

FORT GARRY LIONS POOL

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ABSTRACT

“Fort Garry Lions Pool” is an experimental film about two young women climbing the fence into a public pool at night. This paper tracks the creation of the film from its inception in 2020, production in 2022, up until its completion in 2024. The role of intuition as both subject matter and guiding creative tool is examined. This paper is also a reflection on the collaborative filmmaking process, charting the attempts made to foster a non-hierarchical working environment. The film's thematic and stylistic choices are also explored, centering around the symbolic role the Fort Garry Lions Pool plays in representing the revealing and understanding of trauma within a close friendship.

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SEEMS LIKE A DREAM

I wanted to conjure something that felt like a dream. Grasping a half forgotten memory. Walking through a neighbourhood you used to know. A friendship that faded away. A youthful memory with an undercurrent of dread. A coming of age horror art film. A film about the time when you could only sense, before you knew.

Seems like a dream. Seems like a dream. Seems like a dream.

CONCEPTION

The idea that became “Fort Garry Lions Pool” came to me in June of 2020. It was the early days of COVID. I was waking up from such realistic dreams that it would take me the entire morning to parse my dream life from my real life. My dreams were more emotionally potent than my waking life quarantined in a Winnipeg apartment. I started keeping a detailed dream journal to separate the two worlds. It was the longest journaling practice of my entire life. The setting that recurred the most were the suburban nighttime streets I haunted as a teenager. How could I translate the feeling of these intense dreams into a film?

I left the city to spend time with my parents in Riding Mountain National Park. I was walking down a path in the forest when I was hit with an idea. It was the type of idea that sticks with you. I stewed in it for a moment and then immediately called my friend Riva Billows. “I just had an idea for a movie we should make. It’s about two women breaking into the Fort Garry Lions Pool at night. It feels related to your writing. We should write it together”. I was referring to one sentence in a draft of Riva’s writing I had read before leaving on my trip: “I have flashbacks to dropping her off at his apartment. Back then, at 18, I didn’t fully understand why my stomach felt strange as I watched her walk into his building”¹ (Billows). This piece of writing was lodged in my brain when images for a film started piecing together in my mind. I had the conviction that a suburban dream world could have an emotional core . The first images that came to me were of two young people climbing the fence into Fort Garry Lions Pool. A close up of hands grasping the wires. A wide shot of someone climbing silhouetted by the lights of the pool. Something monumentally intense and personal is about to be revealed in the water but is interrupted by a security guard. The pool would act as a sacred space where two people could melt into one. It had to be two women and it had to be Fort Garry Lions Pool.

¹ Billows, Riva. “Punchline.” 2020, 8 Apr. 2020, 2020.workingdraftmagazine.com/blog/2020/04/08/punchline/.

After receiving the initial idea, I came back to Winnipeg and began writing with Riva. We would sit together in a quarantined Dorchester Ave apartment living room drinking bottles of red wine (Carlo Rossi 1.5L). We would write exclusively at night, speaking our way through the movie together. We would get a little further each time we discussed it, fleshing out the nascent ideas. The film would be about two young women. Around 19 years old. I did not want there to be any cell phones. The women would be walking through the Winnipeg suburbs on a hot summer night. They would climb the fence into the Fort Garry Lions Pool. In the pool, a transformation would occur. Something serious would be imparted between the two women. Before things could materialize from the abstract, a security guard would chase them out of the pool. They would try and catch a bus, but it would be too late in the evening. One of the women wanted to go to her boyfriend's house.

THE PITCH

Riva and I entered the Gimli Film Festival's "Emerging Filmmakers Pitch Contest". This was the major motivator to develop the idea. I did not want the film to be overly written. We would not write a screenplay. We would not storyboard. A structure would be decided upon and within that structure would be room for collaborative improvisation in the imagemaking. We pitched the idea at the 2020 Gimli Film Festival but were ultimately unsuccessful. In preparation for the pitch, Riva and I went down to Fort Garry Lions Pool and took research pictures on a disposable camera. With no money, Riva sick with mono, and the summer ending; the fate of the film was uncertain. I could not let go of this abstract idea of two friends sneaking into Fort Garry Lions Pool.



Reference Pictures by Riva Billows & Ryan Steel, 2020

INTUITION

“Fort Garry Lions Pool” is a film about intuition that was made with intuition as its primary tool. When Riva and I conceptualized the film, we talked a lot about moments of realization within friendships. We had both had recently had our creative worlds destabilized after whisper networks started to grow about people within them. I was having the same intense conversations with different people. Whispered tones discussing abuse with an intense secrecy. I wanted to capture the feeling of the moment before knowing, when you can only sense something was off. The film would be about the feeling of intuitive alarm bells ringing. I wanted the film to be tender and without any didacticism. I did not want to make a movie about reckoning. I wanted to make a film about looking away from overwhelming realizations.

I have been asked if “Fort Garry Lions Pool” is a movie about romantic love. Is this a story about unrequited love? I am interested in this reading of the film, but it was not my intention. I fear what putting concrete language onto the emotional landscape of this film will do. I want the movie to have an endless and mysterious aura that can only be understood by feeling. Intuition acts as both subject matter and the animating creative force behind the film. I wanted the process of making “Fort Garry Lions Pool” to be one of surrendering to the unconscious and following the moments of clarity found in that process. I wanted to follow Andrej Tarkovsky’s description of artistic intuition in his book “Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema”:

“intuition is tantamount to conviction, to faith. It is a state of mind, not a way of thinking. Science is empirical, whereas the conception of images is governed by the dynamic of revelation. It’s a question of sudden flashes of illumination — like scales falling from the eyes; not in relation to the parts, however, but to the whole, to the infinite, to what does not fit into conscious thought.”² (Tarkovsky P.41).

I wanted to make something that would mean different things to different people. In my mind, the feelings that inspired the movie are very different from the feelings people will experience watching the film. It is a purposeful mirage of a film. I do not think everyone will relate to this film, but I believe that the ones who do will find something special within it. The aim was that through an intuitive process the film would be abstracted beyond one singular meaning, in search of a deeper emotional affect. This intuitive method allows the film to speak to the subconscious, inviting viewers to feel and interpret the emotional currents beneath the surface.

