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The Narrative of Flippy Johnson:
The Three Act Structure – Criticisms and Alternatives
Script and Script Analysis

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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by

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Abstract

In this feature screenplay, I have incorporated the complexities of an intertwining multi-strand narrative, while manipulating the materials of time and space. This has enabled me to begin my exploration into finding a suitable structure in which to tell a story that features a number of characters, all of whom are intended to represent some of human nature's darkest emotions. I have attempted to distinguish my script from the standard three-act structure. However, I do believe it is a fundamental requirement to know all the rules of a classical three-act structure in order to subvert its conventions.

The three-act structure has long been a successful model for transmitting a story to the screen. It has provided the basis for many a film where a character triumphs over adversity; where good defeats bad and heroes fall in love. But what about characters that are not heroes? Protagonists who cannot be defined under the even broadest definition of heroism? Can these people thrive within the strict guidelines of a three-act structure, with its strong reliance on a hero's journey? Is there an alternative structure that can deal with these characters, a structure that can incorporate them in a narrative? This MA will attempt to answer these questions, while also investigating if the materials of time and space can be manipulated and understood when working outside the guidelines of a formulaic structure. The materials of time and space are unique to all films and they are both dealt with in different ways by screenwriters and filmmakers alike.

Temporal and spatial characteristics have been studied in depth by many critics including, of particular importance to this MA, David Bordwell. Bordwell has used time and space as a way of making sense of narrative and of engaging with a film. This is something that I am attempting to achieve in the following script and commentary. Furthermore, I will try to articulate the manipulation of time and space, with the challenges of multiple strands of narrative and multiple protagonists.

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'The Narrative Of Flippy Johnson'

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. TOWN - DAY

From a wide view dozens of people frolic around in the sea. It is a swimming race. A jitterbug boogie song accompanies the scene. The music is interrupted by static, then...

COASTGUARD REPORT(OS)

Yeah you're free to dock. Just stay on course for your mooring, you should avoid any swimmers. Over.

FISHERMAN'S BOAT(OS)

Who's winning? Over.

COASTGUARD(OS)

Looks close at the moment. Over.

The music starts up again as the swimming continues. Soon two SWIMMERS begin to emerge from the pack, creating a large gap that grows with each stroke.

Again the music is interrupted by static then...

COASTGUARD(OS)

Twelve-knot wind mate. Gets a bit choppy out beyond Rainbow Island. Over.

BOAT(OS)

Thanks Jacko. Let me know the result. Over.

COASTGUARD

Will do. Over.

The jitterbug boogie music starts up again as the race continues. Hundreds of people stand on the banks cheering inaudibly as the racing gets more frantic.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. HOUSE - DAY

An OLD MAN on the phone. We're close on him as he extends his fingers, using them to split the venetian blinds as

(cont)

he looks out the window. He has a bushy beard and long thinning grey hair. This is TOM EVANS (69).

TOM

(Speaking into phone)

They're doing it again.

On the other end of the phone a MAN'S muffled voice can be heard.

MAN

...What's doing what Mr Evans?

TOM

The bees.

MAN

...The bees?

TOM

(getting angry)

Yes the bees.

MAN

...What bees Tom?

TOM has another look onto his backyard and we see it for the first time. The grass is long, there is broken down machinery all over the yard. The centrepiece is a birdbath, several bees flying around it, attracted to the wild flowers growing beside it. A large mound of dirt sits prominent.

TOM

My neighbour's bees. They're drinking the water in my birdbath, again.

MAN

...Well we'll be sure to make a note of it.

Laughter is identifiable in the background, it does not escape TOM'S attention.

TOM

I'm going to kill myself today.

TOM slams the phone down.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - EARLY EVENING

Inside a car MILLICENT JONES (27) drives along a dirt road in the middle of what appears to be a farm. She is beautiful, long brown hair, deep brown eyes and a thin figure. She has a prominent graze over her left eye. In the passenger seat is ISABEL JONES (29). Equally stunning, but with shorter hair.

MILLICENT

You see it?

ISABEL continues too look ahead.

ISABEL

See what Mill?

MILLICENT'S tone of voice becomes dreary, a monotone sound.

MILLICENT

Doesn't matter. We'll be there soon.

ISABEL looks across at MILLICENT as she slows down the car.

ISABEL

Where are you taking me?

MILLICENT doesn't respond. She just looks ahead and begins softly crying. There is no change to her expression, just tears running down her face.

ISABEL

(concerned)

Millie?

The car slowly pulls to a stop.

MILLICENT

I love you Isi.

ISABEL raises half a smile.

ISABEL

I love you too.

MILLICENT puts on the handbrake and switches off the car. ISABEL looks out the window, confused.

ISABEL

Why are we stopped here?

MILLICENT looks out the windscreen off into the distance.

MILLICENT

(steely faced)

To show you that I love you.

ISABEL'S eyes lock onto the side of MILLICENT'S face.

ISABEL

I know you do.

MILLICENT grips the steering wheel as hard as she can. She begins to get angry.

MILLICENT

I don't think you do. I don't think you understand. You can't.

(pause)

You know the house that was across from the road from us when we were kids?

ISABEL nods.

MILLICENT (cont)

I want that to be our house. Your little girl running around. Roses in the front yard, wild flowers out the back. Maybe a fish pond, with little plastic ducks floating in it, a fisherman gnome on the edge. And a big long concrete driveway where our girl could learn to ride her bike and roller-skate.

ISABEL looks confused.

ISABEL

What's going on Millie?

MILLICENT

I don't want to talk anymore. It's hurting my head.

MILLICENT continues to stare out the windscreen. ISABEL looks a little scared as she looks back at MILLICENT

ISABEL

(anxious)

Can you take me home? I want to

(cont)

go home.

For the first time MILLICENT looks at ISABEL. There is a long exaggerated stare between them. ISABEL looks beyond MILLICENT and sees a BRIGHT WHITE LIGHT coming toward her. We FADE to WHITE. There is a loud crash; it is of eardrum piercing intensity.

FADE IN:

INT. CAR - EARLY EVENING

ANGELA KNIGHT sits in her car at the town lookout. She is of medium height and build, pretty, but not in an obvious way.

From the view we see an entire view of the town as night time draws closer. She fiddles with the radio dial, trying to find some kind of frequency, but there is only static. She gives up the search and stares out at the town. She begins crying, almost uncontrollably.

The WHITE LIGHT encroaches upon her. It startles ANGELA; she thrusts her arms up to protect herself from the light. The car spins as the LIGHT strikes...

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. BEACH FRONT - DAY

A wide shot of the beach. It is a picturesque scene with white clean sand and clear blue sky. But despite the picture perfect setting, it is cold, exemplified by the few sporadic people wandering on the beach, dressed in heavy winter clothing.

CUT TO:

EXT. GRASSY BANK - EVENING (black and white)

Two boys, 11 and 12 sit up against a turned over car in a large grassy area. The 12 year old is COOPER KNIGHT. The other is a redhead, busy chewing a lolly. No one knows his real name; he is always referred to as GINGER.

GINGER

Can you believe what happened Coop?
Look at those feet.

COOPER
It's a miracle... probably.

GINGER
Probably?

COOPER stretches his legs out revealing his giant feet,
covered by plastic bags.

GINGER
They look funny.

COOPER
Maybe.

GINGER
Did you pray for those?

COOPER looks down toward his feet.

COOPER
Didn't need to pray. I did it myself,
hard work and determination.

GINGER
So you got the machine working?

COOPER
Not exactly.

GINGER
Then how the...

GINGER points at COOPER'S feet.

COOPER
I just stuck some latex on them. Should
do the same job.

GINGER
(a little disappointed)
I thought you said you could fix it?

COOPER
I will one day. Just for now, the latex
will work...I think.

GINGER
Bet you'll win the race for sure.

COOPER

Maybe.

GINGER looks surprised at COOPER'S non-existent enthusiasm.

GINGER

Cooper? I had some questions about that machine.

COOPER

What?

GINGER

I'm just wondering. Is the vacuum through time that you said earlier like a vacuum cleaner?

COOPER

Not exactly Ginge.

GINGER

But could you get stuck in it like a vacuum cleaner?

COOPER

I suppose. Be like a black hole, where there is no time.

GINGER

So everything would just repeat over and over again.

COOPER

(not paying close attention)

I guess.

There is a long silence as GINGER looks pleased by his own understanding.

GINGER

That's just... I dunno... fucked.

COOPER gives GINGER a glare, unimpressed with his profanity.

GINGER

Sorry.
(a pause)
What next?

COOPER stands up.

COOPER
I'm going for a swim. Get a bit of
practise in.

COOPER jumps up and begins walking off, GINGER follows behind him.

GINGER
(excited)
Yea Coop.

COOPER has a swagger to his walk, a confidence that belies his age. He picks up speed until GINGER is just a distant speck behind him.

COOPER changes his direction and heads onto the sand of the beach. He hesitates, his face anticipating a shift in the atmosphere. He begins to shake, as do all his surroundings. Suddenly there is a BRIGHT WHITE light.

In the distant background GINGER falls to the ground. COOPER hits the sand with ferocious intensity, an echoing thud. He sits there and looks out to sea. The BLACK and WHITE image fades up into COLOUR.

GINGER walks up to him but says nothing. He tries to look in the same direction as COOPER, but he grows bored and leaves. COOPER continues sitting on the sand, staring out to the ocean. He makes himself comfortable, obviously planning a long stay.

CUT TO:

INT. DOCTORS OFFICE - DAY

Inside the local GP's office. We see the side-on figures of a doctor and patient sitting at each end of the frame, staring directly at each other. The DOCTOR is a short man, bald and overweight. The other man is tall, thin and smartly dressed in a green knitted top and grey pants, longish uncombed hair. This is WILLIAM COONEY (36).

WILLIAM has his shirt off as the doctor listens to his heart. WILLIAM'S body is well defined, athletic.

WILLIAM buttons his shirt.

The DOCTOR has a very deep husky voice...

DOCTOR

You'll be fine, just keep taking your medication.

WILLIAM

I need some help sleeping. I think it's slowly getting worse.

DOCTOR

Well I can prescribe you sleeping pills, but I wouldn't recommend it. Perhaps being more active, getting out and about would help with your lack of sleep.

(pause)

Are you entering this year's race?

WILLIAM

No.

DOCTOR

(sudden excitement)

Really? I just might have a chance of winning this year then. I'll tell you what, if that does happen, the wife will be extremely forthcoming!

The silhouetted figure of the DOCTOR laughs, stands, moves toward the door and out of the shadow.

DOCTOR

Good times.

He opens the door to reveal the RECEPTIONIST staring directly into the room. She quickly puts her head down when the doctor spots her gaze. The doctor escorts WILLIAM to the receptionist desk.

DOCTOR

You'll be fine William. Just come see me when you need more medication.

The doctor pats WILLIAM on the back handing him a prescription form and walking toward the waiting room. WILLIAM'S eyes follow him until the sound of the receptionists (29) voice interrupts his concentration. She is pretty, long blonde hair and glasses. She is PAULINE.

PAULINE

Are you entering this year's race Mr Cooney?

WILLIAM

No.

The receptionist looks surprised. Her tone of voice suddenly changes.

PAULINE
(angrily)

Get out.

WILLIAM is taken a back. The receptionist suddenly smiles.

PAULINE
I'm just fucking with... I mean I'm just
messing with you.

WILLIAM can't quite manage a smile. He hands the receptionist his credit card.

WILLIAM
How's little Harry?

PAULINE
He has his moments.

PAULINE hands back WILLIAM'S credit card. He walks away, giving the receptionist a chance to stare at his feet as he leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

WILLIAM walks down the street. He has a shyness to him, noticeable in his walk, slumped shoulders, as if he's trying to look shorter than he really is. He has a quick glance at his prescription before folding it and placing it in his back pocket.

As he walks by people he is greeted with stares, head tilts, accompanied by the odd "hi" or "afternoon". It is clear the people walking past him know EXACTLY who he is.

WILLIAM continues walking until he stops at the supermarket and stares at his reflection in the window. He watches himself closely before he sees an employee behind the glass waving at him. WILLIAM doesn't wave back; he puts his head down and carries on walking.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

WILLIAM enters a school classroom. The room is what you would expect in any classroom in the world. Small desks lined up perfectly from the front of the room to the back, chairs on top.

MILLICENT, the teacher, sits at her desk reading. WILLIAM approaches her.

WILLIAM

Ms. Jones?

MILLICENT looks up at WILLIAM for the first time, not really paying attention.

MILLICENT

Yes.

WILLIAM

I'm William Cooney. I got your message about my daughter.

MILLICENT stands up.

MILLICENT

I'm sorry Mr Cooney.

MILLICENT moves around to the front of her desk and pulls a kid's chair from the top of a student's desk. She places it in front of her desk.

WILLIAM is quite literally taken aback by her beauty. There is a long moment as WILLIAM just stares. It lasts just long enough to make MILLICENT appear a little uncomfortable. WILLIAM tries to gather himself.

WILLIAM

Um... You ah... You wanted to talk about my daughter?

MILLICENT motions to the seat as she sits back down in her chair.

WILLIAM

I didn't think teachers worked during the mid-winter break. And on a Sunday for that matter.

MILLICENT

Only when we need to.

WILLIAM sits down in the tiny student's chair. It makes him seem like he is some sort of giant. It is an odd looking image.

MILLICENT

Sorry about the um...

WILLIAM adjusts in his chair and smiles.

MILLICENT 'subtlety' checks out WILLIAM, looking him up and down, although trying to conceal her interest.

MILLICENT

So you're the guy that won all those races.

WILLIAM smiles. MILLICENT smiles back. There is a connection between them, some electricity.

MILLICENT

(inquisitively)

So are you going to be racing this year?

WILLIAM quickly changes the subject.

WILLIAM

Is everything ok with my girl?

MILLICENT

Well Mr Cooney, she doesn't say much. Sometimes she doesn't say anything. I have to almost force her to speak at show and tell.

WILLIAM

Maybe she's got nothing to show. Or tell.

MILLICENT raises her eyebrows ever so slightly.

MILLICENT

I just feel that you need to help her get involved in some sort of school activity. Just so she can mix with other kids, maybe make a few friends from school. You teach swimming don't you? Perhaps that's an avenue.

WILLIAM

I doubt out. She doesn't really
like the water.

MILLICENT

And she's your daughter?

WILLIAM sits in silence.

MILLICENT

Mr Cooney?

Long pause.

MILLICENT (cont)

William?

WILLIAM'S comes back into reality after drifting off for
a second.

MILLICENT

Do you mind me asking what your wife
does? Perhaps she could suggest an after
school activity.

WILLIAM

I'm divorced.

MILLICENT

Sorry.

WILLIAM

(slightly apologetic)

It's ok.

(pause)

Going on one year now.

There is an awkward moment. WILLIAM breaks the silence.

WILLIAM

She's a vet.

MILLICENT

Oh. Your daughter said she wanted to
be a vet.

WILLIAM

(joking tone)

She did? I thought she didn't say much.

MILLICENT

I managed to drag it out of her.

(pause)

I just thought we should meet, discuss what's going on with her. Get a dialogue going. I'm new here, so I like to do it with it all my student's parents.

MILLICENT seems a little embarrassed by her easily misconstrued words.

WILLIAM smiles as he watches her, the look on his face is unmistakable, a look of pure affection.

MILLICENT

For the most part she's a good student Mr Cooney. Always well-behaved, on task.

WILLIAM nods his head. A kind of proud grin on his face.

MILLICENT

I'll have a word with her when I get home. I've got the kids for the holidays.

A beat.

WILLIAM takes a look down at MILLICENT'S wrist. It has a weird multicoloured band around it. It is quite large and noticeable.

WILLIAM

Did one of your students make that?

WILLIAM points his head in the direction of the wristband.

MILLICENT brushes her hair behind her ears, an obvious nervous habit.

MILLICENT

It's silly. It's just something my sister made for me when we were kids. I used to be afraid of the dark so my sister made this to help me. That's why it has the bright colours, supposed to glow in the dark. It doesn't, but it makes me feel better. I call it my rainbow watch. Silly isn't it?

WILLIAM speaks softly, almost poetic.

WILLIAM

No. Reassuring one would think. Nothing worse than that feeling of being afraid with nothing to grab onto. Like when you're having a bad dream and you start slipping down a hill or cliff face, nothing to hold to stop you from falling. Be nice to have something to clutch in your sleep, make you feel safe... Like a bracelet.

MILLICENT fiddles with the band. She looks into WILLIAM'S eyes. There is a connection, WILLIAM'S words resonating in her head.

MILLICENT

(grateful)

Thank you for coming in William.

A comfortable silence.

WILLIAM stands.

WILLIAM

By the way I'm not racing this year.

MILLICENT looks a bit embarrassed about her earlier, rather nose question.

MILLICENT

I'm sorry. It's just... you know.

WILLIAM

I know. Maybe I should go on the radio, make a public announcement.

MILLICENT smirks at WILLIAM'S comments. He takes the opportunity to stare at her again.

CUT TO:

EXT. CARPARK - DAY

At the local school car park WILLIAM watches MILLICENT from a distance as she walks to her car. He semi-cowers behind his car so he won't be spotted. He absorbedly stares as MILLICENT gets into her car and drives off. He watches until her car has completely disappeared.

CUT TO:

INT. ANGELA AND JACKSON'S HOUSE - DAY

There is a lengthy dull buzzing sound as JACKSON KNIGHT enters from the edge of the frame, dragging another MALE along the floor. JACKSON is part Maori, with curly dark hair, dressed in a coastguard uniform. The other MALE is tall, thin, his face covered in blood. He wears a distinctive large silver CROSS around his neck. JACKSON looks angry, like his head is going to explode at any minute.

When JACKSON gets to the centre of the room, he lets the man go. The low buzzing sound stops and is replaced by the wheezing and soft painful grunts of the MALE.

JACKSON kneels and leans over him.

JACKSON
(angry)

Fucker.

The MALE curls up and protects his face. JACKSON gets angrier.

JACKSON
Did you hear me? I said fucker!

The MALE momentarily looks up. He appears as though he wants to say something.

JACKSON
Don't say a fucking word.

The MALE is completely limp as JACKSON rains down a series of swift punches, straight into the body of the MALE.

The MALE finally tries to speak through the pain.

MALE
Wai...wait... Jackson...

He tries to continue but JACKSON'S domineering presence stops him.

JACKSON
I thought I told you not to say a fucking word.

MALE

Wait Jackson. Please. Don't...

JACKSON

You're a piece of shit. Talking like a fucking messiah. Goddamn piece of shit!

MALE

(getting angry himself)

That's blasphemy!

JACKSON pulls the ropes tighter.

JACKSON

Fuck you!

MALE

You're going to hell. You hear me!

The silent buzzing noise starts up again as JACKSON starts violently stomping the MALE in the face.

When the MALE goes limp, the buzzing stops. JACKSON leans over the MALE'S completely still body.

JACKSON

Shit. Fuck me!

JACKSON looks around the room in a panic. He holds his arms up to his head.

JACKSON

(trailing off)

Shit! What the fuck...

JACKSON exits the frame. We stay close on the dead body. It is limp, lifeless. We're on the body for a long time before JACKSON comes back with a large black tarpaulin and a shovel. He stands over the body again and has a long moment of reflection.

JACKSON

(shaking his head)

Fuck me.

CUT TO:

INT. MILLICENT'S BACKYARD - DAY

MILLICENT sits out on her deck, overlooking her tiny backyard, reading a stack of papers. ISABEL comes wandering out dressed in a towel, her short hair soaking wet.

As ISABEL enters the frame, she takes a quick look at MILLICENT'S papers and sits in the deckchair beside her.

ISABEL

You're dedicated, I'll give you that.

MILLICENT doesn't respond, just catches a glimpse of ISABEL. It is a subtle look of affection.

ISABEL

Do you want a coffee?

MILLICENT shakes her head.

ISABEL

You know I was insinuating that you should get me some coffee.

ISABEL smirks as MILLICENT stands up and walks past her.

ISABEL

I was kidding.

A beat.

ISABEL (cont.)

But while you're up. Two sugars remember!

MILLICENT (OS)

(semi-angry)

I forgot to put sugar in your coffee once. You don't have to remind me every time.

Very close on ISABEL as she speaks.

ISABEL

How much does that remind you of mum? Remember when you left your shoes on the bus after netball. Every time you went somewhere she told you not to forget your shoes.

ISABEL starts laughing. A jug boils in the kitchen.

ISABEL(cont)

As if you would just randomly take off
your shoes every time you go out.

She continues her laughter.

ISABEL

I mean can you believe that? My god
she was crazy sometimes.

A beat.

ISABEL

In what conceivable social situation
would you take off your shoes? And for
that matter leave them behind. Aside from
netball of course.

MILLICENT comes walking back in, coffee in hand. She
gives it to ISABEL; who nods her head in appreciation.

ISABEL takes a sip of her coffee as MILLICENT sit back
down.

MILLICENT

Japanese restaurants.

ISABEL looks up from her coffee.

ISABEL

What?

MILLICENT

At some Japanese restaurants don't you
have to take off your shoes?

ISABEL

How the fuck would I know?

MILLICENT

You asked me if there was anywhere that
you might take your shoes off.

ISABEL laughs again.

ISABEL

Only little Millie would actually think
of somewhere.

ISABEL continues drinking her coffee. We go close on her again.

ISABEL

So?

MILLICENT

So what?

ISABEL

What did he say?

MILLICENT

Who?

ISABEL

Cooney. Who the fuck else?

MILLICENT takes her time before responding.

MILLICENT

He's not racing.

ISABEL suddenly jumps up in excitement.

ISABEL

I fucking knew it. This is my year.
No more runner-ups.

ISABEL looks down at WILLIAM.

ISABEL (cont)

Did he say why?

MILLICENT

(snappy)

I didn't ask.

ISABEL

Ok. Stay clam.

MILLICENT

He's really nice. I felt bad about snooping for you. We were suppose to be talking about his daughter.

ISABEL

You sound like you've got a little crush.

MILLICENT doesn't speak, she appears a little embarrassed.

ISABEL
Mr super swimmer take your fancy?

MILLICENT
Shut up.

ISABEL messes up MILLICENT'S hair.

ISABEL
Poor old Millie's got a crush.

MILLICENT tidies her hair. She has a bit of a smile on her face, clearly enjoying ISABEL'S roughhousing and shtick.

ISABEL finishes her coffee and stands up.

ISABEL
That reminds me, Gene's staying tonight.

MILLICENT'S mood plummets.

ISABEL
You know he likes you, he thinks we should all hang out more.

MILLICENT
(looking away)
Whatever.

ISABEL leans over and kisses MILLICENT on the top of the head.

ISABEL
I'm going to hit the pool. Get some practise in.

As ISABEL exits MILLICENT turns to watch her leave. She softly touches the spot on her head where ISABEL kissed her, before tucking her hair behind her ear.

CUT TO:

INT. WILLIAM'S HOUSE - DAY

WILLIAM arrives home. The inside of the house is nice. Nothing exceptional but tidy and well looked after.

WILLIAM walks through the lounge and into the dining room where he picks up the phone. He doodles on a pad as he dials.

WILLIAM

Oh hi Principal Miller. This is William Cooney.

The voice on the other end of the phone is muffled, impossible to make out.

WILLIAM

That's right. She's good. No problems at all. I actually just called because I wanted to get Ms Jones' address if possible.

WILLIAM

Why? My daughter and I wanted to take a little gift around to thank her for all the help she's been giving her. I thought a home call was a little more personal than just dropping it at school.

WILLIAM listens attentively.

WILLIAM

That would be great, thank you.

WILLIAM writes on his pad with more purpose.

WILLIAM

Thank you Principal Miller.

He hangs up the phone

WILLIAM leaves the dining area and walks back into the kitchen. He sits down on the couch. We see the writing on his pad for the first time. Circled in the middle are the words *114 Waireka Place*. Written all around it is the name *Ms JONES* over and over again. He writes the name a couple more times before laying back on the couch. He struggles to stay awake, boredom apparent on his face.

CUT TO:

INT. FRONT LAWN - DAY

TOM EVANS comes wandering out his front door, old coat, pants and gumboots. His front lawn is as messy as the back, grass unkempt, despite the presence of an old lawnmower. We follow TOM as he walks toward the lawnmower, and starts pushing it to the footbath. He is stopped by GINGER walking along the path.

GINGER

You finally going to mow your lawns Mr Evans. My dad will have a heart attack.

TOM

Yeah well I hope he does.

TOM starts walking down the road pushing the lawn mower ahead of him. GINGER follows him.

GINGER

What do you mean?

TOM

I said your dad's a fucking asshole. Now go home rat face.

GINGER

My name's Ginger, sir.

TOM

That's what I said.

TOM stops, leans over the mower and yanks on the pull chord to start it up. It goes with a stutter and slowly gets louder till it is completely warmed up.

GINGER

(shouting)

Your house is way back there Mr Evans!
What are you doing?

TOM

(shouting back)

I'm not mowing my lawns, I told old Flippy Johnson I'd mow his!

GINGER looks confused.

GINGER

He lives over past the pub. That's like a mile a way! You going to walk all the way there with the mower going?

TOM doesn't say anything; he just begins walking away from the kid pushing the lawnmower ahead of him. GINGER looks on from a distance as TOM walks off, stones flying all over the place.

GINGER

(to himself)

He's going to run out of petrol.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

WILLIAM awakens in his bed and he gently steps out. He has on pyjama bottoms but no top. He puts on a black hooded sweatshirt and leaves the room.

WILLIAM walks through to another bedroom in the house, a child's room.

The room is rather plain for a kid's bedroom, just a few stuffed toys on a dressing table. The room is dark with just the moon shining through the window providing light.

WILLIAM tentatively enters the room and sits on the bed, next to a young girl, her eyes open. She is tiny, with brown hair.

WILLIAM

Apple pie?

The GIRL looks up at WILLIAM.

WILLIAM

How's my little apple pie?

She says nothing, just looks solemnly into WILLIAM'S eyes.

WILLIAM

I heard you squirming earlier. Did you have a bad dream?

She nods her head.

WILLIAM

The ocean?

She nods again.

WILLIAM

You know it can't get you in here.

This time she just stares.

WILLIAM

You must be the only person
I know in this town that's afraid of
the ocean. I don't know why you find
it so frightening. Is it because it's
big? Are you afraid of drowning, because
you don't have to go in it.

The GIRL starts crying. WILLIAM clearly doesn't know what to do.

WILLIAM

You know I met your teacher today.
You like her don't you? She's nice isn't
she? Seems very warm.

The GIRL rolls onto her side, eyes wide open looking at the wall. WILLIAM follows her eye line.

WILLIAM

Do you want me to sing the song?

SHE rolls back over and nods her head. WILLIAM starts to sing the *Rainbow connection*. We stay close on WILLIAM throughout...

WILLIAM

*"Why are there so many songs about
rainbows?
What's on the other side?
Rainbows are visions
but only illusions
Rainbows have nothing to hide
So we've been told and some choose to
believe it
I know they're wrong wait
and see
Someday we'll find it the
rainbow connection..."*

WILLIAM stops singing when he sees his daughter lying completely asleep. WILLIAM pats her on the head and stands up when he hears the sound of a TV in the background.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

WILLIAM comes walking into the lounge where he sees his son on a lazy boy chair asleep, old style 'Transformers' playing on the TV. His son is 15 years old. WILLIAM sits on the arm of the chair, next to his son.

The boy doesn't respond, he is fast asleep.

Suddenly the phone rings.

WILLIAM jumps up in a flash and rushes over to it in an attempt to get it before it wakes anybody up. He picks up the phone.

WILLIAM

William speaking.

WILLIAM pulls the phone away from his ear, clearly unimpressed by the mumbled rant coming from the other end. It is TOM EVANS voice, although no words can really be made out.

WILLIAM

I think you may have the wrong number sir.

WILLIAM hangs up the phone. He looks across at the clock, nervous, apprehensive.

After a while WILLIAM walks over the coffee table in the middle of the room and picks his keys up. He looks back at his son, still motionless, asleep.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Inside an almost completely white room, ISABEL and an unknown MAN engage in an intense sexual encounter. It is very rigorous and raw, The MAN'S face covered in sweat, ISABEL'S face painted in pure ecstasy.

CUT TO:

INT. MILLICENT'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Through her bedroom door MILLICENT listens to the sexual sounds going on inside an adjacent room. She initially looks intrigued. But her facial expression turns into despair and a look of pure sadness comes across her face.

Her room has children's drawings completely covering her walls. She sits down at her desk and pulls out some papers and a pen. In that instance the figure of WILLIAM is SUDDENLY revealed in the background, looking through the window.

MILLICENT does not see him, she continues to try and work, until the sexual sounds coming from the adjacent room get louder and louder till she can stand it no more. She scatters her papers all over her table in anger.

CUT TO:

EXT. MILLICENT & ISABEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

MILLICENT comes WANDERING out her front door, long black coat, scarf around her neck. When WILLIAM spots her he quickly hides behind some bushes. He watches her leave, before jostling in his pockets to find his keys. WILLIAM walks briskly to his car.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

MILLICENT walks along a street. It is dark, with just some dim streetlights providing any illumination. As MILLICENT walks she is lit by trailing car lights. When the car comes into frame it slows down beside her. The windows slowly move down until WILLIAM is revealed.

WILLIAM

Ms. Jones?

MILLICENT comes to a complete stop.

MILLICENT

Hi William.

WILLIAM

Do you want a ride? You look cold.

MILLICENT has a look around before moving toward the car.
She looks a little tentative.

MILLICENT

Sure.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

MILLICENT removes her scarf as she travels along with WILLIAM. It is an old car, obviously lacking any heating; because as soon the scarf is removed it is just as quickly placed back around her neck.

MILLICENT

You can call me Millie.

WILLIAM

Ok.

MILLICENT

It's short for Millicent. I think I might have told you that.

WILLIAM nods his head.

WILLIAM

Where are you headed?

