well. The moral of the story is that, when things

interfere with your carefully-laid plans, do not compromise on what is best for the film; instead, improvise, take responsibility, and apologize if necessary.

CHAPTER 8

8 ½ : Editing

Collaboration and Workflow

I chose to work on the editing with Steve Roach; he and I have a history of collaborating on films before, and his creative and technical input has been invaluable on these projects. The entire film was constructed while we both sat at his computer, I with my planning notes, and he at the keyboard and mouse. This "co-editing" was a multi-layered process, beginning with splicing the raw video content, then moving on to tightening up the edits, then working with sound and music, and finally applying any necessary color-correction. I would first tell him which video and audio takes I had chosen and would give him an idea of the structure of the scene. He would then gather these clips and place them in order. This was the more tedious aspect of the editing, but luckily that step did not take very long. The creative part was when we tried different structural ideas, added music and sounds, and experimented with visual effects. Often, during the editing work, I would describe my vision of a certain sequence, and he would take the idea and improve upon it, creating something much better than what I had envisioned.

Steve and I had to pioneer our own work flow for editing the video and audio, given the types of media we were working with and the fact that I would be doing the planning (or pre-editing) work at home and the actual editing with him. There were over fifteen hours of footage to comb through, which I downloaded to my own computer, and Steve did likewise. My mom devised a spreadsheet for annotating the content of each tape, so that I could easily see what parts

of dialogue are covered by what kind of angles (Appendix K). The next pre-editing step was to go through each scene line by line, comparing the takes shot by shot, and decide which take was best and to assemble a working list of shots. The easiest way to do this was to note the time code of each shot and write it directly into the script, parallel to the dialogue and scene descriptions. My notes started out somewhat disorderly, but as we refined our system it became easier to streamline the process (Appendix L).

A professional camera would embed a time code in the video, so that when it is played back on a computer, each frame corresponds to a specific time code which can be easily referenced by the editing staff, even on different computers. The cameras we were using did not do this, so we had to figure out our own time code. The basis of any editing program is the timeline – the area which displays the video and audio tracks. Running along this timeline are incremental time markers, starting at 00:00. I took the raw video from each tape and placed it into this timeline, lining the beginning of the video up with the 00:00 mark, and this gave me a consistent reference, just like actual time code, for each frame of each tape (Appendix M). In other words, it was just like stretching a tape measure out alongside the video tape. Steve did the same thing in his editing program, which gave us a common reference. I could tell him, "I want the shot that starts at 6 minutes 45 seconds, camera B, tape #6," and within seconds he would be able to locate that clip and place it into the film. We did a similar thing for referencing the audio, but because it was recorded on a separate device (and therefore the video clips were not necessarily the same length as the audio clips), we had to take the added step of syncing up the audio and video clips. Taking all these pre-editing steps meant that assembling the scenes with Steve went smoothly and we had more time to spend on the creative aspects, such as music.

Music and Sound Effects

The music in *Pomp and Circumstances* is a motley collection of styles and genres, but they all have one thing in common: they are all royalty-free. Steve created a remix of the famous "Pomp and Circumstance March" by Edward Elgar. This was an essential piece to have in the film, for obvious reasons, but rather than the stuffy traditional version of it, I wanted a contemporary, upbeat rendition, and Steve had the know-how, resources, and creativity to create such a piece. We also used one of Steve's original songs, "Pity Party," in another part of the film, and using a synthesizer he created the low tones heard during the beginning of scene one. Steve is a musician as well as an editor, which makes him a great asset to the team.

The other music came from two different online sources. Kevin MacLeod at Incompetech.com creates hundreds of high-quality instrumental songs using a combination of actual instruments and digitally simulated instruments, and he generously makes them available for free download on his website. (He is much-adored by independent filmmakers, and there are even tribute videos to him on YouTube.) This resource met our musical needs for many parts of the film, without costing anything. Another online resource is a band called Hussalonia who, surprisingly enough, release one hundred percent of their music into the public domain and make it available to download for free on their website, asking only that people who use it in their projects credit the band. Hussalonia has an alternative/acoustic rock sound, driven by elaborate lyrics. Having professional-sounding songs, especially those with lyrics (like those by Hussalonia and by Steve Roach) add production value to the film because a viewer would think we had to pay royalties to use them. Another thing that adds production value to a film overall is a consistent musical theme or motif, such as a score, but that is something I feel we did not quite achieve in this film. Some pieces are contemporary-sounding pop/rock songs that seem to go

with each other, and other pieces sound like they are from a film score. Given the no-cost resources we were working with, I think we did okay, but on future films I aim to have a portion of the budget set aside for music, because sound is such a huge contributing factor to the over style and production value of a film.

Reflecting on Editing

Working alongside Steve helped me sharpen the ability to verbally communicate my ideas. It also helped me let go of my tendency to micro-manage, because I was working with someone whose creative ideas I trust and who works in a similar way as I do. I assume that every editor-director relationship is different and that their respective responsibilities overlap in different ways, but personally, on future productions I would like to involve the editor earlier in the process, even during the formative pre-production stage. An editor's perspective is a special one, and like that of a cinematographer, actor, or musician, will help a director envision the film through a different lens.

CHAPTER 9

For Your Consideration: Promotion and Distribution

Marketing

After so many people have put so much time into a film, telling the world about it is fun and rewarding, not to mention an essential part of filmmaking as a business. Speaking of his career as a producer, Kirk Roos says, "I love creative vision, conceptualizing and marketing. A lot of producing is knowing how an audience might respond, knowing what investors want, and what actors and directors would react to…if you can bring that together, it's tough. So having a

vision to pitch, being the person that says "Here's why you should love this and believe in it"...that's fun" (Email Interview, Apr. 7, 2011). A creative and persistent marketing campaign is key; filmmaker Michael Dean writes, "Think of new ways to get your word out. I had a friend who made a rubber stamp and stamped his URL on all the money that passed through his hand. I stenciled my URL on my car. Also, be sure to keep a few copies of your movie and press kit in your car. You never know when you might need them" (362). To generate a buzz around the movie before it was even shot, I started a blog: www.pompandcircumstancesfilm.blogspot.com. On it I have posted photos from rehearsals and shoots, cast bios and headshots, and clips from the film. I have also created a Facebook page for the film and have updated it with similar content. The only way to keep people coming back to the blog and the page is to constantly add new content, and I have tried to post something about every week. After updating it, I email the link to everyone in my address book, but I include a courtesy disclaimer that if anyone prefers not to receive the updates, I can take their address off the list.

These online sources of information about the film has been fairly successful so far in getting the word out to people and maintaining that buzz, but the buzz needs to go beyond just my personal and college contacts. The ultimate reason for this is to attract people to the premiere. A friend of mine is currently working on a trailer for the film, which will be extremely useful for promoting the screening because it can be put on the blog, Youtube, and Facebook, and a link to it can be either emailed or posted virtually anywhere online. I have printed postcard-sized flyers with the film's logo, premier date, and website that I can put on bulletin boards, coffee shop tables, and student lounges all over Columbus. I am building a list of marketing ideas and compiling a press kit; this would include a synopsis, photos, info on screenings, contact info, and any other electronic content that might be of use to anyone helping promote the film.

The Festival Circuit

There are film festivals of all calibers throughout the United States – from the South by Southwest Festival in Austin, to the F-Stop Film Festival at the University of West Georgia. Some festivals, such as F-Stop and the Jay Sanders Film Festival at Auburn University, are limited to short films (i.e., under 15 minutes). In searching for festivals, I am looking for those that will, first of all, allow a film of this length, and also those which have student categories. Sometimes it is difficult to determine from a conference website what kinds of films they are looking for in terms of budget and production quality. While filmmakers can certainly do a lot on a small budget, a film like *Pomp and Circumstances* would likely not get into a festival looking for larger budget films. But if a festival has a student category, or seems to attract films of all budget levels, we have a better chance of getting in, and the entry fees will be better spent.

Some of the festivals that I plan to enter *Pomp and Circumstances* into are the Atlanta Underground Film Festival, the Red Rock Film Festival, the Austin Film Conference and Festival, the Ashland Independent Film Festival, and the Myrtle Beach Film Festival. I have selected these in particular because they feature professional films as well as student films and therefore offer the opportunity to network with people already working within the film industry and to have the film noticed by professionals. The Red Rock, Austin, and Ashland Film Festivals made the list of "25 Film Festivals Worth the Fee" in *Movie Maker* magazine. Film festivals such as these also offer seminars and panel discussions about various issues of film production and business; attending any of these festivals, I would be able to take advantage of these additional learning opportunities. Having all of these opportunities and experiences while still a student would give me a competitive edge in the future, perhaps even putting me a step ahead of many film school graduates.

If the film is selected for any of these events, it would also draw attention to CSU and its range of creative and academic opportunities for students. One conference possibility is the National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR), a spring interdisciplinary conference in Washington, DC; having the film shown and discussed here would do great credit to CSU and its reputation for undergraduate research. Film festivals usually only accept films that have been made in the last two years, so this means that I could try submitting the film for another round of festivals if it is unsuccessful this year.

I fear this film may be at a slight disadvantage due to its length; because of its 40-minute run time, it is difficult to classify, as most film festivals define short films as 45 minutes or less, and feature films as more than 45 minutes. Most short films are very short, perhaps around 10 minutes, and they tell succinct, crisp stories with taut plots and efficient character development. A feature film, however, like those we go to see at theatres, are usually around an hour and a half in length and take more time to methodically develop their plots and characters. *Pomp and Circumstances* is technically the length of a short film, but it is more akin to a feature in its story development. I have always found it challenging to write short stories or screenplays; I prefer to write longer stories with more room for development. Looking back at *Pomp and Circumstances*, I see how my tendency to write longer material merged with the logistical need to make a short film for the purposes of this project. This may make it harder to market because I am left with a film that feels like a feature, but moves like a short. I hope the festivals will like it.

Potential Profit

Working as a professional filmmaker means knowing how to turn a film into a business. For independent filmmakers, this is often done by selling a film to a distributor for straight-to-

video release, as Robert Rodriguez did with his first film *El Mariachi*. He intended to sell it to the Mexican home video market, and in so doing, his film was noticed by people who could take it much further than that. The main goal of my project was experiential learning; however, even for a film of this kind (i.e., a short student film) there is the opportunity for publicity and a small profit. After giving complimentary copies to all the actors and people involved with the production, I would like to sell inexpensive copies of the film on the internet and in the CSU bookstore, if possible. Michael Dean advises fellow filmmakers that they should "register your movie on www.imdb.com and worldfilm.about.com. I did. It's free, and I've actually sold copies of the movie because people saw it on one of those sites" (354). While I am sure to sell more copies to my relatives than to any "fans" of the film, I will explore these options mainly as an experiment in commercial filmmaking. Any profit made from the DVD can be used to help send the film to more film festivals. Thinking and learning about the business side has shown me how varied a skill-set a filmmaker needs to develop.

CHAPTER 10

Hollywood Ending: Final Thoughts

I have come to a few major conclusions about filmmaking and specifically directing during this experience.

1. Being a director is not so much about wearing multiple hats, but about wearing multiple hats simultaneously – and often looking silly for it.

2. Because it is a rule of life that you reap what you sow, you should plan as much as you can, as early as you can, in as much detail as you can. No matter how many things you anticipate, there will always be things that you don't.

3. You have to be confident in your film project...so confident that you can convince other people that they should be confident in your film as well and the amazing, profitable outcome it's going to have. It might get them to do things for free.

4. Be aware of the resources you already have at your own disposal. This can range from making costumes and props at home to using free local access air time to run your trailer.

5. The most important resource for an independent filmmaker is the ability (and willingness) to learn how to do something yourself; this saves you from having to pay/hire/beg/bribe someone to do it for you.

I have also come to recognize some major gaps in my knowledge and skill-set. For one thing, I am accustomed to writing academic essays under a time crunch, but writing creatively with a looming deadline is particularly stress-inducing. The nature of this project required me to generate ideas and realize them in the script over a five-month time span, which worked out in this case and I was fairly happy with the final script. (My constant urge to revise showed that there were some things I would have liked to spend more time on.) I would like to spend the next couple of years during graduate school developing my existing screenplay ideas and turning my fledgling treatments and script fragments into finished screenplays. This is so that, the next time I have an opportunity to direct an original film, I will already have screenplays to work with that I have put much time and thought into.

On the technical side of things, I need to learn more about lighting and sound. For *Pomp and Circumstances* we used the natural lighting found in the locations, and this met our needs for the most part. Reading about lighting techniques is one thing, but experimenting with lights and cameras, before doing any actual shooting, will help me learn how to quickly and effectively use lighting to improve scenes. In addition to lighting's practical function, it is also a key part of a

film's mood and style; a working knowledge of how to manipulate lighting will be essential for my future projects. I also need to learn about sound recording and editing. In the future I may invest in a Zoom audio recorder because it worked so well for this film. Steve informed me that many professional films use over-dubbing, a process in which the film is shot without any audio, and the actors dub voice-overs in a studio afterwards, watching the video to match up their lip-sync. Many of these things I will learn in film school, but because technology is constantly changing, it is also important to independently study filmmaking techniques so that I am better equipped to handle the constant technical innovations of the film industry.