² Tarkovsky, Andrej. *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*. Austin, Texas, U.S: University of Texas Press, 1986.

THEME

I deeply relate to David Lynch in his book “Catching the Big Fish”, when he wrote:

“A film should stand on its own. It’s absurd if a filmmaker needs to say what a film means in words. The world in the film is a created one, and people sometimes love going into that world. For them that world is real. And if people find out certain things about how something was done, or how this means this or that means that, the next time they see the film, these things enter into the experience. And then the film becomes different. I think it’s so precious and important to maintain that world and not say certain things that could break the experience.”³ (Lynch, P.19)

“Fort Garry Lions Pool” is a film about a lot of things, but in part is a slice in the story of confronting and revealing trauma. The film delves into the difficulty and horror of being unable to disclose abuse, and the corresponding unease of realizing a close friend is experiencing intimate partner violence. The character played by Riva is on the verge of disclosing her experience of intimate partner violence when she is chased by a security guard. Her friend watches in horror, intuiting that something is terribly wrong.

One of the ethical challenges of the film was respecting the boundaries and privacy of the real-life experiences that loosely inspired it. I do not want to exploit real-life stories that are not my own. The greater aim is to explore the hauntological affect abuse has within a friendship. As Colin Davis puts it in his essay *État Présent: Hauntology, Spectres, and Phantoms* “The secret is not unspeakable because it is taboo, but because it cannot not (yet) be articulated in the languages available to us. The ghost pushes at the boundaries of language and thought. The

³ Lynch, David. *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity*. TarcherPerigee, 2016.

interest here, then, is not in secrets, understood as puzzles to be resolved, but in secrecy.”⁴ (Davis, 379). The film is about the feeling of getting close to opening up with someone, missing that chance, and living with the haunting that follows.

I aimed to avoid retraumatizing viewers with gratuitous or sensationalized violence, abstracting it to a subconscious level so that viewers would be moved without being able to pinpoint why. All of the men are obfuscated and are borderline unintelligible. The abusive boyfriend character is only seen as a shadow in the window, and the security guard is only shown in blurry disembodied close-up. The shot of the boyfriend in the window borrows from Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, suggesting unseen horrors and adding to the atmosphere of lurking danger. There is no violence in the film, only the reflected subtextual impact of violence. The near disclosure in the pool could symbolize any trauma buried secretly. Intimate partner violence was my portal into understanding what I was to depict on screen. I did not want to put any language or visuals depicting the trauma, keeping the trauma a haunting presence which is what I had to contribute to the cultural conversation around abuse.

One of the biggest nagging fears I faced while working on this film was a never ending internal monologue that asked “so what?”. Why would anyone care about this movie made by me? I’m a white guy who has never experienced intimate partner violence myself, why should I be making this film? I constantly questioned if I even should be working on this film throughout the entire process. That was the key factor in my decision to open up my process from the very beginning, and why working without hierarchy was crucial for this film. I wanted the crew of primarily women to feel comfortable and have their voices heard throughout production. The film is not an

⁴ Davis, Colin. “Hauntology, spectres and phantoms.” *French Studies*, vol. 59, no. 3, 1 July 2005, pp. 373–379, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fs/kni143>.

object outside of me. It is connected to me, my past, my experiences, as well as my crew and their experiences.

The pool in the film is a space of intense spiritual connection. It serves as a symbolic landscape. It's a sanctuary where the character's emotional boundaries begin to dissolve. The water acts as a conduit for an intimate transference of energy. The pool is where two people are rendered liquid. A merging of body and mind. Teresa Brennan writes in her book "The Transmission of Affect": "The transmission of affect means that we are not self-contained in terms of our energies. There is no secure distinction between the "individual" and the "environment" ⁵ (Brennan P.6). The water of the pool dissolves the boundaries between the women and their environment. Its reflective and enveloping qualities acts as a conduit where communication can begin without the use of language. It represents the possibility to experience true interconnectedness within an intimate friendship.

FORT GARRY LIONS POOL

In her essay "Place", Dorothy Allison writes "Place is often something you don't see because you're so familiar with it that you devalue it or dismiss it or ignore it. But in fact it is the information your reader most wants to know" ⁶ (Allison, P.3). This echoes how I feel about setting in my films. I want to get to know places through cinema and I want to show people places that mean a lot to me in my films.

⁵ Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca, New York, U.S: Cornell University Press, 2014.

⁶ Allison, Dorothy. "Place." *The Writer's Notebook*, Tinhouse, 2009, pp. 5–15.

The Fort Garry Lions Pool was always the anchor point for the film. There has never been a film about Fort Garry Lions Pool. It is a setting in Winnipeg that I knew personally that had yet to be explored in the city's rich cinematic tradition. I cannot tell you why the film had to be set in Fort Garry Lions Pool, but every time I tried to imagine shooting in a different pool the spark that excited me in the first place would fade away.

Fort Garry Lions Pool was the pool I would climb into at night with my friends as a teenager. One night, I was chased out by a security guard and had to quickly grab my clothes and run away. Those are some of my fondest memories. I completely condone trespassing on government owned property and hope that my film inspires more teenagers to climb fences. That feeling of nervous excitement was a key inspiration for "Fort Garry Lions Pool". The feeling of getting away with something you are not supposed to is key to my DIY filmmaking ethos. Whether I am being confronted by Portage Place Mall security for my film "Portage Place Mall (with love)" or returning thousands of dollars worth of props after using them to big box stores for the sets in "Late Summer". The energy of mischief runs deep in all of my films. My films are anti-authoritarian at their core. The security guard figure in the film represents the authority crushing a tender moment.

