

# **POINT AND LINE TO PLANE**

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## ABSTRACT

*Point and Line to Plane* is an 18-minute short film on the subject of grieving. In 2018, I was suspended in a deep state of shock after the passing of a long-time friend and collaborator named Giacomo Grisanzio. In my period of mourning, I encountered the work of Swedish visual artist Hilma af Klint and found a connection to the work of Wassily Kandinsky, an artist that Giacomo and I mutually admired. As a tactic to carry on our friendship, I found comfort in forming connections between the different materials I encountered and my memories of him. These acts of “magical thinking” (a phenomenon coined by Freud) is what led me to formulate a process oriented film. This theorem allowed me to freely transport the audience to various spaces, using voiceover to show interrelatedness between different artworks and concepts which were collected throughout a year of travel.

I began shooting the film in October of 2018 and continued periodically until June 2019. I accumulated footage on the following trips: my visit to the Hilma af Klint retrospective at the Guggenheim in New York City; Vienna, where I learned that Giacomo had passed away; the Westfjords in Iceland; as well as the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. In addition to collecting this material, I embarked on a short period of principal photography with actor Deragh Campbell, who plays the role of filmmaker Audrey Benac, a fictionalized surrogate for myself. This footage acts as a framing device that sutures the various fragments of the film together as Audrey conducts a search to find traces of her late friend. These re-stagings feature a white background with Campbell performing various activities and serves as a dream-space. *Mise-en-scène* is

utilized to demonstrate that we are not in many disparate places, but in the continuous expanse of Audrey's consciousness.

The title *Point and Line to Plane* is derived from the title of a book written by Kandinsky in 1925 where he first established his own theories and belief system on non-objective art. As Audrey travels, passages of the book are interspersed throughout the film which mirror her state of mind before eventually becoming seamlessly integrated with her perspective. The investigation of the Kandinsky text, paired with the sudden accidental dislodging of her Bolex camera's pressure plate, enables Audrey to experience and see the world from an enlightened angle. Her search concludes with a moment of catharsis when she discovers a space in which she is able to continue her relationship with her late friend through the plane of non-objectivity.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my two dear friends, Giacomo Grisanzio (1981-2018) and Jaan Poldas (1948-2018).

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## INTRODUCTION: AN ACT OF MAGICAL THINKING

I know why we try to keep the dead alive: we try to keep them alive in order to keep them with us (Didion 225).



Image 1. Still from *Point and Line to Plane*. After inheriting Giacomo's magnets, Audrey organizes them on her fridge.

*Point and Line to Plane* depicts the psychosis that can arise when an individual attempts to extract meaning from an intense loss. Freud coined the term “magical thinking” (an expression which Joan Didion lifted for her 2005 novel), which describes a phenomenon that occurs during the grieving process when a person leans on ritualistic behaviour with the unconscious expectation that their actions will bring a loved one back from the dead. For example, when Didion's husband passed away, she was reticent to throw out his shoes because she was afraid that he might need them if he *came back* (Didion 37). She feared that ridding herself of these shoes might prevent his return. “Magical thinking” also applies to when a person strives to find links, signs, and meaning in everyday encounters and interprets them as omens or cryptic messages from the person that they have lost. These realizations and occurrences are a way of

denying our immediate reality, a method of stalling a person's disappearance as a means of ignoring what Didion describes as the "absolute meaninglessness of absence" (Didion 189).

Stemming from Didion and Freud's theories, *Point and Line to Plane* investigates this phenomenon of mental free association and irrationality endured when grieving a loved one. In Didion's book, she refers to a poem by Gerard Manley-Hopkins when recounting the mindset one passes through when attempting to come to terms with loss, "No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief, / More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring. / Comforter, where, where is your comforting?" (Hopkins 82). Hopkins's poem follows a Petrarchan rhyme scheme which begins with ABBAABBA and then is counterpointed with the pattern CDCDC ("A Short Analysis"). In addition to the visual metaphor of an individual plummeting off of a mountain, the poem's pattern also mimics this idea, utilizing words which tumble, incapable of finding shelter or landing in a safe space. This work is often compared with the storm scenes of *King Lear* since both Shakespeare and Hopkins speak to the idea that the suffering inflicted by the mind outweighs any pain or violence that can be experienced by the body. When King Lear is told to find shelter from a storm he responds that "the storm in his mind is more relevant, prominent, and powerful" (White 84). Following from this idea, in *Point and Line to Plane*, although we see several milieux and countries, Audrey herself is consistently depicted within a white space, fixed in the gyre of her introspective state.

This connects Freud to Didion in that it demonstrates that in Audrey's grief she is forming associations between disparate images and materials in an attempt to conjure her lost friend. It also connects ideologies of Shakespeare and Hopkins in that it establishes how Audrey is unable to escape her own propelling thoughts and becomes detached from her own physical reality.