Directing Philosophy

Two years ago I worked as an assistant stage manager on a play in the CSU Theatre Department. During one of our rehearsals, the two lead actresses were performing a scene, and the director stopped them and said to one of the actresses, "I don't believe you." I have always remembered that because it suggested to me that directing at its core is the ability to distinguish reality from rubbish. It entails sitting back and watching what happens with the eyes of an audience member, and then stepping in and steering things in the direction of honesty. It is easy as a director to get pulled in many different directions and temporarily lose sight of the film's overall purpose, but a truly great director knows how to deal with the minutia while simultaneously keeping a firm grasp of their working vision for the film. When something is either not in line with this vision or does not improve the vision, the director has to be the one to say, "I don't believe you."

All of that being said, I must qualify it with some interpersonal insights I have gained, both through directing and through my work as a Writing Center tutor. Tutors are intermediaries

between students and professors, in that we help students improve their writing, but we do not teach them how to write, per se. Applying this to filmmaking, I feel this is an appropriate way to approach directing as well. I am not there to dictate how I want things done, but instead to communicate ideas to my collaborators – specialists in their respective creative fields – who then bring ideas into fruition and, in the process, improve upon them. Low budget and independent filmmaking often requires a director to take more of an authoritative role because the director has to take on more responsibilities, but I believe this does not mean being authoritarian. Be diplomatic in all things and always let people know you appreciate them and their work. And like I said, always send thank you notes.

End Credits

In lieu of a traditional acknowledgements page at the beginning, it is only fitting that I close with final credits to recognize and thank all of the people who have played a part in the creation of *Pomp and Circumstances*. First, I would like to thank my parents, Pam and LaVaughn Thompson, for their love and *literal* support on this film – they helped me revise the script and advised me during the production process. My Dad practically wrote Melody and Sadie's "auto expert" dialogue, and my Mom tirelessly served as a sound-person and camera-person in most of the shoots. They are both broadcasting professionals whom I eagerly consulted because their experience and knowledge has always been invaluable to me in every single film project I've worked on.

Becky Becker has been an amazing collaborator and advisor for my thesis. She has brainstormed with me, steered me through unfamiliar casting territory, generated comedy ideas, and done much more throughout this adventure. It was an honor and privilege to work with her.

Steven Roach – an accomplished editor and phenomenal musician – deserves much recognition for his work on this film. He always goes above and beyond the call of duty, producing creative, high-quality editing and musical work, while being a genuinely fun person to work alongside.

Each cast-member – Elise Miller, Garrett Gray, Kellan Sampson, Nanisha Martinez, Shea Barnett, Danny Blanda, Jarred Wiehe, Sam Gant, Rachael Williams, Donna Dooley, Ian Dooley, Joey Davila, Amanda Roberts, and DB Woolbright – had a great attitude and worked so hard to meet the acting challenges posed by this film. They instilled in me great confidence in their talents, and they made me laugh continuously by adding so many brilliant touches to the material and their performances. All of the extras who volunteered their time to benefit the film also deserve a huge thanks for their contributions.

Several other individuals contributed in other ways to the film's success. Jon Haney and Garry Cook with Digital and Media Production Services gave time, talent, and equipment to this project. Bret Muller with CSU Dining Services very generously allowed our cast and crew to use the Cougar Food Court on a Saturday, outside of regular business hours, so that we could have the place to ourselves to shoot the diner scene. Rebecca Tew allowed us to use the CSU Health Center as the hospital backdrop in the film, letting us take over their normally quiet space! I owe a thank you to Melody Hyde with the Lumpkin Gym for helping us with scheduling the shoot there. The CSU Writing Center staff deserves thanks for their encouragement, enthusiasm, and willingness to put up with my cluttering up our break-room with props and equipment for the entire month of February.

Brooke Cosby generously gave her graduation robe for us destroy for the sake of "art." Elicia McRae, Nikki Britt, and Dr. Angela Green also lent us their graduation robes and regalia

(though theirs did not end up with glitter glue on them). Thank you also to Tim McGraw and Kim Garcia with the CSU Theatre Department for letting us borrow props and costume pieces. I owe a big thank you to Dr. Shamim Khan and the Undergraduate Research and Experimental Learning Grant committee for aiding this film project financially. I would also like to thank Professor Haley Rice, Dr. Aaron Sanders, Dr. Joseph Francavilla, Akela Cooper, Kirk Roos, and Travis Maruska for allowing me to interview them and reap the benefits of their years and years of research and hard work. It is no wonder to me that a film's final credits are so long, because even a low-budget student film could not have been made were it not for the generosity and creativity of more than fifty people.

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Appendix A: Character Breakdown

Sadie Lucas – Sadie is a homebody who loves to travel – a statement that pretty much sums her up. A part of her is rooted in her community, her family, and her friends, but another part of her wants to travel the world and discover new cultures while working in her chosen field of anthropology. She is very connected with her circle of friends and loves each of them very much; this group of people clicks together as a cohesive whole, complementing each other's strengths and weaknesses. Sadie is going to graduate school in New Zealand the fall after she graduates. Knowing she has to leave the people she loves in order to pursue the career and place she loves is her internal conflict. Such a move will take her away from everything she knows and prevent her from going home very often. She has spent the past few months leading up to graduation by having as many 'last hurrahs' with her friends as she can.

Her mother is an obstetrics doctor, her father is a pilot, and she has a little brother who is 8 years old. She has a boyfriend, Grant, whom she has been dating for a little over a year. She works as a research assistant for a professor, Dr. Lane, in her university's Anthropology Department; this professor is a mentor and friend. Outside of school, Sadie works at a travel agency. In her work there she sees people leave home all the time, and in her research with Professor Lane, she learns about cultures other than her own. She is interested in archeology, and loves the idea of digging in the dirt to discover artifacts from the past that have been rooted in place for centuries.

Melody – Melody is Sadie's BFF. She's a library rat. She's smart, composed, and organized. Like Sadie, she is an anthropology major, but she's changed her major seven times in three years, and as a result of all the different classes she's taken, she knows a little bit about everything. Though she wants to be an anthropologist, she loves school very much, and everyone knows that she's going to be a researcher and professor...of something. She can seem a little aloof at times, but that's only because she's interested in everything, always investigating something. She shares many of Sadie's interests, which gave them an instant bond, but beyond that they also are like sisters to one another. Sadie has only a brother, and Melody is an only child, so they fill a sister role for each other. She and Sadie are both currently working in a research group together with Dr. Lane, and Sadie has taken her part of the work a step further and is trying to publish an undergraduate article in a journal.

Ruby – Bubbly and sweet, this friend is a breath of fresh air whenever the group starts talking politics or stuffy academics. She hates any kind of arguing, but instead likes to keep the group focused on what they all have in common – which, granted, is not much, but at the end of the day they are all loyal to one another. She is the person who has personalized stationary, color-coordinated accessories, and always remembers everyone's birthdays and anniversaries, because she has them all written down in her pink zebra-print planner. She mothers the others and takes care of them, but she is not 'motherly' in the sense that she seems older than the others; instead, she is youthful, playful, and spontaneous. Her teeny-tiny bag always matches her shoes, and she's frequently seen spritzing perfume on herself or lathering her hands with some scented lotion. Like Mary Poppins's carpet bag, her purse holds much more than is physically possible. She always puts her best foot forwards and helps other people do the same. A running gag is that she's always primping in some way.

Dr. Lane – Everything a good professor should be. She cares about her students as individuals and wants to personally help each one succeed. Her teaching philosophy is that jobs are temporary, but students are permanent. Her office door is always open, and when people walk inside it, they find the decor as eccentric as she is. She was never a flower child herself, but she does maintain some of the hippie ideals she was brought up with. She's street-wise and book-smart and doesn't think a person has to be just one or the other. She has a special bond with Sadie and sees a little something of her young self in her. She is adventurous and pioneering, having led many study abroad and research trips all over the world. She encouraged Sadie to apply for graduate school in New Zealand after seeing how much she loved the culture and the landscape on a research trip. She is now supervising Sadie and Melody, as well as a few other students, in the research group, and is supervising Sadie's article and is the liaison between her and the journal.

Christi – A home-wrecker with heart. She is dating Grant, Sadie's boyfriend, but Sadie's existence is unbeknownst to her. Once she realizes that the guy she's dating already has a girlfriend, she is just as mad at him as Sadie is. Externally, she is everything Sadie is not – if Sadie has fair skin, Christi is tanned; if Sadie is blonde, Christi is brunette; if Sadie is tall, Christi is short. Her physical appearance shows that Grant was looking for someone completely different from Sadie. We don't see her for long, but she quickly shows us she is spunky, loud, and doesn't take crap from anyone.

Hal's Girlfriend (later to be named Renee) – A cross between a goddess and an America's Next Top Model contestant.

Mom – Sadie's mom is an obstetrics doctor and gets the most joy from bringing a new life into the world. Though we only see her in one scene in the film, we see that she's optimistic, cheerful, and she loves her kids more than anything. She carries out every task with the professional efficiency and focus.

Wright – Sarcasm served up daily. Always quick with a comeback, Wright has something smart to say about everything and everyone. Most people would brush him off as being too abrasive and untactful, but his friends know that he has a 'special' way of communicating and a special brand of humor, which only certain people are lucky enough to understand. He's brilliant, loves literature and film, but is a harsh critic of it. He says what he thinks, does not mince words, and would give anything to help out his friends.

Hale (Hal) – Hale is an uber-techie computer genius, which has earned him the moniker HAL from his besties. If someone can't think of a song title, or needs to know the rest of an obscure Nelson Mandela quote, he's on it, faster than a speeding megabyte. He has an iPod, iTouch, iPad, and iPhone, all up-to-date with the latest upgrades. But ask him if he's a Mac or a PC? He's both. He likes to help his friends, and he does it by meeting their technological needs. A visual comedic gag is that every different time we see Hal, he is wearing a different t-shirt, each with some 'nerdy' logo, like Star Wars, algebra puns, etc.

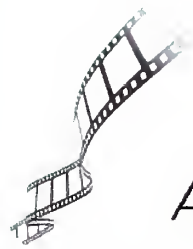
Grant – Grant is Sadie's boyfriend of a little over a year. He goes to the same university, studying business, but is a year below her. He is completely a product of his environment. He

loves the South, where he is has grown up, and gets great enjoyment out of the outdoor locales in that region. He likes camping, fishing, and driving around in his big truck with its huge tires. He speaks with a bit of a Southern accent – it's not over the top or corny, but enough to identify where he is from. On the surface they do have a lot in common, but Grant prefers putting down roots in the area where he is from, and is much better than Sadie at taking time off from work. These are major points of difference in their relationship, and he feels she is not spending enough time with him or making their relationship a high enough priority. Reacting to these problems in the worst possible way, he starts dating another girl – Christi. Yes, he's a cheater, but he's a little more complex than that. And no, it's not excusable, but in his mind at least, he has his reasons.

Little Brother (later to be named Mark) – Um...he means well... At eight years old, he's young enough to still look up to Sadie and think she's cool, but old enough to be capable of much mischief. His motives are a little ambiguous at times, such as in the film when he turns her graduation robe into a "work of art."

Kiwi Cutie – Jaw-droppingly gorgeous. This guy looks like he just parachuted out of an airplane full of male models headed to Los Angeles to shoot "The Bachelorette." He doesn't say much, but when he does, he has a beautiful Kiwi (New Zealand) accent. He is manning the SOS table at graduation, and helps Sadie when she realizes she has forgotten something. He's sweet and attentive, and provides just the bit of distraction Sadie needs after all her day's woes.

Appendix B: Audition Poster



FILM AUDITIONS

Pomp and Circumstances

A new film by Danielle Melissovas Thompson

Sadie Lucas is having the worst day ever.
No, like, epically. Her college graduation is at 7pm tonight, and from the time she wakes up she has to deal with being kidnapped, friends with food poisoning, car trouble, a cheating boyfriend, a computer crash, and a saboteur little brother… all in time to walk across the stage.
Will she make it?

Female Characters:

Sadie, 22, homebody who loves to travel
Melody, 21, professional student
Ruby, 21, exuberant fashionista, the glue to the group
Christi, 21, a homewrecker with heart

Male Characters:

Wright, 22, dishes out sarcasm with a double dose of wit
Hale, 21, PC or Mac? Both.
Grant, 21, a soon-to-be ex boyfriend
Hottie, 24, drop-dead gorgeous, with an accent to boot

Shooting in January and February, depending on actors' availability

AUDITIONS	CALLBACKS
Tuesday, November 30 & Wednesday, December 1	**Saturday, December 4**
6:00pm in Arsenal 120	**2:00pm in Arsenal 120**
Prepare a comedic monologue	**Be prepared to do a cold reading & improv games**

EMAIL thompson_danielle1@colstate.edu TO SCHEDULE AN AUDITION TIME.

