

NAME: Doug Nuttall
FILM # & TITLE: Film 6 “May December”
DP: Austin Doig
DATE SCREENED: 4/10/24
DATE DUE: 4/15/24
(This is the next class after the screening)

TMA 418 DIRECTOR’S REFLECTION

1. Give your **overall response**:

In 2 or 3 paragraphs, write about your **overall experience** making and screening this film: Did you achieve what you set out to do? What are you proud of? What did not work as expected and why? What did you learn?

This film was a bit of a fail on my part because I did a bad job of finding actors. I did try to find an older actress to play Gracie, but I did not try as hard as I should have. I did ask 5 actresses to play the role but none of them could, so I tried a little bit, but I didn’t start soon enough or search wide enough.

But the actors I did find did a good job I think despite the ages not lining up with the script.

I think some of the shots I got look really nice, while others have really bad composition. I wish I had spent more time editing so I could have found music to go with the scene which I think would have helped.

The edit was actually something I was proud of before we screened in class, because I felt like I was being super intentional with all my cuts. But I realized I might have gone a bit too far and over-edited it and not let in breathe enough.

2. Based on the **class discussion and your honest evaluation**, briefly but specifically respond to the following:

a) Refer to your Director’s Plan. In one sentence, what **idea, emotion and/or theme**, specifically, did you want to communicate:

One must confront the darker parts of their mind and their past in order to understand who they are.

- Were you **successful**? How? Why? Why not?

I don’t think I really got there. When the other classmates said what they thought the theme was, they all focused on the conflict itself, like the surface level couples-dispute happening on screen rather than noticing any deeper internal conflict. I think that was caused by shot choices, editing, plus not having a super nuanced performance from the actors. The shot choices occasionally cutting off part of the actors faces (like in the master shot especially after we do the zoom) and over-editing made us lose those key moments I wanted to hit.

b) **How**, specifically, did you try to communicate this idea, emotion, theme:

Part of my plan was to have deeper shadows and higher contrast in the scene, which would’ve helped convey the inner turmoil within Joe. But I think I did that pretty well in the opening shot with the moonlight and blues, although after he gets on the bed the lighting on him is just too flat and high key to show any nuance. I also should’ve spent more time on the color grade, I could’ve changed the light levels and added more masks to increase that contrast.

c) What did you learn about **storytelling**:

I learned the physical characteristics of the actors are super important in story telling. Namely, the fact that Gracie did not look that much older than Joe ruined the overall story of the scene. Luckily I did pick an actor that looks pretty youthful, so at least the scene was somewhat plausible, but realistically there is almost no point in telling this story if there is not that 20 year age gap between the 2 leads because that is what drives everything else.

d) What did you learn about working with **actors** and getting performance:

I learned that I just need to shut up sometimes. I learned this in our lab session on the Monday when Barret

taught us about directing, he said the story of when he did casting for “Dogleg” and then watched the footage back with you, Jeff, how when Barret was giving a direction to the actors, you pointed out the exact moment you could see in their eyes that the actors understood the direction, but then Barret would just keep on talking. Basically actors will get things way quicker than you think.

When Barret explained this to us, it immediately clicked in my mind, because I was having that problem on this shoot where I felt like I had to explain so much background to the actors because they hadn’t read the whole script or seen the movie and it felt like I was just info-dumping so much on them. And then I would do the same thing when it came time to give them direction, I would say the real thing I wanted them to focus on, but instead of just putting a period on the sentence I would just meander around and keep yapping about it. So that was a great lesson to learn. I think part of the problem honestly is eye contact - sometimes I get worried about staring too much at people and so I won’t be looking at them when I’m talking to them, but that literally means I don’t see in their eyes the moment that they understand what I’m getting at. I just need to be more present and engage with the actors.

Also, I was happy with the performance I got from Jacob, the actor who played Joe. It was an interesting challenge to work with an actor who’s performance I didn’t fully believe the last time I cast him, and try again. In my director’s plan, I used a personal experience to give me the idea that Joe feels almost guilty for believing that someone he loves has hurt him and for confronting them about it, and that insight turned into what I think was good direction on set.

e) What did you learn about **blocking** the camera and actors?

I learned getting a Master shot is really hard. I almost used the mirrors that were on set in certain shots so that you could see both characters faces at the same time even if it was an over-the-shoulder shot. Even though I decided to go with something different, I now know why filmmakers like using mirrors and will definitely remember that trick for future shoots.