I felt compelled to document this specific pool at this specific time. There is a certain ineffable beauty about Fort Garry Lions Pool at night that I was trying to preserve on film. The lighting and architecture speak directly to a deep part of my soul. The timing felt of great importance because the "Fort Garry" neighbourhood where the pool is located is currently in the midst of gentrification. Many staples of Fort Garry like the "Pembina Hotel", "Original Pancake House", and "Capri Motel" have been torn down since the conception of this film to make way for condos. The Pembina Hotel specifically has been transformed into a garish modern condo building bearing the neighbourhood nickname of the old hotel: "The Pemby". There has been a concerted effort to destroy the dingy post-WWII brutalist suburban charm that defines the area

in my memory. I wanted to make a document of the pool's beauty before it is inevitably turned into a parking lot.

WINNIPEG

I have been making films since I started taking classes at the Winnipeg Film Group as a teenager. Since then, my art practice has been split between straight narrative (“Late Summer”, “I’ve Got Blisters On My Fingers”, “The Birdwatcher”), experimental documentaries (“Cease & Desist”, “Portage Place Mall”, “On The Bus”), and music videos (“After the Flood”, “Satan”, “Hold Me In Your Mind”). When I started “Fort Garry Lions Pool” I was caught between these worlds. A question I was trying to answer through making this film was “How do I combine my narrative, abstract experimentalism, and music video into one harmonious form”. I always make films by catching ideas and following them with my intuition. The movies flow through me. I steered the creation of “Fort Garry Lions Pool” by trying to make an experimental film that had a narrative and characters. The characters would have arcs but the story had to be opaque enough that the visuals were what carried the audience through the film. I wanted to create mysterious and striking images that would push the viewer to discover a story. I have ideas about what the film means but in the end I want the visuals to create their own narrative.

Since I first joined the Winnipeg Film Group as a 12 year old, all I have ever wanted to do was make movies at the Winnipeg Film Group. My brain has been completely rewired by the workshops and films of this utopian film Co-op. I have been largely influenced by watching films by Winnipeg Film Group members including: John Paizs, Matthew Rankin, Mike Maryniuk, Rhayne Vermette, Leslie Supnet, Ed Ackerman, Shereen Jerret, Ryan Mckenna, Erica Eyres, Isiah Medina, Richard Condie, Guy Maddin, Milos Mitrovic, Fabian Velasco, Tavis Putnam, Eric Peterson, Lasha Mowchun, and many many more. The Winnipeg filmmakers that came before

me shape the way I view the power of cinema and the world. This outsider lineage of artist driven films informs everything about my filmmaking process. One of the Winnipeg Film Group's strengths is that it provides many different models for being an independent filmmaker away from Hollywood Hegemony that defines most cinematic images. The films that changed my perception so radically were scrappy, avant-garde, and unabashedly homemade. Through my time at the Winnipeg Film Group, I learned to strive towards a utopian outsider model of filmmaking started by hippies in the 70s that continues through generations of weirdos.

Working in the artist centred tradition of the Winnipeg Film Group is an important history for me. I want to make movies in a way that directly opposes the way film is produced in Winnipeg currently. "The Manitoba Film and Video Production Tax Credit" has dramatically shifted the landscape of cinema in Manitoba. The Manitoba Tax Credit is the most substantial in Canada, up to 65% (Canada.ca). This has resulted in a flood of primarily American film productions coming to Winnipeg. Terrible movies like "The Christmas Cookie Catastrophe" have all been filmed in Winnipeg the last few years all because the tax credit provides them with the cheapest labour in Canada. This trickle down approach to arts funding is the primary source of provincial film funding in Manitoba. The tax credit is close to inaccessible to actual Manitoban filmmakers because funding from grants from all three levels of the Canadian government grinds the tax credit, reducing it down to basically nothing. I was told by Manitoba Film and Music that the administrative labour of the tax credit would not be worth the amount they would give to a feature film funded through Telefilm or the Arts Councils. The only way weirdo Manitoba art films are made are through the Arts Councils and maybe Telefilm, so the tax credit pushes Manitoban filmmakers out of the province to places with financial support beneficial to them. This system legitimizes the labour of paper pushing arts administrators and burdens filmmakers to the point that the scraps they hand out are not worth our administrative labour.

As well as leaving the funds inaccessible the tax credit leaves Manitoban Filmmakers in working demanding and generally uncreative crew jobs on American films. It is a waste of the talent of the auteurs that in years past would be given budgets to make art film. To the bureaucrats running the Manitoba Film Tax Credit, filmmakers are a source of cheap labour to be pimped out to American production companies to produce garbage for streaming services.

I see the rise of the Manitoba Film Tax Credit as an existential threat to the type of experimental punk rock filmmaking that first inspired me. Throughout the conception and realization of “Fort Garry Lions Pool”, I wanted to do everything in opposition to the tax credit system and the images it produces. We would make low fidelity grainy images instead of expensive clear ones. We would work non-hierarchically instead of the rigid department system of the Winnipeg Hallmark films movement. We would work through intuition and improvisation instead of with a script.

The divide between the “Manitoba Tax Credit Movement” and the type of film I wanted to make goes back to the very foundation of Manitoba as a province. One of the most insightful readings of what creates the Winnipeg aesthetic in cinema is from Matthew Rankin. In the book “Establishing Shots: An Oral History of the Winnipeg Film Group”, Rankin outlines the tension between what he calls the New Nation and the Orange Lodge. The former, an anti-establishment force, traced back to Louis Riel’s vision for the land now called Manitoba. The latter, a pro-establishment force looking to crush the New Nation.

My own reading of Winnipeg history is that there has been, throughout time, a constant tension between two systems of identification. On the one hand, you have what you might call the New Nation. For me, this is the Winnipeg that emerged out of Louis Riel’s Provisional Government, during the Red River tensions of 1869-70. To me, Riel was totally punk-rock, and built up this brave,

anti-establishment coalition, which would resist the brazen entitlements of mainstream Anglo-America and insist upon a new idea of nation. To me, that spirit is still shining bright, particularly in Winnipeg artists, and forms one major ventricle in Winnipeg's beating heart. The other ventricle - the right ventricle, let's say - falls under the metaphor that I will call the Orange Lodge. For me, the Orange Lodge is a Winnipeg that rejects the originality of the New Nation and seeks to crush it. This is the Winnipeg of John Christian Schultz, the Citizen's Committee of One Thousand, of Portage Place and CentreVenture -- it's a pro-establishment, pro-development Winnipeg. A Winnipeg that seeks to conform to mainstream Anglo-America and revel in its ill-begotten economic spoils. ⁷ (Nikkel, 341)

The Manitoba government attempting to crush culture is a force as old as the unjust execution of Louis Riel. It is the heart of the answer to the question I get asked at every Q&A: "Why are Winnipeg films like that".

