

NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED

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Abstract

“Names Have Been Changed” is a narrative short film based on medical records documenting my participation in a psychiatric study as a teenager. The film follows Paul, an eighteen-year-old university student who enrolls in a medical study involving a course of SNRI antidepressants, and Hanna, the resident psychiatrist responsible for documenting his treatment. Drawing from these records, this project seeks to examine the relationship between lived experience and clinical documentation through narrative filmmaking. While clinical records present experience through detached authoritative language, this film uses narrative structure and visual form to place this language alongside the reality it attempts to describe.

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Introduction

“I have told it. I have exaggerated, I have embellished, I have omitted, and there is a lot I haven’t understood.”

— Karl Ove Knausgård, *The End*

Names Have Been Changed is a project that draws on my experience as a patient at a youth mental health clinic, using my requested medical records as the basis for the narrative. The film is a narrative short that follows Paul, an eighteen-year-old university student who enrolls in a psychiatric study involving a course of SNRI antidepressant medication. The narrative unfolds over the course of his treatment, accompanied by a neutral voiceover drawn from the clinical language of his (and my) medical records. Parallel to Paul’s experience, the film also follows Hanna, the resident psychiatrist responsible for his treatment, whose own life begins to reflect the same conditions of isolation that characterize Paul’s experience as a patient. In structuring the film around these dual perspectives, my aim is to explore the synthesis between Paul’s personal and subjective experience and Hanna’s detached and “objective” experience. While I have previously made works that can be considered auto-fiction, the incorporation of my own medical records into the narrative complicates the artistic process.

At the outset of this project, I believed that my goal was to contribute to a more authentic representation of mental illness in cinema, one grounded in lived experience rather than clinical abstraction. Over the course of making the film, however, this goal has become less clear. I do not believe that the film resolves the tensions it presents, but rather, it offers an attempt to examine a specific experience from multiple perspectives, and to explore the aesthetic possibilities that emerge from treating personal history as both narrative and archival material.

What follows is a process evaluation of creating *Names Have Been Changed*, moving from its development and production toward a broader examination of illness narratives and medical authority. Through the creation of this film, I wish to explore the implications of creating a work that must reconcile the imperfect record of memory with the authoritative and ostensibly objective record of clinical documentation.

Narratives of mental illness in cinema often rely on familiar forms and tropes that cohere to pre-conceived expectations. Films like Lars Von Trier's *Melancholia* reflect a tendency to ascribe mental illness to female characters, while male experiences are more commonly framed through violence. While *Mad Art* presents a framework for representing mental illness through lived experience, my interest is less in situating my film within that category than in examining the systems of documentation and authority that shape how such experiences are recorded. Through this project, I would like to explore whether a film that refuses these established narrative frameworks can engage with the representation of mental illness in cinema, and how a work that treats personal history as both narrative material and archival record can offer a productive way of thinking through the gap between lived experience and its clinical documentation.

Development

At eighteen years old, I visited a youth mental health clinic after being referred by my university's counselling center. As part of my intake, I consented to be part of a collection of data for a "process evaluation," that is, a study designed to measure the effectiveness of the clinic's methods for treating youth with mental health needs. While my choice to seek help was set off by specific catalysts, it was also part of a broader realization that I could not recall a time in my life when I was happy. In short, I knew that I could not continue with the trajectory I was on. The story of my time as an outpatient at the clinic is fairly straightforward and banal: I was given a trial of medication that I did not respond well to, I stopped taking the medication, I was scolded, and I never returned. As a deeply depressed and likely insufferable Film Studies student, I also don't doubt that I was a strain on the likely overworked residents and psychiatrists with whom I spoke during our fifty-minute sessions. I was fixated on talking about how I *must* become a filmmaker, and how everything wrong with me was getting in the way of that.

While my time at the clinic was a negative experience, it was not something that weighed heavily on my mind in the more than ten years since leaving. I have since found mental health treatment that more adequately suits my needs, and I have also been able to develop a filmmaking practice that has, in some films implicitly and in others explicitly, expressed my experience living with mental illness. The most explicit of these films was a narrative short I made in 2022 titled *3 Seconds In, 6 Seconds Out*, which follows a young woman who fears leaving her apartment after an intense anxiety attack, and who must venture outside in order to help her mother, who is also dealing with anxiety. The film played at a festival hosted by a youth mental health nonprofit, and the organizers subsequently invited me to present it as part of a panel discussion for an insurance company. I was paid for my participation, but the experience

left a bad taste in my mouth. In particular, I loathed that my film was easily digestible for a room of insurance workers during their mental health awareness programming, and that the organization itself was able to feel good about facilitating the conversation. I realized that I had made a trite film, and that I had been attempting to make something that pleased other people rather than something that was honest with what I wanted to do as a filmmaker.

As part of a broader self-interrogation, I began to question why I wanted to make a “mental health” film at all, and how I might instead make something that existed simply as a film without relying on categorization. It was during this period that I thought back to my time at the clinic and decided to request my medical records under the *Personal Health Information Protection Act*. Several weeks after filling out a consent form and paying an administrative fee, I received a large envelope in the mail. Flipping through the pages, I quickly saw that I had been sent scans of the handwritten notes taken by the psychiatrists during our sessions. A wave of fear came over me, and I set the envelope aside in a drawer that I would not open for another year.

