

# **IMPERIAL GREEN**

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A THESIS SUBMITTED  
TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN FILM  
YORK UNIVERSITY  
TORONTO, ONTARIO

September 2025

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## **Abstract**

Imperial Green is a 66 minute experimental autofiction film, loosely plotted as a rendition of my life before moving to Toronto. Set in Metrotown, a suburb in Burnaby, BC, the film features it due to its unique influence it has had on me since childhood. It was an effort to express my private troubles with my sense of self, and how it has impacted my relationship to my father, and my fiancée at the time. I wanted to set out into the world as an individual, and in making this film and coming to York, I hoped to chart the pitfalls of becoming.

I began the process of developing the film in mid 2021, as a burst of energy and yearning for the search within. I was unsure of where to go or what to do with my life, and wanted to express that directionlessness, as well as create a character that inhabited that: the shadow-side of myself. In doing so, I hoped to reveal a psychology, and present an interrogation on the frameworks of masculinity, Christian morality, paternal influence, the semiotics of the automobile, and metropolitanism (as poison).

The film is a culmination of the last 11 years of my life. It is a capstone for my life after leaving the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses and entering into the World, in all the ways that has meant for me. Photography spanned 8 days over two weeks, beginning on July 15th, 2023. Post-production took place from late August until July of 2024. Scholars, researchers and fellow filmmakers who wish to view my thesis film can contact me at: zacharyl@yorku.ca. Please explain your interest and confirm that it is for personal / private research purposes only, and that you will respect my copyright and not screen my film publicly in any manner.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the staggering amount of support I have received in this program. I was welcomed with generosity, care, and freedom to think and feel. My dearest thank you to my supervisor Manfred Becker for his shepherding of my film, my tenure as a student, and my life in important ways. I was graced by his mentorship and compassion. Furthermore, I must thank John Greyson for his sensitivity, clarity, and sincerity in dealing with my work, feelings, and education. His enthusiasm gifted me confidence and courage.

I must also acknowledge the financial support given to me through the University and other bodies. The freedom of financial pressure and the value attributed to it does not go unnoticed to me. I was able to navigate life, attend school, and support myself on my own without much stress or fear. That being said, I am well aware that my non-status status as a mixed Settler and First-Nations person plays a part in my support. Throughout the course of the program, wrestling with the strength of my identity gained intensity by this, and for that I am thankful—it put the reasons for my film and my new life in Toronto into focus.

As for the rest of my community, my cohort in and outside of my year played a tremendous role in shaping the film and my experiences here at York. They were instrumental in shaping the film and my understanding of myself within the program, be it one on one communion outside of class or in the warmth of vulnerable class discussions. Thank you to Kurt Walker, Devin Shears, Terry Jones, Meysam Motazed, Sharon Mirsky, and so many more.

Lastly, I must thank my father Daniel Lacosse, my sister Jacqueline Campbell, my mother Tamara Sears, my mentor in Vancouver, Wayne Wapeemukwa, and my first love Katie Poetsch. I am forever grateful, and forever indebted

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## Introduction

*Imperial Green* is about a version of myself as Joseph: a white HVAC apprentice burdened by a lack of courage, ability, and blindness to the future. Set around the intersection of Kingsway and Imperial Street in Burnaby, BC, the film tracks Joseph working for his boss and tentative father-figure named Daniel (played by my father), while also depicting his dissolving relationship with his long-term partner, Jen — a stand-in for my own relationship with my highschool sweetheart of a decade, which I would similarly lose after production.

I came to the project in the summer of 2021, shortly after shooting my short film *My Mirror*. I had started to see the cracks in my relationship at the time, and was becoming all the more burdened with a neurosis that came from dissatisfaction. I was hurtling towards a sustained self-hatred which had been growing since I was a devout Witness of Jehovah. I looked around at how to be, what to look like, how to present—as I had always struggled with—and inevitably found the same lack. In my youth into my adulthood, I often found myself traversing Burnaby’s Metrotown Mall, grasping desperately for the sensation of being alone, and being perceived outside of any bonds, either without chaperone as a child during my dad’s work day, or before coming home to my wife-to-be. I used to think that the permanent bachelorism of my father should be cited as a failure of his, but still I craved to be alone, and truly, utterly... myself.

This individualism, whether sensible or not, was at odds with everything I was taught about life and being. The Witnesses believe that taking part in “The World” is flirting with Satanic influence, and portraying attributes of the Devil’s system is the ultimate shame. In the same breath, that theology shares a link to the idea of kinship in Indigenous relations. At the end of the production of my thesis film, I went to Vancouver Island to visit my mom and sister.

During the trip I was reading through Michelle Good's *Truth Telling: Seven Conversations About Indigenous Life in Canada*. I picked up the book in the gift shop on *The Queen Elizabeth*, a passenger ferry part of the BC Ferries fleet. Knowing I would be spending time with my British and Welsh mother in Victoria, I felt it necessary to counteract what I thought would be a trip down colonial lane. I was yearning to present myself to my mother with more knowledge than what I was raised with, and my tenure at York and bonding with my father had developed a certain distance from her. In the chapter "Cultural Pillagers", Michelle Good writes: "A person need not be Indigenous to become a member of an Indigenous community. It is the community though that must be able to decide this based on the facts. It is not something to be decided by self-serving imposters salivating at what they might gain from it." (Good, 2023, 184) While my many conversations with mentor and friend Wayne Wapeemukwa had made these facts already apparent, my academic (non) status as a mixed Indigenous person, student, and filmmaker, was burning within me. I felt like a fraud, and I felt like I needed to prove at every point that I was as Indigenous as possible, despite knowing that most of my family do not exercise their heritage or identity beyond using their Treaty Rights.

On my cross-country move to Toronto from Vancouver, my dad and I spoke at length about our positions as anonymous mixed Indigenous men. He used to always plead with me to get my status card, but I met his hopes with concern for not knowing enough—to become legally recognized without sufficient understanding was wrong in my eyes. So, during our trip we bonded with my Aunts and Uncles, catching Walleye on Mawn Lake, having a fish-fry, and reminiscing on the past. I was delighted by catching my first fish as an adult, and learning how to properly clean and prepare Walleye from my uncle Donny, the eldest of my dad's seven siblings. All this to say that I was making an effort to take part in whatever conversations were in the

background of our family's history, and the remaining knowledge from my dad's past. In my early childhood I would often overhear my grandma using a peculiar expression. If something shocking came on the TV, or my dad made some off-colour joke, she would respond with something like: "Howah! Danny... don't joke like that." I never clocked what that word meant, only to discover in my adulthood that it was an Ojibwe word used to express shock or amazement. While my grandmother Hilda and grandfather Albert agreed never to teach their children Anishinaabemowin (or some mix of Oji-Cree), or French, my grandmother's fluency in her language was still part of her. That there *was* a history to our family forced me to recognize it—I realized that it was the least I could do, or else further knowledge will be lost to time and the colonial project. Like my father, I am a part of the river of history.

With this being said, claiming of Indigeneity is not some simple exercise, as I knew but have come to realize more fully, it is predicated on knowing your relationships, tracing your history, and acknowledging the bonds that you share. Claiming Indigeneity without these bonds is the violence of colonialism reigniting itself; it is imperative to be accepted by the community on the basis of such bonds, not by self alone. The unmoored individual entering into the community without bonds is thus reflected in the Christian notion of rejecting God and His brotherhood. While I will expand on my background and positionality further in this paper, this intersection is the exact place that I approached *Imperial Green*. The midpoint of Worldly self-actualization in spite, and the terror of being bondless, without community, without family, and even without love anymore.

I felt pulled in two different directions. I had only known devotion to the Witnesses, and had shared my life purely with my partner Katie—I was never truly alone before, never just Zach. My family bonds were complicated with a hidden Indigeneity and a devout Christianity,

and my personal life was fraught with tension over a marriage with no set date. Thus, I looked to the horizon of my life with a central hypothesis: how do I become “myself”, and is it worth discovering that if it means finally being alone? When I am out in the world on my own, will I find out how to be me? What if this impulse destroys the bonds I have been blessed by, or the bonds I need? Will I become truer, or more false? Lastly, can *Imperial Green* (and this support paper soothe) my desire to be God-like—or propel me to act with Godliness? York University thus granted me a testing ground for this, and I packed a U-Haul and left my life in British Columbia behind.



Figure 1: Image in *Revelation—Its Grand Climax at Hand!* of a young man turning away from a woman leaning on a car. “Resisting temptation”. Used without permission.

## History

My family on my father's side are from Treaty 9 territory, and are registered to the Eabametoong First Nation, also known as the township of Fort Hope. While my family's heritage is legally recognized, there must be some contextualization. Below is a timeline reconstructed from Census data and other documentation compiled by my aunt Karen Lacosse and another relative of a different side of our family.

My great-great grandfather William Sinclair Ritch was born on the 29th of July 1852 in Rackwick, Hoy, Scotland. In 1872 he came to Canada to work for the Hudson's Bay Company, initially as a deckhand on the Company's ship *The Ladyhead*, then stayed as a labourer, working in Northern Ontario and Quebec at posts such as Moose Factory, Albany, Marten Falls, Fort Hope and Abitibi. He worked for 38 years before retiring in 1910. He was a Presbyterian. Below is an excerpt from a short autobiography William wrote. This was taken from a WordPress website entitled *Hoy Heritage*, which documents this portion of my family's history.