MILLICENT

Don't know, just walking, where are you going?

WILLIAM

Nowhere, just out for a drive.

MILLICENT

(managing to raise a smile)
That's kind of weird.

WILLIAM

Is it?

A beat.

WILLIAM

I just like driving around. Too cold to walk.
(pause)
What are you doing out so late?

MILLICENT

Just needed to get out of the house for a while.

WILLIAM

Do you live with friends or something?

MILLICENT

Just my sister Isabel.

WILLIAM

Do you like living with your sister?

MILLICENT doesn't respond.

WILLIAM

Does your sister have short brown hair?

MILLICENT nods.

WILLIAM

Of course. She was runner up the last few years.

(pause)

I guess you had more of an interest than most when you asked if I was racing this year.

MILLICENT looks a little embarrassed as WILLIAM pulls the car to a complete stop at the town lookout. Through the windscreen the lights of the entire town are visible, plus the sea off in the distance. It is a striking view.

MILLICENT

Wow.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN LOOKOUT - NIGHT

WILLIAM and MILLICENT get out of the car and move around to the front and sit on the bonnet, overlooking the entire town.

WILLIAM

If you didn't know better you would think this was a nice place to live.

MILLICENT

It seems ok.

WILLIAM

You only just moved here. Give it a while.

MILLICENT looks down at WILLIAM'S clothes.

MILLICENT

Do you always go driving in your pyjamas?

WILLIAM smiles.

WILLIAM

Well I don't usually get out of the car.

A beat.

MILLICENT

How come you don't race anymore?

WILLIAM

Politics.

MILLICENT laughs.

WILLIAM

You grow out of it. Can't be a penguin forever.

MILLICENT

It just seems like you can't get away from it. Ever since I got here all I've heard about is this mid-winter mid-week penguin race. It seems like everyone's talking about it. My sister won't shut up about it.

(pause)

Why did you start racing?

WILLIAM

Because of my father I guess. Trying to impress him, you know the story. He expected a lot from me. And not just swimming. School and everything.

MILLICENT

He must have been proud of you.

WILLIAM

Maybe.

An extended silence.

WILLIAM

It's not all it's cracked up to me.

MILLICENT

What's not?

WILLIAM

Success. Your sister will find out.
It goes to your head. Cost me my
marriage.

WILLIAM looks to MILLICENT to respond but she doesn't,
she just looks awkward.

MILLICENT sits up on the bonnet.

MILLICENT

So do you think Isabel will definitely
win this year?

WILLIAM

I don't really like talking about it.

MILLICENT

Sorry.

MILLICENT has a brief look around at her surroundings.

MILLICENT

What kind of stroke did you use?

WILLIAM smiles, impressed by MILLICENT'S persistence.

WILLIAM

Freestyle.

MILLICENT

I like backstroke. In fact you could
call it my speciality. Watch.

MILLICENT leaps off the car bonnet in a sudden burst of
energy. She lies on the grass next to the car and starts
rotating her arms backwards, one hitting the ground after
the other.

MILLICENT

See? Perfect.

WILLIAM laughs as MILLICENT gets off the ground and lies
back on the car bonnet. WILLIAM struggles to hold back
the laughter as he speaks...

WILLIAM
(smiling)

Impressive.

There's a silence as they both look away at the view.

WILLIAM
What are you doing tomorrow?

MILLICENT shrugs her shoulders.

WILLIAM
Do you want to go on a picnic?

MILLICENT looks a bit shocked.

MILLICENT
Wow, that's pretty hit and miss William.
"I've known you for like one day but
lets go on a date anyway".

WILLIAM sits up next to her.

WILLIAM
So. I go on picnics with all my
friends.

A beat.

MILLICENT
Seems more like a date thing than a
friendship thing.

WILLIAM
Do you want to argue semantics here?

MILLICENT
No.

WILLIAM laughs softly at MILLICENT

MILLICENT
What?

WILLIAM
Nothing.

An awkward pause as they both think of what to say.

WILLIAM
I'll pick you up tomorrow morning

(cont)

then?

WILLIAM does his best boyish grin. MILLICENT laughs softly, impressed as WILLIAM shows a little bit of charm.

MILLICENT

Sure.

WILLIAM

Great. Come on, I'll drive you home.

WILLIAM leaps down from the bonnet and searches around for his keys.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

WILLIAM and MILLICENT drive along the car late at night. There's a long extended silence. MILLICENT looks out the window, her attention grabbed by something in the distance.

MILLICENT

(inquisitively)

Lenore Street.

WILLIAM

Quoth the raven.

MILLICENT looks across at WILLIAM.

MILLICENT

Nevermore.

WILLIAM looks around at MILLICENT in astonishment.

WILLIAM

You know that poem?

MILLICENT

Why do you think I pointed out the street? I love Poe.

WILLIAM looks back at her and smiles.

WILLIAM

Me too.

MILLICENT smiles back, until she looks out the windscreen. When she turns around and sees WILLIAM still looking at her she screams...

MILLICENT

William!

WILLIAM looks ahead and slams on the breaks, screeching to a halt.

The headlights illuminate the figure ahead of the car. It is TOM EVANS, his elderly wrinkled face accentuated by the bright headlights. There is a long moment between WILLIAM and TOM. They stare at each other for at least 5 seconds. WILLIAM sees the SHOVEL in TOM'S hand.

MILLICENT

You know him?

WILLIAM doesn't take his eyes off TOM.

WILLIAM

Everybody does.

TOM steps out of the way of the car. He begins walking off, eventually taking his eyes off WILLIAM, who begins driving away.

WILLIAM looks ahead at the road, not making eye contact with MILLICENT. She sits back and doesn't say a word.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

WILLIAM pulls up outside MILLICENT'S house.

MILLICENT

Um... How did you know where I lived?

WILLIAM hesitates before answering and acting ignorant.

WILLIAM

What?

MILLICENT

How did you know where I lived?

He composes himself.

WILLIAM

When I said I would pick you up for the picnic you told me.

MILLICENT

Did I?

MILLICENT seems distant. WILLIAM appears a little nervous himself as he picks up on MILLICENT'S unease.

WILLIAM

Are you ok?

MILLICENT

I'm fine William. Sorry.

MILLICENT looks toward her house and puts her head down.

MILLICENT

Do you think we could just sit here for a while?

WILLIAM

(confused)

Ok.

WILLIAM tries not to stare at her, but his attraction is obvious.

WILLIAM

Do you want me to turn the radio on?

MILLICENT

No no. I'm ok.

WILLIAM

Its pretty cold. I could turn the heater on... Actually it doesn't work. Not sure why I suggested that.

MILLICENT chuckles a little to herself.

WILLIAM stares at MILLICENT. It is clear that his adoring eyes are starting to make her feel a little uncomfortable.

MILLICENT

Thank you for the lift.

MILLICENT gets out of the car very quickly; WILLIAM is a little taken aback by her abruptness. When she has left

(cont)

the car and closed the door, he leans out the passenger side window.

WILLIAM

So tomorrow morning then?

MILLICENT

Sure.

WILLIAM

Aces then.

MILLICENT walks away toward her house. WILLIAM puts his car into gear and drives off. He only gets about thirty metres along the street when he stops right in the middle of the road. He stares at himself in the rear view mirror. He speaks with a self-mocking tone of voice...

WILLIAM

...Aces then...

He gives the mirror a little slap. Reprimanding himself.

WILLIAM

Idiot.

CUT TO:

EXT. MILLICENT & ISABEL'S HOUSE - MORNING

Outside MILLICENT & ISABEL'S house. It is old and small, but there is something cosy about it, like an old log cabin.

WILLIAM approaches the front door, smartly dressed, hair done perfectly.

He knocks on the door. No response. He has a look around before knocking again. He waits patiently.

Eventually the door opens slowly. MILLICENT shows her face from behind the door.

MILLICENT

I can't go today William. I'm busy.

MILLICENT tries to close the door, but WILLIAM blocks it.

WILLIAM

What's wrong?

MILLICENT

Nothing I just can't go. I have to
return some library books.

She attempts to close the door again, WILLIAM stops it
once more.

MILLICENT

I'm sorry.

MILLICENT manages to close the door this time. WILLIAM
stands quietly, a disappointed and confused look on his
face. He walks away slowly, only the odd look back at the
front door stopping his momentum.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MILLICENT closes the door. When she turns back around we
see ISABEL lying hunched over on the floor, a half empty
bottle of spirits on the floor beside her.

The living room is modest. Two old couches and even older
carpet make the place look like it is in need of some
serious D.I.Y.

MILLICENT walks over to the couch and kneels beside the
passed out ISABEL. She softly shakes her.

MILLICENT
(concerned)

Isi?

She shakes her again, a little harder this time.

MILLICENT

Isi? Wake up.

ISABEL slowly raises an eyelid as she adjusts to the
light.

MILLICENT

Are you ok?

ISABEL nearly starts crying, but she manages to compose
herself.

ISABEL

Gene and I aren't together anymore.
We broke up last night. He came to fuck

(cont)
me then dump me.

MILLICENT
(head down)
I'm sorry.

ISABEL sits up.

ISABEL
No you're not.

MILLICENT
Of course I am.

ISABEL
You hate him.

MILLICENT
I don't hate him.

ISABEL
You barely said a word to him whenever
he came over.

MILLICENT
That doesn't mean I don't like him.
You know what I'm like around people.

ISABEL
You might think you would grow out of
that.

ISABEL manages a slight smile, MILLICENT responds with
one of her own.

ISABEL sits back on the couch and pulls out a cigarette
pack. She extracts one and lights it up.

ISABEL
Well?

MILLICENT
Well what?

ISABEL
Nothing I just... I know you don't like
it when I smoke in the house.

MILLICENT picks up the bottle on the floor and places it
on the coffee table.

ISABEL
You want some of that?

MILLICENT screws up her face. ISABEL smirks.

MILLICENT
So you just sat out here drinking all night? You're supposed to be in training.

ISABEL
Sorry, mum! I drank quietly in my room. Can't remember when I came out here come to think of it. And I thought I heard you go out for a while last night, what was that about? And who cares. Cooney was the only guy standing in my way.

ISABEL has a little dry retch. She pauses as she screws up her face, reacting to the terrible taste in her mouth

ISABEL
Why didn't you like him?

MILLICENT looks confused.

ISABEL
You've never liked any of my boyfriends.

ISABEL stands up and stretches. MILLICENT tidies the couch where ISABEL was lying, an obvious tactic to avoid the conversation.

ISABEL
You look nice.

MILLICENT blushes and tucks her hair behind her ear.

ISABEL
Where are you going?

MILLICENT doesn't answer.

ISABEL
So answer me then. Why don't you like any of my boyfriends?

MILLICENT
I liked some of your boyfriends.

ISABEL

Please... You might as well have attacked them all with a fire extinguisher.

MILLICENT

Why a fire extinguisher?

ISABEL

(shaking her head)

Not the point Millicent. Not the point.

MILLICENT takes a moment.

MILLICENT

Gene was a dick.

ISABEL roles her eyes, her face taking on an angrier tone, as if she knows what MILLICENT is about to say...

MILLICENT

He made you do it.

ISABEL grabs MILLICENT hard and turns her toward her.

ISABEL

It was my decision. You know that.
I'm sick and tired of explaining
that to you!

ISABEL grabs MILLICENT a bit harder, she looks scared and tries to break free.

MILLICENT

(composing herself)

Let go please.

ISABEL obliges.

Some anger starts to grow on MILLICENT'S face.

MILLICENT

He made you do it.

ISABEL

Shut up!

MILLICENT

It would have been ok. I would have helped you. We could have all lived here together.

ISABEL

You could never live with Gene.

MILLICENT

I don't mean Gene, I mean the baby.
Me, you and the baby.

ISABEL

Just... Just shut up.

MILLICENT

I hate him. He ruined it. And yet
you still let him touch you.
I don't know how you could stand it.
After he forced you to get rid of it.

ISABEL

I told you he didn't force me. Now shut
the fuck up!

MILLICENT

He's a pig. And a liar.

ISABEL lashes out with a vicious slap across MILLICENT'S
face, drawing blood over her left eye. ISABEL holds her
hand in front of her, revealing the small ring
responsible for the gash on MILLICENT'S face.

MILLICENT takes a step back.

ISABEL

Fuck. Sorry Mill.

MILLICENT walks toward the door. ISABEL gets angry.

ISABEL

Fuck you then, leave!

MILLICENT turns around a little surprised at ISABEL'S
words. She doesn't respond and just stands there staring
awkwardly.

ISABEL

I hate you.

MILLICENT turns around and exits, leaving the door wide
open.

ISABEL

(kind of under her breath)
Close the fucking door. How many times

(cont)
do I have to tell her? She never
learns...

i continues mumbling as she closes the door, we FADE OUT
as she does.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WILLIAM'S HOUSE - DAY

MILLICENT approaches WILLIAM'S house. She knocks on the
door and waits patiently, crossing her arms, trying to
protect herself from the cold. The door opens and WILLIAM
comes into frame.

WILLIAM
What happened to your eye?

MILLICENT wipes a small amount of blood away from her
face. She looks a little embarrassed.

MILLICENT
It's nothing. Just an accident at home.

WILLIAM
So what are you doing here? I thought
you were busy?

MILLICENT
Is there any way we could still go on
that picnic?

WILLIAM sends MILLICENT a warm smile, now a common
occurrence between the two.

MILLICENT
Can we walk?

WILLIAM
It could take like half an hour, maybe
a little more.

MILLICENT
That's ok. I like walking.

CUT TO:

EXT. OLD FARM HOUSE - DAY

Outside an old broken down house, seemingly in the middle of nowhere and surrounded by long tall grass, WILLIAM and MILLICENT approach. The house looks like it should have been knocked down years ago if only anyone really cared about it.

CUT TO:

INT. OLD FARM HOUSE - DAY

Inside the abandoned house, MILLICENT and WILLIAM enter. WILLIAM carries a blanket, while MILLICENT holds a picnic basket under her arm.

The inside of the house is as decrepit as the outside. Dusty, dirty, walls cracked and the roof seemingly caving in.

WILLIAM lays the blanket on the floor and sits, MILLICENT tentatively does the same. She has a look around the room, a kind of confused glance at their surroundings.

WILLIAM

You're wondering why I bought you here?

MILLICENT

Well it is a nice day outside. When you said we were having a picnic I thought you meant at the beach.

WILLIAM

I don't particularly care for the beach. Plus it's a little cold don't you think.

MILLICENT again looks around the room, surprised by just how run down it is.

WILLIAM

Anyway this place is great and no one knows about it.

MILLICENT

Whose place is it?

WILLIAM

Old Flippy Johnson's. He has acres of land out here. I used to come here as a kid.

MILLICENT

He doesn't come out here?

WILLIAM

He doesn't go anywhere. He's a bit of a recluse, never leaves his house at the other end of his farm. There are all sorts of stories about him. Kids around here used to say he was a crazy scientist.

WILLIAM pauses as he gets a bit tongue twisted and clears his throat.

WILLIAM(cont)

Anyway, no one really goes beyond the train tracks, what with the stories and all. So it's away from prying eyes.

MILLICENT

I did notice a lot of people looking at you on the way.

WILLIAM

It goes with the territory.

WILLIAM smiles, putting MILLICENT at ease.

WILLIAM pulls out a bag of apples from the picnic basket and begins cutting them into pieces.

MILLICENT

It's kind of cramped. But you could hide out here if you wanted.

WILLIAM

From who?

MILLICENT

Just in general.

WILLIAM

Like Anne Frank?

MILLICENT beams out a wide smile.

MILLICENT

I love her. Her story is such a perfect illustration of human injustice and suffering.

The tone is suddenly brought down. WILLIAM seems unsure how to interpret MILLICENT'S words. He searches for something to say but MILLICENT beats him to it.

MILLICENT (cont)

I told my dad that I was going to travel back in time and save her from the Nazis.

WILLIAM

What did your dad say?

MILLICENT

Nothing, he just went to the library and got me some books on time travel.

WILLIAM laughs out loud.

WILLIAM

Sounds like a good guy.

MILLICENT

(nodding her head)

He was ok.

WILLIAM

Was?

MILLICENT

He killed himself a few years ago.

WILLIAM

Do you know why?

MILLICENT

Not really. I know it had something to do with our mum poisoning our dog.

WILLIAM

(shocked)

On purpose?

MILLICENT

Of course not on purpose. She was trying to poison the neighbour's dog.

WILLIAM

(Sarcastically)

Oh that's much better.

MILLICENT
(very serious tone of voice)
Shut up.

WILLIAM very quickly changes the subject.

WILLIAM
(chewing his apple)
So have ever read Anne Frank's diary?

MILLICENT
No. I don't think I could get through
it. The stage play I watched as a kid
was tough enough.

A beat

MILLICENT
They played that song "Somewhere over the
Rainbow" at intermission. Now every time I
hear it I burst into tears.

MILLICENT smiles quite awkwardly, WILLIAM'S facial
expression suggests that he has picked up on the
discomfort evident in MILLICENT'S face.

WILLIAM
You ok?

MILLICENT takes her first bite of apple, and waits till
she has finished chewing before she speaks.

MILLICENT
Fine.

WILLIAM looks around the room, unsure what to say.

There's a sudden smile on MILLICENT'S face, but it looks
artificial and soon disappears into a frown.

WILLIAM
Millicent?

MILLICENT doesn't move, she just sits there, staring
straight ahead. WILLIAM looks a little confused.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH - DAY

MILLICENT stands in the middle of the beach with ISABEL, their eyes locked upon each other. They continue staring until ISABEL begins sliding away like she's on a conveyor belt. The background starts slipping away as MILLICENT'S facial expression turns to one of anguish.

CUT TO:

INT. OLD HOUSE - DAY

WILLIAM manages to snap MILLICENT back into reality,

WILLIAM

Millicent!

MILLICENT

I um... I'm going to go.

WILLIAM

We just got here.

MILLICENT

I know. But I have to return some library books.

MILLICENT stands up.

CUT TO:

EXT. OLD HOUSE - DAY

MILLICENT walks briskly out of the door to the surrounding paddock. WILLIAM emerges not far behind and follows her.

WILLIAM

Where are you going?

MILLICENT

I have to go home.

WILLIAM catches up to her on the railway tracks; he grabs her from behind, pulling her around to face him. The house is now out of view.

MILLICENT stands defensively

WILLIAM

Would I sound depraved if I said a person that I have known for two days is more important to me than my own family.

MILLICENT stares into WILLIAM'S eyes. She is confused by his words.

WILLIAM

You think I'm depraved, don't you?

MILLICENT

You're not depraved. Misguided perhaps. Confused.

WILLIAM

So?

MILLICENT

You have kids. An ex wife. They're practicalities. Not something to dismiss because of some misguided feelings. You said it yourself, you've known me for two days.

MILLICENT turns around again and starts walking, WILLIAM again follows her, grabbing her with some force.

WILLIAM

I love you. And I'm not trying to get you to fall into my arms or any of that make-believe bull shit. But I want you to know because it's relevant.

MILLICENT

And the fact you have a family, is that relevant?

WILLIAM

No its not.

MILLICENT

How can you say that?
(pause)
You know it is William. It complicates things, everything.

A beat.

MILLICENT

Why would you love me anyway? I'm not

(cont)
really fun, I'm just...

WILLIAM opens his mouth to speak.

MILLICENT
Don't respond. I know why.
(pause)
You're bored.

WILLIAM
I'm not bored.

MILLICENT
You are.

WILLIAM
You're simplifying. I love you.
(pause)
I've known you for two days, and already
I feel closer to you than my wife,
than my kids. You're just so different.

MILLICENT looks confused.

MILLICENT
Different?

WILLIAM
Most mornings I don't even want to get
up. I just want to lie in bed all day,
watch TV. People say that I'm wasting
away doing that, that I should get
back into swimming or something.
They don't understand that I'm happy
the way I am. Doing something different
just wouldn't be me. I'm happy being sad.
(pause)
I think you're the same. I don't really
know you, but I'm going to love you anyway.

MILLICENT
I don't love you.

WILLIAM steps back, just trying to take in what MILLICENT
has said to him.

MILLICENT
I'm sorry William. I like you
a lot, but...

WILLIAM

I didn't expect you to feel the same.
I'm not angling for anything. Just some
honesty.

There's a long pause.

MILLICENT

I love Isabel.

WILLIAM

Of course you do, she's your sister.
I feel the same way about my family.
Sometimes it's just not enough.

MILLICENT

You don't understand. I'm in love with
her.

WILLIAM takes another step back, further distancing
himself from MILLICENT.

WILLIAM

She's your sister.

MILLICENT

I know. I... I can't help it.

WILLIAM seems unsure what to say...

WILLIAM

You don't have to explain yourself.

MILLICENT looks into WILLIAM'S eyes.

MILLICENT

Now who's depraved?
(pause)
You know I feel like just bringing my
car here, parking on those railway
tracks and waiting for a train.

WILLIAM

Don't talk like that.

MILLICENT

Does the thought of it make you
uncomfortable? Make you feel sick,
like it does to me?

WILLIAM struggles to find any words.

MILLICENT

I'm not different William. I'm just... crazy.

WILLIAM

I don't care, I love you.

A beat.

MILLICENT

You don't love me. You just love some abstract notion that because I'm new to this place I can help you escape a town that you so clearly resent.

WILLIAM

I don't resent this town.

MILLICENT

But you do resent your place in it. The role you've taken in defining it by winning all those races. That's why you stopped doing it. That's why you stopped participating in society full stop. It has nothing to do with being sad. You just don't want your place in history defined by some stupid race, in some stupid town.

WILLIAM is speechless.

MILLICENT

Guess what William, I'm not taking you out of here. Physically or otherwise.
(pause)
I love Isabel. She's the reason I moved here. She's the reason I do anything. She's looked after me most of my life, and I love her for it. I don't ever want to be away from her.

A Pause

WILLIAM

Do you think you could have loved me in a different time, a different place.

MILLICENT

There's no such thing William. There's only now. Dramatic I know. But the

(cont)
truth nonetheless.

WILLIAM can't say anything; he just stands, like he is frozen to the ground. MILLICENT walks off. We stay close on WILLIAM, a sober look about him. He turns and heads back toward the abandoned house.

CUT TO:

INT. DARK BASEMENT - DAY

WILLIAM comes down the basement stairs, his face fuelled by anger. It is dark inside, just faint light. He walks up to the dusty white sheet and removes it. He reveals the MACHINE.

WILLIAM searches around and spots a small DISTINCT loose part. It resembles a brick, just a little longer in length. He holds it up to smash the MACHINE, but hesitates. He stares at the MACHINE for a long time before he backs away.

CUT TO:

EXT. LENORE STREET - EARLY EVENING

WILLIAM walks along Lenore Street. It is a barren gravel road, no houses, and barely any plant life. He tosses the DISTINCT piece of MACHINERY in the air and catches it, as if it is a tennis ball, trying to take his mind of his disappointment.

CUT TO:

EXT. MILLICENT & ISABEL'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

MILLICENT approaches her doorstep. She doesn't knock, just stands looking at the door. It soon opens. ISABEL appears from behind the door.

ISABEL
I thought I heard footsteps.

MILLICENT doesn't respond.

ISABEL
Have you come to apologise?

MILLICENT
(impatiently)
Do you want to go for a drive?
(pause)
I just feel like getting out for a
while.

ISABEL
(concerned)
You alright Mill?
(pause)
I'm sorry I hit you before. You
know I still love ya.

ISABEL walks out of the house closing the door behind her. She gives MILLICENT a little pat on the head as she walks past her. MILLICENT has a little swallow. She touches the spot on her head where ISABEL'S hand was. She watches ISABEL walk toward the car parked in the driveway.

ISABEL stands outside the passenger side door.

ISABEL
Your idea, you're driving.

MILLICENT walks to the driver's side and opens the door.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH HALL - DAY (black & white)

Inside a large empty church hall.

BILLIE HOLIDAY sings in the background. A small group of people mingle in the middle.

The MINISTER(65) stands at one end. He is a very tall man, distinctively so, especially considering his age. He is of Polynesian descent. He has a very prominent SCAR on his left cheek, the indication of a chequered past.

ANGELA stands against a wall alone. She looks edgy, anxious, her hands obviously sweating as she rubs them on her dress.

ANGELA pulls her earphones out of her bag, discreetly placing it in her ear, calming her down. We can hear what she is listening too..

ANNOUNCER

Is Christianity's two thousand year reign coming to an end? Or as I read in the paper, is Christianity's two thousand year Reign of terror coming to an end? Terror? Is our planet being lead so far from god that the word terror is used to describe us as a people, as a religion? This is an inherent evil, an evil that intends to undermine all the truly good things our lord provides us with every day.

The tone of voice begins to get a little angrier.

ANNOUNCER (CONT)

All my listeners know I am not an evangelist, I am not here to bark at you about good vs. evil, but I cannot just sit here as god is blamed as the sole reason for the presence of evil in this world.

(Pause)

Ok, we have a caller on the line. Hello you're talking with Mitchell...

The MINISTER begins walking toward her. ANGELA does not see him.

At the other end of the room, JACKSON KNIGHT watches ANGELA out of the corner of his eye.

His eyes focus in closer and spot the earphone in her ear.

JACKSON briskly makes his way over to ANGELA. There is a moment of tension as he manages to get to ANGELA before the MINISTER can.

JACKSON steps in front of ANGELA and subtly removes the earphones as he brushes her hair back. He places it back in her purse. ANGELA is confused by JACKSON'S actions, but as he steps aside she is relieved when she spots the MINISTER standing in front of her.

The MINISTER speaks pleasantly,

MINISTER

Did you enjoy the service today Angela?
I noticed you looking very intrigued.
Almost hypnotically so.

JACKSON and ANGELA'S eyes meet. JACKSON briefly looks down at her purse. A subtle look of embarrassment on ANGELA'S face when she realises that JACKSON is aware that she has been listening to her earphones throughout the service.

MINISTER

Angela you will be pleased to know that our favourite ex resident is returning to our humble little town. We will be graced with Mitchell Evans' presence once again.

ANGELA feigns surprise, she clearly already knows.

JACKSON

(impatiently)

Come on Ange. Cooper's looking restless.

MINISTER

Yes, nothing like having to deal with a restless child. Even god would have his difficulties.

The MINISTER laughs at his own joke. JACKSON is unimpressed.

MINISTER

Have a good week my friends. Are you going to be providing the town with race commentary Jackson?

JACKSON

Just the usual updates from work.

MINISTER

Good man. Look forward to it every year.

The MINISTER pats JACKSON on the back and walks away.

JACKSON

Coop!

COOPER'S head pops up from the wall that he has been leaning against in the distance.

JACKSON and ANGELA head toward the door, COOPER joins them as they exit.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ANGELA AND JACKSON'S HOUSE - NIGHT (black & white)

It is dinnertime in the KNIGHT family household. The dining room is plain, suggesting a middle class existence.

JACKSON sits at the head of the table, ANGELA at the other end, COOPER on the side. The food looks plain, meat and three veg, no life to it, no colour.

JACKSON

It was a quiet day at work today.
Too windy to for anyone go out fishing
I reckon. Maybe tomorrow.

JACKSON puts his head down and starts eating.

COOPER

Will the race be postponed if the
weather's no good dad?

JACKSON

Not once in the thirty-eight years
that I've lived here has it been
postponed. That's the point of the
race being in the middle of winter.
The harshest conditions bring out
the best.

COOPER

I'll win the race one-day dad.

JACKSON

Of course you will Coop. You're my boy.

COOPER

I'll win it soon.

JACKSON gently squeezes COOPER'S arm.

JACKSON

Not with these scrawny little things.
I tell ya, they're like two copper
wires. Maybe you'll have a chance in
a few years.

COOPER

You don't need big arms to swim fast.
It's all biomechanics.

JACKSON

Load of shit Cooper. You just need
big feet mate.

COOPER looks down at his feet. ANGELA looks up from her
food for the first time, an unimpressed expression on her
face.

COOPER

How big do you mean?

JACKSON

Like flippers my boy.

ANGELA

Don't encourage him to go in that
awful race.

JACKSON

He'll be bloody going in it all right.
It's a rite of passage. He'll do fine,
just like me... before work took over.
If it weren't for that William Cooney
I'd have won a few races in my time.

COOPER looks back down at his food. He seems bored, just
swirling the food around on his plate.

COOPER

Can I go to my room?

JACKSON

You haven't finished your dinner.

COOPER looks at his full plate.

COOPER

I'm not very hungry.

JACKSON

We'll put it in the oven for you.
You can heat it up when you are
hungry.

COOPER thanks his dad with a little nod of the head
before walking away. JACKSON waits for him to leave the
room.

JACKSON

Something odd about that kid. Too
smart for his own good.

ANGELA makes some sort of sound under his breath.

JACKSON

What?

ANGELA shakes her head, there is more silence.

JACKSON

You already knew Mitchell was coming to town didn't you?

ANGELA

He may have mentioned it on his show.

JACKSON

There's something about that guy, always has been. I think it's his smile. You can tell a lot about a person by the way they smile. My old man told me that. He said you could tell if they have warm hearts or cold ones, just by what radiates from their mouths. Every time that guy smiled I swear the air got a little colder.

ANGELA and JACKSON put their heads down, eating their dinners in silence.

JACKSON

I wondered why you had been in a better mood these last few days.

ANGELA

(almost snapping)

It's got nothing to do with it.

ANGELA catches herself a sneaky glance of JACKSON as he puts his head back into his meal. Her look is almost one of guilt. The lengthy silence is broken...

JACKSON

Flippy Johnson.

ANGELA looks up from her food, surprised.

ANGELA

What?

JACKSON

Remember him.

ANGELA

Of course, why?

JACKSON

No reason, just thinking about him.
His name came up at work the other day.
God was he a great swimmer. Won the penguin
race every year for well over a decade,
maybe two. My dad used to talk about him all
the time. His generations William Cooney
I guess. Or Tom Evans for that matter.
Cooper could be like that, if
he works hard.