In the meantime, I was able to shoot two more films with support from the Canada Council for the Arts, as well as other arts councils. The first, *Bracciante*, was a short film about a young man who, becoming aware of his diminishing place within the economic structures of Canada, seeks to make the reverse journey that his grandparents made from Italy. The second, *Otium*, was a feature film about a real estate photographer in Toronto who spends her days shooting condominiums she cannot afford to live in herself. These films were the first works I made that fully interested me aesthetically, personally, and politically. Coming out of these projects, I felt some distance from my earlier attempts to overtly represent mental illness, as well as more confidence in my own voice and abilities as a filmmaker.



Image 1: Still from my feature film *Otium*, 2026

With a new understanding of my artistic practice, I finally opened the envelope again. Reading over the notes, I was struck by the impassive and neutral language used to describe the painful period in my life as a teenager. While my thoughts and anxieties were felt vividly by myself, within these documents, they were condensed into clinical observations written in a detached tone. It would be silly to have expected emotional screeds about my condition, or even an empathetic aside, but reading these notes highlighted a tension between personal experience and clinical documentation. I found myself confronted with a more objective version of myself that existed entirely outside of my own memory. It is this tension that became the foundation for the film.

Influences

At the outset of this project, I found myself drawn toward films that could broadly be described as melancholic, looking to filmmakers such as Béla Tarr and Lars von Trier for their depiction of characters who exist in states of ennui within myopic narrative worlds. In particular, I was interested in Hu Bo's 2018 film *An Elephant Sitting Still* as a reference point, as a film with a split narrative of four disaffected characters that eventually converge. Hu was mentored by Béla Tarr, and the film is composed of sweeping long takes that are reminiscent of Tarr's films. While I maintain a deep appreciation for each of these filmmakers, this initial attraction to misanthropic films as a means of telling my own story proved to be somewhat of a dead end, pushing me toward narrative clichés around depression and therapy. Moving away from the idea of narrativizing emotion, my goal shifted to identifying a visual strategy that would articulate the experience and emotions of being observed in a clinical setting.

Another of these misanthropic works, which has been a major influence in my films, is Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, which I feel is fundamentally about isolation and transgression. Travis Bickle exists as an isolated character in a world of violence, and therefore, his transgression is one of violence. In my feature film *Otium*, I wanted to mirror this trajectory towards transgression with the main character Hanna, a young and disaffected real estate photographer who, at the end of the film, realizing she exists in a system that will prevent her from ever having a home, breaks into one of the apartments she previously photographed to claim it as her own. Beyond the narrative and surface-level connections to *Taxi Driver* (Hanna wears a vintage military jacket throughout the film), I was also interested in the visual moments of distance the film creates, particularly the famous scene in which the camera tracks away from Travis during a humiliating phone call at a hallway payphone. For *Otium*, this visual disinterest

came through continuous circular pans that let Hanna fall in and out of frame, and serve to separate the notion of home from the properties she photographs.



Image 2: Still from *Taxi Driver* by Martin Scorsese, 1976

During our Production Seminar, we were each asked to present a scene in class and explain how it related to our project. I presented the hallway scene from *Taxi Driver*, and during the discussion about visual indifference, I was urged by the course director, Manfred Becker, to watch Antonio Campos's 2008 film *Afterschool*. Campos's film follows Robert, an internet-obsessed prep-school student, in the wake of witnessing (and unintentionally filming) the overdose death of two classmates. The film is primarily composed of long static takes that often cut characters off at the periphery, or allow them to move out of frame as the scene progresses. Just as Robert mediates life through an indifferent gaze of online videos, and does not intervene during the death of his classmates, the camera of the film seems to take on this indifferent perspective of non-intervention. In approaching *Names Have Been Changed*, I was

interested in adapting this distant approach to the distant and clinical observation of Paul as a patient. Early in the film, during Paul's intake appointment, the camera deliberately moves away from Paul as he begins to speak, instead zeroing in on the chart being filled out by Hanna. In this way, the film is resistant to making a direct connection to Paul, and instead nudges the viewer to mediate their relationship to Paul through his medical documentation.



Image 3: Still from *Afterschool* by Antonio Campos, 2008

As *Names Have Been Changed* is heavily rooted in this written documentation, I also looked closely at films that incorporate textual material as a primary narrative element. In particular, I was interested in Ricky D'Ambrose's short film *Spiral Jetty*, which was expanded into the feature film *Notes on an Appearance*. Both films tell much of their narrative through a kind of archival investigation consisting of articles, private letters, and home videos. The lead character is an archivist tasked with whitewashing the legacy of a recently deceased and controversial psychologist, who then implicitly unravels evidence of the killing of his wife. Ambrose's films use a dual approach of voiceover narration and text on screen, with both, at times, converging in sync. While the voiceover serves as the narrative driver of the primary story, the documents that are not read aloud articulate the secondary implied narrative of the

wife's murder. In *Names Have Been Changed*, this dynamic of stated and implied narrative takes shape through the dual perspectives of Paul and Hanna. At face value, Hanna's clinical notes offer an objective account of Paul's treatment, but the images we see of Paul outside of the medical record undercut Hanna's objectivity. The narrative that emerges, then, is the synthesis between these objective and subjective accounts.