Recently, I was working with a long-time industrial film worker on a scrappy Winnipeg Film Group art film. We were trying to get a smoke machine to work in the forest. He was slumming it on the crew of this low-budget production and we only had limited tools at hand. I had devised a convoluted way to get the smoke machine working with a small battery typically used to charge a cellphone. He looked at me and said "I come from a world of logic, and this is not logical. I'm not going to do that". This exemplifies the dichotomy between the scrappy filmmaking of the Winnipeg Film Group school versus the rigid and unimaginative methods of the Manitoba Tax Credit school. The Tax Credit film is unimaginative and quick to conform to Anglo-Hollywood methods and hierarchy.

⁷ Nikkel, Kevin. *Establishing Shots: An Oral History of the Winnipeg Film Group*. Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada: University of Manitoba Press, 2023.

My work on “Fort Garry Lions Pool” was an attempt to make a film by throwing out logic and the way things have been done in the film industry in favour of a purely intuition driven way of working. This method would be an active effort to rebel against the commercially driven Christmas Movie Industrial Complex movement of the Manitoba Tax Credit. I wanted to nurture the anti-establishmentarian streak that makes Winnipeg such a unique regional cinema. Before starting work on this film, I was fueled by an anger towards the “limited” attitude of industrialized filmmaking that I was surrounded by in Winnipeg. I was ready to dream up new modes of Winnipeg cinema.

I first saw clips from the film “Ste. Anne” when Rhayne Vermette came to speak to the teen filmmaking workshop I was leading through the Winnipeg Film Group in January of 2021. The images were unlike any Winnipeg Film Group film I had ever seen. They were full of otherworldly ethereal quality that felt like spiritually fresh territory I had yet to see be explored in the world of Winnipeg cinema.

Shortly after seeing pieces of “Ste. Anne”, I attended a class Rhayne led at the Winnipeg Film Group called “Obliterating Conventional Expectations of Narrative”. I was in the process of emptying my apartment in Winnipeg to move to Toronto to work on this film at York University and was completely galvanized by the idea of destroying conventional narrative. One of the key points in the syllabus was labelled “Beyond the Industrial Complex”. It was described as “Story building through collaboration and community – intimate and private acts of storytelling”. This was a key inspiration for me in making my film. I was fed up with the industrialized turn the Winnipeg film community has taken in recent years. Listening to Rhayne talk about new possibilities in film, ones that centered around deep collaboration with the people around you and private stories was refreshing and solidified how I was going to approach “Fort Garry Lions Pool”. Key lessons I learned from Rhayne’s class were to work with small crews, destroy the

hierarchy of the film set, and welcome divine intervention. I took those lessons to heart and they all acted as guiding principles through the production of “Fort Garry Lions Pool”.

The first time I saw “Ste. Anne” in full was right after I moved to Toronto. It played at the TIFF and it was everything I dreamed it would be. It proved to me you could make an amazing movie with insular storytelling and a non-hierarchical crew structure.

SHOEGAZE

My greatest influence in my art making is music. If I had the talent I would stop making films and become a musician. I am influenced by the ability for music to convey abstract emotion and am jealous of how audiences generally first and foremost approach music emotionally. I am also deeply inspired by the DIY ethos of musicians, particularly 90s indie rock such as Phil Elverum of “The Microphones”, or the sprawling Elephant 6 collective. The scrappy musicians who share houses with a pile of other artists and set up their own shows influence how I live my life. I am inspired by indie rock in part because the technical limitations do not hold back these artists from creating engaging work.

Cinema is held back by expectation of narrative. When a film moves into abstraction, it gets relegated into the experimental genre. I wanted to make a film that felt more like a song than a film. To reach that benchmark, I conceptualized “Fort Garry Lions Pool” as a shoegaze song. Shoegaze is defined by Pete Prown and HP Newquist in their book “Legends of Rock Guitar” as “Musicians who played trancelike, ethereal music, that was composed of numerous guitars playing heavy droning chords wrapping in echo effects and phase shifters”⁸ (Prown & Newquist, 237). Shoegaze is known for overwhelming ethereal guitar textures achieved through layers of

⁸ Prown, Pete and Newquist, HP.. *Legends of Rock Guitar: The Essential Reference of Rock's Greatest Guitarists*. Hal Leonard, 2002.

effects. The words are rendered unintelligible by effects and are drowned out by swirling distorted guitars. The lack of recognizable language in shoegaze impacted my decision to make the dialogue in "Fort Garry Lions Pool" unintelligible. I find a shoegaze band can take me to an emotional place I cannot describe with words because of unintelligible lyrics. The My Bloody Valentine song "To Here Knows When" is an essential influence on the tone and atmosphere I was emulating with "Fort Garry Lions Pool". A feeling of tumbling forever in an amorphous pool.

When I got the scans of our film back for the first time, I was taken aback by the gate smearing that had affected nearly half of our footage. The light was streaking, causing a warbling blur that covered the images we shot. This was an unintentional product of divine intervention that I embraced in the spirit of the Vermette method. In retrospect, I realize the gate smearing is the most "shoegazey" thing about the film. The gate smear mirrors My Bloody Valentine's Kevin Shields' glide guitar technique. Kevin Shields strums his guitar while holding the tremolo bar to create a warping fluttering pitch effect. The gate smearing is a visual analog to this classic shoegaze effect.