Long pause

ANGELA

Don't push him into that race.

JACKSON

I don't have to push him, he can't wait
to go in it. You know how eager he is.

JACKSON speaks almost patronisingly as he pushes his
plate away and stands.

CUT TO:

INT. COOPERS BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS (black & white)

COOPER'S room is messy, clothes and pieces of junk
everywhere.

COOPER lies back on his bead, headphones on listening to
music (some sort of alternative indie pop/rock). We hear
the tunes until JACKSON enters and COOPER removes his
headphones.

JACKSON

Heya Coop. Your dinner's still in the
oven if you get hungry.

COOPER

Thanks dad.

JACKSON sits on the bed beside COOPER.

JACKSON

What are you listening to?

COOPER

Nothing.

JACKSON looks around the room.

COOPER

When can I go in the race?

JACKSON has a little chuckle to himself, COOPER'S words pleasing to his ears.

JACKSON

You'll just have to wait till you're a bit older mate. Wait till those little size 4's grow a bit.

COOPER

I'm a really good swimmer, watch.

COOPER lies face down on his bed and starts thrashing around in some weird kind of freestyle. JACKSON cracks up laughing. COOPER stops and looks back at his chuckling dad.

JACKSON tries to quickly compose himself.

JACKSON

Sorry mate. You're ah... good. A bit of practise and I'm sure one day...

Halfway through JACKSON'S speech COOPER places his headphones back on his head. The music starts up again drowning out JACKSON.

JACKSON smiles at COOPER and stands up. He pats him on the head and walks to the door. We stay on COOPER before the music and the scene FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. TOM'S HOUSE - DAY

Tom comes stumbling through his front door, face and hands covered in lawnmower grease.

TOM

Goddamn Ginger rat face!

TOM has a bit of a sigh, and looks around the room. He walks through to his kitchen and toward the phone situated on the counter. His kitchen is as dilapidated as

the rest of his house. Old unwashed dishes and food scraps lying everywhere. TOM picks up his phone and dials with ferocious intensity. He nervously awaits an answer.

MAN ON PHONE

...Coastguard.

TOM

Is this the coastguard?

COASTGUARD

...That's what I said.

TOM

Yeah. Well fuck you!

Tom slams the phone down, barely able to contain his laughter.

TOM steps out of his kitchen and into the living room. The living room is bare, newspaper spread around and one old and ripped reclining chair in the middle of the room. TOM looks around the room and smells.

TOM

Annabel Lee?

TOM has a look around the room.

TOM

My Annabel Lee.

ANNABEL LEE comes wandering up to TOM and nestles into his feet.

TOM

There you are. Hiding from me again.

TOM struggles to bend over as he pats the cat, his fragile frame restricting his movement.

There is a sudden knock at the door. TOM'S head pops up with the sound.

He struggles back onto his feet and walks over to the door.

When the door swings open a YOUNG MAN and WOMAN are revealed. Wide-eyed with giant smiles, they are excited to be here.

YOUNG MAN

Mr Evans?

TOM is a bit apprehensive.

TOM

Yes.

YOUNG MAN

Mr Evans my name is Barry, this is Kate.

KATE nods at TOM. TOM appears very confused.

BARRY

We're from Grandeur natural remedies. We've been told that you might be interested in some of our products.

KATE

Our remedies can help with many of life's ailments. Including problems associated with old age.

BARRY

Now what we would like to offer you is the chance to go over our pamphlet, and give you the opportunity to select from our extensive range.

BARRY pulls a pamphlet from his brief case and hands it to TOM.

TOM studies the pamphlet for a couple of seconds.

TOM

Would you be kind enough to allow me the chance to talk this over with my associate.

BARRY

Um... Sure. That would be fine.

TOM half closes the door as he steps right back into his house.

TOM

Annabel Lee? Psst.

The cat comes slowly walking over to TOM. He picks her up, and whispers, almost inaudibly.

TOM

What do you think buddy?

Outside the door BARRY and KATE stand around in silence. They are there for a number of seconds before TOM reemerges from behind the door.

TOM hands the pamphlet to BARRY.

TOM

I have discussed your request with my associate. And we have made a decision.

There is an awkward silence.

KATE

What was your decision Mr Evans?

TOM

(straight-faced)

After careful consideration, we have decided to say fuck you.

BARRY and KATE are shocked, as if they can't quite believe what has been said.

BARRY

I'm sorry?

TOM

Fuck you.

(pause)

Take that shit and get the fuck out of here.

BARRY and KATE take one step back.

TOM seems a little annoyed that they are still in front of him.

TOM

Fuck off!

BARRY and KATE briskly leave the front door. TOM smiles as they disappear.

TOM

Fuckers.

TOM steps back inside.

CUT TO:

INT. TOM EVANS' KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

TOM comes walking into his kitchen.

TOM

Come on buddy. Lets get some food.

TOM reaches into his pantry and pulls out a can of non-descript pet food.

He walks over from the pantry to a drawer, where he extracts a can opener and proceeds to open the can.

When he has finished opening it, TOM pours the can into an old stainless steel bowl on the floor and whistles.

TOM'S cat comes walking into the kitchen and starts eating his food.

TOM steps back to the pantry and looks in before closing the door.

TOM

Well buddy, not much here for me to eat.

(pause)

I'm going for a walk ok. I'll grab something while I'm out.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH - DAY

TOM walks along the beach, a paper bag in his hand.

He walks from the sand onto the grassy bank. He takes a seat on a park bench that overlooks the water.

From the paper bag TOM pulls out a pie of some description and begins eating.

From the distance a MAN approaches. He is probably mid fifties. He walks up beside TOM and stands along side him.

MAN

Giddy Evans. Ya checking out the track mate?

TOM doesn't respond, he just continues eating his pie.

MAN

I heard your son yesterday.

This sentence gets TOM'S undivided attention.

MAN

Yep, he was into it. I tell ya he believes in that shit more than I thought was possible. He's in town you know. Or will be soon, not quite sure exactly when.

TOM ponders his response...

TOM

So I've heard.

Another long awkward silence.

MAN(cont)

So... how's that cat of yours? She still getting up to mischievous?

TOM

She's ok.

MAN

What's her name again?

TOM

Annabel Lee.

MAN

That's right.

(pause)

What?

There is another silence. This time the MAN doesn't speak. Instead he just gives TOM a little smile and walks away.

TOM goes back to eating his pie as he watches over the ocean. It is a tranquil, calm scene as this old man stares out to sea.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. WILLIAM'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

WILLIAM comes walking out of his house very nervously. Still dressed in his best clothes from his date with MILLICENT. He has a DOLL gripped hard in his hand. It is very distinctive. Its hair all cut up, leaving just jagged edges, its face coloured in bright GREEN felt tip pen. A constant siren sounds in the background.

We're close on WILLIAM as he walks down his driveway. When he gets to his letterbox it is directly UPSIDE DOWN, the top buried in the ground. WILLIAM bends down and touches it. He looks at his yard and sees the few trees that he has in the front yard all UPSIDE DOWN.

WILLIAM looks concerned. That concern turns even greater when he pays more attention to the siren in the distance. He drops the DISTINCTIVE DOLL to the ground. We stay close on it. In the background we can see WILLIAM'S feet as he sprints away.

CUT TO:

EXT. CRASH SITE - EARLY EVENING

JACKSON KNIGHT stands looking over the crashed car, it is on its roof, spread across the railroad tracks. Next to it lay some sheets, covering the dead bodies of the victims. A handful of medical and rescue staff wander around

WILLIAM comes running toward JACKSON. When he gets to him, he struggles to catch his breath.

WILLIAM

What happened here?

JACKSON

Don't know. I heard reports over the radio that an accident happened out here. I came to see if I could help.

WILLIAM

(getting agitated)

Did a train hit them?

JACKSON

Doubt it. No trains scheduled to come through today.

A beat

JACKSON

No, it's a mystery. No one knows what happened. There have been reports of all sorts of strange things. A couple of boats capsized just 2 nautical miles east of the wharf. Luckily no one was hurt. Some people's letterboxes were turned over, a couple of street lights. The weird thing is they're all still in the ground, just the wrong way up.

WILLIAM runs toward the car.

JACKSON

Will, you can't...

WILLIAM doesn't care. He gets to the first white sheet and removes it. It is ISABEL, lying still, tranquil, dead. He covers her up again and heads to the second white sheet, much further from the crash site, obviously thrown from the car. He slowly uncovers it, MILLICENT'S ghost white face is revealed. She looks content, at peace.

WILLIAM is upset, fighting back tears. He has a look around the crash site; the workers are at least fifteen meters away.

WILLIAM completely removes the white sheet and throws MILLICENT body over his shoulder. He gets a long way away before a female ambulance worker spots him.

WORKER

Hey! What are you doing?

She looks around at the others.

WORKER

Can you believe that guy?

She starts chasing, but WILLIAM soon disappears around a corner.

CUT TO:

INT. OLD FARM HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

WILLIAM comes through the front door, MILLICENT'S dead body draped over his shoulder. He places her on the floor. He has a quick look out the door, before closing and trying to lock it. This proves to be a pretty useless task given the damaged state of the door.

He kneels in front of her body, stroking her hair.

WILLIAM

I can save you. I promise you.

WILLIAM picks up MILLICENT'S body; he places it over his shoulder again and exits the living room area.

CUT TO:

INT. DARK BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

WILLIAM comes down the basement stairs again, this time carrying MILLICENT'S body with him.

When he gets to the bottom of the stairs again he stops. His hope turns to despair when he notices the MACHINE has been smashed up. There are pieces laying everywhere.

WILLIAM places MILLICENT on the ground and moves closer to where the pieces of the MACHINE lay. He picks up a large piece and fires it at the wall in pure anger, it smashes into the mirror in the corner of the room, shattering it. He surveys the damage further and sees a SHOVEL lying nearby on the ground; he picks it up and looks it over, examining it closely.

As WILLIAM looks back at the body on the floor, a distant knock on the door startles him.

WILLIAM walks back to the body. He removes the coloured band from MILLICENT'S wrist and places it in his pocket. He then picks up the body again, this time carrying it in his arms, struggling to hold the body and the SHOVEL.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING AREA - CONTINUOUS

WILLIAM walks toward the front door, MILLICENT'S body in his arms. He struggles to open the door, somehow managing despite the body and SHOVEL that he carries. The door opens, and two police officers stand outside.

POLICE OFFICER 1

Gees ah, William mate, you can't just take the body like that.

POLICE OFFICER 2

Yeah it's ah... Probably a crime mate.

POLICE OFFICER 1 looks across at his younger sidekick with a slight roll of the eyes.

POLICE OFFICER 1
Just hand her over mate, and we'll leave
it at that... mate.

WILLIAM takes a deep breath and hands MILLICENT'S body to POLICE OFFICER 2. He stays still as the young officer struggles to cope with the body. POLICE OFFICER 1 can't help but notice the shovel in WILLIAM'S hand, he says nothing about though.

WILLIAM
What now?

POLICE OFFICER 1
Well mate she'll be sent away for an
autopsy. We'll try and contact her family.

WILLIAM
(solemnly)
She only had her sister.

POLICE OFFICER 2 continues to struggle with the body.

POLICE OFFICER 2
We'll try and contact her I guess.

POLICE OFFICER 1
Nah mate she's the other one.

POLICE OFFICER 2
Oh yeah, I forgot.

WILLIAM doesn't look impressed. POLICE OFFICER 1 addresses WILLIAM again.

POLICE OFFICER 1
When their names are released I'm sure
some of the townspeople will come
forward, you know mate, friends of
theirs, hopefully organise the funeral
and all that... stuff.

POLICE OFFICER 1
So you guys were close?

WILLIAM
I guess.

POLICE OFFICER 1
Well once all the red tape's been tied
in the proverbial twine, you can
probably go see her again at the morgue.

POLICE OFFICER 2
There's a morgue in this town?

POLICE OFFICER 1 delivers his young partner a nasty
stare.

POLICE OFFICER 1
Constable. Can you take Ms. Jones'
body back please?

POLICE OFFICER 2 carries the body away.

POLICE OFFICER 1
Sorry about that mate. You just get
out of here and we'll forget about
that whole body-snatching... thing.

The POLICE OFFICER again looks at the shovel.

WILLIAM semi hides the shovel behind his back, a not so
subtle attempt to hide it from further scrutiny.

POLICE OFFICER 1
Just get yourself out of here mate.

WILLIAM nods in thanks before the OFFICER trundles off.

WILLIAM looks back down at the shovel.

FADE OUT:
FADE IN:

INT. KNIGHT FAMILY DINING ROOM - DAY (black & white)

JACKSON sits at the dining room table, dressed
immaculately in his coastguard uniform. He finishes a cup
of coffee and the paper. He stands, looking at his watch.
ANGELA stands at the front door, also well dressed, ready
for a day out. JACKSON picks up his keys and approaches
her.

JACKSON
Cooper already left this morning?

ANGELA
He said he had something to do at the

(cont)

library.

JACKSON puts on a thick woollen jacket.

JACKSON

Do you want me to drop you somewhere before work?

ANGELA

No thanks I'll walk. I'm just going into town.

JACKSON

A bit cold out.

ANGELA

I'll be fine Jackson.

We stay close on ANGELA for a long time as JACKSON leaves. In the background a car starts up and drives away with a splutter.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY (black & white)

ANGELA walks down the main street of town. She is well rugged up, thick black coat. The streets are sparse, the cold weather clearly keeping people away.

Across the street ANGELA spots a busker, YOUNG MAN, guitar in hand. It is an odd image given there is almost no one else around. He is singing some kind of nu-folk/pop, sort of a combination between *Elliot Smith* and *Bob Dylan*. Lyrics about love and lost love.

A MAN suddenly walks into frame and stands facing the BUSKER. He is tall, handsome and has a rather distinctive and large silver CROSS around his neck. He is MITCHELL EVANS. From across the street ANGELA takes a couple of steps back hoping MITCHELL won't turn around. She stares at him, intently, in deep thought as the BUSKER continues to play and sing.

MITCHELL drops a few coins in the BUSKER'S open guitar case. As he is about to step away he spots ANGELA out of the corner of his eye. He stops as their eyes meet. As they stand on either side of the road, the odd person passes by, but it is as though MITCHELL and ANGELA are the only two people in the world.

It is ANGELA who breaks the exaggerated eye contact when she puts her head down. She has one last look up, before putting her head back down and walking in the opposite direction. MITCHELL watches her walk away.

CUT TO:

INT. TOM'S HOUSE - DAY

TOM comes walking into his house. He smells something putrid as he screws up his face.

There is a muffled meow.

The sound grabs TOM'S attention and his face goes from screwed up to panicked.

TOM

Annabel Lee?

TOM sees his cat lying in a ball in the corner and he races to its side. The CAT is awake but laying still.

TOM

Come on old girl. Do you want me to call the vet? No. Ok. But I'm keeping an eye on you.

TOM picks ANNABEL LEE up in his arms.

TOM

I'll put you in my room, you can sleep in there tonight.

TOM carries ANNABEL LEE out of the room.

CUT TO:

INT. TOM'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

It is dark, but enough light to make out the figure of TOM.

He lies awake on top of his bed, fully clothed. His face a combination of concern and paranoia. His eyes continually dart around the room.

There is no sound, an eerie silence. TOM sits up in his bed.

TOM

Annabel Lee?

TOM stands up. He shuffles around in the near dark, eventually finding ANNABEL LEE curled up in the car, motionless, near death.

TOM leans over her, listening for just the faintest breath. His face fills with panic. He picks her up and rushes out of the room.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

TOM comes walking briskly into the kitchen. He places ANNABEL LEE on the ground and picks up the phone.

TOM dials. He stands with the phone to his ear, staring back at his cat, lying still on the floor.

MAN ON PHONE (OS)

William speaking.

TOM struggles to get his words out; it all comes out in a stunted mumble.

WILLIAM (OS)

I think you may have the wrong number
sir.

As the phone is being hung up, TOM manages to compose himself.

TOM

W...Wait, I need to speak to the vet.
I don't know her new number...

But it's too late.

TOM slams the phone down. He leans over ANNABEL LEE, again listening for signs of life. This time there is nothing. He tries to give her CPR by repeatedly pounding on the cat's chest with his hands.

TOM

(in a panic)

Come on buddy breathe.

TOM works away until he can go on no longer. He falls back against the kitchen counter, exhausted.

He stares down at his dead pet, tears swell in his eyes. But he is too tired to even cry.

He looks over at ANNABEL LEE. Suddenly a look of realization in TOM'S eyes.

TOM stands up, picking up ANNABEL LEE in the process. He carries her from the kitchen, through the living room, and out the front door.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

TOM drives along in his car. His head position alternating between straight ahead and down at the dead cat on the passenger seat.

CUT TO:

EXT. OLD FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

TOM'S car pulls up outside FLIPPY JOHNSTON'S house. He gets out of the car, lifting ANNABEL LEE with him.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

TOM comes walking down the basement stairs, ANNABEL LEE wrapped tightly in his arms.

He walks up to the machine, placing ANNABEL LEE onto the desk beside it.

TOM whips the dusty sheet from the machine. He examines it closely, playing with a couple of loose pieces.

TOM looks back at ANNABEL LEE before picking her up and placing her on top of the machine. He pulls one of the levers in anticipation, as if something will happen, it doesn't. TOM looks confused. He tries again. Still nothing.

TOM looks solemn, tired, defeated.

CUT TO:

EXT. OLD FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

TOM carries ANNABEL LEE out of the house, still wrapped tightly in his arms.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOM'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

Off screen a car stops. TOM comes walking into frame. He lies ANNABEL LEE on the ground next to the birdbath and leaves.

After 30 seconds TOM returns, this time with a shovel in his hands. He begins digging, as hard as his frail old body will allow.

When TOM has finished digging, he drops the shovel and picks up ANNABEL LEE.

TOM lowers her into a grave. He begins shovelling dirt again, covering the cat's dead body. When he has finished he takes a step back. We go close on his face and see the anger grow. In that instance he walks back to his car, throws the shovel in the back and walks around to the drivers side.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

TOM gets into his car and tries to start it up, but it won't turn over.

TOM slumps over the wheel frustrated. TOM takes a moment before his head springs up and he exits the car.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

TOM walks along the road, briskly, deliberately, shovel in hand.

Headlights illuminate TOM.

A car screeches to a halt in front of him. Behind the wheel is WILLIAM, in the passenger seat MILLICENT.

WILLIAM and TOM stare at each other for at least 5 seconds.

TOM steps out the way of the car. We follow him as he walks.

The car drives away off screen.

CUT TO:

INT. FIPPY JOHNSON'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

TOM comes wandering down the basement stairs, his face covered in sweat, the shovel in his hand. He lifts the shovel above his head and prepares to smash the machine. He doesn't though. He just stands there unable to do anything. Eventually he backs away from the MACHINE. He places the shovel under the stairs, and leaves.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TOM'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

TOM walks through his back door, covered in dirt. He looks exhausted as he drops his head onto the table and falls asleep.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TOM'S HOUSE - MORNING

TOM wakes up, still at the table, still sitting in the chair. He wipes the drool from his mouth. He is suddenly overpowered by panic and jumps up and moves to his kitchen where he looks out the window to the backyard.

The dirt pile sits prominent. He stares at it for a long time before shaking his head and banging his fist on the counter.

In that instant he vomits in his kitchen sink. He recoils at the smell and sight of it.

TOM looks back out the window. He stares at the dirt pile at the background before his birdbath in the midground is brought into focus, several bees flying beside it. He very quickly picks up the phone and starts dialling.

CUT TO:

INT. COASTGUARD OFFICE - DAY (black & white)

The phone rings as JACKSON sits at a desk next to a coastguard colleague. The other man is BIG and Maori. He is the FATMAN.

JACKSON picks up the phone.

JACKSON
Coastguard.

TOM(OS)
(on phone)
They're doing it again.

JACKSON looks across at the FATMAN and rolls his eyes.

JACKSON
What's doing what Mr Evans?

TOM(OS)
(on phone)
The bees.

JACKSON
The bees?

TOM(OS)
(on phone, getting angry)
Yes the bees.

JACKSON
What bees Tom?

TOM(OS)
(on phone)
My neighbour's bees. They're drinking
the water in my birdbath, again.

JACKSON looks at his colleague and shakes his head.

JACKSON
...Well we'll be sure to make a note
of it.

JACKSON and his colleague crack up laughing.

TOM(OS)
(on phone)
I'm going to kill myself today.

The phone is slammed down. JACKSON and his BIG colleague laugh again before static from the two-way radio gets JACKSON'S attention.

TWO WAY RADIO

Morning Jacko. Looks like it might get choppiier than your mother out there today, over.

JACKSON smiles and picks up the mic again.

JACKSON

Always a pleasure to hear from you Barn. It's going to be the same as it is everyday, calm this morning, getting rougher as the day goes by. Over.

TWO WAY RADIO

That's what your mother said. Over.

JACKSON and his colleague laugh.

JACKSON

Just make sure your back in before the wind picks up. Over.

TWO WAY RADIO

Will do. Over.

JACKSON again hangs up the mic. The phone rings.

JACKSON

That better not be that fucker Evans again.

But before JACKSON can pick up the phone it stops.

FATMAN

Speaking of that fucker Evans.

From inside the coastguard office, through the glass MITCHELL EVANS goes walking past. Next to him are two other males, escorting him along the hallway.

JACKSON

What's he doing here?

FATMAN

He's in town for a few days.

JACKSON

I know that Fatman. I mean what's he doing here, now. In this building

FATMAN

Probably talking on the radio next door.

(Pause)

Didn't old god boy and your wife have a thing at school?

JACKSON

That was nearly twenty years ago.

FATMAN

Still, good looking chap.

JACKSON

He's a fucking fanatical nutbag.

FATMAN

Like father like son.

JACKSON and FATMAN laugh in unison.

They sit down.

The door behind them swings open. They both turn in their chairs. Standing in the doorway is MITCHELL EVANS.

MITCHELL

Jackson Knight. How are you old friend?

JACKSON stands. He steps toward MITCHELL and shakes his hand.

JACKSON

Mitch. Long time no see.

MITCHELL

Fifteen years. How's Angela doing?

JACKSON

She's fine.

The awkward conversation is interrupted by a long, even more awkward silence.

MITCHELL

She's a special lady, always has been. Anyway, I'm on the air in a few minutes. It was good to see you. Hopefully we

(cont)

can all catch up at some point.

JACKSON nods. MITCHELL smiles, it sends a shiver down JACKSON'S spine.

MITCHELL turns around and walks up. The FATMAN stands up next to JACKSON.

FATMAN

That was awkward. Like watching a car accident with no survivors, just mangled corpses.

JACKSON

That was a delightful analogy.

FATMAN

More delightful than that conversation.
(pause)
Still it was big of him to come and say hi. Considering your... history.

The two way radio hisses in the background.

FATMAN

Saved by the bell. Why don't you take the day off mate. You look like you need it. I've got it sorted here.

CUT TO:

INT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY (black & white)

We're close on a pair of feet as they enter a liquor store. They make a distinctly loud sound, like a cowboy entering a saloon. It is JACKSON KNIGHT.

JACKSON surveys some bottles at a nearby display while the OWNER talks to a CUSTOMER.

OWNER

I'll tell you mate, she's hard to pick this year. No apparent favourite.

CUSTOMER

Bob each way you could say. That chick, Isabel Jones, she's got to be short odds. A fucking chick winning aye. I bet old Flippy Johnson never imagined that happening.

The OWNER takes a step back and rattles a bunch of bottles on the back shelf.

CUSTOMER

Don't drink all that and drive mate.
You take a bike if you need to go
somewhere.

JACKSON stands over the CUSTOMER trying to intimidate him.

JACKSON

What the fuck did you just say about
my wife?

JACKSON looks over at the radio. There is faint speaking on it.

JACKSON

Turn that shit up.

CUT TO:

INT. JACKSON AND ANGELA'S HOUSE - DAY

ANGELA sits back on the couch listening to the RADIO. She plays with her wedding ring as the radio show goes on.

RADIO ANNOUNCER(OS)

Ok listeners. We've got another caller
on the line. What do you want to ask
Mitchell...

FEMALE VOICE(OS)

Hi, my name is Mary.

MITCHELL(OS)

Ah yes sweet Mary. The most beautiful
of all names. What did you want to talk
to me about Mary?

ANGELA listens intently to MARY'S words. We stay close on her throughout. Her face one of concentration, of enthrallment.

MARY(OS)

My daughter. I'm having trouble with her.
It's not that she's a bad kid it's just... she
constantly lies. I don't just mean to me

(cont)

or her father, but to everyone, even her friends. She just makes up some of the most elaborate stories. I want to think it's a faze, but sometimes I'm not so sure.

MITCHELL (OS)

How old is your daughter Mary?

MARY (OS)

She's nineteen.

MITCHELL (OS)

Ok a bit older than I was expecting. Can you give me an example.

CUT TO:

INT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY

RADIO show continues as JACKSON listens on. We stay close on his face as he listens with interest.

MARY (OS)

Well recently she told all her friends that her sister had died. Some of them came round to pay their condolences. They were shocked when we told them Elizabeth was our only child. But that's not the worst of it Mitchell, she told them her sister fell into a meat grinder. She had her friends convinced not to buy anymore mince pies from the local dairy

MITCHELL (OS)

Thank you Mary. I would suggest that nineteen years old is to old for this compulsive lying to be some sort of phase. The 9th commandment is not one to be taken lightly. It covers the sin of tale bearing as much as it does the crime of perjury. As I have repeatedly said they all represent a hell worthy trespass. The key is making sure she knows what she is doing is wrong. You see Mary, every single person needs to take responsibility for their part in the historical process. It is everyone, me and you included, that shapes history, we all have our part to play in defining our world. Your daughter needs to work out what part she is playing,

only then can she move on.

RADIO ANNOUCER(OS)

Thank you Mary.

(pause)

Ok. Time to give away the testimonial scarf. Our humble guest himself will personally be delivering this gorgeous scarf to the winner.

(pause)

So the first caller through will win. And I tell ya, it is worth it.

JACKSON drops some money on the counter and is about to walk off.

RADIO ANNOUNCER(OS)

Angela, you are our first caller through.

JACKSON stops, like he has just run out of oxygen. We stay close on him again. Anger slowly grows on his face.

MITCHELL(OS)

Angela Walters?

ANGELA(OS)

Actually it's Angela Knight now.

MITCHELL(OS)

Of course my apologies.

(pause)

Angela is actually an old friend of mine. We went to school together here.

(pause)

It's nice to hear your voice Angela, I've thought about you a lot over the years.

There is silence, dead air. JACKSON listens intently.

RADIO ANNOUNCER(OS)

..Ok..Well you will be able to have a reunion of sorts. If you leave your address with my producer, Mitchell will bring around the scarf personally. Ok..

CUT TO:

INT. ANGELA AND JACKSON'S HOUSE - DAY (Black and White)

ANGELA hangs up the phone. A soft smile creeps slowly across her face; it is as though she is raising the corners of her mouth for the first time.

CUT TO:

EXT. BASEMENT - DAY (black & white)

Inside the basement COOPER and GINGER walk down the stairs. They approach a new white sheet. COOPER removes it to reveal the machine.

GINGER

Wow.
(a pause)
What is it?

COOPER

What do you think?

GINGER

I don't know. Looks like an engine.

GINGER reaches out to touch it. COOPER grabs his hand.

COOPER

Don't touch it.

GINGER

How did you know it was here?

COOPER

I found it a few days ago.

GINGER

So what is it?

COOPER

A time machine. Actually a two part
time machine.

GINGER looks exited.

GINGER

How does it work?

COOPER stumbles a bit over his words as if he is remembering the words from a book...

COOPER

Well you see that hole in the middle.
If you put say an apple in there, and pull
that first lever, it will speed up time
and age the apple. Isolated particle
acceleration has been achieved, so I think
it could work. I also think that if you
pull the second lever, your whole body
moves through time.

(pause)

You see in order to travel through time
you need some sort of gap in space, or
a wormhole. It's like a piece of paper.
Space is that piece of paper folded in
half, but of course there is no way to get
from the top layer to the bottom, without
tearing it, this can't be done. What you need
is a vacuum to create a wormhole between the
two levels. Then you just need to be able to
be pulled through it, therefore sending you
to another time dimension. This machine creates
that vacuum and pushes you through.
Of course that part has never actually been
achieved, so I'm not holding my breath on that
bit.

GINGER looks utterly lost, absolutely no idea what COOPER
is talking about it.

GINGER

How do you know?

COOPER

I read it in a book.

GINGER just looks confused. But then responds...

GINGER

Let's use it then. Where should we go?

COOPER

It doesn't work. Believe me I've tried
it. And I think I know how to fix it.

GINGER suddenly looks disappointed.

GINGER

It's probably just an old tractor engine
Cooper.

COOPER

I think I know what a time machine looks like Ginger.

GINGER humours COOPER.

GINGER

So how are you going to fix it?

COOPER

Like I said I read a couple of books. Got them at the library. The way I see it is if I can get this thing to work, then I'll be able to use it to advance the growth rate of my feet, making them the size they'll be in several years time. Then...

GINGER interrupts.

GINGER

You'll win the race.

COOPER

Exactly.

GINGER

You know your feet are pretty big now. And I'm sure they'll get even bigger as you grow up, or so I'm told. You might win then.

COOPER

I don't want to win then. I want to win now.

GINGER

Why not just use the second lever to go forward in time and win then?

COOPER

Are we going to split hairs?

GINGER again looks confused.

GINGER

Huh?

COOPER

Damn it Ginger. Just go get some plastic bags.

GINGER

Are plastic bags going to help fix it?

COOPER

No. I need them to cover my feet when I get it working, otherwise people will be suspicious. I might need to go home first, so I'll meet you at the beach in a couple of hours ok. I have to do some work on this thing.