I came to Moose Factory to work for the Hudson's Bay Company (1872) and I was three years there. I was then transferred to Fort Albany on the Albany River and I worked as store keeper for ten years there and I got married to one Sophie Winne, the children's mother and all my children was [sic] born there. Only John, he was born at Martens Falls. In 1885 I went to Martens Falls where John was born, and was [sic] ten years there for the Hudson's Bay Company. It was there where my wife was drowned [sic] along with another woman, while crossing the river above the head of a rapid in 1888.<sup>1</sup>

By the time of his retirement, he was a widower with five children — Wilhelmina, Thomas Sinclair, Margaret-Ann, John, and Isaac, whom he supported until they reached working age. All of their children were born in the Keewatin Unorganized Territories, today known as

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<sup>1</sup> William Sinclair Ritch, "From Hoy to Hudson Bay and Back," *Hoy Heritage*, August 22nd 2024

Treaty 9 territory. My great-grandfather Isaac was born in Fort Hope in 1884. Sophia Winne, his wife and mother of their children, was born in Fort Albany in 1857 and was of Cree heritage. Sophia had passed away while carrying their eighth child by drowning in an accident with another woman while traveling through rapids in a birchbark canoe in 1888. Records as to Sophia's history and extended family in Fort Albany remain obfuscated. After Sophia and her unborn child had passed, William returned to Hoy and remarried in 1915, leaving behind his children in Canada.

My great-grandmother was named Emma Wasaqua, and was the sister of Philip Wasaqua, born from Jemima Wasaqua. Emma's father seems to be missing from any records available to me, so unfortunately I am unable to include that information, as well as the further connection between Emma and her documented family. Emma and her family were of Ojibwe heritage. Emma was born in Fort Hope in 1899 and passed away in 1978. Emma married Isaac Ritch on May 31st 1919 at St. John's Church in Fort Hope. Together they had six children, all raised in the Anglican faith presumably. Ryley, Daisy, Margaret, Walter, another child without a recorded name, and my grandmother Hilda. My grandmother was born in Ombabika, ON, on February 25th 1935 and passed away on my birthday, July 24th, 2017, in Calgary, Alberta.

My grandmother Hilda met my grandfather Albert Lacosse, who was born in Hardisty, AB, on September 19th 1924. His father and mother immigrated from Paris, France, in the late 1800's. My father Daniel was born in 1968 in Sioux Lookout, and was the baby of eight children, including Donald, Gordon, Marlene, Arlene, Karen, Riley, and Albert Jr, as well as a half-brother from my grandfather's first marriage named Marcel.

In the early 1990's my mother Tamara Sears and my father Daniel met in Esquimalt on Vancouver Island and were married shortly after. My sister Jacqueline was born in 1992, and I was born in 1996 on July 24th, the same day as my mother.

As far as my family knows, Sophia Winne and her children were not subject to the typical Residential School system as the first Residential schools were not built until the 1930's in Fort Hope. Furthermore, my grandmother Hilda and her siblings were not either, as they were raised off the reserve and were entered into public school. As far as having a comprehensive history of my grandmother's experiences, I unfortunately haven't been privy to that information, and when I've asked my father hasn't recalled that much in our conversation. This is something I desperately want to reconcile.

That being said, the Presbyterian/Anglican beliefs of my ancestry eventually transitioned after the birth of my uncles Donald and Gordon. My grandmother, a fluent speaker of Anishinaabemowin/Cree but distant from the tradition and culture of her peoples, converted to the Jehovah's Witnesses after praying for direction and having the Witnesses knock on her door the day after. This is where the conditions of our Indigeneity changes further. My grandfather Albert was vehemently against any usage of either French or Ojibwemowin, barring both from being spoken. He was of the opinion that—even as a Frenchman—English was only to be spoken. Essentially, to assimilate with ease. Furthermore, the beliefs of the Witnesses meant that any defined ethnicity, not to mention culture or traditions, was to be discarded in favour of an identity that firstly and only was that of being one of Jehovah's servants. My grandmother even used her understanding of the language to help translate Witness publications.

While some of my father's siblings remain as Witnesses to this day, my uncles Gordon, Donald, and my dad do not practice anymore, unlike my aunts Karen, Arlene, and Marlene. My

uncles Riley and Albert have both passed away, but they too never held onto the Faith. After my parents' divorce when I was four years old, the custody battle was won by my mother. My father's immediate pivot into a secular lifestyle, his behaviour that led to the divorce, as well as the ensuing years of distance confirmed my position as my mother's son. I know undoubtedly that my mother is who raised me, and who I take after the most emotionally and socially. That being said, the Witness faith and my separation from my father and extended family isolated me from the other parts of my heritage. I had no conception of my Indigeneity. I was just a Witness.

Since leaving the Witnesses I've become much more aware of myself, my family, and the social, political, and cultural conditions that concern me. As I've aged I've had to contend with the void that was left after rejecting the Witnesses—I was no longer indebted to Jehovah, I was no longer going to have Everlasting Life in Paradise, and I was no longer the same son that my mother raised. I was always avoidant of my father and who he was. I love him dearly, but in my youth I was cursed with distaste for him. I grew up with a hatred for how he treated my mother, how he treated myself and my sister, and how he operated in the world as a single man. His diverse array of partners and jetsetter lifestyle caused me a lot of stress as a Christian, and as my mother's son first and foremost. I didn't know how to love him the way I loved my mom, and I didn't know how to be his son the way we probably both dreamt. Upon leaving the Witnesses, a line was drawn between my mother and I; I had become a Worldly man just like my father. It was at this juncture that my journey of understanding him as my reflection began. In order to make sense of where to go or who I was, I had to continue my interrogation process—a continuation of the Witness deprogramming I forced myself through.

My father's ethnicity was something I never thought much about as a child, but I was always very aware of how different my parents were. I grew up interrogating my looks in the

mirror, and trying to pin what about me was dad and what was mom. My dad would always make it known anytime I was with him around others, always introducing me as his son and playing up how similar we look. It was only until my move to Vancouver that the discussion about his ethnicity actually was breached, beyond just tongue-in-cheek jokes about his racial ambiguity. Becoming politically conscious in the last 8 years of my life has coincided with finding my own community of mixed, Métis, and First Nations friends and mentors. Jennifer Mae Sampson, Isaiah Lehtinen, Wayne Wapeemukwa, Nic and Will Charuk, Rylan Friday, Tim Myles, and Terry Jones—these are a few names who have aided in my own understanding of my complicated Indigeneity. They have seen me and have given me the courage to engage with this aspect of myself.

It is not my goal to claim that I identify with the experience of being a First Nations person, or that I or my family truly belong to the communities in which we have connection to, despite being registered. My goal is firstly the representation of my history, because to ignore my background would be a further erasure of the past. For example, if I wanted to cast someone to play my dad, casting anyone other than a mixed First Nation would deny a certain truth about him. However, my complicated kinship is further stressed by my family's own separation from the traditions and cultures of our heritage, as well as how far most of us are scattered from the land situated to the Eabametoong Nation. Sooke, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Thunder Bay, Ottawa, or Toronto—Witness or non-Witness—we're all far and away from each other. All I can speak for is the fact of my makeup, the complexities of our history, and that I'm always going to have to keep learning and educating myself on our place in time, our history. It is my hope that eventually I can feel comfortable and confident in saying who I am, and to develop my connections and relations.

It is my view that this history was kept from me by the shroud of Christian totalization, and was nearly all lost with my grandmother Hilda's death. Upon leaving the Witnesses at age 17 and moving to Vancouver, I had made the choice to abandon my mom's side of the family and reunite with my father. This naturally posed many questions about the nature of our relationship, who I was in comparison to him, and what we both were and are. By becoming Worldly like him, I was forced to reconcile the vast distance that had grown between us and the hidden history of our family. I had rejected my identity and history as a Witness and traded it for something new but deeply subterranean, while still desperately trying to find a social and cultural footing through the internet and ecstatic adolescence.

## Self

While my film underplays my history, as a deeply personal work for me, my background is inexorable from the film. The following words are a divulgence of my background as a Jehovah's Witness, a mixed settler and Indigenous person, and an artist.

*Imperial Green* was designed to reveal meaning by making sense of static. My experience of self thus far has been just that, a journey through the fog of influence. To go to the beginning of my self-narrative, I will start with my storytelling as it relates to one of my actors, my father. My parents divorce in my early childhood created two distinct paths... with my mother gaining nearly full custody, and my father jettisoned to a singular existence in Vancouver, I came of age with a choice, I would either be in lockstep with my mother, sister, and Jehovah, or succumb to the World like my father had. This constant friction I was always aware of made every choice and lack of commitment within the Witnesses a throbbing moral anxiety, and proof that I was becoming what my mother never wanted me to be: just like my father... selfish and governed by Satan.

Having said that, this programmed anxiety was not without merit. While my father would support my early forays into art making, expand my horizons through his metropolitan life, and instill a love of cinema within me, I had proof of his failures in romance and his issues being a father. I was led to believe and forced to understand through his actions that his life was just his, and my life as a young Jehovah's Witness would surely lead to something completely different from him. I saw his individualism leading only to destruction at Armageddon. My mother, my sister and I on the other hand would be spared and granted Everlasting Life on a Paradise Earth

by Jehovah. My conception of him was governed by a zealous Christian moralism, and as I have now come to realize, a form of colonial racism through omission.