Appendix C: Audition Form

POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCES
Audition Form

Name: _____

Email: _____

Phone: (_____) _____- _____

Hair Color: _____ Height: _____ Eye Color:_____

Major & Track: _____

Classification (Circle one): Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Other: _____

Do you have a valid driver's license and a car? _____

Would you accept any role? _____Yes _____No

Do you have any film performance and/ or technical experience? _____

_____

_____

If not, please list your most relevant theatre experience:_____

_____

_____

_____

(over)

The rehearsal and shooting schedule will largely depend on the actors' availability; however, rehearsals will begin in mid to late January, and shooting will take place in February. All shoots will be in Columbus, Georgia.

Please list your **January and February** schedule (including weekends): **BE SPECIFIC**

Conflicts: Please list ALL potential conflicts with the rehearsal/shooting schedules as listed above. Any conflicts not listed on this form may not be honored:

Commitment Statement: I understand that auditioning indicates my full commitment to the film with no conflicts with rehearsals or shoots unless I indicated differently on my audition form. Any conflicts, other than the ones listed on this sheet, many not be honored.

_____ _____

Your Signature Date

Appendix D: Costume Memo

Pomp & Circumstances

COSTUME MEMO

To Everyone:

The film is set in December (for a December graduation), so dress for winter time. This is convenient since we're shooting in February! Layers are great because the film takes place all in a matter of hours, but if you have a jacket or hat that you can take off in some scenes, it will help vary your look. I've given guidelines for each character below, so put something together that's close to this from your closet and bring it to rehearsal. I don't want anyone to have to buy anything for this, so if there's some specific item you don't already have, let me know and we'll make an alternative choice. For some characters I've included pictures of what I specifically have in mind, for others it's a little more open-ended.

THE WOMEN

SADIE / ELISE

My costuming idea for Sadie is to have her progress from smaller, 'meeker' patterns to larger, bolder patterns and colors. As she comes into her own and grows more sure of herself, her clothing reflects this change.

Scene 1 – Pajamas and hair up in a pony tail. Doesn't have to be traditional pajamas – could be pajama pants and a t-shirt. Choose a softer color, and if there's a pattern, nothing loud or attention-grabbing.

Scenes 2 through 10 – Dress in layers, so that you can take off a jacket or a sweater or something to make you look a little different in the later scenes. Perhaps a hoodie or a jacket (we can change the lines in the first scene to make it consistent with whatever you wear). Jeans and a cute top, something with some color, but again, not too loud. When you take the jacket/hoodie off, it will reveal more of the color, which will lend itself to the color 'development' that I mentioned above. For shoes, perhaps sneakers or flats – something comfortable that you don't mind wearing for a long time.

Scene 10 – Same as above for the first part of the scene, but later on you wear a bathrobe and have your hair in curlers.

Scenes 11 through 14 – A nice dress that you would wear under the graduation robe. It needs to have one bold detail, such as a bright color contrast, or a bold design – something along those lines. Perhaps the main color of the dress is a bright, bold color, like teal or pink! Something very 'look at me' but not over-the-top. You also need heels that would be appropriate with the dress.

MELODY / SHEA

Melody's costume should look very preppy with clean lines.

Scenes 1 through 7 – She's the 'professional' student, so perhaps dark trouser pants with a preppy top, like a polo shirt or something similar. A few cute accessories would keep the ensemble looking young and fresh.

Scenes 13 through 14 – She has changed clothes and is now more dressed up for the ceremony. Stick with the same style, but in something slightly more formal.

RUBY / KELLAN

Cute is the name of the game. Ruby is a fashionista, so I'm seeing a feminine and colorful outfit, perhaps animal prints and/or bright colors and accessories, nails painted. I have a leopard-print scarf that you could incorporate.

Scenes 1 through 4 & 8 –She needs something with some sparkle – this is an important part of the first scene. We see all these shadowy figures moving into Sadie's room, but then it cuts to a close-up of something Ruby is wearing, and it is sparkling in the dim light. Bring in your

dressiest shoes; alternatively I'm thinking of getting a pair of flats for you and decorating them with sparkly baubles and sequins – something Ruby would probably do!

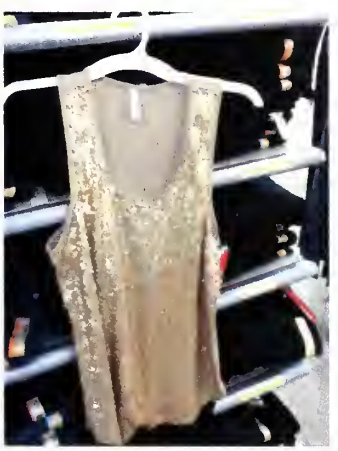
Scenes 13 through 14 – She has changed into something dressier for the graduation ceremony. Keep with the colorful/feminine idea, but slightly more dressed up.

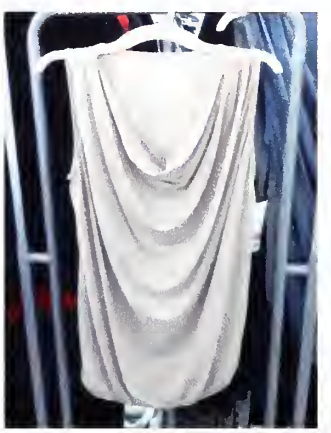
GIRLFRIEND/NANISHA

I'm seeing something simple, elegant, and goddess-like for her. Also, anything that draws attention to your height.

Scene 2 and 9 – A drapey top in a neutral color. The idea is to draw attention to her natural beauty without being overly 'dressed up'. Skinny jeans if you have them, because this will help accentuate your height. And the highest pair of heels you own.

Scene 13 & 14 – A simple, elegant dress, still keeping in the earth tones palate. Paired it with a few choice jewelry pieces to add some color, and again, a high pair of heels.





DR. LANE / RACHAEL

This character plays by her own rules, so her attire should be unique. A funky dress would be great for this character, perhaps with a jacket or scarf, or some other accessory. Maybe even something that looks retro or vintage. Then accessorize with some funky jewelry and shoes. Funky is the name of the game!

CHRISTI / AMANDA

Christi should be trendy, as if she keeps up with whatever is current. Trendy *almost* to the point of being tacky. She's the kind of girl who dresses like whatever is on the most recent cover of

Teen Vogue. Perhaps some leggings and legwarmers, with a tunic top with a punch of color (since that look is trendy right now). If you want to be super-trendy, wear jeggings if you have them! It doesn't even need to be things that are *currently* trendy – perhaps she's a bit of a mishmash of trends past *and* present.

MOM / DONNA

Since she works in a maternity ward, I'm going to see if the Theatre costume department has any scrubs or anything like that. I will get back to you on this and let you know if there's any change. I think her hair would be pulled back and makeup would be simple, with a necklace or earrings to accessorize.

THE MEN

WRIGHT / GARRETT

Wright's costume should be dark and moody, without being gloomy. So wear something with color, but a darker shade of that color (like dark blue or dark purple). Have I seen you wearing a black and purple argyle sweater? That would be great.

Scene 1 - Wright is the one going for the 'Mission Impossible' look, so he's obviously wearing something dark. This could be black pants and a dark coat or jacket, with a lighter colored shirt or sweater underneath. Or a sweater that has different colors, like I mentioned above. Also, he would look cool with a fedora that he wears in some scenes.

Scenes 2 through 4, and 8 – You can take off the jacket in these scenes to vary your look.

Scene 13 – 14 – Keep with the same idea, but a little more dressed up. Perhaps change to dress pants and dress shoes and a different sweater.

HAL / SAM

Hal is the cool techie guy. I think he looks like an average dude but has this massive amount of knowledge! His costume should have some color to punch it up, maybe one dominant color like blue or green.

Scenes 1-4 & 9 – Jeans or dark pants with a shirt that has some color. Top it off with a light jacket, something like a members-only jacket.

Scene 13-14 – Hal really cleans up nice in these scenes! For the graduation scenes at the end, go with dress pants, shoes and a button-down shirt, and some funky tie. Like one with pi calculated out or something! I'll look around online for something like this. In the mean time, bring in a tie to try.

GRANT / DB

Scene 5 – He should look like he's from some established, southern family. Nice jeans and shoes, with a button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled up. Also, do you have a hat that's really

well-worn and broken in? It can't have any brand or sports logos on it though. This might be a good accessory, and it's a prop that you could take off in a certain part of the scene.

Scene 14 – I think Grant has had such a bad day that he hasn't even gone home to change. Instead we'll make some changes to the existing costume: he'll have a black eye, shirt will be kinda wrinkly, etc.

MARK / IAN

Mark is very outgoing, so perhaps a brightly colored shirt or sweater would work for him, and jeans or khakis.

KIWI GUY / DANNY

He should be dressy-casual, considering the occasion. Perhaps dark jeans, a button-down white shirt, and a blazer. Simple and clean. For this character, I have two necklace options: one is made with unpolished brown and white stones, and the other is a shark's tooth on a brown cord.

FRESHMAN GUYS / JOEY & JARRED

Scene 2 & 13 – Think 90s grungy, punk, slacker kid. Backwards hat, sloppy clothes, you know the look. The clothes reflect who the characters are: they don't put much effort into school, and

they don't put much effort into getting dressed either. A cross between Curt Cobain and the two bullies from *Hocus Pocus*. Run with that!

Appendix E: Production Analysis

POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCES PRODUCTION ANALYSIS					
SCENE 1: SADIE'S ROOM					
LOCATION	**CAST**	**COSTUMES**	**PROPS**	**LIGHTING**	**SOUND**
Danielle's room	Sadie Wright Hal Melody Ruby	Pajamas Black jeans Darth Vader shirt Black blazer Black glittery shirt	Door knob Sweater Pants Cell phone 1 Cell phone 2 Scrunchie Bandana School banners Scarf Hoodie	Shadows Lamp Early sun	Midi of "P&C" Dramatic music

SCENE 2: DINER					
LOCATION	**CAST**	**COSTUMES**	**PROPS**	**LIGHTING**	**SOUND**
CSU Grill	Sadie Wright Hal Melody Ruby Waitress Extras	 2nd t-shirt same same same Day clothes	Fruit Grits Milkshakes Toast Grilled cheese Chicken fingers Coffees Newspaper Menus waitress apron coffee pot	Even, warm	low restaurant foley

SCENE 3: HOSPITAL					
LOCATION	**CAST**	**COSTUMES**	**PROPS**	**LIGHTING**	**SOUND**
St. Francis (for est. shot) Cunningham Ctr	Sadie Ruby Wright Hal Melody Extras	same same same 3rd t-shirt no blazer day clothes	Wheel chair paper bag knee/neck braces clipboards w/ pens papers	Fluorescent, sterile	Siren (post)

SCENE 4: WAITING ROOM					
LOCATION	**CAST**	**COSTUMES**	**PROPS**	**LIGHTING**	**SOUND**
upstairs sitting room in Cunningham	Sadie Wright Hal Ruby Melody Extras	same same 4th t-shirt same same altered	knee/neck braces magazines Cheese advert		

SCENE 5: CAR TROUBLE					
LOCATION	**CAST**	**COSTUMES**	**PROPS**	**LIGHTING**	**SOUND**
neighborhood	Melody Sadie Christi Grant	same same	jug of coolant Sadie's car Grant's car funnel pressure gauge	outdoor	

SCENE 6: PROFESSOR'S OFFICE					
LOCATION	**CAST**	**COSTUMES**	**PROPS**	**LIGHTING**	**SOUND**
Prof William's office	Sadie Melody Dr. Lane	same same funky			

SCENE 7: COMPUTER LAB					
LOCATION	**CAST**	**COSTUMES**	**PROPS**	**LIGHTING**	**SOUND**
Writing Center	Sadie Melody Dr. Lane Hal	same same same 5th t-shirt	Swivel chair papers pens		

SCENE 8: WRIGHT'S DORM					
LOCATION	**CAST**	**COSTUMES**	**PROPS**	**LIGHTING**	**SOUND**
Garrett's dorm	Wright Ruby	same same	alka-seltzer toast pepto-bismal water pizza box juice		

SCENE 9: HAL'S CAVE					
LOCATION	**CAST**	**COSTUMES**	**PROPS**	**LIGHTING**	**SOUND**
Steve's office	Hal Hal's Girlfriend	6th tee skinny jeans, top	Laptop cell phone	screens colored bulb	video game electornic hum

SCENE 10: SADIE'S HOUSE					
LOCATION	**CAST**	**COSTUMES**	**PROPS**	**LIGHTING**	**SOUND**
Danielle's house	Sadie Mom Mark	same / bathrobe Nurse's uniform jeans, sweater	grad cake wrapped gift box candy mortarboard glitter robe child's grad robe		

SCENE 11: PARKING LOT					
LOCATION	**CAST**	**COSTUMES**	**PROPS**	**LIGHTING**	**SOUND**
car in parking lot	Sadie	dress, heels, jewelry	Sadie's car glitter robe candy mortarboard		background music - quirky and repetitive

SCENE 12: BREAK ROOM					
LOCATION	**CAST**	**COSTUMES**	**PROPS**	**LIGHTING**	**SOUND**
Howard Hall break room	Sadie	same	glitter robe candy mortarboard change	fluorescent flicker fluores	fluorescent buzz