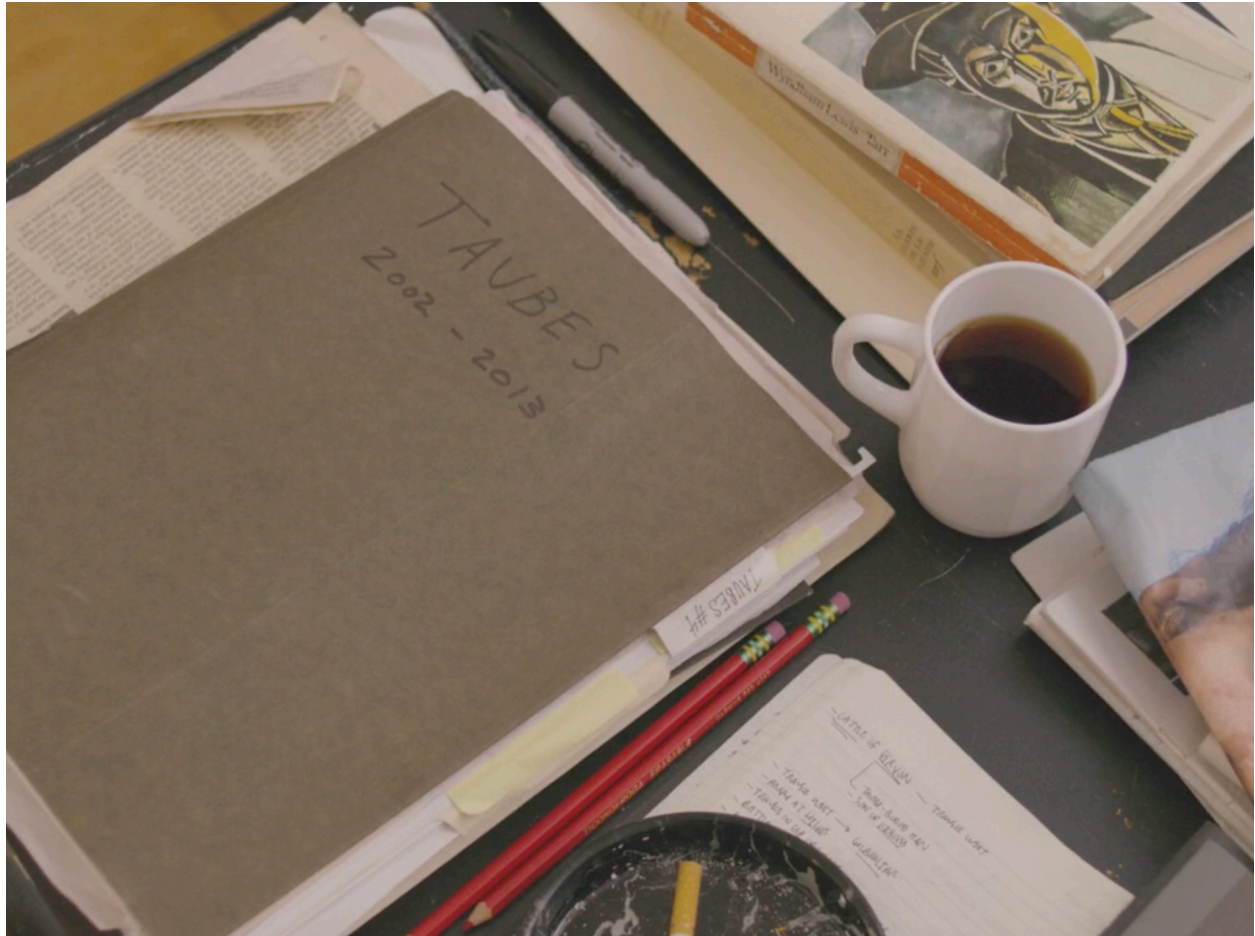


Image 4: Still from *Notes on an Appearance* by Ricky D'Ambrose, 2018

Another structural reference for this dual perspective was Antoine Bourges's *Fail to Appear*, which presents a gradual shift in perspective between Isolde, a caseworker, and Eric, the man she has been assigned to guide through the mental health court system. At the outset of the film, Eric exists only as a subject of discussion within Isolde's professional routines as she

prepares to meet him in court. The two eventually meet in court halfway through the film, and from that point, the narrative gradually shifts toward Eric's perspective, revealing his home life. This gradual shift in perspective was useful in thinking about the relationship between Paul and Hanna in *Names Have Been Changed*, as the film similarly moves between institutional and personal perspectives. Rather than presenting Paul and Hanna as antagonists to one another, I felt that the most impactful approach would be for the two to mirror each other from opposite ends of the structure they find themselves in. At the end of Paul's first appointment, the film pivots closer to Hanna's perspective as we observe her alone in her apartment. As Hanna's voiceover recounts her notes from Paul's chart ("Isolated, lonely"), it becomes apparent that Hanna and Paul share a similar psychological state, complicating the institutional distance that exists between them.