In this sanitized environment of my early childhood, my initial attempts at filmmaking were modest and playful. I became enamored with stop-motion filmmaking through the work by Aardman Animations, early YouTube content, and an online community centered around stop-motion with Lego. This was my first community outside of what I was raised in, and even there I realized that my faith in the Witnesses would be tested. In the Off Topic forums on “bricksinmotion.com” I would often find myself defending Creation and the existence of God with Witness citations, while simultaneously pursuing a cinephilia and burgeoning craft with like-minded users. Leading up to my exodus to Vancouver, my interest in stop-motion waned, and I became fixated on a masculine cinema. The two films that captured my total attention were *Drive* (2011, Refn), and *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976, Cassevetes). I would take significant influence from both, especially the silence of feeling, and the tragicomic performance of masculine self-expression. I was consumed by the inability these characters had in using language to mend their relationships, so I grafted my own tumultuous upbringing onto the silence and desperation exhibited by these characters—not unlike most pop-media I was coming of age with on the Internet. My sculpting of self-identity at the precipice of leaving the Witnesses was not limited to just these two films, it is imperative to note that this mimicry was the central operative mode I worked in at the time. I wanted so badly to *pretend* I was a character—I could have a high school romance like in *Pretty in Pink* (Deutch, 1986), flaunt a self-awareness like Ferris Bueller, or fear the apocalypse and make the ultimate self-sacrifice like Donnie Darko. I was hopelessly indentured by my shameful need to be Worldly. Furthermore, throughout my childhood in public school I often had the fortune of often being the only Witness. This made it

very easy for me to omit this detail, and pretend that I was just like the other children... and thus I became my own mosaic; I was a different face with schoolmates, and a half-truth at home.

After my undergraduate experience at Capilano University, I fell into a dark depression. I had made a film at the end of the second year of their Motion Picture Arts program, and was rocked to the core when my nascent identity as a precocious young filmmaker was shattered. I had made a film that simply was not very good. I was embarrassed at its attributes, but most painfully embarrassed that my crowdfunded campaign—which centered on my auteurship—was possibly fraudulent. The story I crafted about how “personal” the work was was misrepresentative of myself and the film, the film was rife with poor performances, a dire gender dynamic that could easily be construed as misogynistic, and was a genre pastiche far-and-away from the revelatory cinema I cited with abandon. I perceived the failure of my first short film as proof that my mask-making was faulty, and my decision to express myself in the World would too lead to failure... or at worst, proving the Witnesses right.

In the years that followed, I developed a circular anxiety about truth, identity, political embodiment, desire, and moral responsibility. Even today, my journey in self-presentation is always in contention, but the cinema has steadily been the place for me to isolate these worries and interrogate them. My second short film, entitled *Young People Ask* (2018), was my first attempt at truly reconciling my background in all parts, to describe my youth in the Kootenay region in British Columbia, my Witness life, and my tenuous parental bonds. Like my thesis film here at York, *Young People Ask* was created with a two person crew, myself as cinematographer, producer, and director, with my friend and fellow filmmaker Dana Bontempo recording sound. This working method came out of a frustration with the limitations of traditional methodologies I had grown accustomed to in Vancouver’s industry, and a yearning for immediate interaction with

the work as a diaristic piece. I wanted to arrive, shoot, grapple with my past life, and vanish once more—without footprint.

I would continue forging a modality that allowed me to be as free with my choices and free from the standard protocols of filmmaking. Doing it myself has grown to be the safest choice for me, for better and for worse. From this point on, this singular approach in my projects steadily gave way to my own form of autofiction. While I still bristle at the meekness of my productions, having total control over what I present of myself has felt like the only sensible option—especially if I am to shore up my innermost feelings, and illustrate truth and falsehood.

## **Faith in Images**

I have struggled with a retrospective outlook that has followed me since childhood—if this paper has proven anything, it is that the past means a great deal to me. I have come to sense that this charting of my “story” has proven problematic. Telling my own stories, distilling them, and translating them through artistic expression comes with many challenges. Primarily among them the question of honesty, and in essence, the nature of performance in all aspects of artmaking and living.

*Imperial Green* is my statement on the intermediacy central to my experience in life. It aimed to not only interrogate my inward insecurity, but to foreground that my artistic expressions are as biased and messy as the stories I tell myself. Their very formations are born under conditions that encourage opacity; a commercialism of self as provoked by constant stimuli, a fundamental Christian-colonial influence, or the tug-of-war dynamics of divorce. My goal was to express the liminality I struggle with in the present. I entered into the program with the goal to create a film that embodied this questioning stance. I wanted the viewer to ask—should I believe this? What is being constructed versus found?

Before coming to York, my collaborations and film community in Vancouver was predominantly populated by cinematographers, imagemakers, and stylists of many walks. As outlined in the portion “Self”, my bristling at traditional filmmaking forms and imagemaking (mimesis), put me at odds with much of the philosophies in my home city. I felt alienated by a commercialism that had little regard for the value of alternative images politically, economically, and most importantly to me: spiritually. I was entrenched in an environment that championed sublimity through technical virtuosity. Whether this was the truth or not is up for debate.

Regardless, I felt that there was a way to circumvent modern notions of “authenticity”, and to reach an agnostic divinity that transcended expert mimicry.

While I say this, many years ago I was given a PDF of Nathaniel Dorsky’s essay “Devotional Cinema” by my friend Jeremy Cox, a local Vancouver cinematographer. What I found inside was a secular way to express the theology written into my DNA since birth. The final passages of which struck me like a lightning bolt.

“Like our hands, the trees, the drama of the seasons, and the warming and expiring heavens, the basic elements of film must partake in the beauty of the deepest practicality . . . When a film is fully manifest it may serve as a corrective mirror that realigns our psyches and opens us to appreciation and humility. The more we are open to ourselves and are willing to touch the depths of our own being, the more we are participating in devotion.”<sup>2</sup>

Something about Dorsky’s belief was different. It revealed something to me. When the Congregation in Balfour, BC, got wind of my double life in secondary school, a meeting was called between two Elders and my mother and I. I had not been going to meetings any more, I had confessed my want to be Worldly to my mother, and I was preparing to finally move to Vancouver with my sweetheart. We met together in our trailer home, facing the Kootenay Lake. The sun went down before the meeting began, and when the light became blue, they laid my crimes before me. My response lacked elegance surely, but the essence of their shepherding call is clear as day to me, even now. I argued then and would argue now, that the spiritual strength that can be derived from art and love was enough for me, and that I could still have faith in something, if not Jehovah. The reverence in Dorsky’s writing touched me, and I felt even more drawn to the beauty of being, of light in a dark room, “that ineffable quality of vision” (Dorsky, 48).

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<sup>2</sup> Nathaniel Dorsky, *Devotional Cinema*, (Tuumba Press, 2003), Page 48

If I was to pursue devotional cinema, even in a secular manner, I needed to understand what my sense of divinity was. Nature, and the heart was what came to mind first. The reverberations of everyday life. The electricity in total silence. The eternal struggle of being trapped within your own body and mind; the how of contending with the souls of others. This yearning to capture the hum of everyday life became the gesture for devotion to me. Near this same period, my appreciation for John Cassavetes took on a much more serious tone, developing past the valuing of his economy and self-interest, and instead into a reverence typically reserved for a Holy figure. I was gratified to consume the pages of Ray Carney's *The Films of John Cassavetes: Pragmatism, Modernism, and the Movies*—I saw within them that same religiosity (either in argument or from Carney himself). Carney writes:

“The structures of language and society are fundamentally at war with our fluxions of feeling. They inevitably betray or subvert the expressions of our finest impulses . . . For Cassavetes . . . the location of meaning shifts from the mind to the body — from being figured as ideas, beliefs, and visions, to acts of speaking, moving, and acting. Truth becomes a form of doing, rather than a way of knowing.”<sup>3</sup>

Sentiments like these are what allowed me to take a political distaste for intellectualism, commercial computation, and marry it with a Godly way of feeling and thinking. I felt that I could translate the visionary, spiritual experience of having Faith, with the simple, non-contemplative beauty of life; the verve of bodies and faces in motion. Earlier I described turning away from the processes of the traditional film industry, not only in its mechanical functions, but in its product design. In step with what I've described above, I have chased a word commonly used by Witnesses as a colloquialism for the Organization, ironically...

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<sup>3</sup> Ray Carney, *The Films of John Cassavetes: Pragmatism, Modernism, and the Movies*, (Cambridge University Press, 1994), Pages 146, 164

## “The Truth”

If I was to be Worldly, “The Truth” was still the most important thing to me, and before coming to York, I found a path that would hopefully lead to this—the joy and suffering of making sense of life through self-expression, and the vitality of blacksmithing a cinematic language of political rigor, spiritual zeal, and practical value. By expressing my interiority, my histories, the world of myself and others, The Truth was to be found in the process of doing. Searching and perceiving, vs. knowing and conceiving.

Prior to the writing process of *Imperial Green*, I had begun to sew together the ideas presented above... I was focused on stillness, diminishing narrative force, feeling, place, and digital imagery. In August of 2021 I went alone to see a small screening of Ming-Liang Tsai’s return to narrative cinema, *Days* (2020), and the film I met was one of superlative beauty and patience. I took influence from his marriage of his past narrative work with his post-”retirement” gallery, performance, and documentary work. I was taken by his non-existent schema, skeleton crew, and need for comfort in filmmaking at the hands of age. Time too has come for Tsai and his muse Lee Kang Sheng. In an interview with Devika Girish from FilmComment, Tsai says:

Looking back at a lot of the films I’ve made in the past, I think I was full of energy. I was very, very young, very, very motivated. As I’ve aged, I’ve realized that I just don’t want to be bothered by the complexities and details of the conventional ways in which I used to make films. Taking care of every single detail of the production, having very structured scripts and films... that’s just not something I want to do now. So now I tend to gravitate

toward things that are looser in terms of structure and narrative. I just want to make films that are not as complicated.<sup>4</sup>

This complication was already something I have earlier expressed, this need for simplicity in my own work. While a slimmer production model of filmmaking wasn't new to me, I felt that the crystallizing of Tsai's methodology meant something entirely new. I finally saw that his compositional approach was not at odds with the anti-metaphoric cinema of Cassavetes'.