SCENE 13: LOUNGE					
LOCATION	**CAST**	**COSTUMES**	**PROPS**	**LIGHTING**	**SOUND**
4th floor lounge in CCT	Sadie Freshman 1 Freshman 2 Melody Hal Hal's Girlfriend Ruby Wright	same, grad regalia jeans, tee jeans, tee, hat ? 7th tee, blazer same ? ?	glitter robe candy mortarboard back pack messenger bag beat-up notebook gadgets		

SCENE 14: CEREMONY					
LOCATION	**CAST**	**COSTUMES**	**PROPS**	**LIGHTING**	**SOUND**
Lobby of Lumpkin Gym	Sadie	robe/regalia	table		
	Melody		bobby pins		
	Wright		water bottles		
	Ruby		tissues		
	Hal		table cloth		
	Hal's Girlfriend		platters		
	Grant		cheese cubes		
	Dr. Lane		crackers		
	Hottie		several grad robes		
	Extras	some in caps/gowns			

Appendix F: Location List

Pomp and Circumstances

LOCATIONS

SCENE #	LOCATION	CONTACT	DATES/TIMES AVAILABLE
Scene 1	Danielle's House	N/A	Anytime
Scene 2	CSU Grille	Brett Muller 706-505-4669	Weekends anytime or weekdays before 8am
Scene 3	CSU Health Clinic	Rebecca Tew 706-568-2039	Mondays or Wednesdays 5 – 6pm
Scene 4	CSU Health Clinic	Same	Same
Scene 5	CSU Campus	N/A	Weekend preferable b/c less traffic
Scene 6	Rachael's Office	Rachael Williams	Depends on Rachael's availability
Scene 7	Arsenal Computer Lab	N/A	Anytime
Scene 8	Garrett's Dorm	Garrett Gray	Depends on Garrett's availability
Scene 9	Steven's Office	Steven Roach	Weekday late afternoon
Scene 10	Danielle's House	N/A	Anytime
Scene 11	CSU Parking Lot	N/A	Anytime, but needs to be during a high-traffic time of day
Scene 12	Woodall Hall vending machines	N/A	Anytime
Scene 13	CCT Lounge	N/A	Anytime
Scene 14	Lumpkin Gym lobby	Melody Hyde 706-568-2445	Thursday, February 24th, night

Appendix G: Rehearsal Schedule

Pomp & Circumstances

REHEARSAL SCHEDULE – WEEK 1

*Please arrive at rehearsal at least 5 minutes before the scheduled start time.

Wednesday, January 19			
Studio A	9:00pm – 10:00pm	Elise, Joey, Jarred	Scene 13
Thursday, January 20			
Studio A	7:45pm – 8:30pm	Kellan, Garrett	Scene 8
Studio B	8:30pm – 10:00pm	Kellan, Garrett, Elise, Shea, Sam	Scenes 1, 2, 3, 4
Friday, January 21			
Studio B	5:30pm – 7:00pm	Elise, Shea, Kellan, Sam, Garrett	Scenes, 1, 2
Arsenal 120	7:00pm – 8:00pm	Elise, Shea, Sam, Rachael	Scenes 6, 7
Arsenal 120	8:00pm – 8:45pm	Elise, Danny	Scene 14
Saturday, January 22			
Studio B (then A)	1:00pm – 4:00pm	Elise, Shea, Kellan, Garrett, Sam	Scenes 1, 2, 3, 4
Sunday, January 23			
TBA	8:00pm – 9:30pm	Elise, Shea, Amanda, DB	Scene 5

The rest of the schedule is forthcoming, dependent on actors' schedules for the rest of January.

Appendix H: Performance Release

Release Form

I hereby agree to appear in the film currently called *Pomp and Circumstances*, and I hereby irrevocably grant Danielle M. Thompson, and her licensees, agents, successors and assigns, the right (but not the obligation), in perpetuity throughout the world, in all media, now or hereafter known, to use (in any manner she deems appropriate, and without limitation) in and in connection with the film, by whatever means exhibited, advertised, my appearance in the film, still photographs of me, recordings of my voice taken or made of me by it, and my actual or fictitious name. I will not be paid or otherwise reimbursed for said use.

On my own behalf, and on behalf of my heirs, next of kin, executors, administrators, successors and assigns, I hereby release Danielle M Thompson, her agents, licensees, successors and assigns, from any and all claims, liabilities and damages arising out of the rights granted hereunder, or the exercise thereof.

I authorize Danielle M. Thompson to use my image in perpetuity throughout the known universe in any mediums extant or later invented. She may also choose to not use these photos as needed.

Date:_____

Signature:_____

Printed Name:_____

Name for Screen Credit (if different):_____

Street Address: _____

City:_____ State:_____ Zip

e-mail address: _____

Telephone Number:_____

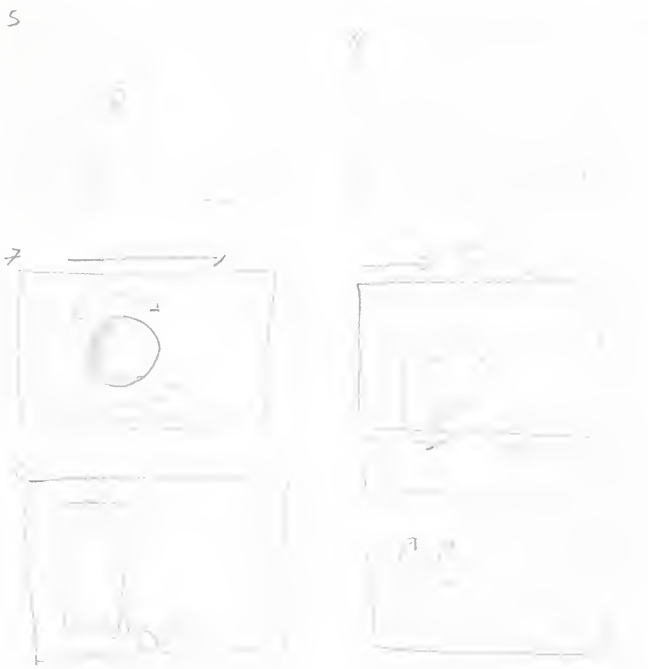
_____

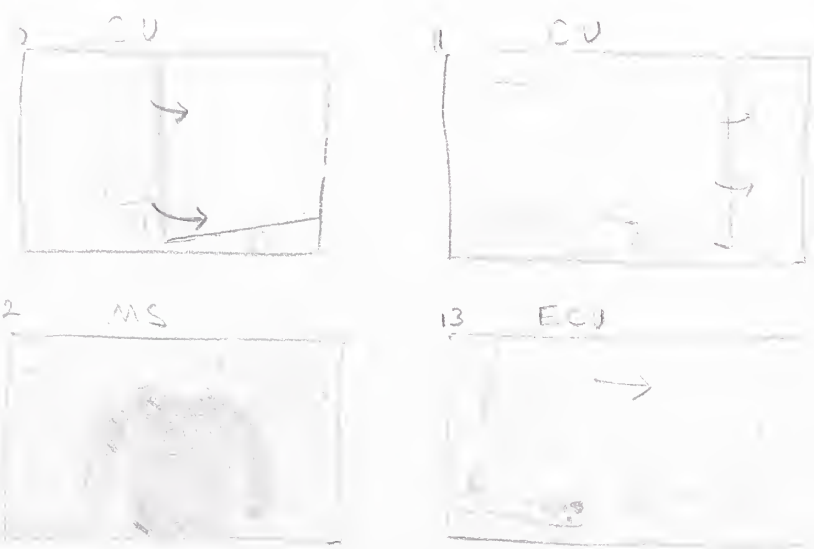
Additional consent to use music sung or played by me, as agreed:

Limitations:

Initial:_____

Appendix I: Storyboards of Scene 1





Appendix J: Shooting Schedule

Pomp & Circumstances

SHOOTING SCHEDULE

Friday, February 11

Shoot Scene 8	Garrett, Kellan (morning)	Garrett's Dorm

Saturday, February 12

Shoot Scene 2	Elise, Shea, Garrett, Kellan, Sam, Nanisha, Extras (daytime)	CSU Grille

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Sunday, February 13

Shoot Scene 5	Elise, DB, Amanda, Shea **(DB & Elise with cars)** (afternoon)	Campus roads

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Monday, February 14

Tuesday, February 15

Wednesday, February 16

Thursday, February 17

Friday, February 18

Saturday, February 19

Sunday, February 20

Monday, February 21

Shoot Scenes 3 & 4	Elise, Shea, Kellan, Sam, Garrett (5:00pm)	Tucker Hall Health Center

Tuesday, February 22

Shoot Scene 6	Rachael, Shea, Elise (6:00pm)	Rachael's Office
Shoot Scene 7	Rachael, Shea, Elise, Sam (7:30pm)	Arsenal Computer Lab

Wednesday, February 23

Thursday, February 24

Shoot Scene 14	Elise, Kellan, Nanisha, Garrett, Sam, Shea, Rachael, Amanda, DB, Danny (7:00 – 9:00pm)	Lumpkin (main campus)

Friday, February 25

Shoot Scene 9	Sam, Nanisha (5:00pm)	Library

Saturday, February 26

Sunday, February 27

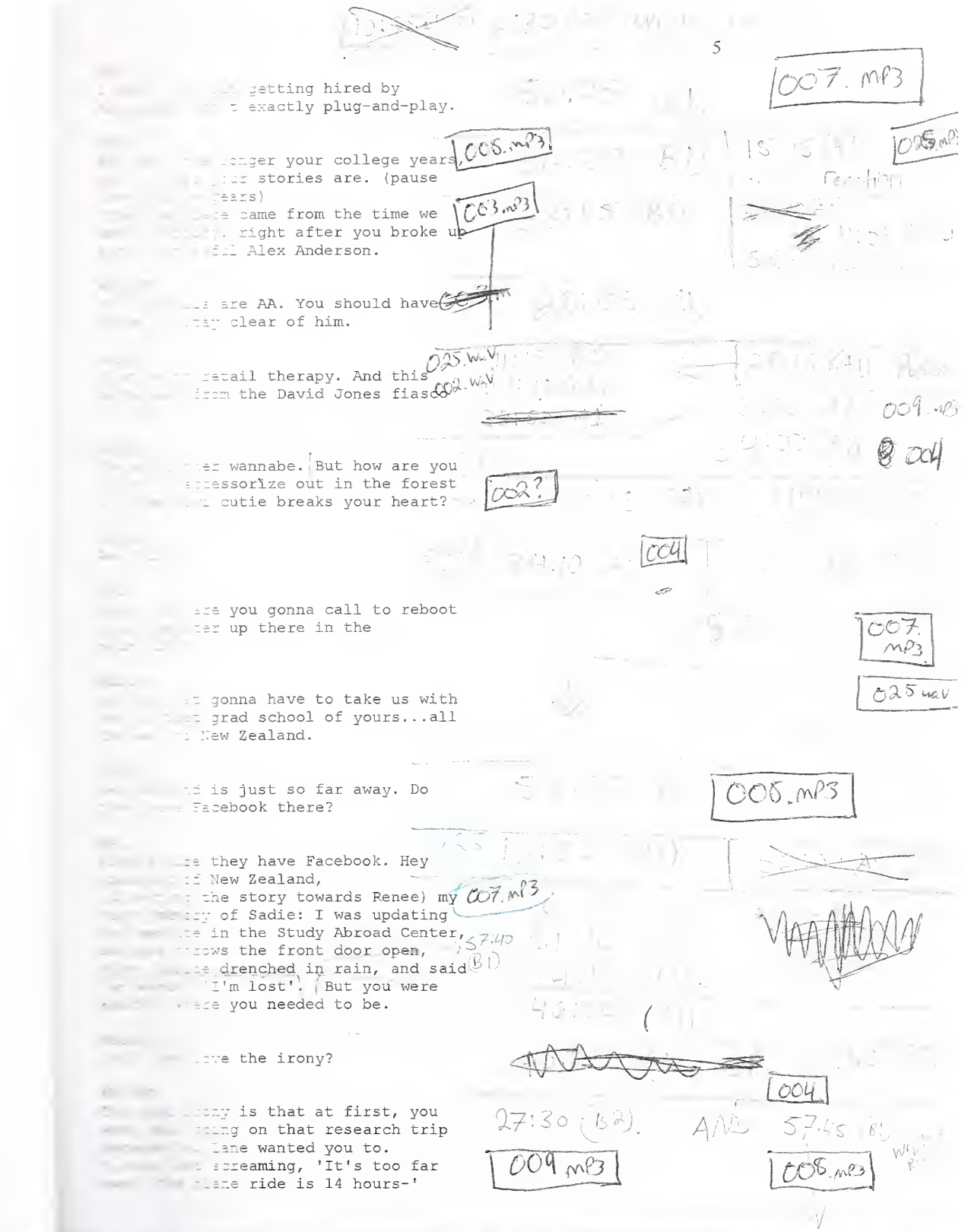
Shoot Scene 10	Elise, Donna, Ian (daytime)	Danielle's House
Shoot Scene 1	Elise, Sam, Garrett, Shea, Kellan (Time TBA)	Danielle's House