Despite his indefensible public opinions, the discussion of my influences as a filmmaker would be incomplete without mentioning the work of Michel Houellebecq, and in particular his novel *Serotonin*. Aside from the clarity with which he writes characters experiencing depressive episodes, Houellebecq's writing has a way of diagnosing a collective feeling of atomization under our current economic system, though it tragically veers into reactionary conclusions that I do not share. *Serotonin* features a fictional new miracle antidepressant called Captorix, which is prescribed to Florent-Claude, the novel's protagonist. As Florent-Claude experiences complete sexual impotence as a side effect of his medication, the novel climaxes with him witnessing the flashpoint of a protest reminiscent of France's *Yellow Vest Movement*. In their analysis of the relation of depression and narrative in *Serotonin*, Jenny Slatman and Inge van de Ven note the "connection his texts forge between sexual and political impotence" (Slatman, Van de Ven). While Houellebecq's protagonists often exist in states of depressive episodes, their individual

conditions are presented as symptoms of broader social and economic decline. While Houellebecq's work channels this economic frustration to reactionary ends, in my own work, I am more interested in locating this condition within the broader structures of neoliberal capitalism itself. With *Names Have Been Changed*, I wanted to embed the physical condition of impotence, a common side-effect of SNRI antidepressants, within a broader societal feeling of impotence in relation to enacting change. In their book *Inventing The Future*, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams offer a critique of what they term folk politics, stating that "from the alter-globalisation struggles of the late 1990s, through the antiwar and ecological coalitions of the early 2000s, and into the new student uprisings and Occupy movements since 2008, a common pattern emerges: resistance struggles rise rapidly, mobilise increasingly large numbers of people, and yet fade away only to be replaced by a renewed sense of apathy, melancholy and defeat. Despite the desires of millions for a better world, the effects of these movements prove minimal" (Srnicek). While I disagree with the sentiment that protest movements and direct action are ineffective, I believe this sense of apathy stems from such movements being quashed and co-opted by those in power. I had initially considered the Occupy movement as the film's political catalyst, but I eventually landed on the 2010 G20 Protests as a moment that was more specific to Toronto's collective memory, and one that presents the tipping point of decline from the 2008 global financial crisis. Within the film, both Paul and Hanna encounter the 2010 Toronto G20 protests (Hanna in person and Paul through online videos), and it is after these protests that Paul stops taking his medication. In this way, Paul's personal experience as a patient echoes a broader atmosphere of diminished agency on a collective level.

Production Journal

Part of my desire to make this film within an academic setting was to give myself the time and opportunity to conduct background research during the writing process. Through my membership at *Workman Arts*, an organization dedicated to artists with lived experience with mental illness, and with the help of my supervisory committee, I was connected with Scott Miller Berry, who then put me in touch with a number of psychiatrists and residents whom I spoke with for background character research. While I am obviously familiar with my own story, and I had access to the notes written by the psychiatrists during my treatment, the creative liberty in writing the script would be in imagining the character writing those notes. While I was treated by a number of different people during my time at the clinic, I ultimately decided to amalgamate these figures into the singular character of Hanna, a psychiatric resident. I was interested in the inherent power dynamic between a resident and their supervising psychiatrist, which situates Hanna within a hierarchy where she is also working under someone. This dynamic also helped me develop the character of Dr. McKenzie, an attending psychiatrist who peppers Hanna with inappropriate questions about her personal life, and who ultimately scolds Paul when he stops taking his medication. Envisioning Hanna as a resident in her early thirties would also give me the opportunity to write a character my own age, alongside my reimagined teenage self. In speaking with residents, the impression I gleaned is that they are often overworked and under considerable stress. Conversely, I also learned that residency is a period in which many choose to start a family, as it is often the first time they have a degree of employment stability and access to benefits through insurance coverage. This struck me as fertile ground for exploring Hanna as a character who may not have reached these conventional milestones in her early thirties, just as Paul struggles with similar milestones in his late teens.

Beyond the use of my medical records in the writing process, I was also interested in tracking down any traces of my eighteen-year-old self that I could find. While many of these traces were preserved digitally through emails, assignments, and YouTube playlists, I also looked for physical ephemera from this time in my life. Rummaging through a closet in my parents' house, I found a letter from my dad with cash for groceries, along with a note that my parents hadn't heard from me in a while. I also found my creative writing journal, where I conceived of an idea for a film that was a modern reinterpretation of Dante's *Inferno* set in contemporary Washington D.C. These traces made their way into the narrative as fragments, as I felt they were a means of fleshing out some of Paul's mindset without going into explicit detail. Going through the digital traces, I became interested in using early-era YouTube videos as another linking device between Paul and Hanna, allowing them to both inhabit the same digital space.

While I do consider this an auto-ethnographic project, by the end of the writing process, I did feel the need to acknowledge to myself that I was creating a separate fictional entity. While I had already given my character the separate name of Paul, it was important to understand that, for the benefit of the narrative (and my own well-being), the film did not have to perfectly correspond to reality. Likewise, the amalgamation of actual persons into the characters of Hanna and Dr. McKenzie became a means to anonymize the people treating me while still using the direct language of the documents. This approach is consistent with methods described in *The Handbook of Autoethnography*, which outlines that "giving individuals pseudonyms or changing a person's demographic information is common. Creating composite characters by collapsing several people into one is another technique" (Tullis). In a way, the creation of this film has allowed me to segment this difficult period of my life into a piece of fiction that feels separate

from my experience. This is not to say that the creation of the film has been a therapeutic process set against my experience, but rather that it has removed the potency of its reality.