GINGER shrugs his shoulders and nods his head at the same time. When he leaves COOPER surveys the machine, picking up a DISTINCT brick like loose piece, sitting next to the MACHINE.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANGELA AND JACKSON'S HOUSE - DAY

JACKSON sits in the driveway of his house. He sucks back on a bottle of bourbon. He gets as much down as he can before screwing the lid back on and throwing it onto the back seat. He opens the car door.

CUT TO:

INT. ANGELA AND JACKSON'S HOUSE - DAY

ANGELA sits back on the couch, contented.

The door suddenly swings open. The intimidating figure of JACKSON stands in the doorway. He wanders in.

JACKSON

Why did you call that fucker Evans?

ANGELA struggles to answer the question.

JACKSON

(anger)

Tell me!

JACKSON'S sudden outburst causes ANGELA to jump back in her seat.

ANGELA

You're drunk.

JACKSON

And you're a fucking liar.

ANGELA stands up.

ANGELA

I'm not talking to you when you're drunk.

ANGELA is about to walk off when JACKSON grabs her arm.

JACKSON

I know how you feel about him. How you've always felt about him. Ever since we were at school.

ANGELA looks him in the eye but doesn't speak

JACKSON

He went off to the big city, and you got stuck here with me.

ANGELA

I just wanted the scarf, and a chance to catch up with an old friend. That's it.

JACKSON

Bull shit! You listen to his goddamn radio show every day, even when we're in fucking church you've got those fucking headphones in your ear for crying out loud. You see the guy like he's fucking Jesus or something.

ANGELA

What's that supposed to mean?

JACKSON

It means you always do this. Your always looking at the past. Like it's the answer to your problems.

(pause)

You haven't been happy with Cooper and I for a long time. So Jesus boy comes along, you figure here's a chance to go back in time and rewrite the wrongs, go away with Mitchell instead of staying here with us.

(pause)

Well guess what? You can't go back in time Ange.

(pause)

(cont)

And what makes you think it would even work out. History repeats. He left you once remember. Pregnant, alone. Guess who had to pick up the pieces, pay to get rid of his devil baby. I'm not picking up your rubbish again. That whole family's crazy, just look at his old man. He kicked his own son out on the street for fuck sakes. Not that I blame him though. Now that son's a self confessed messiah. Reborn my arse. A reborn motherfucker!

ANGELA looks a little frightened, but she stands her ground.

ANGELA

And what about you?

JACKSON

What about me?

ANGELA

(getting angrier as she speaks)

There's always someone in your way isn't there? Mitchell at school, William in the water, and now Mitchell again. When's the cycle going to end, when are you going to move on? Is that why you push Cooper into practising for that fucking race? So he has more to show for his life than you do!

JACKSON all of a sudden lashes out, smacking ANGELA in the face with his fist. He knocks her back hard onto the couch.

She stands again, tears creeping down her face.

JACKSON

(apologetic)

I'm sorry Ange... I...

ANGELA walks past him and out the front door. JACKSON stands in the middle of the room. He slowly backs away and slumps on the couch.

FADE IN:
FADE OUT:

EXT. ANGELA AND JACKSON'S HOUSE - DAY

MITCHELL stands out the front door, box in hand. He knocks.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY (black & white)

JACKSON sits up in the couch, anger stewing in his face. The knocking startles him.

He opens the door, revealing MITCHELL.

MITCHELL
(Surprised)

Jackson. You're home? Did you finish work early today?

JACKSON doesn't say anything, just stares with contempt at MITCHELL. MITCHELL steps inside, much to the annoyance of JACKSON.

MITCHELL

Is Angela around? I was looking forward to seeing her again. I was never fond of how I left things with her. I'm a different man now, I'm sure you know that. In fact I thought this might be a good chance to hash everything out, get everything on the table. Thank God she won that scarf huh! The lord must have been smiling on me today.

JACKSON

Fucker!

JACKSON lashes out, smacking MITCHELL hard in the face. The box containing the scarf slumps to the ground.

MITCHELL cowers back.

There's a staring contest as MITCHELL makes his way to his feet. The scene fades out as MITCHELL and JACKSON meet and wrestle in the middle of the living room.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAY (black & white)

The Polynesian MINISTER stands at the front of his church, looking under the hood of a grand piano, giving it a tune up. ANGELA enters the church and walks down the aisle.

When the MINISTER spots ANGELA he looks up from the piano.

MINISTER

Angela. What can I do for thee?

ANGELA doesn't reply.

The MINISTER puts the top back down on the piano. He steps around the front, sits on the bench like stool and lifts the key guard.

Sunlight shines through the window, drenching the piano in light.

The MINISTER pats the empty space next to him on the stool.

ANGELA sits down beside the MINISTER. He spots the swelling bruise on ANGELA'S face, he reaches out to softly touch it, but ANGELA winces.

MINISTER

Troubles on the home front I assume.

ANGELA nods her head.

ANGELA

I try to make things work with Jackson, I really do. For Cooper's sake. But then Mitchell comes back into town, and things get complicated.

MINISTER

If I remember correctly things weren't always that peachy with Mitchell.

ANGELA

We were kids then. But he always had such heart. He was always going to succeed.

(pause)

I'm not saying that I want to leave Jackson, but, sometimes I just want

(cont)
to get out of this place, find something
new. Something that makes me happy.
Takes me away from here.

The MINISTER motions toward the keys.

MINISTER
Come on.

The MINISTER starts playing (insert classical song name)
softly; ANGELA plays along nicely in time. They continue
to play as the MINISTER speaks...

MINISTER
Do you remember when I first taught
you to play? You must have been only
eleven or twelve. You learnt *Edelweiss*
from the *Sound Of Music*. You picked
it up so quickly. You were so talented.
I always wondered why you chose that
particular piece to perfect though. Don't get
me wrong, *The Sound Of Music* has some
lovely arrangements, but it's not
Beethoven. The problem was you
got good at *Edelweiss* and it took you along
time to move on. Your mother said that
when she finally got you to try something
a little more complicated, you just assumed
because you were good at *edelweiss*,
you could play anything. You seemed to
think you could magically hit those
keys and every note would come out
perfectly.

ANGELA finishes playing. The MINISTER stops as well.

MINISTER
When your mother heard you practising
at home, she told me she could hear you
getting upset and frustrated at not being
able to master a particular piece. I know
she tried to tell you god rest her soul.
We both said you couldn't just wave a
magic wand, make things perfect.

ANGELA looks into the eyes of the MINISTER.

MINISTER
Life isn't perfect. Not in anyway.
It's a constant struggle to find

(cont)

your place. There's no magical place, no magical person. There's just... now. You need to ask Yourself, what can you do in your current situation to make things better, because there really is no magic wand.

(pause)

And the only thing that makes all the years of struggle we go through bearable; is did I at least get something right?

A tear comes to the eye of ANGELA.

MINISTER

Cooper's a good kid. He deserves honesty, from you and Jackson. If dealing with it means you and Jackson being apart, then so be it, maybe that will work out the best scenario for all. But act quickly...

The MINISTER softly touches the bruise on ANGELA'S face.

MINISTER(cont)

...otherwise, you could all get very hurt, especially Cooper.

ANGELA looks into the eyes of the MINISTER, a slight smile sneaks across her face.

ANGELA

You do know Mum wanted me to learn Bach?

The MINISTER starts playing some BEETHOVEN.

MINISTER

Well, nobody's perfect.

ANGELA stands up from the chair. She leans in and pecks the MINISTER softly on the cheek. He carries on playing.

ANGELA walks away, back down the church isle, a nervousness to her face.

CUT TO:

INT. JACKSON FAMILY HOME - DAY (black & white)

COOPER walks through the front door and into the living room. He's wearing a WHITE LAB coat. He flings it off onto the furniture.

COOPER

Dad! Mum!

COOPER sees his black cap lying on the couch. He grabs it placing it on his head before he sees JACKSON through the window in the backyard shovelling dirt.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS (black & white)

JACKSON stands over a pile of dirt in his backyard patting it down with his shovel. COOPER comes walking toward him. He startles JACKSON.

JACKSON

Coop. What are you doing here? Thought you'd be hanging out with Ginger.

COOPER looks at what JACKSON is doing.

COOPER

I'm going soon. What are you doing?

JACKSON

Just burying some fish scraps.

COOPER looks rather confused.

COOPER

When did we have fish?

JACKSON

Don't ask so many questions Coop.
(thinking quickly)
Baden Miller asked me to bury some fish scraps in my garden. As well as getting rid of them for him, fish scraps are good for your garden. An excellent stimulant for growth.

COOPER takes a look around at the very sparse garden; there is nothing but dirt.

COOPER

What garden?

JACKSON

(angry and frustrated)

That's what I'm trying to remedy.

Damn it Coop.

COOPER searches around looking for an answer. But he is almost frozen.

COOPER

Where's mum?

JACKSON

She'll be home soon. Just go Cooper.

COOPER

Do we have any latex?

JACKSON

(very matter of factly)

Of course.

COOPER

Where?

JACKSON

Why?

JACKSON

Curious.

JACKSON

Have a look in the garage and then get your arse round to Gingers. Fuck sakes.

COOPER quickly exits and leaves his father in the garden. His father watches him leave, a concerned, frightened expression on his face.

CUT TO:

INT. ANGELA AND JACKSON'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING (black and white)

ANGELA walks in through the front door. She drops her keys on the table near the door.

ANGELA

Jackson?

ANGELA steps into the middle of the room when she sees the testimonial scarf lying in the middle of the room. It is a distinct shade of SKY BLUE, providing a striking contrast to the black and white image. ANGELA picks up the scarf, confused by its presence.

She takes a couple more steps and stops. She bends down and notices bloodstains on the ground. She touches the stains softly then looks up, through the back ranch slider and out into the back yard. She spots JACKSON shovelling dirt onto a mound. She steps back, shocked, scared. She clings onto the testimonial scarf as she makes her way back out the door, picking up her keys in the process.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. BRIDGE - DAY

TOM EVANS walks up to a bridge, shrouding his face from the bright sun. Below the bridge about 20 ft down is dirty muddy water, very slowly flowing out to the sea. In his hand TOM carries a large roll of rope. He waits for a couple of cars to pass before he starts fashioning the end of the rope into a noose. He does this with extreme speed and skill. He ties one end to the railing of the bridge and places the noose around his neck. He steps out over the railing till he is right over on the edge of the bridge. He stands there, looking straight down.

From behind we see TOM jump. There is an almost immediate splash that follows.

CUT TO:

EXT. WATER'S EDGE - DAY

TOM wanders up onto the bank, his clothes soaking wet. He looks back at the rope, one end still tied to the bridge, the other end coiled in the water with another few meters of extra rope.

TOM

(under his breath)

Fuck.

TOM walks up the bank and onto the sidewalk. As he walks along a young couple approach him, they walk by him, staring.

UNKNOWN MALE

You entering the race again mate.
Getting in a bit of practise.

The GIRL laughs as they walk off. TOM stops in the middle of the footbath and stares intently at the couple that are now away in the distance. He watches, as they become mere specks on the landscape.

CUT TO:

INT. TOM'S HOUSE - DAY

TOM comes bursting through the front door, ripping off his wet coat and throwing it onto the floor with furious anger. His house is a mess. Completely filthy, rubbish flung all over the place, old newspaper littering the space. The only thing that stands out is a large picture of JESUS CHRIST hanging on his wall.

TOM moves some newspapers from his chair, situated in the middle of the room, and sits down. His clothes still soaking wet. He sits in silence for what seems like an eternity. He looks up at the picture of JESUS.

TOM

I know I failed.

TOM looks around the room; as if he's worried someone is watching him.

TOM eyes wander around his living room.

TOM

It's time to do it. Exact my most
righteous revenge.

A beat

TOM(cont)

Who cares. I've had enough of this place.

TOM stands up and moves toward his hallway door and stares at the picture.

TOM

Fuck off you queer!

TOM exits down hallway.

CUT TO:

INT. TOM'S BEDROOM - DAY

TOM pulls off his wet shirt. His body is frail looking; thin, minus any body hair. He puts on another shirt, a red chequered one. It is old looking as well, as many rips in it as the previous one. He removes his pants, his shirt covering all of his genital area. His legs are thin, waif like. He puts on an old 1970's style suit.

CUT TO:

EXT. OLD FARM HOUSE - DAY

TOM arrives at FLIPPY JOHNSON'S place.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

TOM wanders down into the basement. The MACHINE sits there, almost glistening in the dark. TOM gets the shovel from under the stairs. TOM'S anger is apparent on his face, his hand tightly gripped around the shovel. But at first he doesn't do anything. He just drops to the floor, staring at the MACHINE.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BASEMENT - EARLY EVENING

TOM sits the same position on the floor. He stands up gingerly, picking up his shovel and lifting it over his head. He swings it with extreme force sending it crashing into the MACHINE. He continues to pummel it until he is knocked off his feet by a sudden burst of LIGHT, like a sonic charge in a STAR WARS movie.

CUT TO:

INT. WILLIAM'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

WILLIAM arrives back at his house, his best clothes a little rumpled. He places the DISTINCT brick like piece of MACHINERY on the coffee table. He stands in the middle of the room.

WILLIAM

Time machine. Only a kid like me would
come up with that from a tractor engine.

WILLIAM lies back in a chair.

TIME passes as music plays and WILLIAM closes his eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. WILLIAM'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

WILLIAM stands up and wanders through his living room and into his daughter's room. She lies fully clothed on top of her bed, asleep. WILLIAM takes a seat beside her on the bed. He picks up her distinctive DOLL and holds it in his hands.

WILLIAM

Where's your brother? He's supposed to be looking after you.

WILLIAM strokes the side of her head.

WILLIAM

I'm sorry about the picnic Apple pie. Didn't go as I had planned either. How about a song? Something different.

WILLIAM starts singing SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW.

WILLIAM

*"Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high,
there's a land that I heard of once
in a lullaby, somewhere over the rainbow,
sky's are blue and the dreams that you dare
to dream really do come true..."*

WILLIAM only gets a few lines into the song before a bright WHITE LIGHT flashes and the whole room begins to shake. The shaking is violent but somehow doesn't wake APPLE PIE. As WILLIAM stops singing ELLA FITZGERALD'S version of the same song begins.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH - EVENING (black & white)

The SONG continues as COOPER stands on the beach. The black and white image fades up into colour. He shakes as the WHITE LIGHT hits him and he crashes to the sand.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CAR - EVENING (black & white)

ANGELA sits in her car at the town lookout. The SKY BLUE scarf spiralled around her neck. She fiddles with the radio dial, trying to find some kind of frequency, but there is only static. She gives up the search and stares out at the town. She begins crying, almost uncontrollably. The WHITE LIGHT encroaches upon her. The BLACK AND WHITE image fades up into colour, turning the SKY BLUE scarf a dark shade of BLACK. The sudden brightness startles ANGELA and she thrusts her arms up to the light in an attempt to protect herself. The car spins as the WHITE LIGHT strikes..

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CAR - EVENING

SONG continues. MILLICENT and ISABEL in the car, their eyes locked. ISABEL looks beyond MILLICENT as the BRIGHT WHITE light approaches. The screen goes white and shakes as faint crashing noises can be heard again.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BASEMENT - EVENING

SONG continues. TOM lies on the ground looking at the pieces of MACHINE all over the ground.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. JACKSON'S BACKYARD - EVENING (black and white)

SONG continues. JACKSON sits on the veranda of his house, overlooking the dirt mound in his backyard. The black and white image fades into colour. The BRIGHT WHITE light hits him, forcing him to fall from his chair as the shaking begins. The music fades out and JACKSON stands up.

CUT TO:

INT. JACKSON'S KITCHEN - EVENING

JACKSON walks through the backdoor into his kitchen. Static from his two-way radio grabs his attention. The static is followed by a scratchy interrupted voice.

FATMAN (OS)

Chaos all over mate... Some boats have capsized. A major accident just past

(cont)

Lenore Street out at Flippy Johnson's Place.

JACKSON picks up the mic.

JACKSON

Thanks mate, I'm gonna head out there, see if there's anything I can do to help.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - LATE EVENING

BACK in his daughter's bedroom WILLIAM hears the siren in the background, it captures his attention immediately. He stands, gripping the DISTINCTIVE GREEN DOLL hard in his hand.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT - LATE EVENING

TOM lay back on the basement floor, pieces of the MACHINE scattered everywhere. He looks around at his surroundings. His face shows the evidence of flying debris, indicated by the scratches on his face.

The stairway creaks.

TOM whips his head around to the sound.

The shadow of a MAN steps down the stairs. With each step he gets further and further into view. As the figure takes shape we can see it is another frail OLD MAN, at least in his 80's. He walks with a cane, taking each step softly and deliberately, he is obviously blind.

The OLD MAN reaches the basement floor; he stands over the fallen TOM.

OLD MAN

I thought it had to be you Tom.

TOM puts his head down as if he is ashamed. His facial expression suddenly changes to one of surprise.

TOM

How did you get all the way out here?

OLD MAN

You should know by now not to doubt me.

The OLD MAN uses his walking stick to feel around the floor at all the loose pieces of metal.

OLD MAN

When I brought this down here I really thought I could make something out of it, something that would blow this town's mind. Never could get working properly.

TOM

You must have been on the right track Flippy.

FLIPPY JOHNSON

Nah. It's still just a tractor engine, like it was sixty years ago. I think a kid has been down here playing with it though. Being nosy, like you used to be. Do you care to explain what you're doing here, destroying my life's work?

TOM

I wanted it to work so badly. That race has been nothing but a curse. I mean look at you, the once revered father figure of this backwater burg. Now children tell horror stories about you, they're afraid of you. I'm no better, and Cooney's coming along nicely. Do you think it's a coincidence that the three of us are the only one's to win the race in nearly sixty years? Suddenly we're all as nutty as...

FLIPPY JOHNSON

...Each other?

TOM nods subtly.

FLIPPY JOHNSON

We're not crazy Tom. We're just victims of our time. Had I been born in another time, maybe I'd be a scientist. Unfortunately no matter how hard and often I tried, there's no way of changing things, we just got to deal with it, just keep dragging the fuck along.

TOM picks up a broken piece and studies it.

TOM
Sorry about the machine.

FLIPPY JOHNSON
Don't worry about it my old friend.
To tell you the truth, I was getting
sick of looking at it.

TOM drops the piece of machinery to the ground. He turns his head around, but FLIPPY is gone. TOM looks around the room, not really surprised, just at peace, a raised smile on his face as he stands.

CUT TO:

EXT. OLD HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

JACKSON walks up beside WILLIAM as the police officers walk away, carrying MILLICENT'S body. WILLIAM is examining the SHOVEL in his hand.

JACKSON
You alright mate?

WILLIAM
Fine.

JACKSON
I didn't realise you were close to
one of the victims.

WILLIAM
We were... friends.

A long pause.

JACKSON
You sure you'll be all right? I
can drop you at your place if you
Like.

A Pause

WILLIAM
Funny how seeing a dead body makes...

JACKSON
(interrupting)
... makes you remember how good life
is?

WILLIAM looks across at JACKSON.

WILLIAM
I wouldn't go that far. Just...
makes me think that... this place
ain't so bad. There might be something
here that's worth a damn.

JACKSON
So what are you going to do?

WILLIAM looks back down at the shovel.

WILLIAM
I'm going to return this. Then I
might go spend some time with my
kids. Take it easy Jackson.

WILLIAM begins walking away, JACKSON watches him closely,
staring at WILLIAM'S feet. JACKSON'S face is one of
contemplation, WILLIAM'S words swirling in his head. The
image of a dead MITCHELL pops into his head, closely
followed by one of ANGELA, then COOPER. The scene ends
tight on JACKSON'S face.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH/WHARF - LATE EVENING

From the distance JACKSON approaches the fallen COOPER.
He bends down over COOPER.

JACKSON
Coop. I thought I'd find you here.
Are you all right?

COOPER tentatively looks up.

COOPER
I'm sorry dad. It's my fault.

JACKSON
What's your fault?

COOPER

Everything.

JACKSON pats his son on the head, stroking the side of his hair and clearing blood away from a cut over his eye.

JACKSON

It's ok. You're just in shock.

JACKSON looks off to the distance at the nearby fishing wharf. It is all but two hundred metres away.

COOPER looks over to the WHARF where his father is looking.

COOPER

What's going on dad?

JACKSON

I don't know son. I just came from a big accident at Flippy Johnson's place. No one knows what happened.

COOPER

(intrigued)

Flippy Johnson's?

JACKSON

That's right.

COOPER

What about the race tomorrow?

JACKSON

I think it might have to be postponed.

COOPER looks upset. Again his father comforts him.

JACKSON

You go home Coop. Till I figure out what's going on.

JACKSON helps COOPER to his feet.

COOPER

I'll fix everything dad. I will.

JACKSON pats his son on the head and COOPER begins walking away.

JACKSON watches COOPER walk away briskly in the distance as he steps off the sand and onto the nearby grassy bank. He sees his son's feet covered in plastic bags. A confused smile appears on his face. JACKSON walks toward the nearby wharf.

At that moment TOM passes by. JACKSON watches him walk along the wharf, straight past him. There is slight exaggerated eye contact, but no communication.

JACKSON watches as TOM sits at the end of the wharf his feet dangling over the edge. JACKSON turns around and sees COOPER walking in the distance, a mere speck. He spots an upside down rubbish bin nearby. This strange image mesmerizes him.

He yells out to COOPER who is a fair distance away.

JACKSON

Cooper! Coop!

COOPER hears him and stops. We watch as COOPER jogs back to JACKSON.

JACKSON is back looking at the rubbish bin. COOPER looks up at JACKSON.

COOPER

What?

JACKSON

Look at that?

COOPER looks at the upside down rubbish bin, rubbish scattered everywhere.

COOPER

I know. There's stuff like that everywhere. Probably rubbish all over town.

JACKSON

Come on buddy. Give me a hand with this.

JACKSON walks over to the rubbish bin and tips it back up the right way.

COOPER starts picking up rubbish, JACKSON joins him.

The sun sets in the background.

JACKSON looks back at COOPER'S feet.

JACKSON
Where were you going?

COOPER looks confused.

JACKSON
Before, when I yelled out to you.
You said you were going to fix
something. What?

COOPER
Nothing. I guess it can wait.

The two of them go back to picking up rubbish.

COOPER
Dad?

JACKSON
Yea?

COOPER
Have you ever done anything you've
regretted?

JACKSON looks down at his brazed, bloody and dirt covered hands.

JACKSON
I think that's my problem Coop.
I haven't... till now.

COOPER and JACKSON place the last pieces of rubbish in the bin.

JACKSON kneels in front of COOPER.

JACKSON
Listen mate. Don't you worry about the
race. It's not really that important.

COOPER
Do you think it'll still be postponed?

JACKSON
I don't know mate. With everything I've
seen today, I don't think it really
matters.

All emergency services, POLICE sirens, fire engines, sound loudly in the background.

JACKSON

Look mate, I could be going a way for a while. I don't know how long, but you look after you mother ok. She deserves looking after.

COOPER

I will dad. I promise

JACKSON

I love you Cooper.

JACKSON wanders away. COOPER watches him before looking away to the wharf and seeing two figures sitting on the edge.

CUT TO:

EXT. WHARF - EVENING

WILLIAM walks up behind TOM on the wharf, the SHOVEL in hand. He drops it behind the seated TOM; it hits the ground with an echoing thud. TOM doesn't budge or blink an eye.

WILLIAM

It was just an engine wasn't it?

TOM continues looking out to sea.

TOM

Maybe.

WILLIAM sits next to TOM, their feet dangling over the edge of the wharf as they stare out to sea. They don't make eye contact.

WILLIAM

Why did you destroy it?

TOM

(a little smile on his face)
Sick of looking at it.

WILLIAM

You know you turned half the town upside down, literally. Have you seen the letterboxes and street lamps?

TOM

Yes.

WILLIAM

Why would that happen if it was just an engine?

TOM

Old Flippy Johnson used to tell me when I was your age that I couldn't see past this town. He said I was stuck here for life, just like him, all because I can't see that life actually exists beyond this place.

WILLIAM

Smart man.

TOM

Crazy old fool.

WILLIAM

Something he did obviously worked. Look at this place.

TOM

Flippy was wrong though. His problem was he doesn't realise that life doesn't actually exist beyond this place. Not for lifers like us.

WILLIAM

Kind of like a vicious cycle.

TOM looks at WILLIAM for the first time.

TOM

Exactly like a vicious cycle.

TOM looks back out to sea.

TOM

But you know what Flippy did know? Something that took me along time to realise...

(pause)

This place aint so bad.

WILLIAM

Weird. I had that exact same thought today.

A short silence.

WILLIAM

What are you going to do now?

TOM

Might just sit here for a while.

WILLIAM and TOM stare out to sea for a long period of time before an acoustic pop track begins playing.

WILLIAM

Me too.

CUT TO:

EXT. POLICE STATION - LATE EVENING

JACKSON walks around to the side of the building. He leans up against the wall and slides down till he is sitting on the ground. He sits up straight and vomits all over the ground.

He leans back against the wall, looking up at the sky. He begins to crack up laughing as he stands.

JACKSON walks through the entrance of the police station.

CUT TO:

EXT. WHARF - LATE EVENING

TOM and WILLIAM continue looking out to sea.

WILLIAM

Do you want a race?

TOM looks across at WILLIAM

WILLIAM

One former champion to another.

TOM

It's getting a bit dark out there.

WILLIAM pulls MILLICENT'S bracelet from his pocket and studies it for a while before placing it on his wrist.

WILLIAM

I think we'll be all right.

COOPER approaches. When he is right behind them, TOM and WILLIAM turn their heads and look him.

WILLIAM

You're Jackson's boy aren't you?

TOM and WILLIAM both notice the plastic bags on COOPER'S feet. They look at each other and smile.

TOM

Been there.

WILLIAM smirks.

TOM

So you're the kid that's was
fucking around with Flippy's machine.

COOPER

It works. Take a look around.

TOM

It doesn't matter if does...

TOM looks back down at COOPER'S plastic bag covered feet.

TOM

...There's more to life than one
swimming race, in one little town.

COOPER takes a moment before responding..

COOPER

I guess. Still... be nice to win.

TOM and WILLIAM laugh in perfect harmony

WILLIAM

He sounds like old Flippy Johnson.

TOM looks across at WILLIAM. He takes a moment of reflection before he speaks..

TOM

He sounds like us.

TOM stands up. WILLIAM follows.

TOM

Where too?

WILLIAM

I don't know, we'll see when we get
there.

TOM smiles at WILLIAM. In unison they jump into the water with a tremendous splash. They begin swimming out to sea as the final song plays, an eerie kind of acoustic baroque pop. COOPER stands on the wharf. We stay on him as he watches TOM and WILLIAM swim away.

FADE TO BLACK:

<END CREDITS>

Commentary

The Three Act Structure: Criticisms and Alternatives

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Chapter I: The Three Act Structure: Criticisms and Alternatives

Introduction

As a writer I am interested in characters that represent the darker side of human nature. I have a fascination for individuals that don't fall under the umbrella of heroism. People that on the surface may seem outcasts and loners, but still feature some underlying redeeming attribute that makes them 'human'; makes them characters worth supporting and ultimately liking. When I refer to characters as being 'dark', 'complex', or exhibiting the 'darker' sides of human emotion or nature, I am making direct reference to the characters that I am trying to create in my own script. These complex characteristics take into account a wide spectrum of individuals, including those who may be prone to violent outbursts, unhealthy attachments, obsessive behaviour and criminal actions. In my opinion, the three-act structure is not an environment that supports such character traits, as it places considerable emphasis on the characteristics and aspects of heroism, and the hero's subsequent journey. It is not a structure that promotes the exploration of character complexities, nor does it support a multiple protagonist set up. In *The Poetics Of Cinema* (1995), Raul Ruiz refers to traditional three-act structure as central conflict theory, in reference to the three-act structure's reliance on conflict between good and evil. He states that focusing on a central conflict eliminates all the stories that do not include the confrontation, leaving aside events that "require only indifference or detached curiosity" (1995, p.11). The 'central conflict' model is also less able to cope with ensemble casts and multiple characters, social motivations and narratives. This is especially true when dealing with the characters exhibiting the darker side of human emotions.

Such characters are not driven by the interior motivations characteristic of the three-act structure, but are defined by and in turn define a virtual field of social spaces and temporal boundaries, and therefore demand a form that deals differently with the materials of time and space. In this chapter I will separate space and time throughout in relation to screenwriting conventions and the cinematic image. Space will be broken into subcategories; namely geographical space, historical space and the idea of the 'place' (place will be defined in terms of locations and sets, and character interaction with them). Time will be defined by breaking it down into categories.

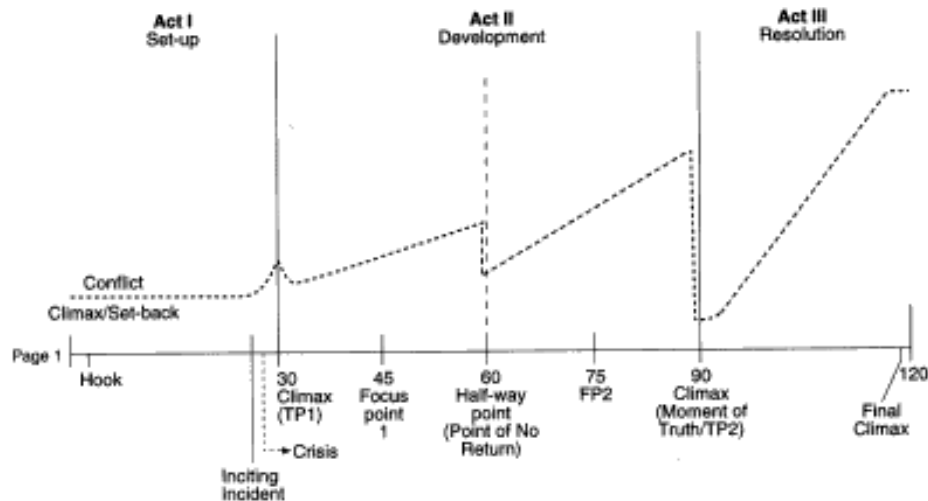
First, empty time, where I will analyse the existence of ‘dead’ or ‘static’ time within cinema; time experienced as moments of intensity, characterised by a moment of reflection for a character leading to stretched, accelerated and or fragmented screen time. Rhythm will also be used as a category for analysis. Andrey Tarkovsky defines rhythm as “expressing the course of time within a frame” (Tarkovsky, 1986, p. 113). He calls it an organising force of dramatic development. Building on this view, I will look at rhythm in terms of individual style, or the way a filmmaker/screenwriter moves time within his/her own work, with specific reference to pace. My definition of rhythm will also be inclusive of the structure of rhythm, as opposed to only being what is in the frame. Tarkovsky comments on rhythm as colouring a film with stylistic marks, enabling a director to reveal their true individuality (p. 114).