DANCE

While I was studying in Toronto, I had the pleasure of assisting my fellow MFA student Jennifer Laiwint during her artist residency at the Toronto Dance Theatre. I worked as a videographer, integrating myself with the contemporary dance troupe to film their improvisations. I tapped into an unhinged handheld camera style that mirrored the dynamism and spontaneity of the contemporary dancers. This hands-on experience of merging dance and cinematography became a vital source of inspiration for "Fort Garry Lions Pool," shaping the film's visual language in profound ways. I do not know anything about dance, but after the residency I realized that the camera operator can act as a dancer. During the residency when I started

feeding off the energy of the dancers and moving the camera wildly, the footage would have a dance quality. The influence of this residency is most visible during the purely abstract shots outside the pool where I swung the camera recklessly. I wanted "Fort Garry Lions Pool" to have camera work that would feel like a dance. I wanted to work in the intersection of camera operator and dancer. Finding harmony in the place where these two roles meet within the viscerally immersive exaggerated camera movements.

SHINGLES

Two months prior to embarking on the filming of "Fort Garry Lions Pool," I was working on a music video and developed shingles. Shingles is a painful nerve infection triggered by the same virus responsible for chickenpox. It is often activated by stress. If you are an independent filmmaker, you already know how stressful of a lifestyle it is. An independent film is always a miracle. They are a near impossible battle against deadlines, financial pressures, the natural world, your mind, and various bureaucracies. All of this in order to make something very few people will even watch. I learned the hard way that my relentless pace was a breeding ground for stress-induced health issues like shingles. The shingles made working so much harder than it already is. I was overwhelmed with fatigue on set and had to take constant breaks. My experience with shingles served as a wake-up call, reminding me of the importance of my well-being amid the demands of filmmaking. It made clear the detrimental effects of pushing myself to the brink of collapse incessantly for film.

Gearing up for "Fort Garry Lions Pool", I made a concerted effort to value gentleness and compassion towards myself and others. I worked to strike a balance between my ambition and self-preservation. Instead of fretting endlessly about the upcoming shoot, I decided to trust the intuitive and collaborative process that I had set up for myself.

HOW TO BREAK INTO A PUBLIC POOL

One of the most challenging parts of making this film was gaining access to the Fort Garry Lions Pool. The bureaucracy of a city government is the antithesis of DIY filmmaking. At first, I emailed the city of Winnipeg's Film Liaison to see if I could have access to the pool and received no reply. Then I emailed the pool management and still received no reply. So, I called 311 and got bounced around between different City of Winnipeg departments, all claiming they could not help me because it was not their job. Eventually I was referred back full circle to the Film Liaison Officer but was given a phone number. I was told that I could film at the pool if enough time was given and if I got production insurance. I went through two rounds of insurance with York University because the city of Winnipeg deemed the first insurance insufficient. I had spent over two months doing emails and calls with the Film Liaison and kept being told that the date I could get into the pool had to be pushed back. July was nearing an end, so we decided to film everything except the swimming scenes with the promise that we could film inside Fort Garry Lions Pool in August. The idea that we could film in the pool was dangled in front of me for months. Eventually, I was told that there was no way I could film in the pool. The city required a lifeguard and there a COVID related shortage of lifeguards. I was not allowed to bring in a lifeguard from another town or province. The Film Liaison Officer offered some suggestions of private pools to film in but we had already shot the exteriors at Fort Garry Lions. I spent a day feeling depressed and location scouting the private pool, but none of them had the right feel. So, I decided we would trespass into the pool for real.

CREW

The decisions I made while assembling the crew of "Fort Garry Lions Pool" were made entirely around who I wanted to spend time with. It is essential to my creative process that I work with

positive people who will foster a collaborative atmosphere. Making movies is a stressful and gruelling process, and I only want to do it if there is a genuine community-minded approach.

The crew consisted of Riva Billows, Sophie Smith-Dostmohamed, Jesse de Rocquigney, Karen Remoto, and myself. Riva and Sophie were the actors. Jesse has skills and experience in cinematography. Karen has skills and experience with sound recording. Though they oversaw the recording of image and sound, their roles were not segregated into a single category. Everyone on the crew used the Bolex at one point. I aimed to blur the lines between traditional crew roles and authority structures. It was important to me to foster an environment of shared responsibility and creativity.

Before shooting, Riva, Sophie, and I went on walks together near the pool to discuss the film. During these walks, we delved into our personal histories, exploring our individual experiences. We came up with ideas about the characters' relationship and how it changes throughout the film. We created structures we could improvise on once it came time to shoot. We spent time cultivating open communication as a team outside of the pressure of a film set. Prioritizing relationship-building was key to fostering an environment where Riva and Sophie were encouraged to share their insights, ideas, and concerns freely when it came time to shoot.

LIGHTING

Our approach to lighting in "Fort Garry Lions Pool" was centered around flexibility and adaptability. While natural light was our preferred choice for its organic quality, we also used portable LED lights when there was not enough ambient light to get an exposure. Their versatility allowed us to quickly set up without power and permits. I did not want to fall into the trap of lugging around pointless gear we never used and spending precious time on overly complicated lighting setups. During a discussion in class I was asked about how we would get

an exposure shooting at night on 16mm film. The solutions to this problem that were discussed included renting industrial movie lighting. Huge lights that require generators and a crew of multiple people to run. This was antithetical to the filmmaking approach I was going for. Truthful, I did not know how the film would look once we shot it. I trusted that we would get an exposure and that the results would be interesting. The aesthetic of the film came from shooting with natural light and letting the colours of the environment affect the image. I wanted the home movie quality that comes with shooting on a Bolex. I wanted to explore the abstract world of hazy film grain. The aesthetic world of the film comes from the acceptance of the limited resources we had on hand. I am bored by well lit digital films that look like car commercials. I wanted to make a film that felt handmade and real. The aim was not to disguise that we shot the film with mostly natural light.

SHOOTING

“Fort Garry Lions Pool” was shot in four days. We shot the majority of the film over the last July weekend of 2022. We shot the pool stuff later in August. A year after, I did a day of additional shooting by myself.