In navigating my own memory, I was also conscious of the risk of reducing the film to an account of my grievances with the process of treatment. In particular, the memory of being scolded for stopping my medication is one that I hold with some resentment, and it would have been easy to frame this interaction in purely oppositional terms. Instead, I found it more productive to situate this moment of scolding within the systemic structure of treatment, in which compliance is expected. In this sense, my aim was not to condemn the process, but rather to observe it as a set of conditions and consequences.

Once Paul stops returning to the clinic in the film, he no longer exists within his documents, and it is as if he has left the world itself. Narratively, this leaves the film with Hanna as the only remaining perspective through which to resolve the story. In an early draft, the film ended with Hanna placing Paul's patient folder onto a shelf in an archive, echoing Paul's marginal position within a bureaucratic treatment system. This ending felt on the nose, and if the film's narrative must end with Hanna, I wanted to take it in a more unexpected and ambiguous direction. Earlier in the film, Dr. McKenzie has an inappropriate conversation with Hanna, asking whether she has a husband and, by implication, whether she plans to have a child. This moment follows Paul's experience of impotence, as well as the *Voluntary Human Extinction Movement* video that Hanna watches just before. In the final scene, Hanna is shown with a child, which complicates our understanding of her throughout the film while maintaining a sense of ambiguity. While the world of the film is built upon impotence and anti-natalism, I felt that the ending should give some kind of reprieve from these setups and suggest that something has changed.



Image 5: Still from *Names Have Been Changed*, 2026

Casting

The next challenge was casting, which is a process that I generally find difficult. My filmmaking practice operates on a small scale with a few close collaborators, and bringing someone new into that environment often feels daunting. More than anything, my aim is to look for people who understand the atmosphere I am trying to create on set, which differs from the structure of larger productions. My preferred approach to casting is to work with actors I have collaborated with before, or to reach out to performers whose work I have seen in other films. The role of Hanna was written with frequent collaborator Eliza Martin in mind, and throughout the writing process, I shared several drafts of the script with her to get her thoughts on the character. We had previously worked together on *Otium*, and although the two characters are fundamentally different, I did find myself adapting certain aspects of the character she played in that film, who was also named Hanna, into her role in *Names Have Been Changed*. Having already cast Hanna, my strategy for casting Paul was to see how each of the candidates performed alongside Eliza, as the film ultimately depends on the relationship between the two characters. The initial round of auditions consisted of self-taped performances based on the following prompt:

“Below are the clinical notes that Hanna (Paul's psychiatrist) writes about Paul after their first session. Your task is to imagine how that initial session might have started, and perform Paul's opening moments in that interview. You can decide what Paul says and how he behaves, based on what you learn about him from the notes. No specific dialogue is required, as we're just trying to get a sense of your interpretation of the character.

Clinical Notes: Paul presented on time for his interview today. He is casually dressed and groomed. He had significant facial acne. He had good eye contact throughout the interview, and there was no evidence of increased or decreased motor activity. His mood is "not happy." His affect is full, slightly anxious, however, he was quite engaging. He had a spontaneous and appropriate smile. His speech was normal in volume, rhythm, and rate. His thought form was logical and directed. There was no evidence of perceptual abnormalities. He denied suicidal

and homicidal ideation. His insight and judgment was intact. Paul appears to be suffering a major depressive episode on a chronic background of social anxiety. Paul is interested in a trial of medication.”

I have used this prompt-based audition process many times in the past, and I find it effective for seeing how actors inhabit a character rather than simply performing specific lines. It also provided an opportunity to use some of the raw material from the medical records and observe how each of the performers responded to it. From these self-tapes, a shortlist of candidates was invited for in-person auditions that I conducted with Eliza. This time, they performed a scene from the script opposite her, allowing us to see how the two responded to one another. Having Eliza present was also helpful in sharing some of the emotional burden of the audition process, which I find quite stressful. This process also allowed us to speak with the actors one-on-one, hear their thoughts about the script, and understand if they related to the material in any way. During these in-person auditions, one actor in particular, Malcolm Green, immediately stood out. Eliza and I both felt that he brought a slightly menacing quality to the role that shifted the character in a way we had not previously considered.

I was initially determined to have a non-traditional casting process that sought people with lived mental health experience, specifically through an organization like *Workman Arts*. This approach, however, eventually raised a number of concerns for me. I felt there was an inherent exploitative element in asking someone to perform specifically because of their disability, particularly when doing so would require them to disclose that experience. As I continued mulling this over, I also felt that the casting approach would come to resemble my experience as a patient, with myself on the other end of the power dynamic. A non-traditional casting approach also raised practical questions about working with non-professional actors, which is not typically part of my process. Eliza has a theatre background, and my approach to

shooting often relies on long takes with little margin for error, so working with a more conventionally trained actor ultimately felt like the most appropriate choice for the film.

Likewise, working with professional actors does not necessarily preclude working with people who have lived experience with mental illness, which does not need to be explicitly disclosed.