Monday, February 28

Shoot Scene 11	Elise **(with car)** (late afternoon)	Parking lot behind library
Shoot Scene 12	Elise (late afternoon)	Jordan Hall break room
Shoot Scene 13	Elise, Kellan, Nanisha, Garrett, Sam, Shea, Joey, Jarred (late afternoon)	CCT (main campus)

SCENE: 8 (Wright's Dof 1)			DATE: Feb 11		
WIDE	:00 - :20 "Do you think... hear you"	0:20 - 1:00 (Start)- hear you"	1:00 - 1:35 (Start)... hear you"	1:40 - 2:10 (Start)... hear you"	2:15 - 2:45 (start)... 'hear you
	2:45 - 3:15 (Start)... hear you"	3:15 - 3:45 (Start)... "hear you"	4:05 - 4:40 (Start)... "hear you"	4:50 - 5:20 (start)... hear you"	15:20 - 15:50 (Start)... (Stare)
	16:00 - 16:35 (Start)... (Stare)	16:45 - 17:20 (Start)... (Stare)	30:30 - 31:00 (hesitate)... clothes"	31:15 - 31:45 (hesitate)... clothes"	
C.U. Ruby	13:40 - 13:55 (Start)... doing it"	13:55 - 14:10 (Start)... asPrin	14:15 - 14:35 (Start)... asPrin	17:40 - 17:55 Stare	18:30 - 18:45 (Stare)
	19:00 - 19:50 [doll] Kitchen (Partial)	19:55 - 21:00 Kitchen (no A's)	21:[illegible] - 22:35 Kitchen (no A's)	22:45 - 23:55 Kitchen (no A's)	24:15 - 24:30 Sink
	31:50 - 32:15 (hesitate)... clothes"	32:25 - 32:50 (hesitate)... clothes"	32:55 - 33:10 (hesitate) clothes"		
C.U. Wright	5:50 - 6:00 messed up "maybe... (texting)	6:10 - 6:50 "maybe... (texting)	10:10 - 10:40 Starts on Ruby "maybe... (texting)	10:45 - 11:20 "maybe...	11:30 - 12:05 "maybe... (texting)
	12:25 - 12:50 (Start)... asPrin	12:50 - 13:10 (Start)... asPrin	13:15 - 13:40 (Start)... asPrin diner	26:00 - 26:40 CU at end (hesitate). clothes"	29:30 - 30:00 (hesitate)... clothes"
	30:00 - 30:20 (hesitate)... clothes"				
2 Shots	7:15 - 7:50 (Start)... hear you"	8:00 - 8:35 (Start)... hear you"	9:00 - 9:10 (Start)... hear you"	9:10 - 9:40 (Start)... hear you"	26:40 - 27:05 Presets AS
	27:05 - 27:30 (Presets AS)	27:30 - 27:45 Stays on Ruby (Presets AS)	27:45 - 28:00 (Presets AS)	33:40 - 34:05 [2 hrs] "Yes."	34:40 - 35:10 [3 hrs] "Yes"
Cutaways	12:05 - 12:25 Garret is Phone	14:50 - 15:00 Rat's nest	23:55 - 24:15 [2 hrs] Ruby's Phone	24:30 - 25:05 [2 hrs] cabinet	25:25 - 25:35 diner

Appendix L: Two Examples of Editing Planning



extracted a zip folder, examined the motherboard, the fatherboard, and the brotherboard, deleted all the temporary files...

MELODY
Did you ask the little Microsoft office assistant for help?

to a close up of Hal with a blank expression.

MELODY (cont)
(defending herself to the group)
Hey, that's how I learned there was a built-in thesaurus...

back to same close up of Hal with an unchanged expression.

MELODY (cont)
It helped me a lot when I was an English major.

SADIE
(to Hal
Well, go on.

HAL
I did find that this PC has a sexy little microprocessor that Steve Jobs would-

SADIE
(exasperated)
Get to the point!

HAL
(unflappable)
In short - don't blow a buffer - but it is verifiably, quantifiably, digitally certain that your article, in fact, did not save.

SADIE
(thinking aloud)
So I'm just going to have to redo all my revisions.

DR. DAVE
The worst part is, they only extended your deadline till 7 o'clock tonight. And the editor was firm on that.

MELODY
Same time as graduation...

DR. DAVE
But you can do it!

MELODY
Hey, it's not as tough as climbing your way through a 4-mile mountain trail in New Zealand - and you did that!

Appendix M: Screenshot of Vegas Timeline

Appendix N: Interview Transcripts

EMAIL INTERVIEW WITH AKELA COOPER MARCH 31, 2011

Danielle Thompson: How did your interest in film/television begin, and what did you do to turn your interest into a career?

Akela Cooper: My interest in film began at a very young age. We were a movie watching household and my parents allowed us to watch basically whatever, as long as it wasn't super violent or graphically sexual. Everyone in my family had different tastes so I was eclectic in what I got to watch, though today I tend to lean more toward science-fiction and horror as my base and passion. In school when we had writing exercises I discovered I was good at creating on paper. I liked movies and so with my imagination it just made sense to me that I wanted to see my work made into films.

I did my undergraduate in creative writing but I lucked up and got into the University of Southern California Graduate Screenwriting Program and while the focus was on film, we did have television writing classes and through that I discovered I liked writing for television. With the help of faculty and a wonderful executive at the CBS Writer's Workshop I ended up getting my first job as a research assistant on a show right after graduation and have been working on and off in television since.

DT: What project or projects are you currently working on?

AC: Currently I am working on original writing samples for what's known as "staffing season" in television, which begins in May.

DT: What are you best at, in terms of a production - are you the ideas person, the organizer, the innovator, etc.?

AC: I love generating ideas, that's a big portion of what television writing is, coming up with ideas.

DT: What, for you, is the most challenging aspect of a production? The most rewarding?

AC: In television I'd say breaking the story is the biggest challenge. Working through all the aspects of a story can take many hours and can be exhausting mentally when you're doing a full 22 episode season.

DT: In your own experiences, what is one experience that particularly has helped you grow as an artist?

AC: I recently took a beginners art class for adults because drawing has always been something I'd never been good at. It was a very freeing experience because my art teacher gave me advice on my art that I now use in my writing. She said art doesn't have to be perfect because it's not life, it's art. While she was talking about my drawing a still life it was also very good for me in

my writing and it allowed me to take a step back and not feel that every script needs to be "perfect". Engaging, yes. Good, most definitely. But as writing is also "art" it's never going to be perfect because it's not life and even life isn't perfect.

DT: Have you seen any good movies lately?

AC: The last good movie I saw was *Win Win*. It's very well done and doesn't go in the stereotypical direction that most movies with a "moody" teen at their center usually do. I was pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoyed it.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. JOSEPH FRANCAVILLA APRIL 5, 2011

Danielle Thompson: So, tell me about how your interests in film and literature began

Joseph Francavilla: I really think I got interested in film through an odd quirk of geography. Since I cam from Buffalo, New York, and lived there most of my young life, I was able to access a lot of Canadian channels. And the Canadian channels would pipe in BBC productions in addition to Canadian programming through Toronto. This of course was before cable. So whatever you could get by aerial you could bring in and see. And we used to play games, stringing up all kinds of aerials to try to get a better picture. But we used to pull in Toronto stations quite regularly, and I remember that I was struck even as a kid that there was something different about Canadian television, in particular their movies. I was watching *The Third Man*, for instance, when I was seven years old. I was watching these BBC pipeline productions and certain classics of British cinema, and some foreign cinema when I was very young. And it struck me as fascinating and something I wasn't seeing anywhere else. And no one was talking about them.

And one TV Ontario program – it was the public station like our PBS stations in America – but it was extremely literate and artistic, and just about every program was interesting. What I remember fairly young, about ten to fifteen years old, was a program on Saturdays called Saturday at the Movies. And this film critic – his name was Elwy Yost – used to have a program on film and it would go from 8 o'clock to 12. And he would not only show a film, sometimes two films, but he would show a film and have people invited who were related to the film, like who were in the film or did production design for the film, or what have you. Directors of film – that's where I first saw Otto Preminger, for instance, was on this show. Things like that, and crew members talking about special effects. And I began to see and really be interested in the making of films, the background of films, the behind-the-scenes part of films. That's the first time I saw film criticism too, which you don't see on stations anywhere, as far as I can see. But I actually saw several film critics, one of whose book – Robin Woods's book on Hitchcock – I actually saw on his show first. And he was talking about Hitchcock, and I said, "Ooh, this sounds interesting." And I think that's where I really got hooked on film, is this show that was one of several. It was a key one that I would always tune in for, would see something different about film, and see the making-of or the behind-the-scenes aspects of film, of how film was

made. That was always, from the very start, really intriguing to me. I just kept following that up. So it was actually being next to Canada in a way.

DT: Who are some of your favorite filmmakers?

JF: Well, those are some of the favorite filmmakers I've kept on with. Howard Hawks. He had a wonderful analysis of a film by Howard Hawks that's remained one of my favorites. It's the screwball comedy *His Girl Friday*. And I started to delve into all the other kinds of films that Howard Hawks did, mainly because of listening to the Robin Wood critic talk about them. He did another film called The Thing, which was a very early science fiction film in the fifties. He did Westerns, he did everything.

He talked about Hitchcock, so I started delving into Hitchcock. These same shows also played Chaplin films and talked about Stanley Kubrick. And most of these people have become my favorite directors. Chaplin, Hawks, Orson Welles, of course...Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick, and then a contemporary filmmaker like Chris Nolan is doing interesting things just about every time he gets out there and does something. But again this sort of started with... Because at the time you couldn't get these at stores. It was very difficult to get these. They were essentially either these little 8mm, 16mm films – I didn't have a projector. I had one broken-down 8mm projector that my father had. So this was very rare and precious to see this on television and get a hold of this. The video tapes only came in in the eighties; so again, I was sort of working before that. So that's how I started with those filmmakers, and those have stayed with me – those directors.

DT: That's interesting. How did you decide to go into teaching?

JF: Teaching film itself?

DT: Mm-hm.

JF: I think it was sort of by accident, actually, because I wasn't teaching Film when I first came here. I was teaching American Literature. I guess when video tapes came out it made things so much easier, and so I started using video tapes. And I said, "You know, maybe I could teach a film class using video tapes now," because we have a record of it. It's like having a battered paperback book. We can use it to mark things and look at things and study film in a way that you really couldn't before, unless you rented the film, which was enormously expensive. So the change in technology to the ease of using video cassettes, and the sense that you could study a film the same way you could study a film, led me to start teaching it here. And I'm teaching more and more of it as time goes on.

DT: If you could only show one film in your classes, what would it be?

JF: I don't know if I can answer that question, because it's like, what's your one child...!

DT: Can you give a top five?

JF: I would say at least several that are infinitely rich – you can watch them over and over again and you keep seeing different things, which I think is a test for a masterpiece. *Citizen Kane* is certainly way up there. Just like the textbook says, you could go at it and look at different aspects of it all the time. There are a couple Hitchcock films that work that way too.

DT: Which are some of your favorite of Hitchcock's?

JF: *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest*, and *Psycho* – the three he did in a row, which I think was where he was at his peak. Those I think are the ones you could go over again and again and talk about different things – mise-en-scene, talk about the visuals, talk about the characters – talk about all sorts of things, and not exhaust the film. Still there would be more to look at. And so if you could show one film, you could spend a whole class teaching one of those films. You could really do Citizen Kane twelve times, twelve sessions or fifteen sessions, talking about different things each time.

DT: I would enjoy a class that was really intensive – Hitchcock's three best films or something like that. For someone really seriously interested in film.

JF: Yeah, if someone's really interested and has already taken the rudimentary stuff.

DT: Someone not looking for a survey but something more in depth.

JF: Yeah. I had thought about doing something similar to that; I'm not sure if I'm prepared to go through with it, but I had thought of doing – remember our selected authors class? – I was thinking of a selected directors, where we'd have two directors. And we'd do Hitchcock and Orson Welles, and pick three films or four films of each. And it might work for, again, students who've already taken the basics and understand the survey.

DT: It would be great if CSU could start a film minor. With the ITDS classes and the English classes for film that we've got, that you're teaching, and other people.

JF: Yeah, there's a lot of other people teaching film too.

DT: I was noticing some of the posters...someone teaching the Tolkein class this summer.

JF: Patrick Jackson, I think, yeah. And then there's even people in different departments.

DT: Yeah, someone in the art department is teaching film.

JF: Michelle McCrillis teaches film, and there's a couple other people that use film. She teaches film as film. I've asked a student who's been in there, and the only difference, he said, is that you teach literature and film, she teaches it as art and film. But there are other courses here that use film, but don't use it in the same way. So there might be a course on, let's say, the history of Brazil, and so all these films that are Brazilian films are used as information about the culture. They're not teaching the film, they're teaching about Brazil. But that would be an interesting minor, and we've been thinking about that, putting that together.

DT: In your personal tastes, what elements make for a good, engaging comedy film?

JF: Hmm...

DT: I was trying to word this question in a certain way, because I was thinking back to our comedy class, and one thing we talked about was how subjective it is. What I really wanted to know was in your *personal* tastes, what do you consider to be good comedy?