In my own script I am exploring a social space that has significant density, a place where the characters that inhabit it have a sense of being trapped, as if there is no escape from what they perceive to be a tedious, repetitive existence. The materials of time are of significance because my script is about a group of characters interacting with each other in a place where all time co-exists. I am attempting to create a feeling that each segment of time co-exists with every other time, creating a cyclical notion of temporal characteristics all occurring within the same geographic space.

The four analytical chapters of this thesis will analyse how space and time are malleable within a screenwriting context. From this perspective, I will look at the way spatial and temporal characteristics are constructed in traditional ‘Hollywood’ film and screenwriting, including a discussion of the work of Robert McKee and Linda Aronson. Throughout this chapter, ‘Hollywood’ or ‘mainstream’ film will be defined as cinema that features the characteristics of a narrative and dramatic theory referred to as the three-act structure. I will also focus on art house or independent cinema, analysing the writings of Cherry Potter, Raul Ruiz, Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush. These authors will be used to investigate what advantages, in terms of exploring character complexities, may evolve from working outside the confines of conventional screenwriting. I will develop several case studies, examining amongst others, the films of Quentin Tarantino, Woody Allen, Richard Linklater, the Coen Brothers and Alejandro González Iñárritu. Apart from the writing of Linda Aronson, Robert McKee, Cherry Potter, Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush, I will also draw on the

work of narrative theorists Mieke Bal, David Bordwell and Mark Currie. In reference to my narrative exploration, I will separate plot and story by defining plot as what occurs on screen and story as the overall account of the narrative.

What is the Three-Act Structure?



(Fig 1.1, Pierce, 2005)

In *Scriptwriting Updated: New and Conventional Way of Writing for the Screen*, Linda Aronson talks about the advantages and disadvantages of using a three-act structure, including the confines that occur from using such a stringent model. Linda Aronson calls this “...the use of only one methodology” (2000, p. 39). She states that by using a set methodology a vertical style of thinking will inevitably occur, taking over the whole process and subsequently curtailing original thought. She contrasts her critique by commenting on the three-act structure as a way of keeping a writer’s characters moving forward. It is this forward movement of a protagonist, the journey towards the resolution, that is most important in terms of character within traditional structure. Aronson comments that in order for a character’s journey to be successful, the audience need to follow them step-by-step, they need to buy into the character’s arc from beginning to end (2000, p. 43). Aronson further contends that an advantage of using a three-act structure is its proven success as a model for screenwriting and its capabilities of successfully transmitting a story. It also acts as an immediate problem-solving device, meaning that through identifying the constituent parts of a three-act structure, the holes and weaknesses within a script are readily identified (ibid).

However, some writers and directors have created a contrasting atmosphere by keeping a main protagonist's temporal existence static. For instance, the films of Hal Hartley often feature a stagnant anti-hero, despite the presence of a three-act structure, in particular his 1990 film *Trust*.

Robert McKee, like Linda Aronson, comments in detail on the 'Hollywood' model of the three-act structure in his book *Story* (1997). He refers to the three-act structure as a natural occurrence, in other words an organic reality, suggesting that a three-act structure would emerge unintentionally when someone starts telling a story (McKee, 1997). This would mean that even a film that could appear to be highly experimental would inadvertently contain its own three-act structure. The ubiquity of this structure appears to contradict my contention that a rigid structural undercurrent is a hostile environment for exploring a protagonist's temporal or spatial existence, as well as darker character complexities. For example, Quentin Tarantino's 1994 film *Pulp Fiction* is a film that, in the opinion of Linda Aronson, contains a three-act structure, despite its fractured plot and non-linear storytelling technique (Aronson, 2000, p. 216). If the plot events are reorganised into chronological order, then the staples of a three-act structure are identifiable. The inciting incident is when Jules and Vincent are shot at but miraculously spared their lives and the first turning point when the two accidentally shoot friend and 'colleague' Marvin in the face. Linda Aronson comments on the characteristics of this film by stating that while none of the stories progress from start to finish, the story of Jules' redemption consists of a traditional three-act narrative personified by Jules being changed by his experiences (2000, p. 216). However, the fact that the film needs to be reordered to identify any semblance of a traditional three-act structure still suggests a subversion of standard narrative structure, be it intentional or inadvertent. When I talk about anti-structure, I will further elaborate on the application of the three-act structure to *Pulp Fiction*.

Spatial Boundaries and the Three-Act Structure

One of the purposes of a three-act structure is to create a believable character arc, or the illusion of a protagonist following some sort of 'journey' to self-discovery and self improvement while overcoming a series of obstacles (as commented on above in regards to Linda Aronson's summation of the presentation of Jules in *Pulp Fiction*.) This emphasis on structure as creating character entails that the places that he/she pass

through would evolve into nothing more than anonymous and more importantly, insignificant spaces, simply because what matters within the narrative is meeting the structural requirements i.e. first turning point, inciting incident and hitting the points for character development. This is opposed to exploring the spaces that the characters inhabit, because that would, to quote Ruiz again, only require detached curiosity (Ruiz, 1995, p.11). It would seem in this situation that it is the characters that define the space, rather than the other way around. When I talk about Woody Allen's *The Curse Of The Jade Scorpion* (2000) in this section, I will focus on it in terms of how the spatial environment detracts from the characters and narratives, rather than adding to it. In contrast, Brian Singer's 1995 film *The Usual Suspects* features a protagonist, Verbal Kint (perhaps better described as an anti-hero), who shapes the film's entire spatial environment by mapping it out like a field, using numerous spatial signifiers. When he goes as far as naming a town from what is written on a flyer stuck up on a wall, we are getting an entirely constructed social space. This is valuable in terms of character, specifically in *The Usual Suspects* because Kint as author within the text, is able to create a social space where his criminally-charged allies are able to thrive.

I would attribute Quentin Tarantino's success in the subversion of narrative expectation in *Pulp Fiction* to the way locations and places are represented during the film. If *Pulp Fiction* had a large number of elaborate sets, the moving in and out of sequence might have become overwhelming for the viewing audience. Tarantino instead uses a number of fairly 'generic' locations in which to place his characters. Examples include a couple of standard American apartments and homes, including the first 'plain' apartment where Vincent and Jules kill Brett and his associate, the room where Lance does his drug dealing, and finally Jimmy's very suburban Los Angeles home. There is also the inside of a car, a non-specific club where Marcellus does his deals and a nondescript diner where the movie 'begins' and 'ends' with the attempted robbery by Pumpkin and Honeybunny. Since Tarantino chooses to tell his interconnected stories in a non-linear format, using 'simple' (but stylish) locations and enabling the audience to keep a sense of orientation in relation to a complex narrative and idiosyncratic characterisation. Yet without wanting to generalise, an audience that is used to seeing everything spelled out to them, still may well struggle to make the leaps in space and time that Tarantino employs. However, at the point when the

location does take on more significance, a greater sense of importance is given to the scene.

The 'date' sequence between Mia and Vincent serves as an example. This scene seems to be a defining moment for Vincent's character, when he doubts his loyalty to his boss Marcellus. The scene unfolds against the backdrop of a colourful 1950s diner complete with waiters dressed as Marilyn Monroe and Buddy Holly (a memorable cameo by Tarantino favourite Steve Buscemi). The scene then builds to one of the most memorable sequences in the film, a dance contest that Vincent and Mia enter and subsequently win. There is a feeling that this scene is separate from the rest of the film, as if it just 'lifts out' (a concept which I will expand on). While I feel that these locations are replaceable, they are not, in my opinion substitutable, because of Tarantino's personal style. He gives every location a distinct 'look' that enables him to utilize the 'place' as a way of adding to the complexities of his characters, namely their criminal and even anti-social behaviour. He gives his characters greater depth by giving certain scenes (i.e. the diner sequence) greater importance in terms of the presentation of both the place and the characters. I draw comparison in this respect to David Lynch's *Mullholland Drive* (2001), namely the *Llorando* sequence, where the two main female protagonists sit and watch as an acapella Spanish version of Roy Orbison's *Crying* is performed. The majority of the film takes place in sterile apartments, mansions, diners, faceless Hollywood buildings and film sets which, while again heavily stylised, seem to represent a notion of a sterile and 'faceless' Hollywood machine. The theatre itself is not overly elaborate, but the simple red colour scheme and the presence of a group of characters that I would define as 'dark' (both protagonists, the theatre owner and the singer) makes it memorable. The scene feels separate from the rest of the film, as it just 'lifts out' and becomes significant as a moment of intensity. 'Lift out' scenes will be explored in greater depth during the Gus Van Sant chapter.

While someone like David Lynch is a master at exploring the complexities of the 'place', Woody Allen is a filmmaker who I believe has explored the complexities of human nature. While he has attempted to do this using a three-act structure (often unsuccessfully in my view), he has been successful when working with alternative narrative styles, for example the superb *Crimes and Misdemeanours* (1989). While

Woody Allen is without a doubt one of cinema's most prolific filmmakers, completing 41 films since 1966, his filmography is not without its critical and commercial failings - perhaps more of an indication on Allen's longevity and his prolific nature, a film a year for nearly forty years to be exact. To explore in detail space within the traditional 'Hollywood' set up, I will use Allen's 2000 film *The Curse Of The Jade Scorpion*.

The Curse Of The Jade Scorpion is a film I would evaluate as having a flawed screenplay, and in my opinion, it is Woody Allen's least 'accessible' film. Generally, it is a combination of 1940's screwball comedy and film noir, and features a selection of Woody Allen one-liners and forced romantic situations. When I say 'flaws', I am referring to the film's deployment of its genre characteristics. For the context of this chapter, genre will be defined as a matrix of elements that exhibit specific narrative and aesthetic characteristics in order to categorise the film for the movie going public (for this chapter Film Noir will be used as an example). Given *The Curse of the Jade Scorpion*'s 'Hollywood' characteristics, the film becomes 'trapped' inside its genre. This means Allen is unable to explore the film's spatial environment in any extensive detail because the film's 1940s setting becomes nothing more than a 'place' for the main protagonist CJ Briggs (Woody Allen) to interact in, rather than to engage with. The setting does not become a character of its own, nor does it successfully aid in the portrayal of the main protagonist. As an example I will compare the film with the more 'art house' Joel and Ethan Coen film, *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001), focusing on the main character of Ed Crane (Billy Bob Thornton), in comparison with CJ Briggs, and their respective workspaces and the roles those play in shaping their personas. While neither film is entirely a traditional film noir, *The Man Who Wasn't There* being far more Hitchcockian in plot and tone and more dramatically based than the clearly comedic *Curse Of The Jade Scorpion*, the films are comparable in setting and era. Where I find dissimilarity though, is the use of their respective spatial boundaries. In *The Man Who Wasn't There* you get a sense that the 'place' that the main protagonist inhabits acts almost as a separate character, contributing to the way the protagonists behave in 'their' world. The complexity of Ed Crane's character, is able to thrive in his barbershop environment; a space that has a significant metaphorical relevance to his character by harbouring his quiet, almost lackadaisical attitude. He is a character who while quiet and reserved, is capable of serious criminal

activity, that being blackmail and ultimately murder. He may be passive in nature, but passivity becomes a form of action, of refusing to take part in what is expected of him as a barber. We get an immediate sense of his character, because the stereotypical representation of a barber or hairdresser is of someone who is talkative, outgoing, as personified by Ed's brother-in-law Frank. Yet the Crane character would not be as interesting or complex without the barbershop setting and his hairdressing profession. Because he is categorised against type, the Coens immediately make the character intriguing by placing him in an environment far removed from his attitude while making the 'place' a catalyst for events (i.e. it is where he first meets the Dry Cleaner opportunist/con man, a character who plays a pivotal role in the film's eventual conclusion). In my opinion, it is the space that shapes the character of Ed Crane, whereas in *The Curse Of The Jade Scorpion*, the 'places' are far more insignificant. CJ Briggs works as an insurance investigator in a small office setting, yet I believe that his character could be of almost any similar profession in any era. As the plot unfolds, Briggs is hypnotised into stealing expensive artefacts, subsequently then investigating himself. I believe it makes little difference to the plot what profession Briggs is, where he works, and the spaces he passes through. In contrast, Ed Crane seems as if he is shaped by his 'place' and the era in which he exists; his darkest secrets are only revealed when we get a sense of who he is by exploring the world in which he lives. Like all Coen Brothers films, *The Man Who Wasn't There* is drenched in idiosyncratic style, including striking high contrast black and white photography, witty dialogue, memorable soundtrack and several incidences of black comedy. Yet none of these elements detract from the presentation of a character that became so entrenched in a world of criminal activity and violence as Ed Crane did. This is directly opposed to *The Curse Of The Jade Scorpion*, where Woody Allen's usually strong personal style, as evident in the stylised New York setting of *Annie Hall* (1997) and *Manhattan* (1979), is missing in this film. The darker side of CJ Briggs (this being his predisposition to theft as catalysed by undergoing hypnosis) is not brought to the surface as Allen may have intended because the film's use of space proves to be insignificant. The Coens however, are able to explore the darker side of human nature, firstly by utilising 'space' as more than just a background, and secondly going against standard 'Hollywood' conventions by focusing on a character who, while intriguing, is by no means a hero, and who does not go through the three-act structure's over-familiar character arc.

I believe that in *The Man Who Wasn't There* the 'place' has as much influence in shaping the characters as the characters have in shaping the environment. However, I believe the opposite is true in some of Woody Allen's more traditionally structured films, particularly in recent years. This is a dangerous statement because it is directly related to a central argument surrounding controversial social issues about social responsibility which filmmakers often reflect. *City Of God* (2002) illustrates my point here. It is a film about Brazil's poorest slums, those who live there and their descent into a criminal lifestyle. Is the slum responsible for the criminals, or are the criminals responsible for the slum? Do the characters create the space, or is it the space that creates the character? The obvious liberal answer lays the 'blame' firmly on the slum; it is however, unfortunately not that simple. To focus on characters that create their own social space, I will use Woody Allen's first feature film, 1969's *Take The Money And Run*. This is a film with an underlying three-act structure, despite its pseudo documentary style. It tells the story of Virgil Starkwell, a petty criminal from a young age, who after robbing a bank by using a misspelled note, is arrested and sent to jail. He then escapes and ends up on the run for several years before being caught. In the first act we get an overview of Virgil's childhood and his descent into a criminal lifestyle. A turning point occurs when Virgil robs a bank and is sent to jail for the second time to serve a lengthy sentence. During the second act Virgil faces many obstacles as he escapes from prison and tries to survive on the proverbial 'lam'. The film then builds to a conclusion where Virgil gets captured again and returned to prison, where he realises again that living on the run is a far better alternative to living in prison, and therefore he plans yet another escape. The best example of Virgil constructing his own social space is his need to turn freedom itself into a prison. Because he ought to be in prison, he finds himself constantly in fear of being caught, of having to return to prison and give up his newly formed life. He has no alternative to live his life in the constant fear of being caught, turning his day-to-day life into a constant search for freedom, as if he were still in prison. *Take The Money And Run* also serves as an excellent example when it comes to exploring temporal characteristics in cinema.

Temporal Characteristics and Structure

With *Take The Money And Run*'s structural undercurrent and storyline of Virgil's incarceration, time becomes a central motif. Virgil relies on time to aid his escape. More to the point, Allen relies on ellipsis in time to enable a large span of events to be presented over ninety or so minutes. This approach creates a seamless passing of time, as Virgil's life outside of the prison walls spans many years. What the film does in essence is cut out any dead time. It is reasonable to think that Virgil's many years on the lam feature for the most part boring instances of staying out of view, being stuck in an apartment, not wanting to be seen and so on. But what features in the plot are only the most exciting incidents, i.e. when he is blackmailed by a work colleague and contemplates killing her (which he later tries by stabbing her with a turkey leg). However, what is left out of the film is as important as what remains, because it incorporates most of Virgil's life outside the prison walls. He lives as a fugitive for many years, hoping that enough time will pass to allow him to live in more freedom, safe from the constant fear of being caught.

Linda Aronson also comments in detail about the idea of time in her writing. Her observations in this area are pertinent to my own exploration of temporal confines. She comments, "Everything about film – about moving factors – is connected with time and movement in time" (2000, p. 40). Aronson proposes that the manipulation of time immediately and unintentionally gives a film structure, without the conscious incorporation of the three-act structure. While I believe this may be true in an absolute sense, in terms of duration there is a certain temporal disruption that can occur from subverting the three-act structure. This causes a dislocation and fragmentation of time that can evolve into a screenwriting structure, one that does not conform to standard conventions. In 'Hollywood' mainstream cinema, screenwriters typically employ time as a way of moving the narrative forward or of progressing a character toward the resolution of their character arc, rather than as a tool for exploring human complexities. In direct opposition to 'Hollywood' cinema, several of Jean-Luc Godard's films use treatments of cinematic time as a way of dislocating the narrative. His 1967 film *Weekend* is a prime example. The film uses dramatic changes in time such as unexplained jump cuts to separate the viewer from the notion of 'real life'. It is as if Godard is telling the viewer to remember that what they are watching is in fact fictional and constructed by a guiding intelligence. We are regularly reminded of the

film making process. I should also point out the strong political angle that Godard approaches his films from. His rebellion against the capitalist driven economy represented by American cinema of the 50's and 60's seems a motivation for him to employ techniques that diverge from those of American mainstream cinema, such as his intentional disruption of filmic conventions. While *Weekend* is not so much about character as it is political, Godard creates an environment where his characters don't have to be heroes in order to get his political view across; they can simply serve his political purpose in collaboration with his subversion on 'Hollywood' techniques.

Earlier I mentioned the significance of moments of intensity and how time is affected, be it sped up or slowed down. The *Llorando* sequence of *Mullholland Drive* is an example of a scene where time feels as if it completely stops. It is as if everyone outside is standing still, while the events inside the theatre unfold. Often this stretching of time is shown literally in an aesthetic way, i.e. the actual use of slow motion. The car crash sequence in *Amores Perros* (2000) is an example. But as is the case in *Mullholland Drive*, when both protagonists are emotionally moved by what they see on the stage, it is the emotional context of the sequence which appears to give the film a sense that time is standing still, as if the characters are having a significant moment of reflection, where intensity is created despite the minimalization of action. As well as moments of intensity, rhythm plays a role in both *Pulp Fiction* and *Mullholland Drive*. Cherry Potter comments on the pace of *Pulp Fiction* when she makes a point concerning the death of Vincent in the so-called 'middle' of the film (Potter, 2001, p. 166). She surmises that the driven dramatic pace of *Pulp Fiction* means there is no time to grieve for Vince, especially as the role of protagonist is effortlessly switched from Vince to Butch (Bruce Willis). In reference to rhythm in *Pulp Fiction*, the exact scene where the protagonists change is of particular relevance to my own script, given the intertwining of protagonists that it will contain. The specific scene features a young Butch being told of the history of his father's gold watch by an old war friend of his fathers, played by Christopher Walken. Potter's comments on *Pulp Fiction* take into account the gold watch sequence. She describes it as a 'plant'; an incident that arouses attention because it seemingly has no relation to the plot, yet as a viewer we are intrigued because we feel it may become important later in the story (Potter, 2001, p. 165). I believe this 'plant' scene is significant to the rhythm of the film, because not only are we provided with back-story for our new

protagonist, we are given a chance to rest as Vince and Butch are seamlessly switched as the 'hero'. After this scene of comparative stasis, we are lead on another frantic journey as we start to identify more with Butch, as he kills Vincent and battles with Marcellus, all in an attempt to retrieve the aforementioned gold watch. As mentioned in an earlier reference to Andrey Tarkovsky, the creation of rhythm in film is significantly individualistic. Tarantino is an excellent example of this because his very distinct style is directly tied to rhythm, where his scenes, including his famous pop culture laden dialogue, feature a 'jerkily' patterned pace of movement.

Anti Structure

As previously stated Raul Ruiz critiques mainstream 'Hollywood' three-act cinema under the alternative name of the central conflict theory. He refers to this conflict theory as a uniquely American occurrence, an underlying ideology employed over many years from early studio based films to the recent output of American cinema (Ruiz, 1995, p.9). Ruiz takes the aspects of the three-act structure that encompass the direct confrontation between a character that wants something, and a character that doesn't want them to have it. He comments that everything in a narrative revolves around this confrontation. Ruiz mentions specifically scenes that are reliant on events that do not revolve around the central conflict and do not move the conflict forward, for example, "a landscape or a distant storm" (1995, p.11). Unless these scenes have a specific relationship to the confrontation itself, for example the setting, under traditional 'Hollywood' structure these scenes have no place in the overall narrative. He goes on to talk about the central conflict theory manufacturing fiction, making us prisoners of the protagonist's will and subjecting us to every step that builds toward a confrontation. This is a precursor to Ruiz's argument that a film can be produced that does not centre around one individual conflict, even though he comments, "central conflict theorists argue that there are no works of theatre, film or narrative without central conflict" (1995, p.14). But as he goes on to state unequivocally, this theory is unprovable. I discussed the application of the three-act structure to *Pulp Fiction*. In my opinion, despite the presence of characters that exhibit 'darker' qualities, the three-act structure is a label thrust upon *Pulp Fiction* by screenwriting theorists like Linda Aronson and is not a structure that has been consciously encoded by Tarantino. In *Method Writing: An interview with Quentin Tarantino*, published in *Creative Scriptwriting* magazine (Bauer, 1998), Tarantino speaks in depth about screenwriting

structure. Eric Bauer directly asks Tarantino about his personal use of structure, and Tarantino's response is, "I just don't do that, you know by the first act this has to happen, and so on. I hold no interest in that; I just see it in too many movies with it (the three-act structure)" (Bauer, 1998). It is important to take into account what the filmmakers and screenwriters have said themselves, especially when these filmmakers fall under the 'independent' label, given that they are the people perceived to be 'breaking' the rules.

On the Sundance film festival website, independent cinema is described as being about creative risk taking (sundance.org, 2001). These risks may include content that is often controversial, sometimes even repulsive, for example the films *Pi* (1998) and *Requiem For A Dream* (2000) by Darren Aronofsky where sequences include graphic scenes of drug use, and in the case of *Pi*, a character drilling himself in the head. They may also include unusual styles of performance, for instance the dry, idiosyncratic performance by Jon Heder in *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004). Finally, such films may experiment with narrative structure, as filmmakers attempt to find alternative ways to deliver their narratives, for example the Christopher Nolan 'backwards' film *Memento* (2000). In *American Independent Cinema* edited by Jim Hiller, independent cinema is looked on as being as much about economics as aesthetics, and is described as implying work "different from the dominant or mainstream" (Hiller, 2001, p.1). For this chapter I will define independent cinema as low to medium budget films, often featuring intimate character studies. Another descriptive label would be 'art house' cinema, which refers to the 'high culture' nature of audiences for these films. However, independent cinema has become somewhat of a marketing term, and even films with extensive independent elements are in part largely backed by studios (i.e. Miramax with *Pulp Fiction*). Therefore, I categorise independent cinema not by its original economic status, but as a genre characterised by its narrative explorations and the targeting of audiences interested in the offbeat and unusual.

One of the motives for independent filmmakers wanting to work in the realm of 'anti-structure' is the way mainstream structure is seen as stifling to creativity and social comment. The motif of a straightjacket occurs often in the comments of independent filmmakers in regards to traditional structure. For instance the metaphor appeared in

two magazine articles, firstly, in the article *The Ten Commandments of Scriptwriting: and why you should break them* from *Creative Scriptwriter* magazine (Wolff, 2002). Wolff makes the argument that structure should serve the story, not the other way round to become a straightjacket (Wolff, 2002). This is backed up by Ruiz's argument to the effect that a central conflict is not necessary to the production of a successful film. He states that the story does not need to be locked into a central conflict; it does not need to be the starting point (Ruiz, 1995, p.11). The second instance where the straightjacket metaphor is used is during an interview by Christian Divine in *Creative Scriptwriter* (2001) with Richard Linklater. Linklater, the writer and director behind films such as *Waking Life* (2001), *Dazed and Confused* (1993) and *Slacker* (1991) is asked directly how he feels about structure when trying to shape a narrative. He responded by saying, "Cinema has sort of painted itself into a corner as far as narrative, like everything has to have a pat, easily decipherable structure. What the fuck? It's a real straightjacket" (Divine, 2001). In Linklater's 2001 film *Waking Life*, he has attempted to break free of any structural confines that may have affected some of his early work, notably *Dazed and Confused*, an honest and humorous account of high school life. Linklater's anti-structure viewpoint that he outlines in his interview was evident at times during *Dazed and Confused*, specifically when he began delving a little deeper into character relationships, and we saw incidences of the dialogue driven narrative that was to follow, for instance in *Before Sunrise* (1995) and its sequel *Before Sunset* (2004). In *Waking Life* Linklater attempts to separate the film from any structural confines as the main protagonist (played by Wiley Wiggins) freely examines the philosophical side of existence without Linklater ever needing to think about plot or character arcs. However, I would dispute a complete lack of structure due to the following question; what is it that moves the film from beginning to end? The answer to this is in character not in the structure. The main protagonist of *Waking Life* does not follow the Joseph Campbell idea of the hero's journey, nor can he be categorised under the three-act structure definition of a character arc, simply because he doesn't actually arrive anywhere and in the process he realises that no one knows the secret of life. Nevertheless in a sense he does go on a spiritual journey, an enlightenment of the soul. The main protagonist has complete freedom to interact with his environment in order to explore the philosophical issues in which he, as Linklater's surrogate, is interested.

The previous example of character freedom begs another question, is freedom a central ideological standpoint of independent cinema? Furthermore is there a clear distinction between freedom and structure? The answer may lie in the origins of American independent cinema. That is, the exploration of the distinctly and often obsessive American ideology of freedom, or more importantly its contradictions. This can be explored as far back as George A Romero's Zombie films of the 1960's, political satires that deal with race relations, American consumerism, and aspects of class and feminism. In terms of freedom, Romero's films, particularly *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), are character studies of human behaviour in a state of heightened anxiety. They show the fear of impending doom hovering above the characters, and society in general, as represented by the hysteria shown by the characters. This mood is obviously still relevant today given the paranoia generated in George Bush's America. But regardless of whether independent filmmakers use freedom as an ideology in their narratives, the narrative itself may very well be fighting a contradiction between striving for freedom within its structure and dealing with the constraints of the viewing public and their ability to follow what is going on in front of them. This is related to my definition of freedom, which is about exploring an issue without thinking primarily in terms of coherence and legibility for an audience. Ruiz discusses the concept of boredom, and the idea that it is usually a filmmaker's job to fill two hours of people's lives, making sure they are not bored (1995, p.12). This presents the central problem for purveyors of independent cinema: how do they keep audiences interested when they are conditioned to be entertained by films that follow a more traditional approach? And finally, how can we deal with the characteristics of examining the manipulation and intricacies of time and space, as well as exploring the character complexities of multiple protagonists, while keeping an audience entertained? Perhaps the answer lies in returning to the fundamentals of narrative.

Narrative

All types of narrative structure in cinema are direct derivatives of manipulating space and time, or to be more accurate an outcome of exploring spatial and temporal boundaries. Conversely by experimenting with narrative, aspects of time and space can also be examined in greater depth. But what is narrative? While the underlying three-act structure may be near ubiquitous, it is unquestionably a non-static entity,

with forever changing forms. Mieke Bal, Mark Currie and David Bordwell all reached the consensus view that narrative is everywhere, as Currie states in his book *Post Modern Narrative Theory* "... narrative is not just confined to literature" (1998, p.2). Currie's view that narrative is the essence of historical recollection is reinforced in Mieke Bal's study *Narratology: Introduction to the theory of narrative* (1985). It is stated that the things in our lives we remember are entirely shaped by our point of view, that as individuals we shape our own narrative about past events (Bal, 1985, p.100). Currie provides a more finite definition of narrative and narrative text. He defines narrative as any text in which an agent relates a narrative: "... films, music videos, advertisements, television and newspaper journalism, myths, paintings, songs, comic strips, anecdotes, jokes, stories of our holidays and accounts of our day" (1998, p.2).

In a chapter called Narrative Theory and Television from the book *Channels Of Discourse* (1987), Sarah Kozloff goes into detail about the 'real life' instances of narrative and their relation to storytelling. These include jokes, stories and accounts of our day. She comments that aspects of our daily lives are not narratives unless there is a teller, hence Mark Currie's use of the word 'stories' when talking about holidays, or when talking about an individual's day. Kozloff says that any incident that occurs does not become a narrative unless along with the act, there is a teller and also a listener. This creates a delay between the 'actual' incident and the 'telling' of the incident. The teller is therefore able to subvert the idea that story telling must proceed chronologically by placing the event in an order that may seem more effective to the needs of storytelling. This is related directly to fictional storytelling, for example, films that use the end of the narrative at the beginning as a teaser, such as the Billy Bob Thornton and Bruce Willis vehicle *Bandits* (2001), a film that uses frequent teasers as to what will occur. This technique is used often in television broadcasts as outlined by Sarah Kozloff, and further illustrated by that most famous of television sayings "after the break". News broadcasts have provided many a trigger for the development of a feature film. In a film that I co wrote and directed in early 2006, *Down By the Riverside*, (which I will discuss in detail during the deconstruction chapter), we used an old newspaper article about an adoption house killing babies, instead of finding homes for them, due to the expense of looking after them. We utilized this article as a starting point for the story and screenplay. Linda Aronson

makes the comment that news stories, perhaps even just a headline in a newspaper, are perfect for triggering film ideas, creating a strong link between real life and fictional narratives (Aronson, 2000, p.31).