Production

The clinic I attended as a teenager was part of a university hospital network, so it felt natural to situate much of the film on the *York University* campus. The brutalist architecture of many of the campus buildings also lent itself well to the indifferent visual language of the film. At the start of the film, Hanna tells Paul that if she happens to see him outside of their sessions, she will not acknowledge him unless he initiates the interaction himself. This boundary that has been stated to me by nearly every therapist or psychiatrist I have visited, and I wanted to use this professional rule as a source of narrative tension for an eventual encounter between Paul and Hanna outside of their sessions. In an earlier draft of the script, this near-encounter between Paul and Hanna occurred at a bus stop outside the clinic, where Hanna would board the bus while Paul chose to walk in order to avoid her. As the production developed, however, the logistics of shooting a bus sequence proved to be complicated and expensive. Instead, embracing the brutalist architecture of the campus, I decided to set this moment in the *Ross Building*, which features a large glass walkway in the center of its symmetrical concrete structure. Another location decision that was both practical and conceptual was the choice to use the same location as both Paul's and Hanna's apartments. Securing multiple apartments was expensive and logistically difficult, but the compromise of using a single apartment created an interesting visual parallel between Paul and Hanna. While this doubling of locations is likely invisible to most viewers, there is perhaps a subconscious connection to the two characters sharing the same home with only minor changes to production design.



Image 6: Still from *Names Have Been Changed*, 2026

Like casting, assembling a crew has always been one of the more difficult aspects of filmmaking for me. For my short film *Bracciante*, I handled nearly every production role myself, aside from my producer and a few collaborators who joined during post-production. For my feature film *Otium*, I expanded the team slightly by bringing on a director of photography and a production designer, though the crew remained intentionally small. This approach partly reflects my own anxieties about working with larger groups, as well as a lingering insecurity about allowing other people's suggestions to take precedence over my own. With *Names Have Been Changed*, I wanted to overcome these anxieties and challenge myself to work with a larger crew. In addition to my regular producing partner, Alissa Chater, we brought on an additional producer,

Benjamin Del Vasto, who helped with the early stages of crew assembly. One of Ben's first suggestions was to create a lookbook that could be shared with prospective collaborators before they joined the project. The intention was to give everyone a clear sense of the film's visual language and tone from the outset, establishing a common point of reference. For me, this also helped ease some of the anxiety that comes with inviting new people into what had previously been a very contained creative process. In practice, the expanded crew ultimately made the production much easier to manage. Having an assistant director in particular gave me more freedom to focus more directly with the actors on performance. At the same time, I did feel that this larger structure occasionally disrupted the slower and more intimate working environment of my previous films. There were moments where I found myself moving through scenes more quickly than I would have preferred, even when we were ahead of schedule, simply out of concern that I might be wasting the crew's time. Moving forward, I feel that the most productive approach for my work would be somewhere in between the small sets that I'm used to and the larger crew that was used for this film.

Post-Production

My post-production process is typically one of stepping away and returning later with some distance. Like my last two films, *Names Have Been Changed* was shot on 16mm, and I sent the footage to a lab in the United States for development and scanning, as doing this locally is significantly more expensive. Mailing the film out creates a natural pause after production, giving me a couple of weeks where I am unable to look at the material, and can decompress before beginning the editing process. In creating an edit, I often feel that my perspective on the footage is limited, particularly because many of the scenes are shot in single long takes. When approaching the material on my own, I tend to see the film only as a sequence of scenes arranged in order, placing them on the timeline as A, B, C, D, etc. My process now is to assemble subsequent rough cuts until I reach a point where I sense that something needs to change, but I can't articulate what that change should be. At this stage, I pass the film to my editor, Rick Batram, with whom I have collaborated on my last two projects. Rick will work on a new version of the cut, we will discuss what he has tried, and the film gradually evolves through these exchanges. This collaboration often allows me to break out of the sequential way I tend to view my own footage and approach the material from a different perspective.

For *Names Have Been Changed*, I created an initial cut that was faithful to the script and incorporated longer segments of online videos that were more integral to the structure of the film. I also found that I was relying on the online videos as time markers for the film, initially taking place in 2010, and then moving to 2016 in the final scene. When Rick took over the edit, his instinct was to strip back the online videos and keep things grounded between Paul and Hanna. This also made the segments of online videos more impactful when they do happen, especially with the protest videos that precede Paul throwing away his medication. Another

consideration was the narrative clarity of the film. Originally, I had an additional scene that implicitly revealed that Sylvia, Paul's girlfriend, was also a patient of Hanna's. After a work-in-progress screening with my cohort, it was clear that most people were not catching this detail, as it was only revealed by Hanna and Sylvia saying hello to each other in passing. Rick and I tried adding a scene where Hanna would read from Sylvia's patient chart, but this stood out as not fitting with the rest of the film, and dragged out a detail that was ultimately inconsequential to the narrative. In the end, we removed the scene altogether, and it made the film flow much more smoothly.