JF: Well comedy is never rewarded very well; you can look in the Oscars and see that. But it's the film genre that has a built in test for whether it's successful – it's whether people are laughing! I mean that's the immediate... There are lots of bad tragedies, and they don't pass the test. You can't gauge it by the immediate audience reaction. So obviously the first thing would have to be sort of, funny, that it would pretty much be funny from beginning to end. But beyond that I think there are other kinds of elements that work into comedies that make them more sophisticated. By that I mean... In the movie Tootsie, the director Sydney Pollack turned the script down when it was first given to him. When people asked him why, he said because in the original script it seemed to be a one-joke movie, and the one joke would be used over and over and over again. So it didn't really seem to be *about* anything. So he got together with the writer, Larry Geldard, and they started working on it so that the story was rewritten so that it was about the relationship between the two people and how they change and evolve over time. Then the director said the comedy was about something and he felt ready to do it. I think some of the best comedies are *about* something in the same way. If you look at another great screwball comedy, *His Girl Friday* – which people still laugh at today. It's gotten great reactions from that particular 1940 film that you wouldn't think possible. And I think one of the reasons is that there's an underlying element that talks about corruption in business, corruption at the newspaper, corruption in politics, and so on. And so it's about something. It has the rudiments of a drama, but it takes it with a different slant to make it a comedy. And I think the best comedies... Some Like It Hot, for instance, I think. There's something about that story. The undercurrent of the gangsters, the subtext of the plot. I think if a film doesn't have that it doesn't last very long. Annie Hall is another great example. Woody Allen's Annie Hall. It has a subtext in it that says it's about relationships that will be true, in a sense, for all time. And it's told in such a way, it's as if you're inside his head, as if you're listening to a stream of consciousness, or of a comedian. It's almost like a stand-up routine, the film. And because it's such an important topic, even though it treats everything comically, you can come back to it and see everything as significant and meaningful to you. If you don't have that in a comedy, I think it's sort of like eating cotton candy. You know, you enjoy it, it's nice, but then you forget about it.

DT: Yeah, no value.

JF: It's not the fillet mignon.

DT: Right. One of the things I'm writing about in my thesis is film about the film's style and how I tried to...almost accidentally, tried to create a certain style that the film is projecting. That was really difficult, because it seems like a nebulous aspect of a film, yet critics talk about it all the time. What aspects of a film do you scrutinize when you are describing a film's (or a

filmmaker's) style? In other words, how do film elements - editing, cinematography, etc - come together to project a certain style?

JF: Yeah, critics talk about it all the time, especially when they believe in the auteur theory, which I'm not sure I believe in anymore. It's a lot more complicated; there are a lot more forces that get into it, so you can't say that the director is just like a stylist or a writer. But I would say this: you could break the idea of a style down to visual elements, verbal elements, narrative elements, and performance elements, if that makes any sense.

DT: It does.

JF: That includes a lot of other material, but there are sort of four general characteristics that, to me, if the film hits well on all four cylinders, it's a really good film. Maybe a great film, but it's a really good film. You think about it, and it's not easy to do all that. It's not easy to have great visuals. Some films have terrific visuals, but the rest of the film is pretty bad, pretty lame, pretty whatever. *Days of Heaven* is sort of like that. It is a gorgeous film, but somehow the story, even the acting, may detract from the film. But you say, gee, isn't that a gorgeous visual.

So certainly the performance elements, which includes not only acting but their clothing, the props – all the stuff that goes into that – that's an important element, particularly if you're doing some kind of period piece or some kind of futuristic piece. How many science fiction films, for instance, look silly because of their costumes? The other thing that's interesting about those four elements is that film doesn't rely on the verbal. Of those four elements, the verbal is probably the least important. One thing I've come to a conclusion after a lot of thinking about it is that the best filmmakers have a sense of how to convey the meaning and emotion of a scene with as little dialogue as possible. Only through the visuals. I'm thinking of, particularly, the people who started in the silent era, like Chaplin, Hitchcock, and John Ford. Those directors had to tell the story only through visuals and couldn't rely on dialogue, and they learned how to do it. So for instance with Hitchcock and Ford, even when they added dialogue later, it was secondary to the visuals that they were supporting everything on. Stanley Kubrick is another one like that. There are long stretches of his films where there's no dialogue. And yet he's able to convey either the emotion or the story or the theme very clearly because of his visuals. So I would say that's probably the most important thing in my mind, for someone who's directing a film is that they have a great visual sense. Ridley Scott is another one who has a great visual sense.

But if a film has a great visual sense, including the cinematography, and also has sort of a sparkling sense of dialogue and a sense of story... Howard Hawks says he was nothing but a storyteller. He was always demeaning his talents. But I did mention that to someone the other day. I was watching [Turner Classic Movies], watching some movie that I really wasn't interested in, in the characters, in the story, the actors. But I noticed that they were able to tell a story better than they can today. And it was very engaging. It got me involved in whatever sort of episode was going on.

And so, if that narrative element is there, the storytelling, that visual element is there, including cinematography, and then you have the right actors... Woody Allen said that eighty percent of everything is the casting. If you have the right actors and the right kind of parts, and you have

and you have some great dialogue, you have the likelihood of a great film. Think of *Citizen Kane* for instance. It hits on all four, and ironically it was a first-time director, a first-time movie actor, it was just all these firsts, it's just astonishing. No one has done it since. And like I say, some of Hitchcock's films after he sort of knew what he was doing, have that ability to last. Look at the lasting influence of *Psycho*, for instance, or *Vertigo*. But that's how I would put it together. A style is just sort of the way a filmmaker will go about doing things, but it's in those various categories. And you'll see some people have strengths in one and not in another. Some people can do extraordinary visuals, and yet as I say, the story... Well, a good example is B*lade Runner*, which I'm always showing for anybody I can, because of the production values and the visuals, which are just stunning. The story just isn't that good. The original novel has actually a better story than that story, because it's watered down and just sort of tepid. And that's why people don't really like it that much sometimes and also why I think it was a box office disaster when it first came out.

So when you have a masterpiece, it's sort of got to hit all those areas – the visual, the verbal, the narrative, and the performance aspects, including the actors. And that's hard to do in any film. There's a few foreign films, like *The Seventh Seal* by Ingmar Bergman that I love to watch over and over again. It does that – it has great acting, superb acting, a magnificent script that the director wrote himself.

DT: How does a filmmaker make a film that is memorable – that leaves an impression on the viewer? What has to be special about a film to make it memorable?

JF: I think these aspects, whether it's a witty line of dialogue, whether it's a situation that someone's involved in, like a screwball situation, or a striking visual that you just can't get out of your mind – that's what makes a lasting film with people. There's some element – one of those four elements – that just stays with people. For some people it's just story, and they can't even tell you who's the director, what the visuals are, but, "You remember there was this movie about a guy who..." That's what stays with them. So film is a really interesting medium because it combines so many different things. And it takes so many artistic capabilities to pull them together, because you're essentially working by committee. And you've got to have people who either trust you or have a similar vision to you to get going on all those fronts.

DT: Well those are really great, full answers to those questions. You mentioned the auteur theory... When I was in Oxford last year, the director Stephen Frears –

JF: Oh yes, I know him.

DT: Yeah, he came to give a lecture, and I went to that. And one of the questions that someone asked him was, do you consider yourself an auteur director? He chewed this person out for saying that! Because he thought his question was, I guess a freshman-level question, just that he didn't know what he meant by asking that.

JF: Well that theory has been raised in the sixties and early seventies, and it has kind of been batted around for a long time. Most people don't believe it, and the reason they don't believe it is so much in filmmaking has changed, and there's so much collaboration in filmmaking that you

can't just say, well, that's this director's style. It's too nebulous. So you might find some interesting answers to that question, if you have to come up with them, from books that believe in the auteur theory. Because they would try to make some case of how this style comes together. But there's too many cases where it fails, there's too many Hitchcock films, for instance, that are just duds. You can say there's no style there. Or there's... Too many cases where there's studio interference, which means that the director's not in control. I mean, how can you lay all this on the director if he's not even the one in control of what's going on? If someone else is choosing who's the cast, for instance – that's a constant struggle from Hollywood. So yeah, I don't quite believe the auteur theory. I'm sympathetic to the viewpoint fairly early on in movie history, but I think what's happened is it's become much more a collaborative medium, and the director's importance now is much less than it used to be. I would suggest that the stars and the producers from the studios now are much more important than the director is. They're the ones that get the thing going. Stars sometimes can give the greenlight to a film.

DT: That's true. Sometimes they produce their own material.

JF: Yeah. So it's changed. It's almost like it was in the silent days, when you had people like Chaplin and Mary Pickford and so on. They were the stars, and the directors, who were they? Non-entities. Well, anything else you wanted to ask?

DT: Well, one quick question that I've been asking at the end of all my interviews is, have you seen any good movies lately? Recent films that have come out?

JF: Pretty much any film that Christopher Nolan has done. And I think the reason why is that he was an English literature graduate student.

DT: Oh, okay!

JF: And he wondered at one point, he mentions in an interview, why filmmakers weren't using the same devices that early novelists were using. Changes in chronology, flashbacks and flash forwards...

DT: He did *Inception*, right?

JF: Yes, he did *Inception*, the first two films he did were *Following* and *Memento*, which were independent films. That's another whole area where I think Hollywood is really being nourished by the independent spirit. He did then his sort of successful films, including *The Dark Knight*, the first Batman film he tried, which was a big success. And then finally this Inception. And I just think he's a very savvy filmmaker who is using all these techniques he learned about from reading in his literature classes.

DT: That gives me hope!

JF: And he's trying to put them into film.

DT: That's really interesting that he would cite early novels, because I've always been interested in early novels and how they use those techniques.

JF: Have you ever read *Tristram Shandy*?

DT: I have not. I've heard about it.

JF: You have to. It is an extraordinary book. You wouldn't believe it was written that long ago. You'd think it was a modern book...the techniques he used. There's actually a funny movie called *A Cock and Bull Story*, and basically it's an attempt by a filmmaker to film that novel, which is essentially unfilmable. But it's a fairly funny...I think it's an independent film about that.

DT: I'd like to hear some Christopher Nolan things, interviews that he's done.

JF: Well look on the first copy of *Memento*. They have a great twenty-minute interview with him there. And I think he has commentaries on his later films too. He's very savvy. I think I'll go see every film he makes, till he makes some duds like M. Night Shyamalan.

DT: Well thank you very much.

JF: Well I hope it helps you.

EMAIL INTERVIEW WITH TRAVIS MARUSKA APRIL 5, 2011

Danielle Thompson: How did your interest in film/television begin, and what did you do to turn your interest into a career?

Travis Maruska: My interest in film began at a young age. I grew up in North Dakota and didn't fish, hunt, or play football, but I did like to watch movies, particularly older films or films that were critically acclaimed. I was very interested in films as an art form, not just as a source of entertainment (although I liked it for that reason as well).

The college I attended did not have a film program, so I majored in theatre (where I met Becky Becker) and after college moved to New York to act. After a couple of years I decided an acting career wasn't for me, but I still wanted to be involved in film, so I attended film school at Chapman University in California. From there I was able to secure a job as an assistant at a major talent agency, CAA, while writing screenplays and finding representation, until my family and I moved to the east coast. I have an MFA in screenwriting and continue to work on my craft despite being removed from LA - the great thing about screenwriting is that you can do it anywhere and you really only need gumption to do it.

DT: What project or projects are you currently working on?

TM: I am currently working on two features as well as a TV pilot I am co-writing. One feature is a comedy, the other is science fiction. The TV pilot is about a veterinarian clinic. I get up at 5am in order to spend an hour each day (most days) writing before I have to go to school to teach. I'm not good at night. My creative juices are fried and I just want to watch TV or go to bed. I'm fresh in the morning.

DT: What are you best at, in terms of a production - are you the ideas person, the organizer, the innovator, etc.?

TM: I'm not really a production person, but in the past, when it came to production, I liked to direct - I liked to be organized going into a shoot. I believed in mapping out everything you were going to do in order to avoid more stumbling blocks than you would inevitably encounter anyway.

As a screenwriter I see myself more as an idea man. I have folders and folders of them, more than I will ever have time to write. Whenever I have an idea, I jot it down in paragraph form and file it away.

DT: What, for you, is the most challenging aspect of a production? The most rewarding?

TM: The schedule is very challenging. It is your life while you are shooting, but if you can devote yourself to it, it is an exciting hurricane in which you are the eye. Of course, seeing the finished result is the biggest perk, assuming you didn't totally screw up your project.

DT: In your own experiences, what is one experience that particularly has helped you grow as an artist?

TM: There was a moment when I realized I was writing scripts for films that I wouldn't enjoy watching. I completely rewrote the script I was working on and became much more happy with it. It also went on to gain some attention, so that did well. Since then I've tried to write scripts that I would enjoy, not just the average viewer.

DT: Have you seen any good movies lately?