Narrative and Time

David Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985) provides a step away from literary narrative study and focuses on narrative in a filmic context. Bordwell devotes a chapter specifically to time and the relationship it has with narrative. He describes time as a programmed temporal form, a self-actualising concept that develops inevitably through the viewing of a film (Bordwell, 1985). Thus actual time in film unfolds in front of us, sometimes spanning decades, while we sit for just two or so hours. In my chapter about Gus Van Sant's Death Trilogy, that being *Elephant* (2003), *Gerry* (2002) and *Last Days* (2005), I will go into detail in reference to Bordwell's three types of narrative duration, these being *fabula*, *syuzhet* and *screen duration*. For now I will go into narrative and space, taking a screenwriting and filmmaking perspective on the manipulation and positioning of audience through exploring space.

Narrative and Space

In his chapter Narration and Space, Bordwell writes that the single most important aspect of filmic space is position (Bordwell, 1985). He calls the observer invisible, incarnated within the camera. He refers specifically to the audience as narrator acting as spectator. This is related to the Freudian concept of the spectator as voyeur. A commonly used example is the Alfred Hitchcock film *Rear Window* (1954), where the viewer is placed in the same situation as the protagonist (in *Rear Window*'s case, the wheelchair bound Jimmy Stewart). An alternative side to this incorporates the viewer being placed within the context of a participating 'audience', created by the filmmakers. Fritz Lang's 1939 film *M*, about a mentally disturbed child murderer (played by Peter Lorre) serves as an example. In this film the viewer is placed into the perspective of the larger community. The murderer is not seen till much later in the film (where he becomes the most rounded and developed character), so we thrive on the terror that the community feels. We inevitably become part of the angry mob that ultimately lynches the killer and other innocent people along the way. It is as if we see our own reflection and question how we would act as part of this mob, angered by the

death of eight pre-pubescent girls. It is easy to say you would be diplomatic and allow the law to take its natural course. However, Fritz Lang seems to question this rational line of thought by suggesting that the viewer is as likely to be drawn into a mob mentality as the people in the film. This observation of *M* is simply a personal and individual one. For example, many may view the film as an allegory about working class justice versus bourgeois law.

In Narratology: Introduction to the theory of Narrative (1985), Mieke Bal takes a more literary approach to narrative and space. She discusses three senses that are involved in the perception of space; sight, hearing and touch. She points to those three because we perceive them visually. When we smell something we imagine what we smell, likewise when we see and hear something. Bal uses an example of the sound of a distant church bell increasing the apparent size of a space (Bal, 1985, p.94). This is a prime illustration of off-screen diegetic sound as a spatial signifier. The presence of sound off-screen implicates a far wider world than what is appearing on camera. This is not only used in the actual film, but can be effective at the script stage as well.

Films that rely strongly on the setting in particular use non-diegetic sound to create atmosphere. The following is an extract of a scene from the shooting script of *Platoon* (1986) that occurs early on in the film, “We hear the sound of MEN coming, a lot of MEN. The thwack of a machete. Brush being culled. We wait. They are getting close” (Stone, 1986). Given the Vietnam setting and the audience’s preconceived ideas about what being involved in the Vietnam war may have been like, Oliver Stone uses off-screen sound, even as far back as the script stage, to create apprehension and anticipation. It becomes easy to imagine the war occurring even when it is not directly represented visually on the screen. Our perception of the Vietnam War can certainly shape a viewpoint on a film like *Platoon*; in fact, the whole spectrum of historical space is reliant on viewer’s memory and knowledge. Whether we are watching *Platoon*, *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) or any film that features Vietnam as the setting, any preconceived notions of Vietnam that we have are paramount to shaping historical space. Much like *City Of God* where the film is really about the slum itself as opposed to its inhabitants, *Platoon* is really about the jungle of Vietnam, the ‘place’ where the narrative unfolds. In *Post-modern Narrative Theory* (1998), Mark Currie allocates a specific chapter to time and space in which he explores the temporal and spatial influence of historical narrative.

Of particular interest in Currie's work is his discussion on narrative and exclusion, or what we do not see in a narrative, and in the case of film, what we aren't privy to on the screen. This is important not just in terms of my script, where the narrative spans three days only, but to engage with the moment. Films that take place in the span of one or two days and are solely focused on the moment are almost exclusively reliant on the viewer inferring the historical and future context behind the characters, their situation and their environment. The interpretation of the moment, as opposed to the antiquated and not-yet-occurred, is of significance given the importance of the moment in my script for shaping history and the participation of every character in that historical process. This historical ethos would suggest, in Mark Currie's terms, that the moment is an exclusion of the "relations" that, to use his exact words, "constitute it" (1998, p.82). He argues that the moment cannot be explored in its entirety without referring to the past or the future (1998, p.84). I would suggest that audience interpretation of the past and history, specifically in my script, will evolve through character interaction and that focusing on the moment with no reference to history or past is not possible, unless the moment itself is the focus of the film, and the viewer is therefore dropped immediately into the centre of the action. For instance, the Richard Linklater film *Tape* (2001) illustrates the importance of historical space, or knowing the character's back-stories. The film is set in one room, unfolds in 'real' time and involves three friends dissecting the painful memories of high school. 'Real' time can be defined as a presentation of life second by second as the ninety or so minutes of a film unfold on screen (Lacey, 2000, p.21) If we were to buy into the collective backgrounds of the three characters respectively, then without the viewer knowing their history and making assumptions about their future interaction, the film would seemingly lack depth. On the contrary, in Gus Van Sant's *Elephant*, a film that also unfolds over a matter of hours, the characters are more of a broad representation of American teenagers. This means that the characters do not play such a vital role in progressing the story from beginning to end, and Van Sant does not require the viewer to know the back-story of each character, simply because he makes the film about the issue of school violence. It is Van Sant's intention to highlight the normality of high school life, and the sudden terror that unfurls when a horrible situation occurs such as a massacre. The characters are therefore depictions of your 'standard' American teenagers. There are the picked on 'geeks', who eventually take their frustrations out on the student body. There are the 'cool' girls

with eating disorders, the isolated homosexual students and the popular ‘jocks’. However, Van Sant offers no blame, no explanations for the shooting, few warning signs and no solution. *Elephant* also serves as an example of the stretching and fragmentation of time, a topic that will be discussed in more detail during the Gus Van Sant chapter.

Parallel and Multiple Narratives.

If the three-act structure is not the right environment for exploring character complexities and for examining unusual configurations of time and space, then what is? What is a practical example of alternative structure that would harbour such issues? During the *21 Grams* (2003) chapter I will focus on multiple protagonists with intersecting storylines, but firstly I will examine the nuances of parallel story telling. In *Alternative Scriptwriting: Writing Beyond The Rules* (Dancyger & Rush, 1991), there is emphasis placed on parallel storytelling as a means to step back from the traditional storytelling structure. Dancyger and Rush use Woody Allen’s *Crimes and Misdemeanours* as an example and discuss Allen’s construction of a modern parable in examining the nature of morality other than by using the classic sympathetic main protagonist and malevolent antagonist, as outlined in traditional narrative structure (1991, p.71). Interesting in regards to *Crimes and Misdemeanours*, a film based on an alternative structure, is the stark difference in tone of the two narratives. While the plots interlock via one character, a rabbi named Ben, they have entirely different atmospheres. One story is about Judah, an ophthalmologist who conspires to murder his mistress, who in turn is threatening to reveal their affair to Judah’s wife. The narrative is complex and dramatic with no comic relief. On the other hand, the second story features Woody Allen as Cliff Stern, a documentary filmmaker pressured by his wife to take a job with a man he despises. This story is ‘typical’ Woody Allen situation comedy, featuring many Allen one-liners. Only at the film’s conclusion do the two main protagonists meet and relay their respective resolutions. Dancyger and Rush discuss the ‘flipside’ nature of drama versus comedy; the two genres that *Crimes and Misdemeanours* utilises in polarizing the two narratives. But although two distinct genres are presented, there are breaches of genre expectation. As Dancyger and Rush explain, comedy so often ends with an upbeat positive ending and vice versa for drama (1991, p.92). However, in *Crimes and Misdemeanours* this

expectation is subverted when Woody Allen's comic character suffers the 'down' ending and Judah the positive conclusion.

In my script I am also trying to create a spatial environment that employs drama with distinct comedic undertones, so that 'dark' and 'complex' characters can coexist with so-called 'normal' people. In an article from *Scriptwriter* magazine, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to Genre* (2001), Lucy Scher discusses the subtext of genre. Scher states that the subtext of audience expectation is the way to understand the emotional range that the characters will go through in a genre film (Scher, 2001). She writes about defining genre by audience expectation, not the expected genre stereotypes or predictable formula; and that audience expectation operating as a subtext is vital. This is something that Woody Allen seems to appreciate during the ending of *Crimes and Misdemeanours*, when he plays with audience expectation and provides an ending that was unexpected given the two separate genres he incorporated in the narrative. *Crimes and Misdemeanours* is a particularly good example of a parallel structure that enables two times to coexist in one film by the presentation of two separate stories. We are led to believe that Judah and Cliff's separate narratives are occurring at the same time, intersecting at subtle points. Perhaps an appropriate metaphor is a piece of paper representing a film. One half of the paper is one story, the other half, the parallel. If you fold that piece of paper in half, the same period of time is used for both narratives. So in order to intersect those stories, holes can be punched from one side to the other. It is important at this point however, to distinguish between character arc and audience experience, given that an audience experience has its own trajectory apart from that of the characters. This is especially the case with *Crimes and Misdemeanours* where Cliff and Judah's character arcs may be understood differently by every individual, depending upon their own personal experience, in this case of love, desire and greed.

In *Scriptwriting Updated* (2000), Linda Aronson describes four categories of parallel narratives. Firstly the flashback narrative, as utilised in perhaps the most famous film to use such structure, *Citizen Kane* (1941) and more recently in Robert Zemeckis' *Forrest Gump* (1994). The latter of course more traditional 'Hollywood' films, but I believe alternative cinema can utilize a flashback narrative by using the flashback as a separate story, apart from a central all-encompassing narrative. Then there is tandem

narrative that uses interconnected stories, such as the aforementioned *Crimes and Misdemeanours*. Thirdly, there is a sequential narrative form, where often a multitude of stories are told out of sequence then tied together in the end, as in Aronson's example of *Pulp Fiction* (1994). A further example would be *21 Grams* by Alejandro González Iñárritu. It is a film that uses a non-sequential, slow-reveal type of narrative, where the individual stories of each protagonist are connected towards the conclusion of the film. Each scene takes place in no specific order, in fact, it is suggested that the director possibly shot fifty or so scenes, and then during editing randomly placed the scenes in no apparent order (Berardinelli, 2003). But given the film's gradual unveiling of relevant information, the order of the scenes does seem in fact vital to keeping the audience guessing for as long as possible as to the relationships of the protagonists. The fragmented structure of *21 Grams* will be discussed in further detail during a later chapter. What I find interesting in this case is the implication that a group of protagonists or one or more storylines are related. I wonder if it is possible to have completely un-related narratives that do not intersect, be it through characters, storylines or thematically. More to the point, would such techniques make for a coherent film, a film that an audience could be entertained by? This appears to be the final hurdle in storytelling, because while unrelated storylines and character studies have been tried, for example in *L'Argent* (1983) by Robert Bresson, unrelated thematic narratives remain untried and possibly unachievable. Films that have attempted to utilise unrelated narratives are typically broken down into separate short films, conceived by different directors, rather than being presented as one full-length feature film, without a need to separate them into segments. Examples include *New York Stories* (1989), a collection of three short films utilizing a New York setting, and *Three Extremes* (2004) a trilogy of horror films from accomplished Asian directors Fruit Chan, Takashi Miike and Chan-wook Park. Perhaps the answer is in the fourth style of parallel narrative, which is a multiple protagonist, or antagonist, narrative. Following characters through a series of events and actions, without them intersecting, is possibly the best way of completely separating two or more narratives from each other. However, in my script I am not attempting to completely separate the narratives, because in order to examine characters who I define as being 'dark'; I believe that tightly linking the characters by their yearning for better lives, as I attempt to do, is the most effective approach.

Conclusion

In the majority of sources researched for this chapter there was one constant theme - the ever-changing nature of structure and narrative. In independent cinema these entities are elusive, constantly being updated and reinterpreted by filmmakers attempting to provide alternative views of experience. But regardless of an ever-changing structural approach to film, finding a way to portray characters that do not fit into mainstream structure is no easy task. It is not as simple as manipulating narrative structure, and consequently, fragmenting time and space, for the development of a non-heroic character. In my opinion, whatever association there is between space, time and characters cannot be seen clearly through theoretical speculation. These issues should be explored from both screenwriting and filmmaking viewpoints. The film *21 Grams* will be interpreted from these two perspectives as I break down its intertwining and convoluted narrative in order to view how its manipulation of time influences the presentation of characters. Following this, having co-written and directed a low budget feature in 2006, I will also take a writing and directing perspective in the Gus Van Sant chapter. I will undertake this task because of the difficulties that can arise when translating the character from the page to the screen, as I learned on set. Furthermore, to enable an environment that provides room for characters that are conflicted, selfish, and at times immoral, as is the case in *Down By The Riverside* and *The Narrative Of Flippy Johnson*, I believe there is a need to look at two filmmakers who have been successful utilizing such characters in their narratives. My script takes elements from both Gus Van Sant's death trilogy - for example plot duration - while also utilising the multi-layered approach of Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu's *21 Grams*. These two filmmakers successfully manipulate the characteristics of time and space to create an environment that enables their 'darker' characters to move their films from beginning to end, without undertaking a classical hero's journey.

Chapter II: 21 Grams: A World of Intersecting Narratives

Introduction

The following chapter will focus on *21 Grams* (2003) by Mexican filmmaker Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu. I will firstly look at the film's non-linear structure and endeavour to reorder the film into something that resembles a chronological order. I will attempt this reordering to delve into the reasons why I believe the film utilises this non-linear structure, and what advantage in the presentation of characters, if any, is gained from this seemingly chaotic order of scenes. I will also look at diverse ways of telling the story, and how an alternative structure could impact on the film's narrative. Secondly, given once again the non-sequential order of the scenes, the relationship that the film has with concepts of time and space takes on greater significance. This is due to the manipulation of temporal and spatial factors that develop within a narrative that utilises a multiple protagonist set up. These factors include the 'place' where the film unfolds, but also the characters themselves and their direct relationships with time and space. To further my understanding in this area I will use Gilles Deleuze and his focus on the order of time and time as series, and also will rely on the work of Cherry Potter, Linda Aronson and David Bordwell.

21 Grams is the story of three people whose lives and actions, unbeknownst to them initially, will have an influence on each other. There is Paul Rivers (Sean Penn), a dying mathematician, stuck in a loveless marriage and awaiting a new heart. Then there is Christina Peck (Naomi Watts), a reformed drug addict and now a middle class suburban housewife, happily married with two young daughters. Finally there is Jack Jordan (Bernicio Del Toro), an ex-convict and alcoholic, trying to raise his family and forget his troubled past through his new found passion for Christianity. When Jack is involved in a terrible accident, killing Christina's entire family, the three protagonist's will all be brought together and their lives will change forever.

My script also features numerous characters intersecting, scenes out of sequential order and characters who have an unknowing influence on others. On this note, *21 Grams* is of direct relevance to my script. It is also similar in terms of character, as a group of protagonists react to incidents in their lives by primarily thinking about

themselves. For example in *21 Grams* Jack's wife's immediate response to her husband killing Christina's family is not to turn Jack over to the police, but to try to convince him to keep quiet. While this may seem selfish and immoral, it is in my opinion a natural reaction to protect the ones you love. In my script characters are faced with decisions that while they only think of themselves (as is the case in my script with the character of Jackson and his accidental killing of Mitchell), they are not evil, just people.

Using *21 Grams'* non-linear sequencing as a starting point, I have broken the plot down into 110 scenes and placed them in what I believe to be a chronological order. Even this order is up for debate as some of the sequences can be connected to several others, but I have endeavoured to be as accurate as possible in placing them in order. The bolded numbers in brackets represent the order in which the scenes play in the movie. I have done this to show the seemingly random order that the filmmaker chose to tell his story. To further illustrate the non-sequential aspect of *21 Grams*, below the chronological list, I have placed the scenes in the order that they appear in the film from 1 to 110.

21 Grams in chronological order.

1. Christina baking with her daughters in her kitchen. **(21)**
2. Christina speaks at a rehab clinic. She speaks about her family's role in saving her from a life filled with drugs and alcohol. **(3)**
3. Jack speaks to a troubled youth at his church. He tries to show him the way of Jesus. He shows the youth his new truck, telling him it was Jesus who wanted him to have the truck. **(4)**
4. Paul's wife meets with a fertility doctor. He asks her if she has had an abortion, she confirms. **(7)**
5. Jack talks to the Reverend of his church about the troubled youth he is trying to help. Outside the church Jack nearly gets into a fight with the youth. **(8)**
6. Jack arrives home from church in his truck. We see his wife, son and daughter. **(9)**
7. Paul sits at home working on a computer, hooked up to an oxygen mask. He goes into his bathroom to sneak a cigarette. **(14)**
8. A sick Paul sits in his bed. His wife informs him of her trip to the fertility clinic. Paul does not seem interested in the idea of having a baby. **(22)**
9. Jack carries a set of golf clubs on a course. He is a caddy. He is called in by his boss and subsequently fired because of member complaints about his tattoos. **(17)**
10. Jack eats dinner with his family. He tells his wife about being fired from the golf course. He has a confrontation with his children when he tries to show them some

Jesus inspired discipline. **(20)**

11. A sick Paul and his wife talk to the fertility doctor about artificial insemination. Paul gives a sperm sample. **(27)**

12. Reverend preaching at church. Jack shows his enthusiasm for his new found religion. **(13)**

13. Jack retrieving his final belongings from the golf course. His boss approaches him. Feeling guilty about Jack being fired, the boss asks him out for a drink (non-alcoholic) **(35)**

14. Birthday party at Jack's house. The church congregation is there, but Jack has not yet arrived. **(24)**

15. Jack leaves the bar (sober). He says goodbye to his boss and drives away in his truck. **(52)**

16. Christina's husband and daughters having food and drink at a diner. They stand up and leave. **(2)**

17. Christina's husband walks home with their daughters. He leaves a phone message telling her they will be home soon. **(41)**

18. Christina and her sister doing laps of a swimming pool. **(12)**

19. Christina's husband and daughters walking home. They speak to a gardener. Jack drives closely behind in his truck. An accident occurs off screen as the gardener runs to the scene of the crash. **(67)**

20. Jack pulls into the driveway at his house following his hit and run. The party goes on inside as Jack arrives. He tells his wife about the accident. **(29)**

21. Reverend drives Jack's wife past the scene of the hit and run. **(26)**

22. Wife tells Jack that the people at the accident are dead. She tells him to pull his truck further into the driveway. **(33)**

23. Christina arrives home, calling out to her husband and daughters. She receives the phone message from her husband. Christina then receives a phone call from the hospital, she is told about the accident involving her husband and daughter. **(25)**

24. Christina arrives at hospital. **(28)**

25. Christina finds out her husband is in critical condition, but she also learns that her girls died in the accident. **(32)**

26. Christina's finds out that her husband is showing no brain activity. She is asked about organ donation. **(36)**

27. Paul asleep in bed with his wife. They receive a phone call in the middle of the night, a heart has become available. **(37)**

28. Paul's wife waits while Paul is prepped for surgery. As she waits she sees a grieving Christina leave the hospital. **(38)**

29. Jack's wife cleans blood away from the bumper of the truck. **(46)**

30. Following the accident Jack watches his kids asleep in bed. He informs his wife that he is going to turn himself in. This causes friction as she wonders what's the point in turning himself in when there is no evidence. He sees it is the right thing to do by God. **(42)**

31. Paul lies in hospital after his operation. He is brought his old heart in a jar. He refers to it as the culprit. **(18)**

32. Christina removes a bunch of her children's belongings, but she cannot set foot in her girl's bedrooms. **(43)**

33. Funeral of Christina's family. She speaks to her family about life not being able to continue. **(47)**

34. Christina drinks in the kitchen at her family's funeral. Her sister tells her that the hit and run driver has turned himself in. **(49)**

35. Paul being examined in hospital. He is curious as to whose heart he has. But the rules prohibit his knowing. **(31)**
36. Dinner party at Paul and his wife's house to celebrate his new heart. His wife mentions to their friends that they are planning to have a baby. **(44)**
37. After the party Paul questions his wife's reasons to tell their friends about their pregnancy plans. **(48)**
38. Jack walks down the prison hallway, being led to his cell. **(11)**
39. The reverend visits Jack in prison. He asks Jack to beg for the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. Jack refuses and blames Jesus for putting the truck in his hands and allowing him to run over his victims. **(55)**
40. Jack tries to hang himself in the prison shower. **(57)**
41. Paul meets an associate at the bowling alley. **(45)**
42. Paul meets another associate at a bar. He finds out who his heart donor was and what happened. **(50)**
43. Paul tells his wife who the donor is. His wife is curious as to why Paul needs to know. He responds that he wants to know who he is now. **(51)**
44. Paul rings doorbell at Christina's house. There is no reply. **(16)**
45. Paul sits in his car watching Christina leave her house. He follows her to the liquor store and stands behind her in line. **(23)**
46. Paul watches Christina swimming in the pool. **(34)**
47. Paul watches Christina eating at a squash court. He speaks to her for the first time. He doesn't tell her who he is. **(39)**
48. Jack is visited by his wife in prison. She tells him she has sold his truck to pay for a lawyer. **(59)**
49. Paul and wife meet fertility doctor. Paul finds out about the abortion. This revelation strains their relationship to breaking point. **(54)**
50. Jack's wife and the reverend wait for Jack outside prison. He ignores them, but the reverend goes up and speaks to him. **(68)**
51. Jack is driven home by his wife and the reverend. **(70)**
52. Jack arrives home and greets his children. He gets a rather frosty reception from his son. **(71)**
53. Jack has sex with his wife. **(76)**
54. Jack's daughter asks him if he really killed two little girls and their daddy. **(79)**
55. Christina drinking alone in her house. She calls her friend, a drug dealer. **(40)**
56. Christina arrives at a club. Paul follows as Christina receives drugs in the bathroom. **(56)**
57. Christina tries to drive her car home drunk but is stopped by the valet parking. Paul offers to drive her home. When he gets to her house he leaves her sleeping in the car. **(58)**
58. Jack at a church service. He now appears completely uninterested. **(78)**
59. Jack sits alone at the front of the church praying. **(80)**
60. Jack leaves his house in the middle of the night, no word to any of his family. **(82)**
61. Christina stands outside her sports club in the pouring rain. Paul comes up behind her and offers to give her a ride home, she eventually accepts. **(63)**
62. Paul drives Christina home. He drives away. **(65)**
63. Paul vomits while driving home. **(66)**
64. Paul meets with his doctor and finds out his body is rejecting in his new heart. He either has to come into hospital and wait for a new heart or risk dying a very painful death. **(69)**
65. Paul has lunch with Christina. **(72)**

66. Following their lunch date, Paul and Christina walk home. **(73)**
67. Paul hangs out inside Christina's home. He sees some photos of Christina's now deceased family. He begins to feel sick and leaves. **(77)**
68. Christina calls Paul in the middle of the night. He leaves to the objections of his wife. **(81)**
69. Paul arrives at Christina's in the middle of the night. He tells her he was the recipient of her husband's heart. She gets angry and kicks him out of her house. **(84)**
70. Paul's wife sits alone in their house at night. **(87)**
71. Christina wakes up at her house. She goes outside and sees Paul asleep in his car. She gets into the car and they speak. They kiss. **(86)**
72. Paul and Christina have sex. **(88)**
73. Paul sits up in bed, watching a naked Christina sleep. **(1)**
74. Paul sits in bed looking at more of Christina's family photos. **(91)**
75. Christina gets dressed, as Paul lies asleep in bed. **(93)**
76. Paul returns home to find his wife packing her belongings. She tells him that she is returning to England and still plans to have his baby. **(94)**
77. Christina walks along the street and approaches the gardener. She speaks to him, presumably about the accident, consequently upsetting Christina. She then walks to the diner where her husband and children were eating prior to the accident. Following this, she goes to the part of the street where her family was killed; she sits down on the sidewalk. **(95)**
78. Christina cries as she listens to the phone message again. **(96)**
79. Christina prepares to take cocaine. But just as she is about to, Paul stops her. **(98)**
80. In the kitchen Christina tells Paul she wants to kill Jack. She tells Paul that he should do it because he owes her husband because he has his heart. **(99)**
81. Paul speaks to his associate and gets information on where Jack is living, where he works and what he looks like. **(62)**
82. Jack works away at some sort of mining facility out in the desert. **(60)**
83. Paul and Christina drive out in the country. They drive past Jack's new workplace. Christina reminds Paul she wants Jack dead. **(19)**
84. Jack arrives back at his motel. Paul watches him from an adjacent room. **(64)**
85. Jack sits alone in his motel room. **(85)**
86. Jack calls his wife from his motel room. **(89)**
87. Jack drinks (alcohol) in his motel room. He burns off the Christian cross tattoo on his forearm. **(97)**
88. Christina stands out on the balcony. She walks back inside and lies down on the bed next to Paul. **(61)**
89. Paul watches Christina sleep. He soon stands up and walks outside. **(74)**
90. Paul sits in his car. He waits for Jack to come out of his motel room. When he walks past, Paul steps out of the car and points the gun at Jack. He makes him walk away from the motel and into the wilderness. Off screen there are gunshots. **(75)**
91. Paul stands in the wilderness with his gun pointed at Jack. This time we see the gunshots as Paul misses on purpose. He tells Jack to disappear. Paul leaves. **(100)**
92. Paul walks along the dusty terrain with the gun in hand. He vomits. **(53)**
93. Christina sits in the Motel bathroom taking drugs. **(6)**
94. Christina steps out of the motel bathroom and out the front door of the room. **(102)**
95. Paul sits beside an empty motel swimming pool, playing with his gun. **(10)**
96. Christina approaches Paul at the empty swimming pool. She asks if he killed Jack, Paul says yes. They go back to their motel room. **(103)**

97. Christina and Paul hear a noise outside their room. Jack comes in and tries to get Paul to kill him, but Paul can't do it despite Christina's silent pleas. Christina beats Jack with a large wooden stick. In the corner of the room Paul shoots himself in the chest. **(104)**
98. Christina holds the shop Paul in the corner of the room. She screams at Jack to call an ambulance. **(15)**
99. In a car Jack drives the shot and bleeding Paul in the backseat being held by Christina. **(30)**
100. Jack arrives at a police station, Paul and Christina in the back of the car. He tells the cop that he shot Paul. **(83)**
101. Jack is let go by the police because his confession does not match the police report and comments made by Christina. **(92)**
102. Christina offers to give her blood to help Paul. **(90)**
103. Christina finds out her blood cannot be used because of high levels of illegal substances. She also finds out that she is pregnant. **(101)**
104. Christina and Jack look in on Paul in the hospital. They share a look. **(106)**
105. Paul lies in hospital. His final voice over begins. **(5)**
106. Paul's final voice over continues. We get a montage of past events. **(105)**
107. Jack returns home to his family. **(107)**
108. Paul dies in hospital. **(108)**
109. Snow falls on an empty pool. **(109)**
110. A pregnant Christina manages to step into her children's rooms. **(110)**

21 Grams in viewing order.

73. Paul sits up in bed, watching a naked Christina sleep. **(1)**
16. Christina's husband and daughters having food and drink at a diner. They stand up and leave. **(2)**
2. Christina speaks at a rehab clinic. She speaks about her family's role in saving her from a life filled with drugs and alcohol. **(3)**
3. Jack speaks to a troubled youth at his church. He tries to show him the way of Jesus. He shows the youth his new truck, telling him it was Jesus who wanted him to have the truck. **(4)**
105. Paul lies in hospital. His final voice over begins. **(5)**
93. Christina sits in the Motel bathroom taking drugs. **(6)**
4. Paul's wife meets with a fertility doctor. He asks her if she has had an abortion, she confirms. **(7)**
5. Jack talks to the Reverend of his church about the troubled youth he is trying to help. Outside the church Jack nearly gets into a fight with the boy. **(8)**
6. Jack arrives home from church in his truck. We see his wife, son and daughter. **(9)**
95. Paul sits it at an empty motel swimming pool, playing with his gun. **(10)**
38. Jack walks down the prison hallway, being led to his cell. **(11)**
18. Christina and her sister doing laps of a swimming pool. **(12)**
12. Reverend preaching at church. Jack shows his enthusiasm for his new found religion. **(13)**
7. Paul sits at home working on a computer, hooked up to an oxygen mask. He goes into his bathroom to sneak a cigarette. **(14)**
98. Christina holds the shop Paul in the corner of the room. She screams at Jack to call an ambulance. **(15)**

44. Paul rings doorbell at Christina's house. There is no reply. **(16)**

9. Jack carries a set of golf clubs on a course. He is a caddy. He is called in by his boss and subsequently fired because of member complaints about his tattoos. **(17)**

31. Paul lies in hospital after his operation. He is brought his old heart in a jar. He refers to it as the culprit. **(18)**

83. Paul and Christina drive out in the country. They drive past Jack's new workplace. Christina reminds Paul she wants Jack dead. **(19)**