Despite Tsai being much more flirtatious with symbolic, metaphoric understandings, I've felt that he engages with an approximative realism in that his form locates meaning primarily in the body and heart. His compositions consistently situate the individuals (human beings) as figures separate but governed by environment, and trains you to commune with his own personal, heightened sense of feeling and seeing, his personal authorship. In *Days*, he had stripped down his approach to his most "real", his most purely intuitive and feeling-based. Shooting as pure recording of footage without narrative, letting notions of story come just by chance through "depositing images"<sup>5</sup> and the editing process. Both now and historically though, Tsai has worked in a state that encourages the intuitive flow of experience, both from himself as the creator, his performers, and the viewers as swimmers in his rivers of feeling. In Song Hwee Lim's book "Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness" (2014), Lim writes:

The long take is an incredibly democratic nontechnique that, unlike slow motion, does not attempt to dictate how we see. As such, its effect is also highly subjective, as it is left to the individual to decide how he or she would engage with its extended temporality. More important, the long take is about the unknown. While the object in a slow-motion shot is usually fixed, we cannot predict what a long-take shot is going to show us (or not show us) next in its extended duration: anything can happen (or disappear). The unpredictability of the long take's object, the unguaranteed experience of its slowness,

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<sup>4</sup> 1. Devika Girish, "Interview: Tsai Ming-Liang," Film Comment, July 18, 2022, <https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/interview-tsai-ming-liang-days/>.

<sup>5</sup> Girish, Devika. "Interview: Tsai Ming-Liang." Film Comment, July 18, 2022. <https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/interview-tsai-ming-liang-days/>.

and the uncertain extent of its duration combine to create an aesthetic that embraces the unknown, the lost, and the default.<sup>6</sup>

To connect this with what meant something so new to me, was exactly this embracement of the unknown, but now through a much more intimate and freeform working method. Truly responding to his environment and finding narrative through perception is why I've made the links to Cassevetes and Dorsky. It is my view that my personal engagement with such radically different forms is due to this. I sense that there *is* a shared devotional approach, but with different means to an end. To quote Ray Carney once more in his article "The Adventures of Insecurity: The Films of John Cassavetes", Carney explains:

The process of breaking free from limiting formulas of response in order to learn how to make meanings in a moment by moment activity of improvisation might be said to be the masterplot of all of Cassavetes's films. They tell his viewers and his characters alike that only by plunging unconditionally into the present, to make something of it here and now, may the possibility of possibility be brought into existence. This capacity to hold ourselves open and responsive to the individuals around us, irrespective of our experiences, might in fact be said to be Cassavetes's definition of love. In this entirely practical sense, all of his films are about finding possibilities of emotional spontaneity and susceptibility in a world which relentlessly mechanizes behavior and punishes vulnerability.<sup>7</sup>

To "plunge unconditionally into the present" is the primary operating condition of all the influences I have gathered up to my time at York and henceforth. I have been searching for a language unto my own, that was both attuned to the spiritual and mundane, that was dramatic, spontaneous, and chaotic—but similarly patient, discerning, and painterly. I wanted to be in the present with contemplation, and alertness, but still maintain a curiosity for the what-if's of being, life, and creation. It wouldn't be correct to previsualize and pre-plan every detail, to chase perfection and a one-to-one recreation of my life in the past. In writing about these two

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<sup>6</sup> Lim, Song Hwee. Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness, University of Hawaii Press, 2014. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/york/detail.action?docID=3413595>. Page 151.

<sup>7</sup> Carney, Ray. "The Adventure of Insecurity: The Films of John Cassavetes." The Kenyon Review, vol. 13, no. 2, 1991, pp. 102–21. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4336423>

filmmakers, I hope to illustrate what I perceive to be a polarity in feeling: outwardness and inwardness, of being close and being far. If the caress of the expressive close-up and embrace of spontaneous meaning through expression can exhibit a philosophical, spiritual way of working, so too can the “distance” of being far, wide, or slow. *Vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*.

Later on in Song Hwee Lim’s writing on Tsai, he writes of the unpredictability of the long take, the relinquishing to a cinema of perception... In my view, a modality which the Cassavetean philosophy is wedded to. In the opening shot of *Days*, we see actor Lee Kang-sheng, sitting and watching the weather for a runtime of six minutes. Within these six minutes, you begin the contemplative organizing and analysis of every element in the frame, and yet, the duration resists this. Eventually, you are left with only the image and afterimage of Lee Kang-sheng the human being, playing Hsiao-kang, and his own gaze in tandem with the viewer. In this way, filmmakers like Tsai Ming-Liang or John Cassavetes center their work on the viewer engaging with themselves as living people in time, and thus are putting forward a philosophy on how to respond to the world that is complementary to each other, based on what I perceive of my own experiences.

This is the realm in which my cinematic object and thesis was meant to exist; the crossroads of movement and stillness, and taking ownership of your own way of expression. For myself to believe in my voice regardless of it being either erratic, quiet, or highly communicative. For the purpose of my life and film(s), having devotion, or searching for “The Truth”, is trying to say what’s in your heart. In doing so, I hope to navigate exactly how close or far away I am from others, and myself.

## Research and Development

My writing process began shortly after the production of my short film *My Mirror* (2022), in the summer of 2021. I was thinking about John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), a film I have always held near and dear, and thought about what it meant to set off into the metaphorical city and be myself. I began writing about a very similar situation to what the film is today, under the name "Metro Town", but originally focusing on the character of Joseph as a male escort with religious trauma. I was thinking primarily about masculine presentation, gender, sexual orientation, and Christianity, but as time went on, the realities of depicting this material felt so far and away from my lived experience, so I recalibrated the film to once more discuss the nature of my relationships. My partner Katie and I decided to turn our relationship long-distance with the advent of attending York, and thus I would be challenged in roleplaying my character in the film as it developed. I was going to be "alone", and even more part of the World. It became the obvious avenue to take the film.

With it, I realized that to depict Metrotown and retain my anxiety about individualism, so too I would be discussing the realities of my history, and my father. With this understanding, the political and geographical resonances grew into the project even further. Something as simple as

living at the intersection of “Imperial Street” and “Kingsway” was in itself a comic representation of my colonial position, coupled with that I would no longer be living on Coast Salish land, but Anishinaabe land, my family’s land. I met with my collaborator Dana Bontempo often to discuss the project, and shared it with my partner and friends. I mentioned what role my dad ought to play with him, and left it on the backburner, occasionally making edits to the script before coming to York.

Once arriving in Toronto and presenting the idea in class, the research and rewriting stage truly began. My “research” was primarily the working through of my feelings. Navigating how best to discuss my private affairs publicly would be my most important concern. In the first semester, I recall holding onto this idea that if I stripped down my feelings and made them as subtle as I could, I would circumvent disaster, and maybe imbue the film with the serenity I often felt but was losing. If I could “deposit images” and steer away from a heavier dramatic composition, maybe beauty could still be recognized, and love too. Writing my screenplay then became less important to me—I knew what I wanted to barely say, and knew it came from a time in the past, and to truly expand on it would risk doing too much and revealing too much. Of course, time would prove otherwise, but this was my approach during my first year of the program. I was in a state of constant judgment, always weighing the truth and safety of what was written, but remaining steadfast in what I had intuited on the eve of leaving Vancouver. My interest became focused more on feeling and the image vs. dramaturgy.

During this development, I approached a number of different works I felt were synonymous to the nascent ideas I had. I was set into motion by experiencing the serene meanderings within *Café Lumière* (2003, dir. Hou Hsiao-hsien), the docufiction grace of *The Company of Strangers* (1990, dir. Cynthia Scott), or the burning widescreen compositions and

terrifying masculinity of Paul Newman’s titular character in *Hud* (1963, dir. Martin Ritt). I was looking for an approach to image-making, narrative, and character that was already present in my film’s embryonic state.

I returned time and time again to the works of Hong Sangsoo, most frequently *In Front of Your Face* (2021). His influence is written all over my film; long takes of mundane “naturalistic” conversation, use of mid-fi camcorders, and punctual but unorchestrated zoom mechanics. During my first time attending TIFF, I went out of my way to watch and rewatch his latest feature at the time, *Walk Up* (2022). I was particularly taken with the particular formation of male behaviour. Often contemptible, the patterned thinking of his self-inserts has become a touchstone for many of my own feelings about manhood. In *Walk Up*, though, I was struck by a recalibration. Sangsoo’s implant in “Byung-soo” (played by Kwon Hae-hyo) is conversely an expression of balance. I had grown accustomed to his workman-like camerawork, proximal sound, and especially the self-loathing—but for once in his filmography I was met with self-care. Byung-soo’s journey throughout an old friend’s three story walk-up is one of folly, yet settlement. The ultimate example being one of the final scenes of the film. Cho Yun-hee’s “Ji-young” is on the rooftop patio of the walk-up having a meal with Byung-soo. They talk about their living situation, who to contact and when, and so forth. The conversation lulls and Byung-soo hangs his head to pray. It’s a peculiar moment, because prayer from Sangsoo’s mirror image seems almost laughable... what exactly is there to pray for when coming from an authoritative position as rarefied as “the director”? The following is the English translation of their dialogue:

Ji-young:       Did you pray?

Byung-soo: A bit.

Ji-young: Tell me again about when you saw God.

Byung-soo: (laughs) Shall I? You like that?

Ji-young: Yeah, it's amazing. I wish it'd happen to me.

Byung-soo: But I really saw Him. I'll tell you, but don't tell anyone else.

Ji-young: (nods) I know. Of course.

Byung-soo: (turns to the balcony) It was here.

Ji-young: That's right.

Byung-soo: I was taking a nap like this (mimics), and suddenly I woke up. And I could hear this droning, symphonic sort of music. So at first I thought something was going on below. So I turned to look... But up in the sky... I saw God.

Ji-young: (Exhales)

Byung-soo: This is what he said: "Byung-soo, move to Jeju Island and shoot 12 films."

Ji-young: Wow.