1) JULY 30, 2022

The first day of shooting began at Fort Garry Lions Pool. At the time, I was still waiting to hear back about filming inside the pool. There was an improvisational tone to shooting. There was no script or storyboard with us. When I shoot with a storyboard, I follow that document and shoot all the shots I planned. When I shoot with a script, I shoot coverage style. Coverage style captures the entire scenes from various angles to edit together in the edit. By shooting without a script and storyboard, we had to rely on intuition and feeling our way through scenes. We only knew when a scene was done when it felt done. We started off the day by getting comfortable in the environment shooting landscape and detail shots. Some of these made the final cut, like the shot of the street lamp. We shot way more than what ended up in the final movie, surveying the

pool and surrounding area. After the landscape shots, I put my experience shooting dance to use by filming the grass and fence. I swung the camera wildly and clicked the shutter as fast as I could to get a disjointed slow smeary frame rate. I knew I wanted this kind of detail but had no idea how it would fit into the film. We shot Riva and Sophie climbing the fence and running away with the intention that we would pick up on the other side of the fence at a later date. In general we shot a lot of wide tableaux of action but the main one that ended up in the final version is the wide shot of Riva and Sophie climbing the fence. We then shot the scene at the Pembina and Point Road bus stop. We started by shooting a wide tableau of the action from across the street. From our conversations before production, Riva, Sophie, and I determined that this would be the place where after swimming in the pool Riva's character would want to go back to her boyfriend's house and Sophie would be uncomfortable with that. By starting the shooting of this scene from across the street, it gave space to Riva and Sophie to improvise their way through the scene. Myself and the rest of the crew gave the actors space to discover what the scene would be. This gave power to Riva and Sophie to determine the tone of the relationship between their characters that would have continuity through to the end of shooting. By the time we wrapped at the bus stop, the sun was beginning to rise.



July 30th, 2022

2) JULY 31, 2022

The following day we began shooting at Riva's parents house. We shot a scene of Riva and Sophie coming home. The plan was for this to be the ending of the film. After the events of the film they would go back to Sophie's character's family home and fall asleep. We filmed the two actors creeping into the house and trying to stay quiet. After that, we went to our friend Sean Henderson's apartment and filmed the exterior apartment scene. We did not have any permission to be at the apartment. We tried various ways of shooting this scene. Passing the camera around and seeing what happened. The shot we spent the most amount of care on was the window shot. I called my friend Sean to turn all his lights off except one.

After that, we filmed Riva and Sophie walking. We thought of different moments throughout the film and improvised moments of the actors moving through the neighbourhood. The tracking shot of Riva and Sophie in the back alley is the one that features the most prominently in the film but we shot a bunch of different setups of walking through different locations. While filming this portion of the film, we got a shot of the trees and windows in a puddle's reflection. This shot is one of the first of the film and I have no idea where it came from or who shot it. It was an unplanned shot that ended up being one of my favourite in the film.



July 31st, 2022



3) AUGUST 26, 2022

I arrived at the pool an hour or so early that day. I took a walk around twice to see what we were facing. The lights were off so we would have to bring in our own lighting. There was no sign of security, thankfully. Jesse De Rocguiney arrived with the Bolex and lights, then Riva and Sophie. We loaded the Bolex and walked from the parking lot to the pool. As we got close, the lights turned on. We did not need the battery powered lights after all. I took another look and noticed that the pool security had shown up. There was a man in a security uniform at a desk next to the doors that faced into the pool. There was no other chance to get this footage, so Riva, Sophie, and I decided to climb into the pool anyway. We went to a dark corner and started to climb the fence. I climbed over first, and once I was in, two drunk teenagers showed up. They asked what we were up to and offered up some vodka. I told them we were going into the pool, and one of them immediately started taking off his shirt to come in with us. I told him he actually could not do that because we were filming a movie and I did not want our cover blown. He told me that I had the most annoying voice he had ever heard. The teens left us alone, and then Riva and Sophie climbed the fence.

We decided that they would hop into the pool and then, if the security guard came out, we would film them running away for real. Miraculously, we shot for around 10 minutes and the security guard never turned away from the stand up comedy he was watching on the pool's computer. We rushed away giddy with the energy I wanted to permeate the film.

We then went to my friend's parent's house and shot close ups of Riva and Sophie in the backyard pool. We shot extra footage outside of the pressures of a looming security guard. Then we went to Riva and I's house and shot a tableau of Sophie and Riva falling asleep in Riva's actual bed. This was intended as the ending of the film.



Security guard watches the computer while I film with a Bolex. August 26th, 2022

4) SEPTEMBER 2, 2023

After editing the film for a year, I spent a day filming pieces that were missing from the film. I bought my own Bolex that summer and did the reshoots on my own. I started by shooting the exterior daytime shot of the pool that is at the end of the movie. I went to the pool on the last day they were open for the year with Riva and my roommates. On the way back home I went out into the football field next to the pool and took that shot.

Riva and I originally conceptualized the movie to only have two characters in it. We wanted to make a movie about the intimacy of friendship. One of the ideas we had to communicate this was by only having the two characters shown on screen. Unfortunately, the chase scene out of the pool made no visual sense without a security guard. I got my dad to act as a security guard and we filmed for a few minutes outside of the pool. After that, I went back to Sean's apartment and filmed the window again, this time with his silhouette in it. I was not sure where or if this shot would be used but it felt worthwhile to get. I then went inside his apartment and shot the empty apartment tableaux that ended up in the movie.

EDITING

Shooting "Fort Garry Lions Pool" was a collaborative process done with a tight knit team. Editing on the other hand was where I took all the material we had collected and spent time by myself figuring out how to turn it into a film. The key inspirations in the edit were Terrence Malick, J Dilla, and God.

I approached the editing process of "Fort Garry Lions Pool" trying to emulate the psychedelic sample driven underground hip-hop music that I love. This is a creative approach that I learned

from Rhayne Vermette. I was thinking of producers like; J Dilla, Madlib, and The Avalanches. Emulating the way a hip hop producer flips through vinyl records to find samples to build songs out of, I searched through the footage we had shot looking for moments to repurposed and reimagine in new ways. Each shot was a potential building block, a fragment waiting to be discovered and transformed. Just as a producer might chop, loop, and juxtapose samples, I was looking for new connections and visual rhythms that echoed the supreme creativity I find in hip-hop beats.