10. Jack eats dinner with his family. He tells his wife about being fired from the golf course. He has a confrontation with his children when he tries to show them some Jesus inspired discipline. **(20)**

1. Christina baking with her daughters in her kitchen. **(21)**

8. A sick Paul sits in his bed. His wife informs him of her trip to the fertility clinic. Paul does not seem interested in the idea of having a baby. **(22)**

45. Paul sits in his car watching Christina leave her house. He follows her to the liquor store and stands behind her in line. **(23)**

14. Birthday party at Jack's house. The church congregation is there, but Jack has not yet arrived. **(24)**

23. Christina arrives home, calling out to her husband and daughters. She receives the phone message from her husband. Christina then receives a phone call from the hospital, she is told about the accident involving her husband and daughter. **(25)**

21. Revered drives Jack's wife past the scene of the hit and run. **(26)**

11. Sick Paul and his wife talk to the fertility doctor about artificial examination. Paul gives a sperm sample. **(27)**

24. Christina arrives at hospital. **(28)**

20. Jack pulls into the driveway at his house following his hit and run. The party goes on inside as Jack arrives. He tells his wife about the accident. **(29)**

99. In a car Jack drives the shot and bleeding Paul in the backseat being held by Christina. **(30)**

35. Paul being examined in hospital. He is curious as to whose heart he has. But the rules prohibit his knowing. **(31)**

25. Christina finds out her husband is in critical condition, but she also learns that her girls died in the accident. **(32)**

22. Wife tells Jack that the people at the accident are dead. She tells him to pull his truck further into the driveway. **(33)**

46. Paul watches Christina swimming in the pool. **(34)**

13. Jack retrieving his final belongings from the golf course. His boss approaches him. Feeling guilty about Jack being fired, the boss asks him out for a dink (non-alcoholic) **(35)**

26. Christina's finds out that her husband is showing no brain activity. She is asked about organ donation. **(36)**

27. Paul asleep in bed with his wife. They receive a phone call in the middle of the night, a heart has become available. **(37)**

28. Paul's wife waits while Paul is prepped for surgery. As she waits she sees a grieving Christina leave the hospital. **(38)**

47. Paul watches Christina eating at a squash court. He speaks to her for the first time. He doesn't tell her who he is. **(39)**

55. Christina drinking alone in her house. She calls her friend, a drug dealer. **(40)**

17. Christina's husband walks home with their daughters. He leaves a phone message telling her they will be home soon. **(41)**

30. Following the accident Jack watches his kids asleep in bed. He informs his wife

that he is going to turn himself in. This causes friction as she wonders what's the point in turning himself in when there is no evidence. He sees it is the right thing to do by God. **(42)**

32. Christina removes a bunch of her children's belongings, but she cannot set foot in her girl's bedrooms. **(43)**

36. Dinner party at Paul and his wife's house to celebrate his new heart. His wife mentions to their friends that they are planning to have a baby. **(44)**

41. Paul meets an associate at the bowling alley. **(45)**

29. Jack's wife cleans blood away from the bumper of the truck. **(46)**

33. Funeral of Christina's family. She speaks to her family about life not being able to continue. **(47)**

37. After the party Paul questions his wife's reasons to tell their friends about their pregnancy plans. **(48)**

34. Christina drinks in the kitchen at her family's funeral. Her sister tells her that the hit and run driver has turned himself in. **(49)**

42. Paul meets another associate at a bar. He finds out who his heart donor was and what happened. **(50)**

43. Paul tells his wife who the donor is. His wife is curious as to why Paul needs to know. He responds that he wants to know who he is now. **(51)**

15. Jack leaves the bar (sober). He says goodbye to his boss and drives away in his truck. **(52)**

92. Paul walks along the dusty terrain with the gun in hand. He vomits. **(53)**

49. Paul and wife meet fertility doctor. Paul finds out about the abortion. This revelation strains their relationship to breaking point. **(54)**

39. The reverend visits Jack in prison. He asks Jack to beg for the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. Jack refuses and blames Jesus for putting the truck in his hands and allowing him to run over his victims. **(55)**

56. Christina arrives at a club. Paul follows her as Christina receives drugs in the bathroom. **(56)**

40. Jack tries to hang himself in the prison shower. **(57)**

57. Christina tries to drive her car home drunk but is stopped by valet parking. Paul offers to drive her home. When he gets to her house he leaves her sleeping in her car. **(58)**

48. Jack is visited by his wife in prison. She tells him she has sold his truck to pay for a lawyer. **(59)**

82. Jack works away at some sort of mining facility out in the desert. **(60)**

88. Christina stands out on the balcony. She walks back inside and lies down on the bed next to Paul. **(61)**

81. Paul speaks to his associate and gets information on where Jack is living, where he works and what he looks like. **(62)**

61. Christina stands outside her sports club in the pouring rain. Paul comes up behind her and offers to give her a ride home, she eventually accepts. **(63)**

84. Jack arrives back at his motel. Paul watches him from an adjacent room. **(64)**

62. Paul drives Christina home. He drives away. **(65)**

63. Paul vomits while driving home. **(66)**

19. Christina's husband and daughters walking home. They speak to a gardener. Jack drives closely behind in his truck. An accident occurs off screen as the gardener runs to the scene of the crash. **(67)**

50. Jack's wife and the reverend wait for Jack outside prison. He ignores them, but the reverend goes up and speaks to him. **(68)**

64. Paul meets with his doctor and finds out his body is rejecting in his new heart. He either has to come into hospital and wait for a new heart or risk dying a very painful death. **(69)**
51. Jack is driven home by his wife and reverend. **(70)**
52. Jack arrives home and greets his children. He gets a rather frosty reception from his son. **(71)**
65. Paul has lunch with Christina. **(72)**
66. Following their lunch date, Paul and Christina walk home. **(73)**
89. Paul watches Christina sleep. He soon stands up and walks outside. **(74)**
90. Paul sits in his car. He waits for Jack to come out of his motel room. When he walks past Paul steps out of the car and points the gun at Jack. He makes him walk away from the motel and into the wilderness. Off screen there are shots. **(75)**
53. Jack has sex with his wife. **(76)**
67. Paul hangs out inside Christina's home. He sees some photos of Christina's now deceased family. He begins to feel sick and leaves. **(77)**
58. Jack at a church service. He now appears completely uninterested. **(78)**
54. Jack's daughter asks him if he really killed two little girls and their daddy. **(79)**
59. Jack sits alone at the front of the church praying. **(80)**
68. Christina calls Paul in the middle of the night. He leaves to the objections of his wife. **(81)**
60. Jack leaves his house in the middle of the night, no word to any of his family. **(82)**
100. Jack arrives at a police station, Paul and Christina in the back of the car. He tells the cop that he shot Paul. **(83)**
69. Paul arrives at Christina's in the middle of the night. He tells her he was the recipient of her husband's heart. She gets angry and kicks him out of her house. **(84)**
85. Jack sits alone in his motel room. **(85)**
71. Christina wakes up at her house. She goes outside and sees Paul asleep in her car. She gets into the car and they speak. They kiss. **(86)**
70. Paul's wife sits alone in their house at night. **(87)**
72. Paul and Christina have sex. **(88)**
74. Paul sits in bed looking at more of Christina's family photos. **(89)**
102. Christina offers to give her blood to help Paul. **(90)**
74. Paul sits in bed looking at more of Christina's family photos. **(91)**
101. Jack is let go by the police because his confession does not match the police report and comments made by Christina. **(92)**
75. Christina gets dressed, as Paul lies asleep in bed. **(93)**
76. Paul returns home to find his wife packing her belongings. She tells him that she is returning to England and still plans to have his baby. **(94)**
77. Christina walks along the street and approaches the gardener. She speaks to him, presumably about the accident, consequently upsetting Christina. She then walks to the diner where her husband and children were eating prior to the accident. Following this she goes to the part of the street where her family was killed, she sits down on the sidewalk. **(95)**
78. Christina cries as she listens to the phone message again. **(96)**
87. Jack drinks (alcohol) in his motel room. He burns off the Christian cross tattoo on his arm. **(97)**
79. Christina prepares to take cocaine. But just as she is about to, Paul stops her. **(98)**
80. In the kitchen Christina tells Paul she wants to kill Jack. She tells Paul that he should do it because he owes her husband. **(99)**
91. Paul stands in the wilderness with his gun pointed at Jack. This time we see the

- shots as Paul misses on purpose. He tells Jack to disappear. Paul leaves. **(100)**
103. Christina finds out her blood cannot be used because of high levels of illegal substances. She also finds out that she is pregnant. **(101)**
94. Christina steps out of the motel bathroom and out the front door of the room. **(102)**
96. Christina approaches Paul at the empty swimming pool. She asks if he killed Jack, Paul says yes. They go back to their motel room. **(103)**
97. Christina and Paul hear a noise outside their room. Jack comes in and tries to get Paul to kill him, but Paul can't do it despite Christina's silent pleas. Christina beats Jack with a large wooden stick. In the corner of the room Paul shoots himself in the chest. **(104)**
106. Paul's final voice over continues. We get a montage of past events. **(105)**
104. Christina and Jack look in on Paul in the hospital. They share a look. **(106)**
107. Jack returns home to his family. **(107)**
108. Paul dies in hospital. **(108)**
109. Snow falls on an empty pool. **(109)**
110. A pregnant Christina manages to step into her children's rooms. **(110)**

While there have been comments from critics that the film is in no apparent order at all, the order is in my opinion very deliberate and serves a purpose. On his website internet critic James Berardinelli, while writing mostly positive in regards to 21 Grams comments, "It's as if the filmmakers assembled about 50 scenes, all two to four minutes in length, and randomly edited them together" (Berardinelli, 2003). However, he further goes on to say that by using a non-linear structure "Alejandro González Iñárritu keeps us far more intrigued than a conventional vision of identical material would" (ibid). The purpose of this approach is to keep the viewer guessing as to the way events will unfold on screen and consequently to make up their own minds in regards to the order of the plot. Despite the fact that we see all the main characters together from the final sequence that is placed early in the film, there is still mystery and intrigue as to how the main protagonists will interact and ultimately end up. The structure is much like a spiral that curves closer and closer to the key moments until they are reached. Had the film been told in sequence, it would read much like a standard revenge tale i.e. A woman is wronged and with the help of an acquaintance, tracks down and attempts to take revenge on her wrong doers. That synopsis however, certainly does not apply to 21 Grams, because it takes the form of a far deeper character study. Characters are motivated by more than simple revenge and retribution, but by destiny, tragedy and redemption. I do wonder given Paul's penchant for numbers, and the nature of his profession, if there is a mathematical formula to the film. But with my own mathematics being less than impressive, I will

not attempt to find a solution that miraculously explains the structure of *21 Grams*.

The structure of the film enables the plot to be revealed slowly and very deliberately. Typically films rely on the plot driving the narrative; however, with *21 Grams*' non-linear structure breaking up normal narrative flow, *Iñárritu* is dependent on the characters driving the narrative. I wondered while watching the film, just what how different it would be had it been told in a different order. Perhaps not chronologically, but for example, if one character's story were placed after the other, so that the stories intersect at the point where the characters interact with each other, i.e. the numerous scenes between Christina and Paul. To illustrate, I have taken all of Jack's scenes and placed them one after the in the other they appear after the film.

Jack's Story.

3. Jack speaks to a troubled youth at his church. He tries to show him the way of Jesus. He shows the youth his new truck, telling him it was Jesus who wanted him to have the truck.
5. Jack talks to the Reverend of his church about the troubled youth he is trying to help. Outside the church Jack nearly gets into a fight with the boy.
6. Jack arrives home from church in his truck. We see his wife, son and daughter.
38. Jack walks down the prison hallway, being led to his cell.
9. Jack carries a set of golf clubs on a course. He is a caddy. He is called in by his boss and subsequently fired because of member complaints about his tattoos.
10. Jack eats dinner with his family. He tells his wife about being fired from the golf course. He has a confrontation with his children when he tries to show them some Jesus inspired discipline.
21. Reverend drives Jack's wife past the scene of the hit and run.
20. Jack pulls into the driveway at his house following his hit and run. The party goes on inside as Jack arrives. He tells his wife about the accident.
22. Wife tells Jack that the people at the accident are dead. She tells him to pull his truck further into the driveway.
13. Jack retrieving his final belongings from the golf course. His boss approaches him. Feeling guilty about Jack being fired, the boss asks him out for a drink (non-alcoholic)
30. Following the accident Jack watches his kids asleep in bed. He informs his wife that he is going to turn himself in. This causes friction as she wonders what the point is in turning himself in when there is no evidence. He sees it is the right thing to do by God.
29. Jack's wife cleans blood away from the bumper of the truck.
15. Jack leaves the bar (sober). He says goodbye to his boss and drives away in his truck.
39. The reverend visits Jack in prison. He asks Jack to beg for the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. Jack refuses and blames Jesus for putting the truck in his hands and allowing him to run over his victims.

- 40. Jack tries to hang himself in the prison shower.
- 48. Jack is visited by his wife in prison. She tells him she has sold his truck to pay for a lawyer.
- 82. Jack works away at some sort of mining facility out in the desert.
- 84. Jack arrives back at his motel. Paul watches him from an adjacent motel room.
- 50. Jack's wife and the reverend wait for Jack outside prison. He ignores them, but the reverend goes up and speaks to him.
- 51. Jack is driven home by his wife and reverend.
- 52. Jack arrives home and greets his children. He gets a rather frosty reception from his son.
- 53. Jack has sex with his wife.
- 58. Jack at a church service. He now appears completely uninterested.
- 54. Jack's daughter asks him if he really killed two little girls and their daddy.
- 59. Jack sits alone at the front of the church praying.
- 60. Jack leaves his house in the middle of the night, no word to any of his family.
- 100. Jack arrives at a police station, Paul and Christina in the back of the car. He tells the cop that he shot Paul.
- 85. Jack sits alone in his motel room.
- 101. Jack is let go by the police because his confession does not match the police report and comments made by Christina.
- 87. Jack drinks (alcohol) in his motel room. He burns off the Christian cross tattoo on his arm.
- 97. Christina and Paul hear a noise outside their room. Jack comes in and tries to get Paul to kill him, but Paul can't do it despite Christina's silent pleas. Christina beats Jack with a large wooden stick. In the corner of the room Paul shoots himself in the chest.
- 107. Jack returns home to his family.

This sequence would follow or precede *Christina's Story* and *Paul's Story*. So the gaps that remain in *Jack's Story* would be filled in during the other two narratives. Conversely, the scenes that involve two or even three of the main characters could be seen multiple times, each time from the perspective of a different character, an example being the motel scene (number 97 in viewing order) when Paul shoots himself. Under the above structure, this scene would be shown three times, each from the view of a different character. If the stories were to be told one after the other, then the film might take on some of the elements that *Pulp Fiction* also utilizes, such as the seamless switches between protagonists and the more episodic presentation. Instead Inarritu uses a multiple protagonist and multiple time-frame set-up, cutting back and forth between them, creating both temporal and spatial dislocation. With the structure that I suggested, there would be a more significant folding in time, as opposed to the more distinct non-linear approach to time that is actually used in *21 Grams*.

21 Grams and Time

It seems too obvious to state that time is what drives the film. But I am speaking not in terms of a literal running time, but more to the fact that a film must move rhythmically from beginning to the end, in whatever presented order, regardless whether or not the first scene appears at the beginning of the film, in the middle, or at the end. Rhythm also plays a significant role in a film's temporal progression, particularly in *21 Grams*, where the filmmakers demand a lot from their viewers due to the convoluted structure. David Bordwell speaks about the importance of rhythm in cinema. He comments that individual's minds make decisions at the speed at which the environment demands. This would suggest that a viewer watching *21 Grams* is forced to make quick decisions about the film's narrative because of the fast pace and snappy editing. He goes on to say, "if narrative information is coming thick and fast, the viewer will opt for a quick-elimination" (Bordwell, 1985, p. 76), in other words dismissing alternative "hypotheses". It begs the question then, how are viewers able to make sense of *21 Grams*? How do we follow the complicated plot and interwoven character relationships? The answer lies in the film's chronological sequence. Despite scenes occurring out of sequence, the film actually takes place in the 'present', making engagement far easier than may be initially surmised. There are no detailed flashbacks about each character, we don't really learn about their childhood, or even how they came to be in their current situations. In Paul's story we learn a bit about his troubled relationship with his wife through her abortion. We also find out snippets about Jack and Christina's troubled past. However, while that information is important to the story, the plot occurs entirely in a series of moments, enabling the viewer to engage with these moments. It is possible to argue that because Paul dies at the end while speaking in voiceover, the film is one long flashback by his character. However, I would dispute this by arguing that Paul is not the main protagonist in the film, as he would be if he provided the narration (Aronson, 2000). I believe that Paul's final words are more representative of his final thoughts about his life, as opposed to him telling the story of how he ended up in hospital. Chronologically, he speaks only at the end of the film, rather than relating his story at the start.

When Deleuze discusses the order of time and time as series, he speaks about the present as "distinguished from the future and the past, when something is replaced by something else" (Ronald Bogue, 2003, p. 138). In dealing more significantly with

temporal order, there is an understanding that viewers look for signifiers from the previous event in order to make sense of the present (Bordwell, 1985). As a viewer you tend to look at the causality of actions, i.e. the relationship of cause and event. Interestingly enough this idea of causality nearly mirrors a key theme of *21 Grams*, that is, the idea that every event can have an unknowing significance on yourself and others. This is tied closely to the theme of destiny proliferating from *21 Grams*. An obvious example is the event of the car crash, which has significant repercussions. Firstly for Jack, as the cause of the accident; Christina as the unknowing victim, and Paul, whose life is ironically saved by this tragic event (even if only for a short time). The effect of the tragedy of course stretches beyond that of the three protagonists, but to those around them and close to them as well, such as Paul's wife and her desire to have a family, and the Jordan family's desire to have their father and husband around, instead of back in jail. I would draw a comparison in that respect between *21 Grams* and M Night Shymalan's *Signs* (2002). While these films are not what I would describe as similar, they do share a very prominent theme of fate and destiny. However, *Signs* is presented in a far more straightforward fashion, while *21 Grams* is far more reliant on the audience making sense of the order of events, rather than just being told them, as is the case in *Signs*. *21 Grams* as mentioned previously, expects a lot of its viewers. This seems to be a common theme through much screenwriting literature, that is, that a film should cater to the viewer as though they are for lack of a better word, ignorant, as though people are incapable of interpreting something for themselves. *21 Grams* approaches the viewer far more interactively, enabling individuals to make sense of the time sequence themselves, without being told. This may of course impact on a film's commercial capabilities and success, but conversely it makes for an intriguing, challenging and rewarding two hours. In *The Narrative Of Flippy Johnson* I do not wish to spell out everything for the viewer, however, I also don't believe I can take the audiences ability to comprehend the narrative structure for granted. *21 Grams* is a film that successfully achieves its goal of utilizing a non-linear structure to its advantage, and still presenting a coherent and legible storyline.

Chapter III: Gus Van Sant's Death Trilogy: An Elaborate Illusion of Time

Introduction

Death at the hands of a stranger, death at the hands of your best friend and death by your own hands. These three phrases aptly describe *Elephant* (2003), *Gerry* (2002) and *Last Days* (2005) respectively, Gus Van Sant's feature film trilogy, which has come to be referred to as the 'death' trilogy. These are three films that centre around brief moments in time for their protagonists, and each creates a world where time becomes its own character, as intriguing, complex and important as any organic life form that graces the screen. Time becomes more than simply a tool for driving the narrative, but is used to create intersections between reality and fantasy; a sign that Van Sant's characters have a preference for retreating into fantasy. This chapter will analyse these three films, looking in particular at how the manipulation of time influences narrative structure and characterisation. I will look at the way Van Sant as a writer and director not only attempts to manipulate audience expectation by fragmenting and dislocating time, but also goes a step further, and in my opinion, deliberately polarizes viewers between loving and hating his work by breaking standard 'Hollywood' filmmaking conventions, in particular by his use of long continuous tracking shots.

Gus Van Sant, a Portland born filmmaker and musician, started his career with two of independent cinema's best known titles: *Drugstore Cowboy* (1989) and *My Own Private Idaho* (1991). He ventured into more mainstream cinema and had success with *Good Will Hunting* (1997), and to a lesser extent the similar *Finding Forrester* (2000). Van Sant then returned to his earlier independent approach with his 'death' trilogy. Gus Van Sant has made a name for himself as a filmmaker with a particular personal style, someone who is not scared to break cinema convention by using long, extended takes. He is certainly not the first filmmaker to utilize these long continuous takes, Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu is an often-cited example, as is Orson Welles. Nor will he be the last; Vincent Gallo's much maligned but misunderstood 2003 feature *The Brown Bunny* is a perfect example of this approach. But Van Sant in my opinion has found a niche as a filmmaker and artist, personified by his intentional and

purposeful manipulation of temporal characteristics. This is exemplified by his ‘death’ trilogy, of which I will now provide a brief synopsis for.

Gerry

Gerry focuses on two twenty-something males, both named ‘Gerry’ (played by Matt Damon and Casey Affleck), whose friendship is put to the test when they go on a hiking adventure in search of the ‘thing’. They find themselves lost in the middle of a large desert with no food or water. Gerry, much like Elephant and Last Days, features regular long continuous shots, which creates in viewer at least a perverse sense of engagement, an almost voyeuristic pleasure and fear. It is as if I can’t look away despite the fact that it seems an inevitability that the characters will die as we follow them wandering the desert for minutes at a time. In fact, the film features no more than 100 shots in its 103 minute running time. Thematically, the film explores the moral decisions that arise when people are faced with extreme adversity, the implication that death is approaching with no obvious means of escape. Van Sant gives an insight into the harsh realities of friendship by examining the dynamics of what happens when a seemingly brother-like relationship is removed from its comfort zone and placed into a harsh unforgiving environment; a large open, expanding space, with no apparent end. Van Sant concludes the film with possibly one of life’s most difficult questions, ‘would you end your best friend’s life if he asked you too, if there appeared to be no other alternative?’ Could you answer the question if days of walking, severe dehydration and hunger had left you disorientated, your judgement completely gone and your movement more like a dream than real life? This question is put to the test in Gerry.

Elephant

Elephant deals with a day in the life of several high school students who go about their day unaware of an impending tragedy. Most of the film is occupied with interaction between pupils, their friends and teachers, portrayed by means of long continuous tracking shots through the school. But away from school, two young and confused male students plot revenge on their unsuspecting peers, and eventually undertake a Columbine style massacre-attack. Elephant focuses on themes relating to teenage alienation, adolescent confusion and the fragility of life by presenting a broad range of characters, as outlined in Chapter 1, all having to deal with the complications

of American high school life. Van Sant makes the school shootings ‘realistic’ in the sense that he doesn’t build up a hero, or saviour; everyone in the school is at risk, and no one is there to save the day. The characters Van Sant focuses his camera on (aside from the killers and the character of John, Van Sant does not delve into character back-story or psychological depth), an example being Eli, are extinguished just as brutally and forthrightly as everybody else. In fact Eli’s death is shown almost off screen. When his character seems as if he is about to be built into a hero, he is struck down in a split second. A character named Benny also provides an example as he struts along the hallway, seemingly hell-bent on bringing the gunman down, before he himself is killed. Events unfold in *Elephant* by means of long unbroken tracking shots; which repeat from a different starting point, often showing the same sequences from multiple viewpoints. This approach enables the viewer to become embroiled in the moment, enabling engagement with the narrative on an intense visceral level so that we too, feel under threat from the killers.

Last Days

Last Days (loosely based on the final days of Kurt Cobain) tells the story of Blake, an introverted rock star struggling under the burden of fame and growing isolation. He spends his final days staggering and mumbling around the large grounds of his stone mansion, intriguingly situated in the middle of the woods. His time consists of avoiding a private detective, a concerned record executive and ‘friends’, who only make contact when they need money or help with songs. He politely meets with a Yellow Pages salesman and visits an underground rock club, but soon finds himself alone in his greenhouse where he takes his own life and escapes his tortured existence. Van Sant is able to examine the complexities of fame and the expectation that goes with being considered ‘talented’. Blake is a character who represents an archetypal rock star; with scruffy long hair, odd sense of dress, heroin-addicted, and, as his record executive refers to him “a rock and roll cliché”. The location of the mansion in the middle of the woods is an expressive device that reflects Blake’s growing insanity, because it exemplifies his isolation from the world, his sense of being like a large stone structure out of place in the middle of a forest. Van Sant again uses long continuous tracking shots to follow Blake through the forest and inside his mansion. This gives us the opportunity to get a sense of the declining mental state of Blake, as he mumbles along, unaware of anything beyond his own mind. While only a

few days pass in the film, time feels as if it is excruciatingly long for Blake, as his death approaches. Van Sant achieves this feeling by keeping the camera firmly focused on Blake, without needing to cut away.

Gus Van Sant and his Audience

Bordwell and Thompson comment, “Because stories are all around us, spectators approach a narrative film with definitive expectation” (1993, p.65). This means audiences go into a movie knowing what will make them enjoy the experience, and conversely what will make them think less of a film. While the actual position an audience member will take is obviously an individual one and depends for a large part on his or her own inclinations, what is apparent, according to Cherry Potter, is the inevitability of the reaction itself (2001, p.153). So, despite audience position being individual, there will still be a reaction to a film, be it good, bad or indifferent. I would argue that there is no neutral ground when it comes to *Elephant*, *Gerry* and *Last Days*, because these films are as hated as they are loved. For example, Roger Ebert in his 2003 review of *Gerry* for the *Chicago Sun Times* website says, “the movie is so gloriously bloody-minded, so perverse in its obstinacy, that it rises to a kind of mad purity” (Ebert, 2003). Nev Pierce on *bbc.co.uk* refers to *Gerry* as “astonishingly beautiful. Like the sea, the desert is both magnificent and fearful, an unforgiving force of nature captured here in all its awe” (Pierce, 2003). However, on *deseretnews.com*, Jeff Vive refers to *Gerry* as “...an exercise in tedium. And though the film is shorter than two hours, it's so sluggishly paced and uninteresting that it feels as if it's actually several days long (Vice, 2003)

How is it that Van Sant keeps some viewers at an emotional distance, causing them to become so infuriated that they may go to the extreme of walking out of the cinema less than halfway through the film? An example comes from a 2002 screening of *Gerry* at the Sundance Film Festival, where more than half the audience walked out (Ebert, 2003). The obvious answer is Van Sant’s filmmaking technique and style, or more accurately Van Sant’s disregard of ‘standard’ cinematic conventions. An example is his continual use of tracking shots; entire scenes taking place from single wide shots without the customary close ups to reinforce emotion, and limited non-expositional dialogue, as opposed to dialogue being used to create character depth and move them toward their resolution. Van Sant seems content to allow the narrative to

develop from a visual distance, often only using close ups at the end of films. Both *Gerry* and *Last Days* utilize big close ups of the protagonists only in the final moments, creating what could be described as a moment of reflection for not only the characters, but the audience as well. *Elephant*'s slightly more mainstream approach means it employs more frequently-used common cinematic tools. But if viewed against Van Sant's standard mainstream efforts i.e. the intelligent, if at times indulgent, *Good Will Hunting*, or the remake of Hitchcock's *Psycho*, *Elephant* undoubtedly fits the label of 'independent or art house' cinema as per any previous definition. It is a label that enables Van Sant to explore the complexities of his characters, because they are not confined by cinematic conventions. Van Sant is able to follow his characters around, showing their darker emotions without needing to cut away from them to develop other aspects of the story and build towards a satisfactory resolution. While this may irritate audiences so used to experiencing the diverse satisfaction of mainstream three-act cinema, it is the perfect environment for Van Sant to use his characters as a way of exploring the issues that clearly interest him (see below). Given that these three films centre on the inevitability of, and complexities of death, his exploration in my opinion begins with his deliberate manipulation of time.

The Manipulation of Time

In *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Bordwell, 1985) and *Film Art: An Introduction, fourth edition* (Bordwell and Thompson, 1993), the significance of duration as a storytelling convention beyond simple running time is explored in detail. Bordwell and Thompson state, "plot duration consists of highlighting certain stretches of story duration" (1993, p.71). Bordwell devises three types of durations; *fabula*, or the time that the viewer presumes the story action takes, be it hours or decades; *syuzhet*, or duration consisting of the stretches of time which the film dramatizes; and *screen duration*, which encompasses the length of the *syuzhet* and shrinks it down to running time (Bordwell, 1985, p.81). *Elephant*, *Gerry* and *Last Days* are all interesting case studies in terms of duration, given that Van Sant's continual use of long tracking shots would seem best suited to showing a narrative in real time. But while *Elephant* takes place over a period of no more than 3 hours, *Gerry* and *Last Days* span approximately three and two days respectively. What Van Sant does, very effectively in *Elephant*, is frequently use screen duration to expand story duration. This enables greater emphasis on certain moments, such as the haunting few moments before the gunmen attack the

school. We not only learn the whereabouts of everybody, but the helplessness that the characters will soon feel. It is a different situation in *Gerry* and *Last Days*, where Van Sant is able to show time passing while presenting long tracking shots. For example, an early tracking shot following the two Gerrys walking lasts one minute and three seconds, the next shot, one minute twenty-four. There is a gradual build up in tracking shot length throughout the film's running time of ninety-eight minutes, culminating in one of the film's final dolly shot that stretches for five minutes and nine seconds. This measured build up of lengths feels as though it is extending excruciatingly slow for the characters (and for that matter many audience members), as their situation gets more and more desperate.

Along with their exaggerated use of tracking shots, the films also do not utilize traditional framing techniques. For example, there are no instances of the intercutting of over-the-shoulder-shots frequently used during dialogue-heavy scenes in mainstream cinema, simply because they would detract from the feeling of isolation Van Sant is attempting to create in the narrative. I believe this is directly related to rhythm, and the individual approach Van Sant has to his films. By utilising more 'standard' approaches to making his films, his long and slow rhythmic approach would be compromised. But by keeping the viewer at a distance, and by keeping their eyes permanently fixed on the characters without cutting away, an audience can identify with the plight of the protagonists, including both their physical and mental states. Any cutting away to alleviate tension is immediately forgone when Van Sant chooses to literally follow his characters; as we are forced to watch them and forced to feel their inner anguish and pain.