Byung-soo: It was so distinct. His voice. It was so loud. It was booming! "Byung-soo, move to Jeju Island and shoot 12 films."

Ji-young: That's so amazing! You've been blessed.

Byung-soo: You think? ... Don't ever tell anyone.

Ji-young: I won't... It's because you're so pure-hearted. God revealed Himself to you, really.

Byung-soo: It was so real. And since then, all my fears disappeared. Really. I'm not scared of anything! All I need to do is move to Jeju.

Ji-young: Oh, my baby. (Gets up to embrace) How can you be so cute? How can a person be so adorable?

Byung-soo: Thanks.

This to me was the purest expression of what drives the director—or at least, what drives me; that turning thoughts and feelings into images and sound could be a God-given task. Perhaps not so literally as I consider myself agnostic, but the idea that taking control over your own creations is something God would even consider... that to me is a wildly evocative notion. Sangsoo being able to laugh at such self-seriousness while giving grace to naivete was powerful to me at the time, and still is. God telling you to make films is surely the most self-aggrandizing revelation a filmmaker could have, and yet it is understood within the film and by Ji-young that it is a child-like idea, and could only come from someone in need of direction. As I was at the precipice of enacting my vision onto my father and long-term relationship, my omnipotence over them was the clearest anxiety. If I were to play God with my subjects, I should do that with compassion for myself and all those involved.

I was busy absorbing these conceptions of self-pitying autocracy in the works of Sangsoo, Caveh Zahedi (*I Am a Sex Addict*, 2005), Vincent Gallo (*The Brown Bunny*, 2003), or Mishima Yukio (*Confessions of a Mask*, 1949), while dashing them against the communal and oral storytelling found in the aforementioned *The Company of Strangers* and especially Sky Hopinka's *matni—towards the ocean, towards the shore* (2020). In the case of Cynthia Scott's superlative expression of wisdom and womanhood, I was awestruck by the profound sensitivity and texture of the women's improvisatory reminiscence of their pasts. In particular, Kanien'kehà:ka elder Alice Diabo. Near the end of the film, a scene unfolds like many others.

Alice and three other women muse about their experiences, this time allowing Alice to take center stage. She reflects on her earliest experiences in love, the nature of love later in life, and the group come together as a channel for Alice's lifeforce to come through in word, and in the film's montage. Through this unwritten and felt exchange, one of the women states to Alice: "I think you'd like some love today, the way you're talking, am I right?" Alice and the rest hum and haw, agree and shrug... then Alice responds with "I guess we can dream, huh?" The film then returns us to a device that the viewer has grown accustomed to, a carousel of images from Alice's real past as a young woman. We see the same light in her eyes, the same capacity for hope, the same perseverance. This proved to be a monumental moment for me as a person interfacing with this film. Not only does Alice's spoken voice and temperament remind me so dearly of my grandma Hilda, but also how I have lost the chance to experience her wisdom as an adult. A door cracked open for me. I saw a gateway to my past, and an approach to voice and the face that I could grace my father with. At the time of watching, I already knew my dad would play himself in my film, and I knew I would not force him to learn lines. I was aware of his ability to perform as himself, but now I had a personal touchstone. I knew not to write for him, and I knew to frame him with gentleness; to let him speak and be himself. Nothing is more powerful to me than seeing Alice show her true self in the subtle gestures, what is given or withheld in words, and the poetry of life written in the face. Having my father's face and voice inside my film thus became an affirmation of his history and place in time. In my view, a statement that is the opposite of insignificant.

Going back to Ho-chunk filmmaker Sky Hopinka and his 2020 experimental documentary *malni—towards the ocean, towards the shore*, I must highlight the film and him as a filmmaker for his approach to language, both spoken and cinematic. I spent many evenings in

my first apartment on St Clair Ave. West, tucked into bed with my laptop, pouring over his work and finding something accessible, but inscrutable. In an interview for the Criterion Channel,

Hopinka speaks for his practice plainly, saying:

“Part of the desire I had to make films was to tell Indigenous stories that were unique to my own community and my own identity. It felt like there was a lot of room to tell contemporary stories without engaging in contextualization around history and around trauma, and around the historical romanticization of Indigenous people. And what I was really interested in doing was telling stories that were relevant to what a contemporary experience is without that baggage, and how to make things a bit more creative, or poetic, or trying to explore these different facets of my culture and my identity, and how all those different things have shaped me.”<sup>8</sup>

This statement is reflected in the way information is conveyed throughout much of his work. In recontextualizing Ho-chunk, Chinook, or other Nation’s stories and experiences, Hopinka does not hold the hand of the viewer. That contextualization that is craved by the outsider is traded for a formal language and narratology that revokes easy understanding. His business is strictly his and his subjects—not to dissuade engagement, but to acknowledge that expressing the truths of history, tradition, culture, language, are better expressed in the present. Part of this is communicated through his formal experimentations and side-stepping of “traditional” cinematic syntax. Hopinka makes use of many different devices, for example (but not limited to), colour inversion, horizontal and vertical double exposures, opacity, and on-screen text. His graphic and textual motifs are married to his considerations of language, often using English or romanized (written) translations of his or other’s language. In the case of *matni*, the two central subjects of his film, Sweetwater Sahme and Jordan Mercier, are presented as figures in the present, enveloped both in the lush musicality of Hopinka’s soundscape and images, but

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<sup>8</sup> “Sky Hopinka Interview,” The Criterion Channel, n.d., <https://www.criterionchannel.com/videos/sky-hopinka-interview>.

also their position as Chinook peoples linked to story and tradition. The film glides through the beautiful landscape of the Pacific Northwest, resting to allow Sweetwater and Jordan to speak for themselves. In an early moment, Hopinka follows Sweetwater down to a waterfall; they speak in English about her. The film however, subtitles her words in chinuk wawa, the language of the Chinook people. In my approximation, this gesture is indicative of the positivity of the closed loop, the fact that I cannot read or speak chinuk wawa, or that the oral stories weaved throughout the film are not given context, means that I cannot have a true transaction. I am a guest, not a trader. This is a beautiful and politically resonant concept that not only speaks volumes for Indigenous autonomy, but the nature of being as a whole. We do not, cannot, and should not have complete access to the other. That is the challenge of life and other people: we can only know so much, so how can we do our best?

My experiences with *Strangers* and *malni* equally refined my concepts outlined in “Faith in Images” and “The Truth”. Accessing myself, my dad, and my partner Katie would thus need to reflect the following: 1) a shooting method that gave my subjects (actor or non-actor, inspired or present) freedom on screen and off, 2) a narrative that did not over explain or contextualize, and 3) a metatextual awareness of my involvement, and the limitations of knowing. I did not want to be a maestro, walking through my film and my life with orchestration in mind. Instead, I was to suggest and record without determinative reasoning.

On January 5th, 2023, I torrented a 60 fps file of Ang Lee’s *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* (2016). I still had sourness in my mouth from watching *Avatar 2: The Way of Water*, and wanted a high-framerate experience divorced from perverse “Indigeneity”. I was six months away from principal photography, was about to embark on a journey in John Greyson’s Hybrid Fiction class, and was searching for a digital frontier that need not be etched with the colonial

past. Nonetheless, something touched me when I saw the 60 FPS passages inside *Avatar 2*, something that I could not shake. The physiological experience of switching frame rates within the film spurred dissonance inside me, pushing me to think about how I upgraded my 60 hertz monitor to 144 hertz to have a smoother gaming experience. That might sound silly to recount, but in truth, that quality of life improvement is no small thing. If I was gaining clarity of information and relief from eye-strain, surely higher framerates in cinema might provide a similar reprieve, or at best, a wealthier image!

Upon watching *Billy Lynn*, my whole world turned upside down, momentarily. Frankly, at the time I was nearing a mental health crisis and was self-soothing with substances, clinging to my project and my ideas for dear life. I was under the influence and alone on January 5th, and what I saw on screen was a galvanizing, radically new experience. Lingering on Billy Lynn (Joe Alwyn) for 60 frames per second became a sight hitherto unknown to me. I had never seen the human face and its internal drama with that degree of information and fluidity. To see how eyes move at that speed was a flashpoint moment for me.

At the time, my consideration of high-framerate cinema was one of distaste. I remember being repulsed at Peter Jackson's attempt at 48 frames in *The Hobbit*, and I was well aware of the specter of "motion-smoothing" implanted in every parent's Smart TV. This was different. In the comments for a 4K 60p clip from *Billy Lynn*, I zeroed in on many different sentiments. Here are a few:

**@rushnerd** 4 years ago

I wouldn't say this is the best shot movie ever, but it's an amazing case study of how 24fps suspends audience disbelief, hides imperfections, makes special effects look WAY better, and uses our brains to fill in the gaps.

Here at 60fps it fails to be what our minds expect as "a movie" and starts being treated closer to real life, thus any and every flaw stands out.

**@TeleMa50C** 1 year ago

I feel like you need to dramatically rethink the camera work in a situation like this. This feels too anchored in traditional cinematography and while they clearly try to adapt to the HFR they didn't really get there. Somebody will make something really immersive and amazing like this one day that will be much better received. I'm sure it's already happening on a smaller scale but we're still waiting on the blockbuster that nails it.

**@LloydWaldo** 2 months ago

HFR should only ever be used in a situation where the camera is very slow and has virtually no presence in the scene. Every movement reminds you it's a movie

I saw in these comments a human reflection of a physiological experience above anything. I zeroed in on how all of these commenters were so willing and able to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of high frame rate. Their investment into the future of the art form, and generosity for something considered so negatively progressive was enlivening. I saw that there was a horizon uncharted, and specifically, a horizon where the very illusion of cinema is questioned through motion alone. When I first watched *Billy Lynn*, I remember thinking that if I could expose the apparatus through revealing the construction of my images, then what is left behind might be even more enriched. High frame rate, like duration, was a fertile zone of hybridity.