TAKING THE LONG ROAD HOME

Editing this film took a long time. It took over a full year with three completely different cuts. After the shooting in 2022, I moved back to Toronto for my second year at York University. I drove from Winnipeg to Toronto with the undeveloped film. When I arrived in Toronto my housing situation fell through. I was couch surfing when I dropped off the film at Niagara Custom Labs. One of the most joyful moments in the process of this movie was riding my bike to and from the lab to pick up and drop off the film. When I got the developed film back I lost about a month or so in a misguided attempt to scan the negatives myself (that is why there are scratches on the sides of some reels). I could not get the colours to look right and finally came to my senses and got the negatives scanned at Niagara Custom Labs.

The first cut came right after I got the professional scans back. I edited on my laptop as I watched the scans for the first time. This was more of an assembly cut than anything. The first cut of the film was around 13 minutes long. It followed the events as we had envisioned them chronically. This cut used the best take of pretty much everything we shot. It began with the women drinking out a wine bottle in a field. Then it cut to them walking up to the pool and climbing the fence. Then a long montage of swimming. After that, running out of the pool and

through the field. A long ambient moment that included them walking to the bus stop. A fleshed out scene at the bus stop where the characters get into an argument. A scene outside of the apartment building that ended with Riva looking up at the empty window. After that a long scene of them walking through the empty streets. The film then ended with the characters walking into Sophie's character's family home and falling asleep. This cut would hold on long wide tableaux of action and then cut into close ups for impact when motivated in the wide shots. It was a more durational piece using the long shot lengths as a tool to hypnotize the audience.

THE INSTALLATION CUT

The second substantial cut of the film came in February of 2023. I went to the Royal Ontario Museum where I came across the installation film "Anima Mundi" by Theo Eshetu. A multimedia installation that places a video monitor playing an experimental film with a hall of mirrors. The mirrors refracted the film in all directions to infinity. I was flooded with the sense that my film should be an installation. I went home and immediately started re-editing the film from scratch. The idea that the film would be seen on an endless loop in a gallery setting informed many of my decisions. The guiding principle for this cut was that it was meant not to be viewed from beginning to end but rather at a random point in a gallery setting where you could choose to watch the full loop if you felt like it. This version had extensive sequences that used the light leaks at the beginning and end of each reel heavily. The second cut was still chronological but I started cutting things shorter. The scenes were laid out with the overall same structure as the first cut but instead of building fleshed out scenes, I would let the scene play out in a few more abstract closeups. I used a temporary soundtrack that heavily relied on Julia Holter's song "Everyday is an Emergency" to convey emotion.

I showed this cut to my advisor Moussa Djigo and he told me that I needed to show a person in the apartment and the security guard. These first two cuts only ever showed Riva and Sophie and only implied the offscreen presence of other people. I liked the idea that the film was about one friendship and the way the outside world disappears/infiltrates the friendship but felt that he was right. I went back to Winnipeg and did the final shoot on September 2nd, 2023.



FINAL CUT

The final cut came together quickly once I got the film back from the final shoot. I decided to discard the installation idea and keep the form of a theatrical short. I re-edited the film from scratch for a third time. This third version discarded the chronology of the film. I went full in on the sampling methodology and cut the film based purely on rhythm. This version was a deeply intuitive process. There were shots or moments that felt forced or fake to me. I cut out everything that made me feel bad. I followed cuts that filled me with excitement. We had made

enough material for two movies and I then cut it down to strictly the stuff I thought was good. I kept much of the experimentation that came from the installation cut but streamlined it. This cut is only 6 minutes long. Half the length of the original cut. I sacrificed the linear coherence for a cut that felt more emotional and more personal to me. The looping and circular timeline feels more truthful to the haunting experience of memory. The lack of narrative clarity mirrors the indirect whispered affective quality that comes from discussing trauma in a friendship.

WORKING WITH CLAY

My process is a reductive one. I start with a plethora of ideas, images, concepts, and directions and slowly they start to fade away until the film's final form takes shape. One of the ideas that got parred down was the plot point of waiting for the bus. We only get a flash of this in the final film but I wanted to have a key point of the film be the two characters waiting for the bus. After running away from the pool they would be stranded at the bus stop with the final bus of the evening having already gone. At the bus stop, they would discuss what to do and that's where Riva would ask to be walked to her abusive boyfriend's house. I wanted to make a point about buses not running 24/7 in Winnipeg but found the pacing dragged. While we were filming, Riva had an idea that after the bus stop that she would try and make a call on her cellphone. We filmed a scene where Sophie tried grabbing the cellphone out of Riva's hands. It was a spur of the moment fight scene that I ended up cutting because I felt having a cellphone in the film broke some sort of dreamy illusion and also having the characters fight each other felt out of line for the tone.

One of the elements that I ended up cutting that bothers me the most is the underwater camera footage. While we filmed in the pool, Riva, Sophie, and I took turns filming each other with underwater cameras. This was one of the most joyful moments of shooting and where the

actors really got to film. I made a DIY underwater super 8 camera rig with a camera I bought off Kijiji. Unfortunately the super 8 came back entirely unexposed. Either we did not have enough light in the pool for an exposure or the camera was broken. We also shot underwater footage with a digital camera but I found that cutting to the digital images together with the celluloid ones felt jarring. I think there is room for this footage to be recontextualized, maybe as a separate piece if I ever end up making an installation work out of this film.

One of the hardest elements to wrap my head around was the ending. The original ending that Riva and I wrote was for her character to walk into her boyfriend's house and Sophie's character to watch the single lit up window. My supervisor Moussa suggested I try scripting a third act, an ending that would go beyond the apartment. We ended up shooting an ending where Riva and Sophie's characters go back to Sophie's parents house and they fall asleep together with her cat. I was never really sold on either ending and ended up with the discontinuous ending of the final cut.