The zooms didn’t really work like I wanted them too. I was originally thinking dolly moves which I think would have felt better, but all of the dollies were checked out. And I think the zooms just weren’t executed 100% perfectly.

3. **Rules:** Refer to your Director’s Plan. List what **specific visual elements** and **cinematics** did you choose to use and what were the **rules** for their use? Where you successful in the use of that rule?

VISUAL ELEMENT/CINEMATIC	RULE(S) FOR USE	HOW SUCCESSFUL WERE YOU FOLLOWING YOUR RULE?
Shape	Triangles are danger, circles are safety	Not super well, I knew it was going to be tricky to have Gracie surrounded by triangles, I almost pulled it off with the set dressing but totally didn’t realize that the circular mirror right above her broke any chance of the triangle thing coming through
Movement	The camera will move when Joe is becoming trapped	Again, not well. The zooms instead of dollies could have worked well to close the frame around Joe and make him feel trapped, but the zooms just weren’t composed very well so they just didn’t look good.

Jump Cut	Jump cuts happen when Joe is trying to find his words	When I was writing “jump cuts” I knew I wasn’t really talking about jump cuts, I was trying to say how I wanted quick cuts to the hand rubbing on Joe’s back to feel like the hand/Gracie was interrupting him. I think it kind of worked, but people did complain that the editing was too confusing and too fast at times, which I think is because I didn’t have any other slow moments to contrast with those “jumpy cuts”. So the quick cuts actually worked, it was the stuff surrounding it that made it feel like it wasn’t working which is a good lesson to learn.
Silhouette	Gracie is silhouetted by the lamp whenever she is manipulating Joe	I kind of moved away from this because you left this note in my directors plan - “Does this eliminate some of the ambiguity for the audience?” Which was totally true. So instead I had a 2 tone thing going on for Gracie, blue on her left side and orange/ warm light on her right, in order to show that duality going on which I think looked better.

4. What did you **learn about using the visual elements** (space, line, shape, tone, color, movement, rhythm), cinematics, contrast and affinity, lighting, composition, framing, etc.:

I learned that conveying a specific shape is really tricky, especially without an art department. I knew that going into it but that was part of the reason I picked shape as one of my visual rules, because I wanted to challenge myself and try something new. And so I learned that EVERY shape matters, like the class noticed the window and the shape of the shadows on the curtain in the shots of Joe and saw the squares/rectangles and thought that was the rule. But I had never even noticed those shapes even though they are clearly there once someone pointed them out to me. So if you want to do a rule about shape, you have to be really careful about what you are seeing in the frame otherwise you will introduce new shapes and confuse the audience.

5. What did you learn about **production design**, art direction, locations, etc.:

Similar to what I said above - you gotta be really intentional about your production design to ensure it doesn’t go against your rules. And a great location can do most of the production design for you. We shot in my friends basement apartment, and there were a lot of great little props and set dressing I borrowed from the space which did some of the work for me.

6. What did you learn about the **filmmaking process** such as pre-production, collaborating with crew, securing equipment, etc.:

I learned that I really do like doing a location scout with the DP. I did it on film 5 but not on this one, and I missed being able to walk through the space with the DP and plan things out ahead of time. It meant we had to spend more time on set going through all of that, time that could have been spent doing other things.

7. What did you learn about **post**, such as: editing, sound design/music, color correction and/or grading:
This was the first time I've done an edit where I really tried to make every single cut intentional, with a reason behind it, like what does the audience want to see now, oh they want to see the reaction to this, or oh they need to see that Gracie is thinking something right now. And it felt really good going through that process. After it screened in class, I realized that I had trimmed too much of the fat and there should have been more moments of breath. It's cool though because now I know after I go through that first process of editing, I can reevaluate the scene and look for cuts that I don't need, or for shots where I can start doing multiple things at once or have multiple ideas happening besides just the 1 reason for the cut. So I'm excited to try that next time.

8. What was it like to watch your film with an **audience**? Did they understand it? Miss the point? Why did they respond the way they did?
I think they did get it, although they were kind of focused on the surface level argument like I mentioned above and were not really able to see that internal conflict of Joe all the way which shows I failed a bit. Also, it was funny hearing their criticisms, because I went in there really proud of my editing because I tried to be so intentional and I really felt like it was the first time I was able to make every cut matter. So then when someone said "yeah there were so many cuts, the editing didn't really feel intentional" I was annoyed at that and immediately thought "well they just don't know what they are talking about". But then I tried to see what they were saying, and I realized oh yeah, there are too many cuts. So while they may have been wrong about it being intentional - it was super intentional - they were right that it didn't feel that way. That saying of how audiences don't know how to fix a problem but they can definitely tell you when there is a problem or when something doesn't feel right is true here.