The Indifferent Camera

In my recent films, I have been aesthetically leaning towards what I would call an indifferent camera, that is, a kind of personification for the camera's perspective that is indifferent to the characters in the film. This visual language began somewhat unintentionally in *3 Second In, 6 Seconds Out*, in which I wanted to use extremely wide framing to express anxiety, allowing the main character to feel small within the space of the frame. Working with these wide images, I found that beyond anxiety, they created a literal and formal distance between the viewer and the character. In *Bracciante*, I took this a step further by shooting the entire film in various wides, with the final shot zooming out from a distance so that the character disappears within the frame. *Bracciante* was fundamentally about a character who feels that he is losing his place in the world, and so it felt apt to shoot him from a distance and deny any emotional connection that a close-up would provide. From a practical standpoint, shooting from such a distance also allowed me to disappear as the camera operator, with the actor unaware of where I was shooting from at times. *Otium* was my first film in which I used this notion of the indifferent camera deliberately, using a motorized pan head to shoot slow, continuous 360-degree rotations. These circular camera movements allowed the character, Hanna, to drift in and out of frame, continuing regardless of whether she remained visible. As the film was about the impossibility of affording a home within the current housing crisis, this visual approach was a way to mirror the structural indifference to Hanna's situation.



Image 7: Stills from the final shot in my film *Bracciante*, 2024

Names Have Been Changed uses a combination of the techniques that I have been implementing over my last few films, but has also shifted the approach so that this sense of indifference appears not only through the film's visuals, but also through the use of voiceover. While Paul is primarily framed in wide shots, and there are several moments in which the camera pans or zooms away from him, I feel that the reading of his medical records while seeing him on screen creates the greatest dissonance between his inner self and how he is observed. The frequent use of zooms, particularly extremely wide zoom outs when observing Paul, allows a kind of double function: it emphasizes a visual and physical distance between Paul and the viewer, while also introducing more expressive imagery that suggests his condition without granting direct access to it.

Another aesthetic decision that has permeated from my recent films was the choice to shoot on 16mm film. I am perhaps an aesthetic reactionary when it comes to shooting formats. If I am unhappy with technology and the general direction that the world is heading, I can at least find some solace in creating images that, both visually and practically, invoke the past. I previously completed an MA at TMU, where my research focused on technology and

image-making, particularly in how the ubiquity of smartphones might change the visual language of cinema. Building off of Sergei Eisenstein's notion of cinema as a dynamic square, in which the shape of the frame can be modified to convey "every geometrically conceivable form of the picture limit," I posited that films and other media would adapt and take on the vertical aspect ratios of these devices (Eisenstein). Accompanying this research, I made a vertically-framed short film called *No Connection*, and a separate multi-screen film (echoing the windows of a computer screen) that has never seen the light of day. I have since abandoned this technology-focused aesthetic, but a kernel of my insight from Eisenstein remains. In the contemporary landscape of filmmaking, where a variety of shooting formats are available, one can and should choose the format that fits their practical and ideological needs. In *Bracciante*, part of my aesthetic goal was to create a flattened sense of time and history by combining 16mm cinematography with 16mm archival footage. This creates a blurred line between the journey that Anthony is making in the present and the journey that his grandparents made in the past. For *Otium*, this also worked to highlight a sense of a society in decline through a visual texture that references the past. Likewise, as *Names Have Been Changed* is visually dense with documents, the association of 16mm with archival material suits the project well, and the film itself can be seen as a kind of archival documentation of Paul.

The Wounded Storyteller

In *The Wounded Storyteller*, Arthur W. Frank outlines three types of illness narrative: restitution narrative, quest narrative, and chaos narrative. The restitution narrative focuses on recovery and a return to health, while the quest narrative frames illness as a journey of self-discovery that allows the sufferer to derive meaning from the experience. In the chaos narrative, which is closest to the direct experience of illness, Frank explains that “stories are chaotic in their absence of narrative order” and “events are told as the storyteller experiences life” (Frank). In basing the film around my medical records, *Names Have Been Changed* can perhaps be seen as falling under Frank’s chaos narrative, as these records recount the experience of my illness as it happens, with no path to recovery that might be found in a restitution narrative, or insight that might be found in a quest narrative. Likewise, the fact that they are written by an external observer, rather than my own personal account, adds to the lack of narrativization. In writing the script, this initially proved daunting, as I felt that this sense of anti-narrative would result in an unwatchable film. Frank characterizes chaos narratives as having a “syntactic structure of ‘and then and then and then’,” that is, a telling of events that does not have a fixed chronology (Frank). Bringing Hanna into the story was not only a way to create a mirror for Paul, but also a means to introduce structure into a narrative that might otherwise be a series of “and then” events with no conclusion. By the end of the film, Paul disappears from the narrative, as he leaves the clinic and there is no longer any document trail with which to look into his life. At this point, Hanna becomes the viewer’s only mediator within the film, as we watch the conclusion of her own narrative.

In preparing for this project, I re-read my copy of Alphonse Daudet’s *In The Land of Pain*, which, ironically, was given to me by a friend around the time that I visited the clinic.

Daudet's book is a collection of notes and journal entries written while being treated for *tabes dorsalis*, a consequence of syphilis. Absent of a narrative structure, these notes present a clear example of chaos narrative. The book ends with an uneventful dialogue with other patients, followed by a contextual note from editor Julian Barnes that this was Daudet's final entry, and that he would pass away three years later. Daudet himself has an awareness of the futility of narrating his pain, writing that "words only come when everything is over, when things have calmed down. They refer only to memory, and are either powerless or untruthful" (Daudet). This distance of memory also matches Frank's chaos narrative, which he describes the telling of as "already taking place at a distance" and "reflected on retrospectively" (Frank). While my medical records provide a direct account of my experience, the act of re-telling the story inherently creates a level of distance. Likewise, while the records may be seen as an objective account, there is a level of subjectivity to the details and manner in which they are written. In her introduction to *Depression and Narrative: Telling the Dark*, Hilary Clark writes, "given the cognitive impediments and distortions associated with depression, most literature on the subject is generated either by clinicians, who can document only what they observe, or by patients in remission, who must reconfigure their experiences, through the transformative lens of memory" (Clark). My challenge (or perhaps opportunity) in creating this piece of auto-fiction was to bridge the gap between time and memory, both in the details that are lost to time, but also in the memories that do not suit the fiction.