I believe that great art should be in communication with the infinite. The ending that I settled on is my way of communicating with the infinite. Part of why I chose this ending is that I'm still haunted by my past. I have close friends that have been really hurt, and I do not know what to do with that. My memories are a spiral that fall into abstraction. I do not have a thesis statement about abuse. I do have a lot of open ended thorny feelings.

SOUND

Sound was recorded as field recordings. Because the Bolex is so loud, we could not record sync sound during the takes. We had a boom mic and two lavalier microphones for Sophie and

Riva recording their dialogue. Riva and Sophie would improvise dialogue during each scene. The actors and myself would come up with the general plan for the dialogue before each scene, and then they would start improvising. In the end, I cut out all the dialogue and made it unintelligible. We are so used to language shaping our reality, especially in film, and I wanted to subvert that. Cutting words out of the film was an attempt to get at something deeper. The meaning of the words from the improvisation exists but only as a tool to gesture towards emotion. The goal was for the language of the film to go beyond that of English and lean into an intuitively emotional universal form of communication. I was very inspired by bands like Cocteau Twins and My Bloody Valentine in this regard. In the way those bands have never explained what the words to their songs are, I do not want to explain exactly what dialogue was improvised in the film. It's more beautiful to me as a mystery.

Samantha Sarty of the band Living Hour created the film's soundtrack. I told her to make it more of a soundscape rather than a traditional soundtrack. My main sonic idea was to have bass that rattled your body during the pool shots. I wanted to bring a physical aspect to the pool. Make it overwhelming. An amorphous space where two people could share a moment.

Alongside Sam's original score, I also layered the song "any", that Sam released with her side project "Pue Pulp" over the beginning of the film. This ambient track was the initial inspiration for me to ask her to score the movie. The soundtrack Sam created for the film lacked the feeling the drone of "any" has. Using the two pieces of music in harmony achieved a meditative depth that felt more in line with the atmosphere I wanted. I also overlaid a section of the drone tape "The Quivering Green Music of Animals" by Leigh Lugosi's project Góra to fill out the ambience.

SAM'S NOTES

Here are notes from the film's composer Samantha Sarty about her work on the film's soundscape:

- *I recorded old keyboards from thrift stores and Facebook marketplace to cassette tape through my used (from eBay) 4 track Tascam Porta02MKII*
- *I used the Casio 501 and a Yamaha ABC (Automatic Bass Chord System)*
- *The Yamaha is pretty weird, and is known to pick up radio signals. I don't know why, so when you lift your hand off the keys, it creates a static/explosion sound, and then there are muffled voices from radio broadcasts filtering through the keyboard signal --> tape machine --> onto the recording.*
- *I recorded many takes on cassette tape, then put this tape into another tape machine*
- *The tape machine brand is from the American Printing House for the Blind. Inc. (APH), originally used to assist blind students record and play back their lectures in university.*
- *I recorded this tape machine onto my computer while I manipulated the tape machine. I played it like an instrument, warping the pitch, adjusting the speed of the tape and recording both sides of the tape so that the magnetic strip recorded one side playing forwards, and the other side playing backwards.*
- *This offered some really cool sounds and textures. I did about 4 passes of 5 minutes long*
- *I went through each take and parsed out my favourite sounds and cut up the takes into pieces*
- *Then I went into my computer, added distortion, reverb, delay and essentially collaged everything into place in the film where it seemed to fit*
- *For the water sounds, I filled my bathtub and did a couple of takes splashing my arms around and swirling the water, also recorded it draining and filling for texture.*



DOES THIS PROCESS MATTER?

I would like to think yes. I do not think a utopian purely collaborative process was achieved while making the film, but we got somewhere close. At the end of the day, I am the one writing this paper, the film was shepherded into existence from my effort. As much as I would wish to give up my authority I am not sure how successful of a film that would be. I gave up a lot of control and tried to lower my perfectionist tendencies during production but then took it all back during post-production. After going through the process of making this film, I believe there is still lots of room for exploring anarchy on the set of a film, but it would require giving up more control than I have in me to give up at this point in my life. To go further with the process, I think the film would have to be entirely improvised, giving up the script entirely seems like the way to push the film further. The editing process was not a collaborative process on this film and that would have to be expanded upon too. Perhaps a film edited entirely in camera?

My artistic practice feels like a pendulum. I swing wildly from the experimental and improvisational into narrative and the highly structured. "Fort Garry Lions Pool" feels like a response to the precisely storyboarded film I made before it: "Late Summer". My practice as a filmmaker has been to switch between forms and ways of working. They all have their own pros and cons and produce different results. I am not striving towards perfection. I am striving to bring images and sounds that appear in my imagination into the material world. The collaborative and improvisational working conditions are the DNA that shaped "Fort Garry Lions Pool" into the film it became. I can tell you that my next film will be wildly different, I am ready to storyboard again.

MAKE MOVIES WITH YOUR FRIENDS

I aspire to create films that exist outside the confines of commercialism, challenging the narrow perspectives imposed by capitalism on the art of cinema. The prevailing notion of filmmaking as a profit-driven enterprise, driven by competition and marketability, feels limiting and superficial to me. Instead, I am drawn to cinema as a form of spiritual expression, a medium capable of transcending its commercial boundaries to become a tool for introspection and meditation. The type of cinema I want to create is a prayer aid. An object to meditate on. I aim to craft films that invite viewers into a contemplative space, encouraging them to dream alongside the images unfolding on screen.

Filmmaking is a brutal endeavour. Focusing on the aspects of the process that nourish and sustain us can mitigate the risk of burnout. By prioritizing the cultivation of joy, creativity, and meaningful connections, we pave the way for deeper fulfillment. Nurturing the parts of the process that nourish us will pay off in deeper ways than striving for perfect products. There is transcendence and beauty in imperfection and spontaneity.

The memories of staying up overnight making this film with people I share a genuine relationship with is worth more than any accolades the product of our labour could ever receive. One of the keys to avoiding burnout as an independent filmmaker is to focus on finding the joy in the process of making a film. I find joy in the shared creative energy of working symbiotically with people I love. I find solace and satisfaction in the time I spent doing what I love, making movies with my friends.



Love is the message

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