TM: I have so little time between school, writing, and family, to do what I used to love, which is sit around and watch movies. As such, I have become more critical. I won't waste two hours on a movie unless I'm sure it's good ahead of time, which is probably not a good practice. Anyway, I LOVED *Inception* as well as *The Social Network*. I've lately gotten hooked on TV series - *The Walking Dead* (if you like zombies - not everyone does) and *Boardwalk Empire*. TV has gotten very good since *The Sopranos* came out ten years ago. It's easier to watch an hour in the evening than two hours, to be sure.

INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR HALEY RICE NOVEMBER 17, 2010

Danielle Thompson: How long have you been teaching theatre, teaching acting?

Haley Rice: Good Lord! Let's see, the first acting class I taught was in 2002, so I've been teaching about eight years. And I was a TA for an Acting for the Non-Major class. And so then I've been teaching ever since then.

DT: And what schools have you taught at?

HR: I taught at Illinois State University, I taught at the Flint Center for the Performing Arts in Burlington, I taught some classes at Essex Junction High School. I also directed a play there. I taught something for the CEDO – Community Economic Development Offices of Burlington. So I've taught in a variety of situations and places.

DT: I bet you've got a lot of different types of audition experience from all of that.

HR: Oh yeah! Oh yeah, because in the mean time I kind of use teaching as like a companion to my acting, so while I'm teaching I'm also auditioning and getting jobs. Trying to get jobs, in the mean time.

DT: What are some of the most unusual, stand-out audition experiences that you've had?

HR: Oh my goodness...most of them have involved really weird improv, such as like, "Be a rubber band." You know? My first audition in grad school was for a show called *The Art of Dining*. The director had us do – the director was actually an MFA directing student. It was part of the mainstage series. But the director had me pair up with someone, and we had to be really cold and try to get warm. And it didn't really have anything to do with the play at all. She just wanted to see how I interacted with the people. And I got the role, which is awesome...probably because I tried to hide under this guy's shirt! I think when you use improv in auditions, it's almost like to test the imagination and the willingness of the actors, to see how far they will go. Because as a director it's always easier to pull back than to get them to go further. If you use improv, test their level of commitment. You can work with that, whereas if you have someone who's really reticent and won't make a bold choice, then... You don't want to use them for that. But it's a little different for film, in that, they still need to make bold choices, but the externalization of those choices doesn't have to be as big.

DT: Yeah, all those... You're touching on things that Becky and I had talked about. And in my callbacks I want to do some kind of improv game or something, and find the right game or games that kind of lend itself to what I'm doing. So would you have any suggestions for specific types of games? I'm thinking back to stuff we've done in class.

HR: Yeah, you know I use the warm-up games to sort of like, be spontaneous. But I don't think those would necessarily be very good for an audition situation. Anything that involves listening or reacting off of your partner is a good improv game. So, I'm trying to think of one specific...in terms of listening. This is something I'm trying to impress upon my Acting 1 students. I want to

say Ruin My Day might be fun, just to see how they interact with each other. Just to see how susceptible or sensitive the other person is too. Are they really reacting to what the other person is doing, or are they ignoring it? Let me think about that and get back to you on that.

DT: Sure. Something else Becky and I were talking about just today in our meeting was, in callbacks, trying to figure out how good a person is at taking directions. So, she said you can give them some sort of prompt – "She's not really amused at this, she's angry at this." Or something for them to go off of. So is there any kind of improv game like this?

HR: Yeah, do you remember that game we played where you had to do it like an opera or like a newscaster or something?

DT: Yes. That would be good.

HR: So you can start with the two people at the party, then you can call out different accents or different emotions, or different genres, like melodrama, and they have to adapt to that. That's a great one for people being able to take direction. And for them, for spontaneity too.

DT: And how bold a choice.

HR: Exactly. Meanwhile, they have to still listen to their partner and keep the party going.

DT: That's fantastic. I'll definitely do that. The biggest thing that's on my mind going into auditions – because I have very limited audition experience, being the person auditioning. As a director or a casting director, how do you judge from watching a one-minute monologue, if you don't know that person, don't know their work, if they're going to be right for a role, or potentially right and you'd like to call them back?

HR: Well the first thing you have to do, you have to know what you want in the role. What are the essential qualities of the character? Then... See the problem with casting, and it's not so much with theatre, but with film, people often cast based on looks or type instead of like, internal qualities. That's going to be something you're going to have to go with intuition on. You know what I mean? So you may have someone with the right internal qualities, but maybe they don't look right for the role. I would go with someone who has that natural quality, just because it's so much easier to work with nature rather than against it. So talk to them, get to know them. Ask them questions. You know, "If you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be?" People say this, but it's really true. Eighty percent or ninety percent of your job as a director is to cast the show well. So then you just let your actors do their thing. So you have instincts, you have intuition. I would just trust that. And, honestly, talk to other people who know their work maybe better, people who have worked with them before. That's how a lot of actors get cast is word-of-mouth, and somebody sees their work on stage. Networking is a huge part of casting, from the casting director's perspective as well as the actor's perspective.

DT: How about in callbacks – sort of a similar question. What things are you looking for in callbacks?

HR: Pairings. You want to make sure that people have some chemistry if they need to. You want to make sure they look good together. That they don't absolutely hate each other. You're lucky because the age range is what they can play, so they're all in their twenties, which is good. But that's a big one. I mean, you really do want to look for chemistry, you want people to look right together.

DT: And especially given my show. It's about – I don't know if I've explained it very much – but it's about a group of friends, a really close-knit group of friends. So seeing if they can interact and function as a little family is going to be really key.

HR: Yep. Absolutely. So maybe you want to have them improvise around the story or improvise a section of the script to see if they can take the reins. Work as an ensemble together. That's what I would recommend.

DT: And how about the logistics of callbacks? When you are doing callbacks, do you have everyone together in the same room or do you look at pairs of people at a time?

HR: You can do it several ways. Typically what happens is you bring people in in groups. I would think before hand, "Okay, well if I'm going to cast Julia as the character, then who would look right with Julia? Okay, Dave would look right with her, Bill would look right with her." So then you want to develop a group out of that. See them, see if they sort of click. And then you can do interchanging groups as well. But I would go in with a notion of who...

DT: Kind of a rough idea.

HR: Yeah, who looks good together. I've always heard, like don't call any more than four people back for a role, just because that'll force you to sort of make your choices. And it'll help you to keep your callback time to a really short time.

DT: How long?

HR: Less that two, three hours. You know, shorter than four hours.

DT: It's a short film, so hopefully the auditions will be short.

HR: Yeah. So, get an idea in your head, be prepared. You know oftentimes you have them read sides from the script. Give them some direction and everything. I make decisions pretty quickly. Because I trust that...you know, "Yes, this works" kind of thing. But sometimes it's hard, especially if you have two people who are really right for the role. And that just comes down to whatever your criteria is. And maybe it comes down to availability, or seniority or something like that. But yeah, for callbacks I would have them read from the sides and pair people up. And ask them to stay for the entire time so you can interchange them. But I wouldn't call back a lot of people.

DT: And the last question – I'm asking all of my interviewees this – have you seen any good movies lately? Off the top of your head.

HR: I love movies! I love them, love them, love them. Which one did I see... *Splice*, it was okay, it wasn't that great. I saw this crazy movie, I think it was Japanese? Japanese or Korean. It was called *Old Boy*. And it was crazy. It was about a guy, he was in prison for fifteen years, and he had no idea why he was in there. And then one day they let him out, so he spends the entire movie trying to figure out why he was in prison.

DT: Oh that's cool.

HR: Yeah, the visuals were great. It was very Quentin Tarantino-esque. I recommend it. And then I got this...psychedelic, 1977 ghost story movie called House. It is Japanese, it's called Housu, but it just came out on DVD. So I started watching that, and some of the technical effects that they used – they used a slide, or a swipe. Is that what that's called?

DT: Yeah.

HR: They use swipes for the girls talking to each other on the phone. Yeah, the way they put that film together was pretty amazing. It's bizarre, it's really, really bizarre. They do the whole circle-in and circle-out.

DT: I love films that do bold things with that. Because that's something you don't see a whole lot, and it's kind of considered passé, but it's nice to see people bring it back and use it in a quirky way. I like that.

HR: Yeah, definitely. I'm all about how they tell the story, which is why I really like Tarantino so much. Because he does use visual, kitschy, throwback, referential stuff. He's all over the map in terms of his narrative and how he puts that out there.

DT: I've got the DVD of *Death Proof* sitting on my TV right now.

HR: Have you seen it?

DT: A friend let me borrow it. I've been trying to find time to watch it.

HR: Oh, yes!

DT: I haven't seen either of the *Grindhouse* films. I love Robert Rodriguez too.

HR: You know, *Planet Terror*... yeah it's okay, but *Death Proof* – it was like... oh, wow! Again, talking about the throwbacks and the referential in a very postmodern sort of thing... It's so interesting how he does it. Like he has the cigarette burns on the DVD, and the jumps, where it looks like the film ran out and was spliced together. Like really cheap? But that's how he made it, so that it looks like you're watching a B-movie at a grindhouse theatre. So you get that real feeling of 70s/80s bad B-movie. But then it really does flip. It's crazy. I have this image from that movie burned in my head. I do! I'm not going to tell you what it is. But after you watch it – you watch it and let me know.

DT: I will.

HR: So have you seen any Peter Greenaway films?

DT: No, I don't think so.

HR: You should watch him. He did *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover*. He did *Eight and a Half Women*. There's Fellini's *Eight and a Half*, and then there's this man and his father have all these women in like a collection. Its just bizarre. He did *Drowning by Numbers* and *A Zed and two Naughts*. He's this Australian guy, and his filmmaking is really beautiful and strange. I love film, I just... You can probably tell!

DT: What's his name again?

HR: Peter Greenaway. So see Peter Greenaway. The other director I would recommend is Jeunet and Caro. They're a French duo, and they did *Amelie*, which you probably know.

DT: Yes.

HR: But Jeunet, he kind of went off and did his own thing. He did *Amelie* by himself, I believe. But the two films I would recommend is *Delicatessen*, and *The City of Lost Children*. They're just beautiful, beautiful films, and you can stop them at any point and they're amazing.

DT: I love *Amelie*'s style. It's just really beautiful.

HR: Yeah, the way he uses light and color, it's just magic.

DT: And the way he...the editing, there's something in the style of the editing, very quick at times, and just cute and quirky.

HR: Yes, that's kind of his style. Cute, quirky, visually gorgeous, and...fairytale-ish.

DT: Non-realistic.

HR: Right. Again, with the outside the box kind of feel.

DT: Well awesome. I definitely learned a lot.

HR: Well, no problem. I hope it's helpful, and just enjoy yourself, you know? Actors love, love, love, love, love acting. And essentially, at the end of the day, a lot of them just want to get work and please you as the director.

EMAIL INTERVIEW WITH KIRK ROOS **APRIL 7, 2011**

Danielle Thompson: How did your interest in film/television begin, and what did you do to turn your interest into a career?

Kirk Roos: My interest really began as a kid, no joking I wrote a play when I was 5 years old and had my cousin do the writing since I didn't know how to spell, yet. But, I really picked up in college when I changed my major from music to theatre at the last minute. There was no doubt I'd be in the entertainment business, but my only problem was I wanted to act, write, produce and direct…that can be accomplished over a span of a career, I suppose, but one really has to focus one thing at a time. So, after 5-6 years of professional acting, I began to shift gears into writing/producing, and the last 10 years I've really focused on that, only occasionally acting or directing. Recently, I've had a 3 year run of just ridiculous juggling of multiple projects, producing, so I'm looking to act in something this coming fall, 2011, just for a little break.

DT: What project or projects are you currently working on?

KR: *HIGH ROAD*—finishing color correction/post production and promotion and PR. Festivals, agents, distributors, etc—a lot of social networking and buzz creating, but in general it's Marketing before the "sale"…it's a fun period, a lot like the buzz from the "just before shooting" part of the movie. This project, like many, has been over one full year now, and we're not even released yet, so about one year from now I can imagine it finally settling down, into DVD and cable sales. We're also looking for a project for the same director to follow up with, so we're now meeting a lot to brainstorm what that can be.

BRASS TEAPOT—one month out from shooting. Casting, final touches on the financial stuff (lots of banks and lawyers involved), location scouting and a little diplomacy and team building. A lot of hiring, and final debate on location, state we shoot in, tax incentives, other incentives, and overall strategy. Love this part, when we actually "announce it" publicly, there's no turning back and then we'll be on auto-pilot for a couple months, hard to even talk during that time, but a fun ride. Shooting in NY May 23-June 25th. This one is exciting, and possibly the coolest project I've ever been on in terms of high-concept, edginess and commercial viability.

DEAD RIVER—option and development…..just got the script from a writer, so I'm looking to have him do a quick rewrite, then I'll get it out to a casting director and some directors and my agent, to see if we can find a team to cast, that will garner attention from distributors and investors.

TOP TEN—similar to *Dead River*, in that I've only had the script for a while, but it's going through a more detailed rewrite, so it could be one to two years out still. That said, we're pitching it to CMT three weeks from now, to see if they're interested. It's a music based movie, similar to *Crazy Heart*, but with more heart. And humor.