In my pursuance of speed and time, I came to realize that marrying a high frame rate image to a slow documentary flavour could possibly pay dividends. I had never seen anyone make a link like that before, and felt that my own experiences with high refresh rate video games was synonymous. I own a 144 hertz monitor in order to play the video game Counter-Strike at a higher level. A standard 60hz monitor is unanimously agreed upon to be substandard and a handicap to reaching a higher level of play. Issues of eye-strain, blur, tearing of the image, those are but a few of the conditions one circumvents when playing at a higher frame rate and refresh

rate. For my purposes in *Imperial Green*, I realized that I could alleviate the strain of watching a long shot of a face, or an alleyway, or a conversation, and I could shoot in a format that would engage the viewer's eyes more easily. Not only that, it seemed possible to double down on that idea by allowing the discomfiting side-effects of "hyperreality" to become an asset rather than a fault. Hyperreality being a duality that would alienate the viewer from my narrative, while also involving them in a way unlike anything I had seen personally. Thus, I elected to pursue a 4K image at 60fps, and found my camera body in the Panasonic AG-CX 350, a prosumer camcorder available at York. I poured over many sample videos and test footage at 60fps from the camera and started my own round of testing. I shot my film *V-DAY* on the Panasonic for John Greyson's Hybrid Fiction course, expressly as an opportunity to put my ideas to video. Moving forward in the term, I also elected to exclusively use the camera before shooting in all of my projects in Ali Kazimi's Documentary Workshop class. Leading up to Pre-Production, I made the Panasonic an extension of my practice, and an extension of my body and eye.

## **Pre-Production**

When I returned to Vancouver for Pre-Production, I was met with something that irrevocably shaped the film and myself. I was so delighted to return with my film, to finally set into motion what I had been carving out in Toronto. What happened was something unexpected. My relationship was brimming with optimism and love nearing my return, yet when I arrived back in Metrotown with Katie, she fell into a panic spiral that lasted seven days, and included multiple trips to the Emergency Room. She had experienced an anxiety induced episode just by my return, my physical reappearance. I had triggered something in her that even she didn't understand. I was a dark cloud returning to a vibrant summer.

I didn't know what to do.

I wanted to cancel the film right then and there, but she would not allow me to. She said she would hate herself if I threw it all away. We spoke to and fro about this, until I committed to doing it out of a sense of duty to the film. She gave me the go-ahead, and I reluctantly went forward. There were many times I wasn't able to be around her due to her mental state, at her request, so my pre-production was spent nearly exclusively at local coffee shops in Metrotown,

arranging the production myself. For the first week of July I spent nursing her back to stability and preparing the following: the creation of a magazine cart used by Jehovah's Witnesses with my production designer and sound recordist, sorting out the shooting schedule, call sheets, etc. I acted as Producer, 1st Assistant Director, Production Manager, and so forth. Pre-production was short, lasting only 15 days, leading into principal photography which was scheduled into two blocks, a 4 day and 3 day block around two weekends in July. Starting on July 15th and ending on my birthday, July 24th.

I scouted the locations, spoke to the necessary bodies in charge, took reference frames for myself, and searched for actors to fill out the two ancillary roles of "Mechanic" and "Preaching Mother" (which has since been cut from the film). Securing access to shoot in the Metrotown mall was a strange, subversive experience. I had email correspondence with the liaison for shooting, Julia Dosen, and spoke to her about the low-impact nature of the project, and found her surprisingly accommodative. I simply had to show up and alert security, which we did on the day of shooting. The securing of the other proper locations were ETS Automotive (the auto shop), and the two restaurants featured in the film. All interactions were extremely simple and without contractual engagement. I simply asked and they allowed me to film.

Most of my experiences in Pre-Production were just logistics, save for some new discoveries for the film. I elected not to rehearse the film, and decided that intuiting on the day would produce the best results. To expand on this, I allowed this freedom for myself as well. There was a day that exemplified the struggle of my singular shouldering of this weight; I was unable to be at home for the day, so I took the camera out and filmed myself driving down Kingsway, and spoke to the camera as if it were my diary. This was a major turning point for me in the nature of my film, as I had a direct address, and whatever was to follow would now be

compared and contrasted with how easily I was able to speak for myself. I had clips on a SD card of myself speaking from the heart spontaneously, and my actors and shooting style needed to be married to that same effect.

## **Production**

The first day of photography was a beautiful beginning. Myself and my production designer and sound recordist Dana Bontempo set off together informally to shoot pillow shots of the surrounding Metrotown area. We took our time, drove around and spoke openly about the production, our friendship, and the intimate struggles of making the film and living the film.

The first “proper” day of photography was on July 15th, where all my cast was present. The day mostly consisted of the earlier scenes in the film, Joseph and Jen waking up, leaving their apartment, and going to work. It was also the first time my dad would meet his scene partner Joseph Logelin. Their first meeting was recorded when my dad pulled up in his work van and Joseph got in, which became a union of laughter. Before taking off to film their work day, myself, my dad, Joseph and Dana went through the Triple O's drive-thru while I was still recording. The clip goes something like this: Dana is ordering up ahead, we're figuring out our order, and then my dad begins hollering at Dana ahead in the drive-thru, leaning out from the driver side window of his Mitsubishi Lancer, trying to hear my dad say: "Make it a combo! Make it a combo!" He was going to pay for our meals and needed to express his generosity

thoroughly—Joseph entered a hysterical laughing fit, and I followed suit, gleefully enjoying how silly my dad can be. Through the Panasonic I saw my dad's face ablaze with joy, and at that moment I knew that the production would have beauty and happiness within it, regardless of all my worries and serious considerations leading up to production.



Figure 2: My father smiling and laughing.

The following shoot days were blessed by this joyfulness. I designed the film's production to be lower stakes and very relaxed, so throughout the schedule myself, Dana, and my cast would leisurely arrive, shoot, talk, eat, and enjoy each other's company with ease. However, on shooting the dramatic bedroom scene between Joseph and Jen (played by Kate Boutilier), I had scheduled it so my partner Katie would not have to be around for such a revealing moment in the film. I recall sitting in the bedroom with Joseph and Kate, desperately trying to rationalize why I would write this scene and what Joseph is communicating. I had to explain what it meant to want to "be in the World", and reveal the darkness at the center of the film: my own feelings

about my relationship. Kate and Joseph listened but had questions, especially Joseph. Joseph even questioned his words in the scene, saying: “Why would I say this, why wouldn’t I just break up with her?” That was the hardest thing to hear and rocked my vision of the scene and how it should play. I chose to provide cover for myself and rationalize that the end needn’t come like that, or at all, and that Joseph’s character was acting from inexperience in life, and immaturity. Near the final breaths of the shoot, in the middle of a take, Katie came home and we stopped for a moment. She waited in the living room while we got our final takes and said our goodbyes.

The next morning, maintaining the relative chronology of the shoot and script, we filmed Jen going to work, and Joseph getting the car fixed. The film was wrapping up, save for one last shoot day. I walked cautiously to the finish line, culminating to our final day, scheduled so that I would spend my birthday filming my dad only. I only had to worry about capturing my dad’s life and face. The last image I recorded was him playing guitar through the sliding glass door. On the soundtrack you hear his improvised strummings and pluckings, until something changes. For the first time I saw what I was afraid of, but yearning for. I saw my dad totally alone at home, like he would always lament. “Put some music on, drown out the silence!” He would always say. Now, I saw what the silence of his home and life actually looked like. I couldn’t handle seeing myself and him in this mutual state, and I wept.

The totality of the production taught me many things. I learned that it was very hard to mount a production solely by myself, especially one with the proposed runtime of 60 odd minutes. While I made it as easy as possible for myself, and I tried to strike a balance, the pressures of my material on my personal life needed to be handled daily. I was sewing together a film with scraps, trying my best to express myself with as little footprint as possible. That

footprint was front and center in my mind, both in terms of our production's size and anonymity, but primarily in the way that it was meant to be "fun" and in a lower key. Crafting the film on my own with Dana at my side was indicative of this. I couldn't bear to have more hands and eyes on what I was making, and I simply wanted to be safe, and keep everyone else safe. It was all "no big deal". If it was the opposite, if I treated the film and my production traditionally, I would've put even more on the line than I already had.

Looking back on the production, I feel that this attitude was the shrewd choice, but also may be a little cowardly. If I underexposed the image, or if I only got a couple of takes, I could toss it off by acting like I didn't care, or that the modesty of my production made it so those things didn't matter. I was making something that I was just about to cancel, and while I care deeply, I also felt that maybe none of this mattered that much. I regret feeling this way, but in truth, it was an honest reaction to what had been transpiring in my life. Upon returning to Toronto for Post-Production, these feelings lingered.

## **Post-Production**

Post-Production began shortly after returning to Toronto. My methodology did not depart much from my usual approach as an editor of my own work. I dove headfirst into the edit, organizing the footage into a 90 minute assembly cut before the Fall semester commenced. The initial stages of the edit came relatively easy to me, as I had the fortune of seeing the footage firsthand as cinematographer as well as director. Forming the structure of the film was also made easier due to the nature of the film's lack of coverage and slower pacing. My considerations were

primarily the timing of my long shots and the rhythm of the work as a whole. Throughout the entirety of this stage, the film has fluctuated by mere minutes at best—this is indicative of my constant tinkering with a whole that largely remained unchanged since my first assembly.

Throughout the Fall of 2023, I buried myself in the edit with a fixation on two things. Firstly, the management of performance, and secondly, the management of fairness. I was stricken with despair at the crumbling of my relationship, and now was faced with constantly reliving the events of the summer, the shooting, the directing, and the living of my private turmoil with Katie and my father. Finding honesty and balance in the depiction of my faltering relationship onscreen was my biggest challenge, and was compounded by performances aided and burdened by such loosely structured shooting.