Rhythm

Van Sant uses very strategically placed scenes that I would describe as 'lift out' scenes. I mentioned 'lift' out scenes in chapter one in reference to *Pulp Fiction* and *Mulholland Drive* I pointed out that these types of scenes are significant as moments of intensity because they allow an opportunity for an audience and the characters to reflect on what has been occurring in the story, while also building character depth and relationships without needing heavy exposition. However, I believe these scenes not only act as moments of intensity in Gus Van Sant's death trilogy, but they are also linked to rhythm as well. These are scenes that I believe are separate from the rest of

the narrative. I would define 'lift out' scenes as scenes that, while they are separate from the 'feel' of the overall narrative, in the case of the 'death trilogy', are important to the pace of the film. I personally believe these cannot be described as 'plants', something that Cherry Potter in particular speaks in depth about (2001, p. 166). While plants are clever ways of hiding exposition without the obligatory plot explanation, the scenes that I am describing are not about plot. In fact they are almost the antithesis, given Van Sant's disregard for standard plot convention. He does not use them to move the plot forward because I believe his films, the death trilogy in particular, deal with and focus more on human behaviour under distress or pressure. Van Sant seems more interested in human behaviour in specific instances, as opposed to their stories. These 'lift out' scenes are directly related to time in the way they intentionally slow down the already deliberately slow pace of the film. This stopping of time also allows the scene or sequence that immediately follows to be moved ahead several hours. Van Sant often uses subtle humour in these scenes; employing almost farcical situations and seemingly pointless dialogue to alleviate the tension or impending sense of doom. A couple of examples from *Gerry* include a sequence where Casey Affleck's Gerry is stuck on top of a large rock he uses as a lookout, while Matt Damon's Gerry attempts to find a way for his comrade to get down. The scene lasts for approximately nine minutes, as Affleck's Gerry eventually, after much discussion, querying and hypothesising, decides to jump. The scene takes place in one long extended wide shot, only cutting in for a closer view on one occasion, before just as quickly cutting back to the wide shot. There is the obvious metaphor related to the scene about the hopeless situation and being cut off from existence, and the difficulty of making decisions when all the options appear the same. However, because of the metaphorical significance underlying the scene, Van Sant is able to move the story forward while still keeping the slow deliberate pace with which the film begins and ends. *Gerry* also features a scene at night when the two Gerrys discuss a video game (not by accident it is a strategy, *Command and Conquer*-style game, given that the characters are forced to come up with their own strategy for survival if they wish to escape their predicament). Obvious 'friendship' clichés are avoided throughout this movie; in fact dialogue is kept to a minimum. When there is dialogue they talk about video games and game shows, which is in fact perhaps a far more accurate portrait of the activities of contemporary male friendship. This dialogue scene, like the rock scene, brings the already slow-moving plot to an almost complete standstill. But when

the film begins moving again, no matter how slow, time has advanced almost seamlessly without needing another dissolve that would be aesthetically out of place. At times it almost seems like these scenes could be straight out of a Charlie Chaplin film, so darkly comical that if not handled right they could end up as ridiculously laughable. In saying this, Van Sant does use some classic time advancing technique's, for example, showing the sun setting; a standard example of movement of time in Bordwell's *fabula* or *syuzhet* types of duration. However, I believe these shots signal the arrival of another tracking shot, giving the audience a moment to reflect as the sun goes down, before the journey resumes.

Last Days and *Elephant* also feature sequences I would describe as 'lift out' scenes, where music is used as a tool of exposition. I do not mean music in a nondiegetic sense i.e. score, but the characters themselves indulging in musical endeavours. These foreshadow the events to come by showing the emotional state of the characters. In *Last Days*, given the influence the last hours of Kurt Cobain have on the basis of the film, a musical interlude seems inevitable because of the musical occupation of the main protagonist. However, the sequence of Blake playing his guitar is more than just about illustrating a character's inner psyche: it also allows the audience to reflect on the past hours of the character's existence before the film builds to the inevitable climax. Like the *Llorando* sequence in *Mulholland Drive*, music is used to emphasise what I would describe as a moment of intensity in *Last Days*. In *The Narrative Of Flippy Johnson*, I have attempted to use musical interludes as a way of slowing the film down, while also attempting to build on character depth and motivation as I believe occurs during similar these scenes in Van Sant's death trilogy. *Elephant* too uses a significantly lengthy musical interlude scene, where one of the student 'killers' is seen playing a piece of classical music on his piano (Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*). The music serves to illustrate an aspect of character by showing the young man's persistence in learning a complicated piece of classical music; reflecting the fact that he is able to go through with his plan to shoot up his school and not just talk about it. Interestingly, the scene is juxtaposed with the footage of the other 'killer' playing a violent video game. While this seems most likely a reference to social criticisms of the detrimental influence of video games, there could just as easily be a connection between the appreciation of Beethoven and school shooting as well. Van Sant could be suggesting that popular targets for blame, like video games and heavy

metal music, are not the sole reason for such devastating actions. This scene is one of the few that does not come across as being with the main flow of time, in that it seems separated from the rest of the film. It is also one of the few scenes that give us a sense of character relationships (the other being an opening scene with an interaction character of John and his father) However, I would still describe the scene as a ‘lift out’ scene due to the sense of separation created by the sequence, and how it is directly related to character motivation. Because for the most part the future assassins are planning the killings, or playing with the guns, even a scene in the shower where they kiss is a reaction to the fact that they know they are most likely to die. Therefore, I believe the separation is a result of the fact that the characters themselves are ‘wasting’ time, as opposed to every other scene where we are building towards the final shootings, even when time is repeating and folds in on itself. For the most part characters are heading to school, doing work for school, planning to ditch school or participating in school. The same situation is apparent for each ‘lift out’ scene in *Gerry* and *Last Days*, where ‘wasting’ time proves to be a great way of moving underlying story time. This means Van Sant can keep the slow pace even when jumping forward in time, simply by stopping a scene completely, or inserting a scene that has no (or little) pace, but considerable intensity. The leap in time that comes next is almost seamless because we are just going back to the long tracking shots that we have already become accustomed to, adding to the feelings of isolation and powerlessness for the characters and for us.

Van Sant and his Issues

The opening scene from *Elephant* features a car erratically driving down a suburban stretch of American road. This image acts as a metaphor for the entire ‘death’ trilogy, as if it were part of a long (at times excruciatingly so) journey that veers off the beaten narrative path. But every now and then as it comes back into the centre of the story, it gives the audience the chance to comprehend exactly what is going on, and perhaps access is provided to what Van Sant is trying to ‘say’. It seems ironic that audiences can take such divergent stances with regard to their evaluations of Van Sant’s films, yet he himself can appear to be neutral and even non judgemental in regards to the issues he explores. For example, his take on high school shootings in *Elephant* could be described as just a slice of life in American High School life, as opposed to a detailed critique of the Columbine massacre. What we get is a film that

doesn't search for reasons or solutions, it just observes. I would argue that while Van Sant doesn't necessarily attempt to find reasons or solutions, the mere fact that he is exploring the issues surrounding school shootings suggests he is taking a deliberate stance and one opposed to the blame that gets bantered around (particularly by the news media). While he may just be showing an unfortunate 'slice' of modern society, simply by placing the events on screen and showing us the lives of those involved through the device of using multiple viewpoints, he is making his audience take note of the issues at hand. This of course raises the question; what relationship does Van Sant's stance have with his intentional stretching and manipulation of time? In *Elephant* we see events from the same few hours before school several times over, in fact from as many as seven different perspectives. We are given these viewpoints as Van Sant shows us the realities for the people involved, without needing to 'mainstream' his characters. In *Last Days*, scenes of Blake's fragile psyche are also seen from different points of view. For example, a scene where Blake makes macaroni and cheese is seen twice; once from the viewpoint of his friends wanting to track him down for money, and once from Blake's point of view as he meanders around his mansion. This multiple perspective approach entails different viewpoints, equalling a far more 'balanced' approach. Van Sant can explore not only the moments of an individual's, or several individuals existence, but also the events leading to their actions as well, all the while relating all angles of the issue at hand to the viewing public. Van Sant may appear to not be pushing an agenda beyond that of an observation of a moment in time, but the nature of his intervention and his particular techniques suggests that his interests are not centred on finding a solution, but enabling his audience the room to interpret the issues.

Death

Like Gus Van Sant, in *The Narrative Of Flippy Johnson* I am attempting to explore the issue of death and the influence it can have on people's lives, both directly and indirectly. For me death acts as an extreme example of the dark complexities of the types of characters which I outlined in chapter one. For example, the deaths in my script of Millicent, Annabel Lee (Tom's cat) and Mitchell, are all central to the progression of the characters whom these deaths affect, those being William, Tom and Jackson respectively. Mitchell's death in particular is as a result of an extreme emotional outburst from someone who would under normal circumstances never kill

another human being. The issue of death is of significance in the 'death trilogy', but more to the point, the issue surrounding what (or who) it is that is responsible for those deaths. In the case of *Elephant*, your classmates, in *Gerry*, your best friend and in *Last Days*, yourself. In the *Narrative Of Flippy Johnson*, the who's and why's surrounding death are as important as the issue itself. What is it that causes Millicent's death? What result does Annabel Lee's death have on Tom? And what drives a normally reasonable man to commit an horrific murder? And finally, can these questions be answered? It seems Van Sant does his best to interpret the mystery that is death by utilizing his own specific techniques for dealing with time and space in the 'death trilogy'. I may not use any of Van Sant's specific techniques in my own film, for instance, I would not mimic his long tracking shots. However, there is merit in exploring the work of a filmmaker who has successfully found a way of dealing with the darker sides of humanity, without needing a hero, or conforming to any sort of standard narrative structure.

Conclusion

Gus Van Sant has used his 'death' trilogy as a canvas for his exploration, seemingly more interested in investigating themes of 'art house' or alternative cinema than traditional narrative structure. In a 2003 interview on *aboutfilm.com*, Van Sant speaks explicitly about his filmmaking and screenwriting techniques. He is quoted as saying "At this point it's [alternative cinema] something I've been exploring. Yeah, I prefer it. Definitely. I'm going in a really weird I-don't-know-where direction, but I prefer anything [different] from how standardized filmmaking has become" (Van Sant, 2003). On the *Last Days* DVD, Van Sant in an interview makes reference to his scripts, saying he doesn't write a full script, he just writes an outline. He provides an example from *Last Days*, where the actors comment on a portion of the script that read, "he walks though the forest – 20 mins". It seems even during this conceptual process Van Sant is as much concerned with time as he is with other sorts of plot or character development. He leaves it up to his actors to improvise the dialogue, clearly focusing on the aesthetic elements that make his film so rich and unique. In that structured he is not scared to push audience expectation, using his time-manipulating techniques to give the viewer a perspective that would so often be overlooked in traditional narrative cinema. Van Sant in my opinion is not trying to tell us what to

think, but is looking at an issue, exploring the possibilities (again death takes centre stage as an issue in the aforementioned trilogy), and letting the camera do the talking.

Chapter 4: Deconstruction: From Theory To My Own Work

Introduction To The Narrative Of Flippy Johnson

This MA began with the purpose of exploring multi-strand storytelling by looking at the way it uses temporal and spatial boundaries and how that knowledge affects the process of learning to write creatively for the screen. I also looked at the structural ways in which to tell the stories of characters that exhibit the darker qualities of human nature. My research culminated in the production of the feature film script entitled, *“The Narrative Of Flippy Johnson”*. Taking what I learnt from the likes of David Bordwell, Linda Aronson, Mieke Bal, Cherry Potter, Ken Dancyger, Jeff Rush and others, I adapted the aspects that I felt were most interesting and thought-provoking and applied them to my own practical work. Firstly, time and temporal characteristics were not only a central theme in this document, but in my script as well. The very nature of multi-strand story-telling suggests an immediate relationship with time, given that in order to portray multiple sequences intersecting, certain liberties must be taken to successfully transmit the intended narrative occurrences. For instance, certain scenarios need to be shown multiple times, often from different angles or perspectives (aesthetically and figuratively) to enable an audience to make sense of events occurring on screen. This was explored during the *21 Grams* chapter; a film that presents certain select scenes more than once, often twice, with the second being in a completely different context, therefore clearing up the narrative for the viewer. An example is Sean Penn’s character Paul being shown dying in hospital twice. In my own screenplay there are a couple of examples where I attempted to show the same scenes from different viewpoints.

The first time that the character of Tom Evans is introduced, we see him on the phone talking at that point to an unseen coastguard. My idea was to introduce Tom to the viewing audience as something of a crazy man; an old fool with nothing better to do than annoy the local coastguard with ridiculous stories about bees drinking the water in his birdbath. The intention was that Tom would come across as an archetypal small town ‘loon’, hell-bent on annoying people by constantly complaining about every little thing that annoys him. Then as his character is fleshed out, we learn about his existence, his past and what it is that drives him now. From that point I wanted to show Tom’s introduction again, much later in the script, but this time the viewer is

aware of the context, and can in many ways sympathize with him, due to the obstacles he has to overcome (i.e. the death of his beloved pet). When it comes to intersecting multi-strand narratives, this double perspective approach gives the opportunity to show the connections one character has to another. In Tom's case it meant I could show how his life overlaps with another of the town's residents. It is learned at a later point in the script that Tom and the coastguard Jackson have a lot more in common than could be initially deduced from their phone conversation, given that it is Tom's son Mitchell who plays the central role in the conflict between Jackson and his wife Angela. I used the telephone as a way of representing the fragmentation of time that occurs when showing the same sequence twice. In Tom and Jackson's case they have a brief phone conversation early in the film, where we see the initial stages of the scene play out from Tom's end of the phone, later the same action plays out from Jackson's end. A similar occurrence transpires later in the script, during a sequence where Tom is endeavouring to save his cat's life. He makes a telephone call in a vain attempt to try and get hold of the vet, but because of the panic of the situation, he is unable to articulate his needs. Earlier in the script, we see William (whose former wife is the local vet) receive a call that makes no sense at all, later we see that the call was in fact from a frantic Tom, trying to do all he can to save his beloved pet. This kind of multiple viewpoint approach immediately sets the script within a context of fragmented time, simply due to the fact that seeing scenes from more than one point of view at opposite ends of the script, can give the appearance that time is of a cyclical nature, and that all time is coexisting with every other time. Obviously this is vital to my script, not only because I used multi narrative standards in the initial writing stages, but because the nature of time is intrinsically linked to the script thematically.

With what I have read regarding the nature of spatial and temporal characteristics of multi narrative story telling, I decided that time, or more specifically the cyclical nature of time, would work as a central motif, and was also relevant to the small town setting. As anyone knows who has lived in a small community, time has a way of feeling as though it is constantly repeating, meaning similar incidents can occur over and over again. That is why the characters of Cooper, William and Tom share a lot of the same characteristics. They are in many ways carbon copies of each other; Flippy Johnson could be added to that list as well. So for all intents and purposes, William is

Cooper in a few years, Tom is William, and Flippy is Tom. It is of course not as clear cut and obvious as that, but it does represent the kind of whirlpool that the town is supposed to be stuck in (hence Cooper's early reference to a timeless black hole), supported by the fact that the town waits with bated breath for an annual swimming event. I wanted to further reinforce the cyclical feel by having only three swimming champions in something like fifty years (this of course also shows the dominance of William, Tom and Flippy). There are some major problems that occur in the script writing process when wanting to show a stretching or fragmentation of time, simply because it can be best shown aesthetically. I've mentioned Gus Van Sant's abilities at showing exaggerated stretches of screen time by subverting classic cinema techniques; however, subverting scriptwriting standards would in no way have the same effect. So in order to show the almost predatory and unforgiving nature of time in my script, I tried to use the repetition of characters, scenarios, and images, for example the regular references and images of feet, plus the above mentioned metaphorical replication of characters and their actions (William and Tom's attempts at using the machine to revive their loved ones). Standing still while moving forward might be an oxymoron, but it makes perfect sense as the starting point of a multi-strand screenplay where the essence of time is a central theme.

Problems

The difficulties that arise from writing a multi-strand screenplay, and a challenge that I particularly faced, were directly related to time in a literal sense; namely plot time (as directly opposed to story time). When dealing with intersecting narratives and characters within a plot that spans a matter of days, there are the obvious obstacles that arise when needing characters to be at certain places, performing certain actions at exact times. This especially proved to be difficult to achieve without to some extent contriving the actions, rather than letting them grow organically. It can come down to the parts of the story we don't see in the narrative. As is outlined in the first chapter with specific reference to the work of Mark Currie, I believe it is important to focus on narrative exclusion as far back as the script conceptualisation stage, especially when it comes to attempting to write a screenplay that utilizes multi-strand characteristics. It is something that became apparent during my own attempts at writing such a script, and while Bordwell is speaking more about an audience, as a writer you yourself need to create a world beyond the plot and story, as not only a

way of creating believable and fleshed-out three dimensional characters, but as a way of making sense of the intertwining multi-narrative. If in fact you do know where the characters are physically placed in the setting and what they are doing at any moment in time, it is a far simpler undertaking, and more beneficial than shaping the environment to suit your plot points. An example from *The Narrative Of Flippy Johnson* is the character of Millicent. Because of her at times obsessive personality trait, it stands to reason that she would be at school on Sunday during the holidays, wanting to meet one of the parents of her pupils (of course later we find she has an ulterior motive for wanting to meet William, given his ambiguity about whether he is racing or not, and her sister's desire to win the town swimming race), adding to her 'place' in the town. Having reasons for being where I want her to be is important, and doesn't leave it up to luck or fate. It is not clearly known to me if I have achieved this kind of detailed knowledge for each person and their position in the town, simply because it is hard to be separated from characters that as a writer you have spent so much time in creating, subsequently producing a personal bias. But experience says that not every character will come off the page as I have envisioned. There needs to be a moment of reflection, a chance to step outside your work where engagement can be had from a new perspective, allowing a person to see characters, actions and narrative in a new light. But at times characters need to be seen off the page, their actions and motivations need the clarity that only an actor can bring. Only then do we know if a character or even an action will have the desired impact. It may only be at that point that the richness of the subtext that we desire can be seen in full clarity, away from the prejudice of our own minds.

My Own Film

As well as applying my research in a practical sense to my script, at the end of last year I also co wrote and directed a digital feature called *"Down By The Riverside"*¹. Parallel narratives were of particular importance because the storyline followed two separate narrative tracks, with distinct similarities, despite nearly two decades between them. The synopsis is as follows..."Inspired by true events, Down by the Riverside is a film-noir horror, telling a parallel story of murder and mystery across two decades. In the early twentieth century, several pregnant girls were sent away to a

¹ *Down By The Riverside* is a Downending Films production. It was co-written and directed with Marama Killen, and produced by Joe Hitchcock.

house in the country to have their children. The girls and their unborn children were never seen again. Twenty years later, the truth is discovered” - We follow one core female in each decade, firstly Kahu in the 1920s. A young Maori girl, Kahu struggles to cope with her new surroundings after she falls pregnant and is sent to the country to be cared for by a Priest, a caretaker and a nurse. When Kahu uncovers a dark secret within the confines of the house, she leads a rebellion against her oppressors. But her bravery inadvertently leads to the death of every girl in the house, and concludes when she faces off against an evil presence at the nearby river’s edge. Twenty years later Amelia, a young part-Maori student, accompanied by a famed historian, re-enters the house, obsessed with finding the truth. Their exploration soon uncovers the same dark presence, still thriving within the walls of the house. Amelia, like Kahu, is forced to face a truly evil figure, where her bravery and inner strength are put to the test.

Included with this document is a DVD, which features a selection of scenes from a recent test edit for *“Down By The Riverside”* (note: these scenes are roughly edited and the colour and audio are incomplete. The clips also feature temporary music that will not be used in the final edit due to obvious copyright issues). I am including this DVD because it is an example of how I utilized what I had taken from, for example: *Scriptwriting Updated: New and Conventional Ways of Writing for the Screen* by Linda Aronson (2000), specifically her exploration of parallel narratives. Namely, her discussion of four types of parallel narratives, as outlined previously in the literature review chapter, these being the flashback narrative, tandem narrative, sequential narrative and the multiple protagonist and antagonist narrative. For the purposes of this film we utilized elements from both flashback narratives and tandem narratives. First, in terms of flashbacks, Kahu’s entire flashback is for all practical purposes just Amelia piecing her back-story together, as she uncovers Kahu’s diary, buried deep inside an old fireplace. The diary is used as a narrative tool and puts Kahu’s actions into context as we view her existence in direct comparison with Amelia’s. This direct comparison is what situates the film within a tandem narrative structure. I commented in the literature review on Woody Allen’s *Crimes and Misdemeanours*, a film where the parallel narratives, while binary in genre, tone and even tempo, are firmly linked thematically. While this is also the case with *Down By The Riverside*, in terms of two stories being linked thematically while opposite in tone and genre (although the both stories are ‘horrors’, Kahu’s story has more in common with

traditional thriller, while Amelia's is far more noir), it is the two lead characters that connect the two stories most significantly. The characters, while being fervently independent individuals, are in many ways reflections of each other. They share many of the same traits; aside from being both part Maori, they are strong, courageous, intelligent and capable. And within the plotlines they face many of the same obstacles, both inwardly and outwardly. They also suffer from many of the same failings, namely an often overenthusiastic and impatient personality that, despite a desire to help, puts those around them and close to them in serious danger. In saying that the characters are not carbon copies of each other, there was never a desire to present the 'same' person, and the same story twice. (Incidentally, Woody Allen did this in his 2004 Film *Melinda and Melinda*, where we see the exact same character in the exact same situation twice, once as a comedy and once as a drama).

Applying concepts of parallel narratives and multi-strand narratives to storytelling can prove difficult, not only in the writing process but in the actual process of producing the idea as well. Adapting a narrative concept to the screen is a completely separate challenge, and creates different problems from that of the writing process. Making the translation from page to screen is an often-cited obstacle when it comes to filmmaking. But when it comes to multiple narratives being explored, there are not only the issues and problems that come with writing such intricate storylines, but the practical difficulties of translating the ideas to screen. Because even when intersecting narratives are successful, or are even conceivable in written and visualised form, the actual comprehension of the intersections by viewers, may not be as apparent as once thought. In the case of *Down By The Riverside* this is yet to be put to the test because the film is still in the postproduction stage, but given my research into the topic, identifying the nuances and wholes, i.e. what works and what does not, is vitally important when first conceptualising the idea and then developing it into a coherent workable script. The script for *Down By The Riverside* was done with a rather significant level of haste, due to our desire to make a film. Given that the film was low budget, a lengthy and detailed scriptwriting process was not really achievable. Because as anybody who has made a low budget feature film knows, getting out there and doing it, is what is most important, simply because you run the risk of never getting it done. Without much money and with a lot of jobs being shared between few people, certain luxuries in the scriptwriting process had to be hurried, which meant we

were reliant on our own belief that the narrative would work and be coherent for a viewing audience. In the case of *The Narrative of Flippy Johnson*, I have had a lot more time, and enough objective feedback to judge if the narrative structure will work on the page. Because, when it comes to directing intersecting story lines, I have learnt from recent experience that making everybody around you understand your vision, is vitally important to the success of your film, from the actors to the person operating the camera.

Character

I mentioned earlier the difficulties in getting a character to come off the page, or more to the point, the difficulties in seeing a character separated from their written form. In *Down By The Riverside* I had first hand experience, and the subsequent problems. Accompanying Amelia to the house is a famed local historian named Owen Smith. Initially we (we being the filmmaking team), wanted Smith to be a classic ‘noir’ character, from the trench coat to the gangster hat, right down to the cigarette. We even toyed with the idea of him being American, trying to assimilate into New Zealand culture and learn Maori terms (classic fish-out-of-water scenario). We also thought about giving him a British persona, showcasing the colonial impact of the time. In the end, through many a draft, we decided to make him a New Zealander, an almost arrogant, cocky but resourceful type of individual. Throughout the cast and test readings, his character was coming across as we envisioned; he seemed sympathetic yet strong, an excellent foil for Amelia. However during shooting and consequently, viewing dailies, then seeing some edited footage, we realised the character was not coming across as we had foreseen. He seemed, if not evil, then mean-spirited. There is no point (in my view anyway) in implying that Smith in any way had something to do with the evil in the house; however, until the end of the film, he often came across as a hindrance to Amelia’s quest. Of course this may have a lot to do with the acting and with aesthetics, i.e. the way the character is lit, the angles he is shot from. But the variation in the character from the page to the screen was at times startling. So much so that we decided instead of having his character survive and be a heroic figure, we decided it would work better and be more dramatic, if he were to die. This approach also meant we were able to subvert genre expectation, where the strong hard-boiled type perishes before the film’s ultimate climax (while lead male characters have been killed in classic noir films from the 1940’s and 50’s, it usually serves as the climactic

moment, an example being Fred MacMurray's insurance investigator Walter Ness, in Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944).

Genre

In *Down By The Riverside*, the clichés of the horror genre were at times unavoidable, and doubly so when working with a small budget. The film's spatial environment is confined to an old house, situated in the middle of the woods. This is nothing new; in fact it is the type of setting for many a horror film. *Night Of The Living Dead* (1968), *Evil Dead* (1981) to more recently *Cabin Fever* (2002), all utilize an isolated house in the middle of nowhere as a primary setting. Obviously this limits your choices of locations, but when shooting a low budget film, it makes it far easier to control. The downside to such a setting is the audience (or people at least with a passing knowledge of horror) will know exactly what to expect; i.e. the terror of isolation, the difficulties in trying to keep people out, the growing insanity and panic of those inside, faced with an at times unseen villain. This unavoidable clichéd setting was one of the main reasons why we broke the film into two narratives, and specifically two genres. While the audience may know what to expect when the genres are presented individually, when they come together, it creates the perfect opportunity for genre subversion. By manipulating the genre expectation of Film Noir, we could blend it far more seamlessly with Horror, and the placement of noir characters in the distinct horror setting. Hopefully this will create a spatial environment that an audience is not used to seeing. Obviously the blending of genres is nothing new, but if done well, can create something that on the surface may appear unique. Tarantino in his 2003 and 2004 *Kill Bill* movies has this down to a tee with his mix of kung fu and spaghetti westerns.

The influence of genre was far less important in writing *The Narrative Of Flippy Johnson*, simply because the conventions of multi-strand drama are not as widely known as that of horror and film noir. However, the setting carried with it its own set of expectations in both a spatial and temporal form. Small town New Zealand has its own set of conventions, the tight-knit communal feeling, everybody knowing everybody else and their business, an assortment of at times odd residents. Multi-strand films however, come with their own set of expectations, an obvious one being the clarity of the 'message' that the film is 'selling'; 2005's best picture winner *Crash*

is an example of an important issue being well presented. There is also the audience expectation that what can often appear to be a minor incident or character interaction will have major ramifications for the conclusion. In *'The Narrative Of Flippy Johnson'* for example, there are Cooper's attempts at fixing the machine, and, given his lack of experience and expertise, this harmless school age curiosity inadvertently ends up turning the town literally upside down. This in turn has rather large consequences for the town's people. The machine itself serves a greater purpose from that of the observable. Clearly given the importance of time to the narrative, both thematically and literally, the time machine takes on significance. But it is not just about representing the idea that getting away from your existence is impossible, as is time travel, but it represents the frustration of the three main male protagonists, particularly Tom and William and their distaste for a town that they feel is responsible for their unhappiness and growing insanity. They blame the town for their inability to deal with being popular, if not revered, figures thanks to their swimming expertise and prowess (I also wanted to critique small town fame, something easily gained, and just as easily lost, a sort fickle existence, almost fleeting). Cooper's frustration comes from his desire to be somebody, to win a race that the town, his father included, put so much emphasis on. Cooper also cannot escape his existence and wants to speed up time in order to have a chance at winning the race. When Tom smashes the machine, it's kind of a manifestation of all those frustrations, released in a flash of white light, turning the town upside down.

And Finally...

Multi-strand or parallel narratives can make for fascinating cinema, at times fresh and original. However, whether or not such an approach will work and be comprehensive is no guarantee. There's a process that needs to be followed, a process of understanding. Using time and space as materials for situating and discussing my own attempt at screenwriting has been a challenge given the complexity of both concepts of space and time, and the numerous questions that arise when considering them. Such as, are time and space mutually exclusive? How does one affect the other? And how are they discernable within a screenwriting context? I found the best approach was to isolate the aspects that I found most intriguing and workable. That is why time evolved into not only a central focus for the *21 Grams* and Gus Van Sant chapters, but in the script as well. Given the small town setting, interpreting space

within the script is inevitable, much as it is in life. Because our position in life is non-negotiable, the space we exist in cannot be changed. So it stands to reason that as an individual you may attempt to interpret it, or more importantly attempt to make sense of it for your advantage. We are responsible for our own time; we shape our existence according to the environment we are in. And yes, time may really be ‘cyclical’; we may be doomed to make the same mistakes as others, but that doesn’t mean it’s not worth taking responsibility, that it’s not worth enjoying the ride. When stripped down, that is in essence what my script is about. A town where time and space simply exist, where people interact with each other, sometimes on an intense emotional level, sometimes with nothing more than a simple gesture. The interaction of everyday life is not necessarily a simple banal, generic occurrence; it can truly affect people, and can have ramifications on a far wider scale than just the individuals involved. Using space and time as a starting off point to attempt a multi-strand script has been a learning curve, but I feel far more equipped to handle the questions that come up when using such a layered approach. The level of success is obviously a debatable one, because there’s every possibility that it may not work. But whether or not the script works and transmits the story the way I intended might in all honesty never be known. But I will say this; it was time well spent. Make of it what you will.

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