Authority and Agency

In the process evaluation study that was eventually published by the clinic, the conclusions stated that while many of the youths did not return for follow-up, the process was deemed effective based on survey data collected from the patients who remained. In creating this film, I have given myself some agency to reclaim this experience as one of the patients who did not return. In part, this project has been a means to question the structures of the medical system itself. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault writes that “it is not as a scientist that *homo medicus* has authority in the asylum, but as a wise man. If the medical profession is required, it is as a juridical and moral guarantee, not in the name of science” (Foucault). This suggests that treatment is not purely a scientific process, but rather a structure of authority that the patient is required to submit to. I do not wish to argue that treatment is wholly ineffective or illegitimate, but rather to acknowledge that it exists within a system that produces its own hierarchies. Writing about the mental health system in *Speaking of Sadness*, David Allen Karp writes, “recognition of medicine’s great achievements does not prevent me from holding the view that science is itself a belief system with great potential for error and for the misuse of power to control people” (Karp). Part of the reason for placing Hanna within this structure as a resident is to make that hierarchy more visible. Hanna exists in a position of authority over Paul, while also remaining subordinate to Dr. McKenzie. By placing Hanna within the middle of this hierarchy, it allows her to have a more ambiguous narrative connection between the two other characters.

The framework of medical care itself requires belief in its authority. As Foucault further notes, “as positivism imposes itself upon medicine and psychiatry, this practice becomes more and more obscure, the psychiatrist’s power more and more miraculous, and the doctor-patient couple sinks deeper into a strange world.” (Foucault). A humorous demonstration of this tension

can be found in Lars von Trier's supernatural medical series *The Kingdom*, set in a hospital where doctors operate with absolute confidence in their scientific authority. The opening monologue describes the hospital as a site where "life was to be charted, and ignorance and superstition never to shake the bastions of science again," yet the series quickly undercuts this claim through the presence of supernatural phenomena and increasingly irrational behaviour from the medical staff. The institution presents itself as rational, but operates through a kind of belief system that is indistinct from the superstition it claims to have replaced. I do not raise this point to invoke the supernatural, or to deny medical science, but rather to prod at the limits of this scientific certainty in a system that can fail its patients. *Names Have Been Changed* has allowed me to push back against this authority by being able to recontextualize the objective and authoritative documents of my medical history into my own narrative.

Conclusion

In making this film, I set out to work from a set of documents that carry the weight of objectivity, but do not necessarily cohere with my memory and lived experience. Rather than creating a straightforward account, these dipoles of memory and documentation allowed me to create a film of aesthetic and narrative ambiguity. Through the split narrative structure and aesthetic distance, Paul's experience is never fully accessible, and Hanna's observations never fully achieve the objectivity they present. The film itself is the only reality in which these differing accounts can make sense as one. The title *Names Have Been Changed* suggests a distance between lived experience and its reconstruction, and with that distance, this film has granted me agency over a clinical narrative that was originally produced within a system of observation and control. This reconstructed narrative, however, reflects the structures of treatment, documentation, and authority that remain in place.

The process of creating *Names Have Been Changed* has been one of great difficulty, both in personal vulnerability and the logistical challenges that are part of making any film. Looking at the film practically, I can see it as a continuation of the aesthetic choices I have been developing over my last few films. I would like to say that it does not fit within cleanly defined categories such as a mental health film, or a film that exists as a work of Mad Art, but I suppose that I am not the one to decide the context in which it will be received. Engaging with the representation of mental illness in cinema, *Names Have Been Changed* shifts attention away from illness itself and redirects the viewer to the systems that document and codify the experience of illness. The use of my medical records does not give me access to a truer version of events, just as my memory does not correct the omissions of the records. Building from the notion of chaos narrative and pushing back against structures of authority, the film speaks to the

fallibility of both perspectives and provides a new framework to explore the depiction of mental illness in cinema. In thinking through the gap between experience and documentation, the remediation of these records into narrative presents a concurrence between the two, holding both perspectives while producing a new account from their contradictions.

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Filmography

3 Seconds In, 6 Seconds Out. Directed by Christopher Beaulieu, 2022.

Afterschool. Directed by Antonio Campos, 2008.

An Elephant Sitting Still. Directed by Hu Bo, 2018.

Bracciante. Directed by Christopher Beaulieu, 2024.

Fail to Appear. Directed by Antoine Bourges, 2017.

The Kingdom. Directed by Lars Von Trier, 1994.

Melancholia. Directed by Lars Von Trier, 2011.

Notes on an Appearance. Directed by Ricky D'Ambrose, 2018.

Otium. Directed by Christopher Beaulieu, 2026.

Spiral Jetty. Directed by Ricky D'Ambrose, 2017.

Taxi Driver. Directed by Martin Scorsese, 1976.