There are five to ten projects we're "taking meetings on"…this is that phase where we PITCH our projects to investors and agents, etc, and other people pitch us THEIR projects…and we try to find good fits. This is like auditioning for an actor; there's a lot of hurry up and wait, there's a

lot of showmanship, but really, at the end of the day, it's about relationships…who do I want to work with? If I have a good story, or they do, and we can work together, let's do it! Momentum is big, but chemistry matters more! So, always looking for the next project, and always pitching the project I think should be the next project. Somewhere in the middle you hope something hits.

Finally. I've recently contracted to work with a Chinese Film Fund. Another part of my job is to develop a long term strategy for our business and its investors, and in this process, made relationships with different Chinese businessmen. Together, we've created a fund that will help us push bigger projects in the future, but we're STILL working on this, two years after the idea started, we're just now rolling out their first film. We hope to announce it in May at Cannes Film Festival. It's an animation.

DT: What are you best at, in terms of a production - are you the ideas person, the organizer, the innovator, etc.?

KR: Ideas, team building, inspiring, motivating and driving the big picture. I've directed, I love it…but it's a privilege, everyone WANTS that…it is a little political, or just commercial, or opportunity or hard work and latter climbing, etc. But, producing is really even more creative—because from script choice to casting to marketing to hiring crew, heck, hiring the director—the producer does a little of everything. Sometimes credits are given for "producer" for people who get the $, or line up a few things…that title is tossed around too much, but in the "biz" it's a title you fight for and they only give it to the person doing the actual work…that said, it's not as glamorous as directing or acting, but in the industry, I think people respect that it all starts and ends with producer. I love it. Maybe that's what I'm best at. Still, there are days I think back to my singing and acting with Becky Becker in shows like *Into the Woods* and I think "If that paid better, I'd do that!!"

I love creative vision, conceptualizing and marketing. A lot of producing is knowing how an audience might respond, knowing what investors want, and what actors and directors would react to…if you can bring that together, it's tough—so having a VISION to pitch, being the person that says "Here's why you should love this and believe in it"…that's fun. Again, that title is producing, but sometimes that can be a director's vision, too…

DT: What, for you, is the most challenging aspect of a production? The most rewarding?

KR: There's no one easy answer, it's a bundle of keeping your head above water, and other 'you can do it' philosophies, but practicing that philosophy and talking about it (or believing it) are quite different challenges. So, keeping a great attitude, believing you're going to make it, and making it happen on your own, are all balanced with knowing that failing is not a bad thing, it's subjective, so often NOT trying is the failure. With that knowledge, success is DOING. If you can keep this in mind, while staying busy and paying the bills, I have found that things take care of themselves. *It's not always pretty, but it's of course "not a sprint, it's a marathon."*

Challenges:
-the patience, the ebb and flow, the blood/sweat/tears…the pain

-the not knowing…
-the rejection
-the critics
-raising $
-keeping your eye on the NEXT project, while successfully completing the current.

DT: In your own experiences, what is one experience that particularly has helped you grow as an artist?

KR: Each project I've done, I've learned HARD lessons, from allowing TOO many cooks in the kitchen, to not enough. The first film I attempted, that was full length, I wrote it, and acted in it. But, I also "Produced" if that's the word you can use. Really, though, all that meant was I put together a team of people, and I let it get out of hand, too many people got involved, and I didn't want to be a dictator, so I let it get out of hand. I wanted "everyone to be happy." Not always possible. But, I learned. The next few projects I did, I learned how to balance the ebbs/flows and artistic visions, and I learned to find out how to put on my director hat when directing, and take it off, when producing or acting. You have to "act well your role, there all the honor lies!" (Ask Ms. Becker about that quote from our high school teacher!) Anyway, I've learned that in group art, there's an art to the "producer" role that is really exhilarating, and it's about driving the vision, sharing the vision, and creating an experience.

I also love helping artists find their voices. I've grown by learning how to love anyone and everyone's work, and to help other people, lift them up! I recently got to make someone's dream come true by enabling her to direct her first movie and it was heartwarming and amazing! And she considers ME equally creative to her, just because I believed in it, and am helping her produce it…it's rewarding for sure!

DT: Have you seen any good movies lately?

The King's Speech was beyond good, it was excellent. And don't underestimate a good comedy; just because it's commercial and silly, doesn't mean it doesn't serve a purpose as "good"…so I argue a good comedy once in a while, too. However, I am a sucker for a *Forest Gump*-y movie, so what I call "good" is something that is a high standard for me, maybe "great" is the word…or "rare"…but Good? I'd say *The Kids Are Alright*, *Girl with the Dragon Tatoo*, and *Ceremony* are the most recent ones that caught my attention. I saw *The Fighter* and all the other Oscar noms, but not a lot of them were in my top 10 ever. But, *Babies* was great! I admit, I am jaded by the business. What is good? It's subjective. A basketball game has a winner, and I can tell you that the Lakers are better than the Celtics if they win 105-103, but I can't tell you *Avatar* was better than *127 Hours*, or vice versa. But one probably made more $ than the other.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. AARON SANDERS **OCTOBER 15, 2010**

Danielle Thompson: So what is your experience with screenwriting? Have you written screenplays before?

Aaron Sanders: Well, I've written several screenplays but none that have ever been produced. But right now I'm working on one with a director that hopefully will be produced. It's in preproduction. We're hoping to get a real screenwriter here eventually as the Creative Writing program grows. But I do have some experience.

DT: Okay, very cool. How did you first get interested in screenwriting?

AS: Well I think like many young writers, I loved film, I wanted to make a film. And so, I just started with a script, and my friend and I in grad school decided to write a script. And we indeed wrote one that we were able to submit to several producers, but we got passes from all of them. But nevertheless, it was good, so that's how I started.

DT: Oh that's exciting. So as a writer, how do you think it's different – your approach to it. Cause when you sit down to write a poem, it's very different from when you sit down to write a screenplay. What's sort of like the mental process or the preparation you go through when you have an idea for a screenplay?

AS: Well, the biggest challenge, I think, for me is the form, because it's so clunky. And I know that there is software that will help with that, but I've never used it. I know some screenwriters that do. But I think, the one thing I've learned, it's a visual landscape, and so you really have to think in terms of images. So in some ways, it's like poetry in that way, where you do have to think of images and how you string the images together to move the story along. So I think you have to see it that way. It's also... I always have to think about what I'm going to do with a project. So if I'm deciding to write a story or if I'm working on a novel or a screenplay, I have to have some idea of what I might do with it. So all those things I'm thinking about before I start a project.

DT: Yeah, I have a hard time when I'm trying to write a screenplay from feeling kind of limited, because I'm thinking in terms of being a filmmaker, and could I make this practically? And so you don't have that problem with a poem or short story. You can write anything under the sun.

AS: I get that. I've also heard people say, though, that you have to write the script as if you could make anything. But I understand the other side of that too. No, it's very expensive, although digital filmmaking has made it more democratic again, I guess. But it's still expensive though.

DT: So, as a professor, tell me a little bit about your screenwriting class; I think it's coming up in the spring?

AS: Yes, well it's a good question – which is always a bad thing to say to start an answer. But nevertheless, it is a good question. Because I wanted to try something out in the summer course because there's a little more freedom, I think. Classes are smaller and you can try some things out. I wanted them – in reference to what you said earlier – I wanted them to write something with the problem of making it in mind. So I thought we would work on scripts, and then as a group choose one of those scripts to produce, and have them use their technology, their video cameras and things to actually shoot the film. And the idea was to edit them in the Mac lab. So

they did do that, but we ran into several problems that I didn't anticipate before. So my new idea for the class – I like to keep switching things up to try and teach the perfect class, which will never happen, but nevertheless... We will do readings of the scripts, but we're not going to actually produce them, because we don't have a filmmaking program yet, and the technology really stood in the way I think. So the way I'm going to approach it now is I want them to start by adapting something. Because you really do have to... it gets so clunky from thought to paper, you've got the screenplay form to wrestle with. So I think that they need to have a story and study the story visually and then adapt that into a screenplay form. And then they'll also later on do one of their own scripts. So basically do two scripts, and we'll do readings of the scripts, but we will not get into the filmmaking this time.

DT: Okay, so they'd be taking a short story and then adapting it as a screenplay?

AS: Yeah, a short story by someone else, and we'll work with the text. That's what this director has taught me that I'm working with now, is to study the story and look for visual clues. And so even though you're taking a lot of poetic license with a plot, for example, to really mine the original author's story for cues and using it to create a visual landscape. Which is kind of a spatial way of thinking, more than linear.

DT: That's interesting. That would be a great exercise, as a screenwriter, I can imagine, especially having studied literature. You know, taking something and thinking about it in a new way. That's really cool. You talked about working with a director. Could you talk a little bit about the relationship between a writer and a director, as you've experienced it?

AS: I think that that does change, depending on the project, of course. But the relationship I have is she knows my work as a fiction writer, so she trusts at some level, I think, that I can tell a story. So that gives me a certain amount of currency with her. But she's studied directing. So she'll read the script, and as I said she finds ways to explode it spatially. And she'll talk about not leaving the story in a jewelry box – which is treating the author's original story with kid gloves, as it were – and really just taking cues from the story and exploding it. So I'm constantly working on the script and sending her drafts, and she reads them quickly and usually calls me on the phone. And we discuss ways to rewrite it again, and we just do this over and over again. And I suspect that what will happen...I hope to be on the set, but I don't think that at that point I will...I'm fine turning it over to her and letting her do what she needs to do with it.

DT: That's really great during the formative stages when you can...it's almost like a partnership, and I like that.

AS: Yeah, it's a collaboration, definitely. And I think that's one thing I've noticed in film and even really good television, that there's some really good writing, and that can only come out of collaboration – that there is a team of writers often. And changes depend on what the project is, of course, but there are a lot of really smart people just really rigorously going through this thing over and over and over again. And then you do get something that's quite good.

DT: What would be some advice that you'd give to screenwriters, like to your students or to me? What would be some key words of wisdom?

AS: Well this is some general and then maybe some specific... The general advice is that young writers in general don't revise enough. And that's the one thing I've learned – the more I've done it, whether it's with fiction or for screenplays, whatever – is that you have to plan on having a relationship with that piece of writing that is long and complicated and sometimes frustrating...well, often frustrating and full of moments of deep despair. Until you sort of go through it that way, the piece of writing won't be textured, and it just can't be very good. It can show promise, but it can't be good. More specifically I think that... I tend to think that film is more collaborative, so a writer needs people around him or her to help and to be critical.

DT: I agree.

AS: I guess that's basically what I was talking about with the first part.

DT: Okay. Last question: have you seen any good movies lately?

AS: I usually go to films a lot, but I've been very busy. Let's see, what's the best film I've seen lately? Well I recently showed *Memento* to my class and was reminded of how exciting that movie is. And I guess even his most recent, *Inception*, was quite good too. But I did see something... I liked *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.

DT: I haven't seen that.

AS: I thought it was a good adaptation. Although, the interesting thing about a lot of adaptations, right now, of novels is that they are just straight adaptations. In other words... *The Kite Runner* was the most egregious example, where it was like I'd read the book, and so I saw the movie, and half-way through the movie I just didn't need to watch anymore because it was exactly the same. It felt exactly the same.

DT: What do you think about that, adaptations? Because the classic thing we always hear is that when a book gets made into a movie, it's nothing like the book and everyone's disappointed. So what do you think about that?

AS: Well I go in hoping that they're not the same, because I get bored if they are. So I think it's something people like to say, but they don't really mean it. Of course the movie can be the book and vice versa. I always hope that they're different, that they've done something interesting with the text. What you see now, of course, is movies that are made as quickly as possible on the heels of the book, as if it's part of the book's release.

DT: Yeah, like part of its marketing.

AS: And then they just try and make a bunch of money. That doesn't mean it can't be good. Like I said, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* was quite good. But at the same time, it's more interesting to see something come out of nowhere, that's just surprising and interesting on its own. That's when I get the most excited, when I don't know what the movie's going to be like, and I'm surprised and delighted by it.

DT: And it just stands on its own.

AS: I can't think of a movie I've seen recently. I get bored when I know what it's going to be, if that makes sense.

DT: Yeah, it does. Speaking of adaptations, it makes me think of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and how the film ends so much differently than the book. And that's, I'm sure, the result of Hollywood, and that was the classic ending – you had to have that kind of ending for a story like that. And I don't know how I feel about that; I've never been able to figure out if I like the book or the film better. I like both.

AS: One thing about film is you are a slave to the economic part of the process, in ways that you're not...like you said, especially not in poetry, short stories, for sure. Novels can get a little more in between, but still, not even close to what you have to go through to make a film.

DT: And too, there's the question of audience – what sort of a film do you want to make, what sort of an audience do you want to gear towards? And then you have those same sorts of questions, but different, for written pieces. So, another thing writers have to consider.

AS: And I still can't think of a movie I've watched lately.

DT: I know I've seen a lot of movies, but nothing really memorable. Maybe that's it. Maybe that's an indication of the state of film as an art right now!

AS: But there are some people doing just fantastic work.


Pomp and CirCumStanCeS
Writer•Producer•Director
Danielle Melissovas Thompson
2011