My actors Kate Boutilier and Joseph Logelin would often be put in a position where they would be photographed in only a handful of angles, and with little rehearsal and a hands-off approach to direction, their skill with handling the scenes would fluctuate. In my sifting through of the footage, I found that the scripted scenes were often the ones with the most issue, and would require a schematic understanding of the emotional mathematics. Fine tuning the climactic emotional scene in the bedroom between Kate and Joseph thus turned into a labour. I continually fixated on getting that scene right, not only because of its importance, but because I felt it was the least natural expression in the film. In truth, much of the “drama” present in the film feels somewhat juvenile in my eyes; I was expressing my juvenile anxieties within my relationship and tasking actors to portray something with little to no info or direction to accomplish this. While I found an arrangement that was simpatico to my interiority, it was not without frustration and worry. The final scene as it stands is one of breaths and withheld feelings, much more silent and underexposed than what I even prepared for. While my actors were not

mirroring the script exactly, this was their moment as performers in an otherwise subdued dramatic environment. For myself too, hinging the entire film on this ultimate moment proved to be a challenge to the otherwise serene and mundane rhythm of the film. The recurrence of melodrama in my work persists, I suppose. This rendition, however, seems most agreeable in comparison to my previous attempts.

With my blacksmithing of the hard material in the edit, I was doing so to navigate the honesty and safety of my personal life. Making sure that the film spoke with grace, kindness, but clarity was of utmost significance. Making Joseph more antagonistic by excluding sweetness from his performance, adding it back in, prioritizing coverage of Kate, or choosing to hold on her face over entire swaths of dialogue from Joseph... All of these were strategies I employed to manage my autocracy and dominion over my subjects (and their real life counterparts). If I was to tell the story of Katie and I's relationship, it better not be self-pitying or at worst, aggrandizing. I perceived my self-insert in Joseph to be a laughable but understandable node inside of a system of thought and feeling that precludes genuine connection, so whatever permutations I fostered were going to dictate this dichotomy; Kate and Joseph were thus tasked with being somewhat fixed ideas, that still needed to be synchronized to what I felt was the "truth" of my relationship. The burdens of approaching heartbreak, but the care and kindness we both still felt. I wanted my actors to feel open and unchained to any prescribed idea about their characters, but still needed to be precise in what I was saying about my relationship. This was the major hurdle throughout the entirety of the editing process.

The secondary challenge I faced was finding plasticity and my own image within the montage. Earlier in this paper I elucidated my thoughts on making myself visible, through the camerawork and handcrafted methodology, but I also knew my visage, voice, and essence

needed to enter the film in some form. This idea was ignited during a day in pre-production, when I could not be home due to Katie's emotional distress. I had to leave her alone for nearly an entire day, so I decided to go for a drive down Kingsway. Only a few hundred meters away from our apartment, I turned around and went back with an idea. I set up the camera as my passenger and filmed myself exiting our dark underground parkade, filming myself driving down Kingsway for the entirety of the trip. During this trip I spoke freely to the camera, nearly got into a car accident, and was able to capture the car, Vancouver, and my frame of mind at the time. By the time I got home I was electrified with excitement over my spontaneous decision, and felt that I had uncovered a way of being direct for the first time in the film. I now had an extension of my narrative that purposefully excluded the film's schema, and was an avenue to finally show what the film lacked: myself (or Joseph) finally driving the car that cannot be driven.



Figure 3: Frame of my exodus from the parkade.



Figure 4: Joseph walking through the mall. Cell phone footage spliced into the film.

Throughout 2024 I was challenged with finding an appropriate endpoint for my film, not in terms of its narrative, but in terms of the project as a whole. I was constantly adding and subtracting from the film, and entered a spiral of indecision. I became unsure of the film's value, and lost my love for it. I resisted the film, then returned to it, always searching for the moment that would spark my admiration. For a long period of this year I flirted and eventually committed momentarily with a new title: "Auto Fiction".

This was an attempt to heighten the self-referential nature of the film, and to enhance the humour of the film that I felt was a little inscrutable to outsiders. In retrospect I have realized that I was treating my need for serenity and authenticity as a joke, and that my title *Imperial Green* was truest. This is congruous with my efforts in the edit—by finding metaphorical inroads for understanding for the viewer through images like those cited above (the changeover from Joseph to myself in the car, Joseph appearing in water, the stopped clock), I was trying my hardest to directly convey my concepts, versus relying on percepts. By changing my title to "Auto Fiction", I was intentionally underlining the car as a symbol for relationships, and steering the film directly into a container of meaning. It was no longer about Metrotown, Katie, my dad, me, our routines, our love, or our work. It was now dominated by the semiotics of the automobile... certainly the most prominent of symbols of the film, but like the edit process itself, thankfully I became conscious of leaving the film more open to interpretation and reverted the title back to *Imperial Green*—a title taken from an artificial turf store I would walk by on my commute home from work, and magically tied to my father's improvised advice on "greener pastures". His voicing of which was directly pointed at what he perceived of my own journey.

## **Ethics, Talismans**

Throughout this paper I have endlessly described all of my worries, big and small. At this point I am sure that the reader of this document may have grown tired of these apprehensions, but for the purpose of this section I must fully divulge what I consider to be the paramount problem of my picture-making. To diagnose this, I would simply argue without much reference, that the moving image's historical application as a vestige of "realism" has affixed us to "the frame". Much of cinema presupposes that we are reducible to observation, but worse, are made to possess the point-of-view of the character, the narrator, or God. Much of traditional cinematic image and montage grammar dedicates itself to a viewpoint that is avoidant of the audience. It determines that the viewer must be injected into the film itself, to "empathize" and become one with the film and its subjects. The POV shot is an example that should go without mentioning. It is my belief that this cocooning of the viewer inside the film is part of what makes much of cinema talismanic... Especially works that intend to "put the viewer in the character's shoes". That is alchemical, and simulative. I choose to be suspicious of designing fantasy, and its ability to ensnare or suggest, I want the audience to see how perforated my filmic expression really is.. While I was already fearful of the alchemy of the moving image, my hands and their scrawlings have begun to take on a spiritually hazardous quality—not to mention my eye.

In the beginning, in Manfred Becker's Production class, I first voiced this worry; I wanted to enter the program and this new world with one goal: to avoid creating a talisman... despite knowing full well that was what I was carving. Preeminent above all else, forging a work that would invoke the real feelings inside myself, Katie, and my father might produce results I did not intend for, or at least, I hoped not to intend for. As far as ethical concerns go, is this not

the ultimate? I have expressed this many times in this paper, but here I will express exactly what occurred and my feelings about it.

I thought that the character of Joseph would be my Adam, a creature made of dust and clay, a golem of no particular form other than the concrete of a metropolis, and the self-involvement of a machine with only one function. As I believe it, creating a character like this meant that all other subjects and the film itself would be chartered into territory that was just as pre-determined. Katie was Jen, my dad was my dad, and their fates were written, locked away inside a film I could seal and move on from. Today, with the dawn of a new relationship, I have found it incredibly easy to forget my bonds, and forget the film I created precisely for the two most important people in my life. Prone to binary thinking, I have had difficulty not seeing myself become the character in my film. I have become an individual in *The World* like never before, and have progressed with the same singular focus and selfishness I desperately wanted to never embody.

My father craves connection with me, and Katie still emails me with kindness on my birthday. She lives her life with joy and comfort despite suffering to leave me when I couldn't say it, my dad toils on his own and provides for himself, and I am in Toronto walking the streets of public with my image screaming inches from my forehead. I want to believe that I hadn't produced anything that wasn't already in the making, but surely, surely, if I had not returned to Vancouver with an exposé, perhaps things would be different. Perhaps, if I hadn't crossed the Rubicon to Toronto I would be a kinder, truer, and more honest person. What's honest about playing pretend with the lives of others?

I don't know. That's what I told myself on countless occasions, and truthfully, it is what I still believe. Not knowing has seemed to be the only honest place for me to create from, and

*Imperial Green* was unfortunately a creation of total knowing. I knew what was happening, and I knew where I stood with all parties. My questions were spun into tapestry, a design meant to relieve or reveal my behaviour. If I could conjure the spirit of my dismay, maybe it could be locked inside the film, but instead, I possessed myself with the apparition of my doubts utterly and inexorably. That is where the film, and my part in it has failed. As a work on its own, I believe it has merit, but as a creation for others, it has not bolstered the ties that bind, and only frayed them.

This section (and paper) should be alleviated from constant inwardness, so I will finish with my other ethical concerns. In making this film, I was also focused on providing an environment for my performers and crew that was fairly compensated and unchallenging logistically. I paid Kate and Joseph an equal pay, higher than the UBCP/ACTRA standard rate for Ultra-Low Budget productions, and refused to take any financial favours from rentals from friends (in the case of audio equipment), and covered every expense extolled by all contracted members. Partly due to my embarrassment and worry over receiving funding from the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Research Council, but also because I had been procuring goodwill from my community in Vancouver for a long time; repayment was beyond necessary for me. My cast and crew needed to be treated fairly and with respect for their time and finances.

With that said, during the shooting of the bedroom scene between Joseph and Kate, our shoot day which was bisected in the morning and late evening had produced an issue. I had completely forgotten about the need for sustenance, and by the time we wrapped the day past midnight, it was too late for me to provide for them. I argued and tried to rectify this, but my actors were adamant that all was fine. While I appreciate their forgiveness, this was exemplary of my limitations and failures as a Jack of all Trades. Hiding behind my insecurity and taking on all

roles of the production left many things underdeveloped, under-organized, and forgotten.