Image 2. Still from *Point and Line to Plane*. Throughout the film Audrey is consistently depicted in a white gallery space.

In *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Didion's experience with grieving is described as living with an acute sense of incorporeality, where she shifts from past to present, and as a result gains ghost-like powers and the ability to time-travel. Didion depicts experiencing time in a non-linear way as well as a complete dismemberment of her body. In the voiceover, I purposefully do not situate the audience in time but refer to both Audrey's memory of Giacomo and trips she embarks upon all in the simple past tense. For example, in one segment I show images of landscapes from my trip to Iceland and the voiceover states, "I tremble in front of mountains. I watch the sunset". This portion, which is written in the present-tense, along with the strategy of matching Audrey's eye-line from the white space to the images from my travels, serve to show how Audrey is physically transported to the places she is remembering. The story exists in a liminal place between presently unfolding action and the character's imaginings. Audrey is neither truly present or absent in the physical locations; she resembles a time-travelling ghost like the one Didion describes. Likewise, Audrey is frequently on her cellphone and the images

she views on the internet join in the stream of images that she moves through. We are never quite sure whether she has the ability to teleport herself to the places of her thinking.

Throughout my artistic practice, I have endeavored to investigate the following: What kind of meaning can we glean when processing the passing of a loved one? How do we archive and organize our thoughts as we move through grief? Furthermore, how does mourning impact, infect and infirm our intellect? Is it possible to halt the disintegration of memories by remounting them to film? Lastly, can a deceased person's essence be recaptured through moving image? In the creation of *Point and Line to Plane* and throughout this paper, it is my intention to share my own journey to process, heal and document my own period of mourning and my experience of "magical thinking".

## A COLLECTION OF COINCIDENCES

From the outset, my proposed thesis was a refraction of the biography of my grandfather's violin mentor, Kathleen Parlow. However, my plans diverged based on events in my life that led my attention elsewhere. In 2017, in Professor John Greyson's production class, I began to explore this topic with a short film titled *Veslemøy's Song*. The narrative follows Audrey as she unsuccessfully attempts to retrieve a rare recording of Parlow's from the New York Public Library. The film was not intended for film festivals, however, I was encouraged to apply and ended up successfully touring the film to major film festivals including Locarno, TIFF, BFI, and NYFF. I intended to garner funding to make a feature film version for my defense, but I was met with resistance from funding bodies due to my status as an MFA student. It was while at a loss for a new subject for my thesis and while touring *Veslemøy's Song* that various life events led to the new subject matter of my film: the discovery of the work of painter Hilma af Klint, the paintings and theoretical art writing of Wassily Kandinsky, the death of my neighbour Jaan Poldas, and the sudden passing of my long-time friend and collaborator Giacomo Grisanzio. It was the subsequent interconnections that I found between these subjects and how they contributed to my processing the loss of my friend that became the narrative of my final thesis film, *Point and Line to Plane*.

While I was in New York City presenting *Veslemøy's Song* at NYFF, I learned that the Swedish artist Hilma af Klint was having her first American retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum 75 years after her death. In all of my work I explore and honour the lives of elderly matriarchs and, after doing some research, af Klint perfectly aligned with my interests. She was included in the first wave of women who were allowed to practice fine art in the early 1900's. She made work through a spiritualist practice and was commissioned to create paintings for a

spiral temple by a spiritualist named Amaliel on the first of January, 1906 (Bashkoff 18). Despite af Klint's prolific output, she only exhibited a handful of her paintings publicly throughout the course of her lifetime. In her will, she instructed her beneficiaries not to exhibit her work until 20 years after her passing as she feared that the world was not ready to grasp the significance of her creations (Bashkoff 17). Af Klint's exhibition at the Guggenheim in October 2018 perfectly fulfilled the artist's original vision as her paintings were exhibited in a spiral shaped rotunda<sup>1</sup>.

On October 11th, I made what turned out to be a fortunate mistake and arrived at the Guggenheim the day before the exhibition was set to open. The clerk at the desk kindly offered me a discounted rate to see the museum's permanent collection as well as watch the exhibition's installation from the rotunda. Since I had made the journey all the way to the Upper East Side of Manhattan, I decided to proceed with my visit to the museum. The way that I was inadvertently held at arms-length from the content I was aspiring to research, mirrored the narrative which took place in my previous short film *Veslemøy's Song*, where Audrey is only able to experience Parlow's recording as mediated by the New York Public Library. I found the situation to be comical and felt compelled to record the installation of the exhibition with my iPhone. Later that day, I had a Skype meeting with my supervisor Professor Brenda Longfellow. In response to recounting my experience at the Guggenheim, she described how, in addition to the curation that museums provide to their visitors within a certain topic or theme, our own experience of an archive, library, or museum is also dictated by its accessibility, dates and hours of operation. Although this experience was only tangentially related to my thesis, I was encouraged to pursue the narrative which I had serendipitously discovered and, inspired by our conversation, I decided to return to the following day to film the opening of the exhibition.