9. **Deliberate Practice:** Because you practice deliberately, what will you **do differently** on your next film because of what you learned on this film? Set a specific goal(s):
Get actors sooner!! Also do more drafts of the edit and show it to someone else before class so I can know if it is feeling too fast.

10. Other **observations** or notes:

11. **Production Report** (in addition to numbers, include any notes if necessary)

Hours Preparing Director's Plan:	6
Preproduction Hours:	3
Shoot Date:	4/6/24
Call Time:	9pm
Wrap Time:	12:30pm
Total Production Hours:	3
Total Postproduction Hours:	3

12. **Director of Photography** (except for Film 4)

DP: Austin Doig

Briefly describe working with your DP. (You must include: Were they dependable and on time? Were they committed to your film? Did they follow through on their commitments? Did they have the proper equipment? Had they tested it and know how to operate it? How was their attitude? Etc.. This will remain confidential.)

He was good to work with, I didn't finalize the shooting day and time until late in the week and he was very patient and willing to work his schedule to fit whenever I wanted to shoot.

He was missing a couple of things on set, most importantly no batteries for the zoom h6n. He said that he thought I was going to be getting a sound person and that “they would just figure that out”. But really all the equipment was his responsibility. And then we couldn’t even go straight into camera with audio because he didn’t have the mini-xlr cable adapter thingy that you need for the Blackmagic Pocket 6k. So we had to use my Rode video mic on the camera, and then I used my iPad recording a voice memo and just hid that as close to the actors as I could for all of the takes which was a big pain in post to sync. But realistically missing that cable was a tiny thing, the annoying thing was the batteries (especially because I have a bag of batteries at home I was going to bring in case Austin didn’t think about it, but forgot them as well).

And then just not being able to rely on him as a camera operator is tricky. He was operating for the zooms and they just didn’t work super well. I could’ve given him more takes to get it but I didn’t think it was worth it since I didn’t know how long it would take.

13. Actors

List the names of any actors who committed to your project *then dropped out*. Note if they were a BYU student; include any other observations. *Do not list the actor if you changed the shoot date and/or time at the last minute!*

ACTOR NAME	BYU STUDENT?	REASON FOR DROPPING

14. Another Approach *Only for Films 5, 6 & 7 (unless 7 is an original film)*

After screening the film in class, but not before, watch the produced version of the scene you shot. Remember: you are not watching the original version so that you know the “right” approach to the scene and what you did “wrong”! The original version is simply that director’s approach; however, you can learn a great deal about your own approach by seeing how a more experienced filmmaker executed the scene.

How does the **original version** compare to your scene? What choices did the director make that were different from yours? What choices were the same? How did the director address any problems you experienced?

There is ambient sound effects at the beginning, like bugs and crickets chirping, to help set the scene at nighttime. They also used windows to get some moonlight in there and motivate the lighting which is what I tried.

The Master was shot from a better spot, they had more space on that side of the bed to put the camera but I couldn’t do that because there was a wall right there in my space so I had to get creative, and I kind of like how I did mine where we couldn’t see Joe’s face at all and then the light coming through the window made it feel like an interrogation room almost in my scene, which I thought was cool.

The coverage of Joe at the beginning has this totally blacked out wardrobe or wall or something covering half of the background behind him, and that does a great job conveying that inner conflict which I struggled to get. And they didn’t show his coverage there as much as I did, which made the moments they cut to it feel a lot more impactful.

The performance by Joe is dynamite, this is clearly a man fighting not to just burst into tears and is fighting for every word, just torn apart by the idea that Gracie might’ve wronged him.

The pauses make things feel way more weighty, the beginning has much more room to breath, and then once their tone rises the cuts and their dialogue start snapping around and that contrast is great.

They had Joe stand up in the argument which feels a lot more natural to the emotions in the scene, and then he comes back on the “I’m begging you” which works great.

I struggled to know how to direct Gracie, but in this scene she is a really dynamic character because there is no overt hint from the actress that she is manipulating him. She is really crying and struggling with the argument and it is totally believable. Which makes the whole scene even more sinister. That is a hard place to get to as an actress, and I don’t think I could have gotten mine there in just a few hours of shooting. Maybe with a couple of rehearsals I could do it.