Whether forgetting a meal, or not realizing I should have gotten Stefano Reale (the Mechanic) to sign his release form before paying him—a form I still haven't received—I have to make an effort to pursue a more cohesive and responsible production. I am not a strong producer, I lack much of the knowledge and follow-through of a real producer, and clearly it creates issues and cracks in the production. Ethically speaking, those that sign onto the film must be taken care of in every respect, and they deserve a production that covers every base and supports them through pre-production, production, post-production, and the life of the film afterwards.

## Synergy and Self-Sacrifice

In combing through this document as supplement to my film, it surely has become apparent that there is a stark difference between *Imperial Green*, and the words herein. Throughout the process of writing this paper, I have made the conscious but near compulsory decision to vomit all my feelings and thoughts—I have provided context and spoken through my point of view almost exclusively. While my film similarly employs that vision in many respects, the openness and vulnerability of my work (should you not be acquainted with me) is harder to parse, more nimble and subterranean. Much of my personal feelings about being my father's son are relegated to a handful of scenes, or communicated through what I perceive to be character similarities I see in myself with my father, and in Joseph's character—for example, the decision to cast a white actor to play a role similarly to me, and sever that familial bond textually by making Joseph simply an employee of my father. Their actions too speak for my hidden feelings... but are most resonant to only a few. Here however, I have a direct venue.

I never wished to make this film for anyone but myself, my dad, and my partner Katie, but I made concessions and pulled punches to limit my influence on them, and myself. The moral ambiguity of my pursuits is the latch to the door of understanding *Imperial Green* and my descriptions of self in these pages. The simplest diagnosis for this moral ambiguity and the divergence in this paper and my film is to return to my Christian moral framework. Truth or falsity, fiction or reality, pure or impure... These are well-exhausted polarities, dissected, reinforced, torn and discarded. What I've come to search for in *Imperial Green* and my greater life philosophy has been tripartite. Namely, the nature of Christlike self-sacrifice, the narrow path vs. the broader path in art and living, and the convergence of the death of God and

post-post-modern Sincerity through autobiographical fiction. My “mission” as it were, is to bear the cross (or stake as Jehovah’s Witnesses believe), and carry it through to Golgotha—spreading the word (“the truth”) of God (Love).

The essence of whatever vulnerability lies within this document, and whatever is “justly” shrouded inside of my film is based entirely on what I originally deemed to be a martyrdom of self, as penance in hopes of redemption for my actions and inactions. What I have come to understand and will extrapolate on is that I have grossly distorted these Christian conceptions of Being, and have not even lived by Christ’s example—a decision I made almost unconsciously. I hope to achieve a framing of these ideas that are secularly valuable, interrogative of their animus, and implicative of the past, present, and future.

My pursuit of a modest production method and increased engagement with auto-fiction is predicated on my discomfort with the dualities of good and evil, mind and body, and my anguish over having to choose one, not two masters. Since my youth I have been plagued with the phenomena of being within my own skull, I was haunted by others having their own totally unknowable mental experience. Therefore, externalizing the mechanisms and productions of my mind (and heart) were primary to me. Wanting to make others feel or see as I do was central to my disquietude inside the Witness congregation. I was aware of my painful individuality, especially with the knowledge that the inner lives of friends, family, and members of the congregation were inaccessible; how does one partake in worship if they feel removed from the group, and from God? Prior to this thinking, God, His son, and Satan were the only creatures capable of peering inside me. When I chose to believe that God and company were figments of Davidic imagination, I willfully disposed of that which I found so troubling—and in doing so, locked my mind up and made my externalities the significant and only truth of my being. In

tandem with what I've described earlier, my outer shell (my body or identities) became the singular way for me to relate to the world.

Following this path however, was not a secular venture. It is not an easy task to throw away Christ and enter into the world without influence. Firstly, my predispositions towards Good and Evil remains, and how I've presented my externalities is linked to a way of being that is in essence, an effort to be Christ-like. I wish for myself and my creations to embody the traits of love, compassion, approachability, unselfishness, forgiveness, zeal, humility, and patience—and as time has gone on, most importantly: “His insistence upon the duty of self-sacrifice”<sup>9</sup>.

In writing this paper and returning to the question of why there is such a distinct difference between my vulnerable writings and ascetic film, I find that it rests squarely on my complicated relationship to Christ and his doctrine, particularly that “a man must lose his life to gain his life; that no man can be his disciple unless he deny himself and take up his cross and follow him; that no man can serve two masters” (323). It is my sense that my journey towards self-actualization through artmaking was based on the idea that if God is love, then love must be God. If taken as fact, then a decision to pursue Earthly endeavours with the belief in Love as the ultimate driving force would still be righteous! That was my animating principle in becoming secular, and was easily graftable to my programming in Christ's teachings.

Believing in this idealism meant that I unconsciously agreed to retain the suffering involved in being imperfect and chasing perfection. Having total faith in love and submitting to that rarefied consideration means always walking the narrow path, always choosing a single

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<sup>9</sup> Self-Sacrifice in the Teaching of Jesus  
Source: *The Biblical World*, May, 1903, Vol. 21, No. 5 (May, 1903), pp. 323-326  
Published by: The University of Chicago Press

master, and faltering in following the doctrine of unconditional love as practiced by Christ would deflate all my decisions and my entire self.

*Imperial Green* is entirely based on this distinction. Telling the story of the World's corrosive nature and speaking through a refracted version of myself was my way of repenting for sins in progress. The film was meant to express the shame of choosing Self as my single master, as if that would right the wrongs I had committed against my partner Katie and my father, anonymous actions wrought against Christ-like love. What I have come to recognize now, is that "Jesus never made misery the thermometer of holiness" (324), and that my invocation of his teachings and behaviour were still framed in a false way. I made the production of my thesis film a private repentance that could not be forgiven, and acted truly, and actually, without belief. I would watch a film like *I Am a Sex Addict* (2004, dir. Caveh Zahedi), and see the filmmaker's confessional self-destruction through extreme honesty and think that that was synonymous with the self-sacrifice I privately craved. In my youth I would listen to Joy Division and think of Ian Curtis' suicide and accompanying ballads dedicated to love's thrashing ability and think: what if I made such an ultimate choice? What if art and love's greatest expression was martyrdom? What good is art if it isn't an ontological polemic on love and self? Now in my adulthood, I think: shouldn't artmaking be attributed utmost reverence, or at the very least, be a battleground that accommodates the violence between fact and fiction—and is that not the very nature of the mind-body problem, and the battle between good and evil? Truth and falsity, just like love and hatred are polarities that dominate Christian theology, and thus the bodies that occupy the pre- and post-colonial state. These are the paramount questions that lacerate the Western(ized) body, mind, and spirit, so it is natural that I have embodied these questions and made small efforts to interrogate them personally and textually within my work.

*Imperial Green* was always the housing for such dualities. In fact, if there is a reason why the film is so opaque, it is because the polarities above are so internalized and multiplicitous that exorcizing all of them inside the film would be near impossible. The decision I made was to forefront the static (as in television without feed), and suggest the same operating function of most if not all autofiction: “the process of invention in self-narration, or the discursive construction of the self... [autofiction] necessarily collapses the categories of truth and fiction in the process of self- invention.”<sup>10</sup>.

Where the “synergy” outlined in the title of this portion comes from, is the fact that there is such a schism... *Imperial Green* has no such obvious synergy between the film and these writings. I did not have synergy in creating the work in the first place. I was torturing myself with the fear of not showing unconditional love, and believed that if I questioned myself and my motivations, and sought forgiveness by hating my metropolitan, Worldly anonymity, I would save myself in my own eyes, in the eyes of my father, Katie, my cohort, the faculty, and the public. I wanted to express it all but was too ashamed to do so, and lacked faith in the cleansing power of love. I was too focused on the act of self-sacrifice on the basis that it was what I was supposed to do... a selfish gesture. I have made a work that *is* self-centered, because I acted with doubt. The film exemplifies doubt in so many ways. Doubt in relationships, doubt in self, and doubt in forgiveness. I thought that if I told on myself and my worst attributes, I was doing everyone a favour by revealing what I most disliked about myself, but in reality, I wasn't truly vulnerable, and I didn't act with love.

Jesus did not give his life because he wanted to be a martyr, he gave it because it was for the gain of something greater. It was not out of asceticism, but out of gainful exchange through

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<sup>10</sup> Srikanth, Siddharth. “Fictionality and Autofiction.” *Style* 53, no. 3 (2019): 344–63. <https://doi.org/10.5325/style.53.3.0344>.

belief. He gave his physical life for eternal life, and the opportunity for eternal life for all mankind. I sacrificed my old life because I wanted to not feel bad about wanting what I didn't have. Now, having made a film with tacit vulnerability, I have put myself in a position where writing a reflective paper can much more easily accommodate my true feelings—I have felt them and become wiser, I hope, and more willing to be honest without fear. That is the synergy and the discord at the heart of my film and paper.

## **Conclusion**

Now at this final moment, I feel compelled to leave this page blank. I have said everything and nothing, spoke too much and shared too little. It is my dream to speak through my images and sound, to find honesty and calm within the frames of my paintings. To create with confidence and self-assurance, not self-hatred and doubt. I dream to invite people in with rejoice, and to be with other people out of genuine communal love and hard work. “Doing it myself” has compounded my individual senses, and shaped me into a crevasse only I can fit in. If there is anything this program has taught me, it is that you cannot truly make things alone, and that you are at the mercy of your community, the kindness and generosity they bestow, and how you give back to it. For all my future films and experiences in life, I will move forward with the understanding that “I” is not as important as I once thought, and that living for others is integral to living as You. Being part of the World means being with others, and treating others with love and care. I want to believe totally in love, and act with faith.

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