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<sup>1</sup> Professor and curator Daniel Birnbaum has a lecture which delves into af Klint's history in detail for more information visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdC5OjRCp2Y&t=1968s>

Upon entering the exhibition, I was struck by the first series of 10 ft by 7ft paintings featured titled *The Ten Largest*. These works were intended to depict each stage of human life from childhood, youth, adulthood to old age (Bashkoff 23). After absorbing the paintings' vibrant colours, palettes and remarkable modernity, I felt a magnetic attraction to the circles or "orbs" which intersected within Klint's art.



Image 3. Orbs intersecting in af Klint's painting titled *No. 2, Childhood*, 1907. Image courtesy of The Hilma af Klint Foundation.

They reminded me of footage that I'd shot and hand processed for an assignment in Phil Hoffmans's "Process Cinema" course months prior. I shared a studio with my neighbour, famed Toronto artist Jaan Poldas, and had filmed his blotting strips, which also featured orbs that



intersected and touched each other. Attracted to the coincidence, I documented the recurrence of these orbs as I found them throughout the exhibition.



Image 4. Still from *Point and Line to Plane*. An example of the orbs found on Poldaa's blotting strips.

Only weeks later, I was in London for the U.K. premiere of *Veslemøy's Song* and learned of Poldaa's passing. He died suddenly from complications of pneumonia following cancer treatments. Unfortunately, due to financial constrictions, I was unable to return home to grieve his passing and I was slated to go to the Viennale to screen another short film titled *The Soft Space* (2018) (co-directed with Melanie Scheiner). The morning of my second day at the Viennale, I was struck with another round of devastating news: one of my closest friends of over 10 years, Giacomo Grisanzio, had suddenly passed away.

Weeks after Giacomo's funeral, I continued my research on af Klint. I made the connection that she was a predecessor of Wassily Kandinsky, who was an artist that Giacomo and I had mutually admired. I remembered that Giacomo was colour blind and I recalled a Maya Angelou quote that his twin sister read at his funeral, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them



feel.”<sup>2</sup> In looking at Kandinsky’s work, there was an affinity with how I felt when I was with Giacomo. I recalled how he described that, although he could never see Kandinsky’s palettes in their true form, he was attracted to them for their “movement and energy”. In examining Kandinsky’s work, I again found the occurrence of intersecting circles and orbs that I had observed previously in af Klint and Poldaa’s pieces.



Image 5. Kandinsky’s painting, *Several Circles*, 1926. Image courtesy of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

Due to their proximity in the time I encountered them, as well as the recurring image of the orbs, the work of af Klint, Kandinsky and Poldaa, and my grieving of Giacomo became inextricably linked. Utilizing the fictional character Audrey, as I had in my previous films, I began to write a narration for the script in which I reimagined Audrey visiting the Guggenheim under the same mistaken circumstances as me, the day before the opening of the af Klint exhibition, but this time after just having experienced the loss of her friend Giacomo. The

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<sup>2</sup> This quote is often misattributed to Angelou, the quote actually comes from Carl W. Buehner in a book titled *Richard Evans’ Quote Book* and is “They may forget what you said – but they will never forget how you made them feel” (Seales, “Let’s Save”).

narration begins, “I was looking for Giacomo today,” and traces the interconnections between these various materials, following the visual motif of orbs and transporting the audience to the images and places of Audrey’s thinking in an act of mental teleportation.

This idea of mental teleportation while in a state of grief is well described by Joan Didion in her book *The Year of Magical Thinking*. She writes, “I was thinking as small children think, as if my thoughts or wishes had the power to reverse the narrative, change the outcome” (Didion 35). When Didion’s husband passed away she described wanting to travel to a different time zone so that she could transcend time and change the course of her husband’s fate. “I found myself wondering with no sense of illogic, if it had also happened in Los Angeles. I was trying to work out what time it had been when he died and whether it was that time yet in Los Angeles. (Was there time to go back? Could we have a different ending on Pacific time?)” (Didion 31). By tracing Audrey’s thinking through various places, I was participating in a kind of magical thinking, creating a material plane in which mine and Giacomo’s relationship and conversations could continue. The tracing of coincidences between the works of af Klint, Kandinsky, Poldaa, and my memories of Giacomo was in fact an illustration of a search for meaning and an act of mourning.

The concept of teleportation as an expression of grief is present in Alice Rohrwacher’s *Happy As Lazzaro* (2018), in which a young man named Lazzaro disappears from his community one day and reappears 30 years later looking exactly the same. We see scenes of Lazzaro reuniting with his family and members of his community who have aged significantly. Throughout the film Lazzaro wears the same outfit and, as the world around him metamorphosizes, we wonder if his presence is a manifestation of grief. Similarly, in *Point and Line to Plane* Audrey wears the same outfit throughout the film, which functions both as an

homage to Rohrerwacher's work as well as a visual metaphor for Audrey's unevolving mental state.

When immersed in grieving, our minds bend, stretch and yearn to recollect sensations, interactions and sounds which revive our memories of the deceased. In my research to describe my personal voyage of loss, I wanted to find objects and spaces which brought the feeling of Giacomo back to my consciousness. In Proust's *Swann's Way: In Search of Lost Time*, there is a passage which described this particular sense of longing.

I feel that there is much to be said for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and so effectively lost to us until the day (which to many never comes) when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison. Then they start and tremble, they call us by our name, and as soon as we have recognised their voice the spell is broken. We have delivered them: they have overcome death and return to share our life.

And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die. (Proust 50)

I was attracted to collecting objects that were part of Giacomo's life as an experiment to see if I might find an aural trace of him in the same way that Proust described the Celtic peoples' search for their loved ones in their immediate surroundings in both living and inanimate objects.

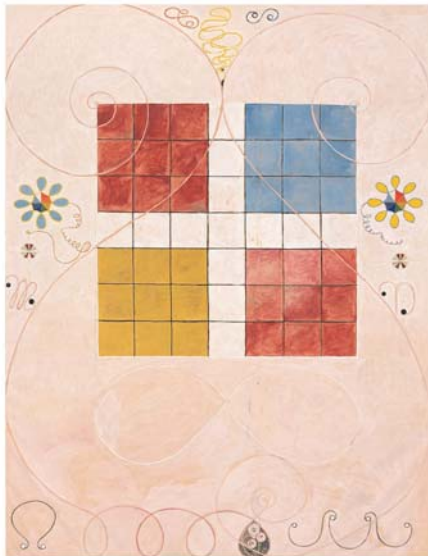
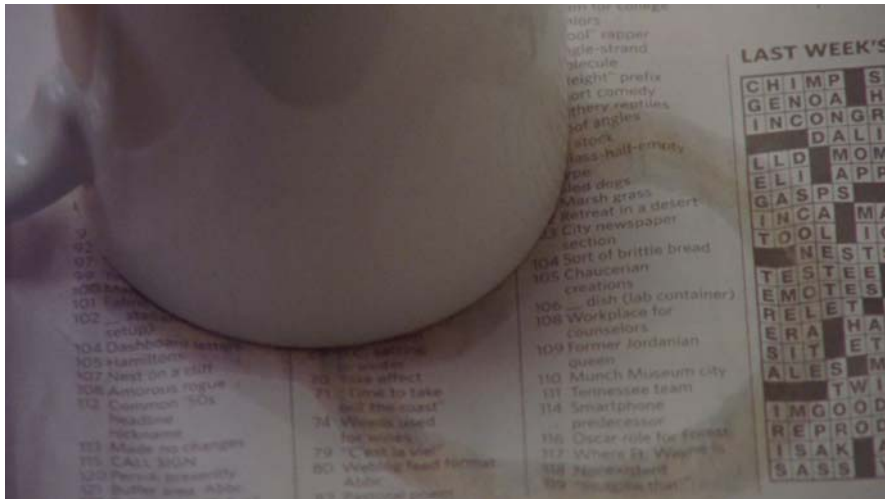
It was too painful to imagine that Giacomo was gone, so I imagined that he might be hidden somewhere and strived to pinpoint that location.

As mentioned previously, I was in Vienna when he passed away. I was temporarily stuck in the city while I scrambled to find a flight home and as I moved from place to place, I saw that every store around us they were selling chocolates called “Mozart Balls”. Giacomo’s family owns a bulk food store in Toronto’s St. Lawrence Market and Mozart balls were a chocolate that we snacked on frequently when we attended film school together. Being surrounded by this confectionary at this time felt cruel and peculiar; I wondered what it meant. Weeks later, I began to read more about Mozart and came upon the coincidence that he and Giacomo shared the same birthday. They both died in their thirties, Giacomo was 37 and Mozart was 35. Later on in my research, I found out that Giacomo died on af Klint’s birthday, October 26th. In the creation of *Point and Line to Plane*, I considered these coincidences between Giacomo’s biography and those of the artists I encountered.

I also traced another kind of serendipity, that of images that resemble each other. For instance, I realized that the interior of a Mozart ball resembled paintings in af Klint’s *SUW, The Swan* series, as well as one of Poldaa’s paintings titled *Target*. In addition, my intern Zainab Fatima pointed out that the crossword puzzles that Giacomo loved to do every weekend resembled a painting titled *No. 10, Old Age* in af Klint’s *Ten Largest* series. I later found a photograph of Poldaa in his studio doing a crossword puzzle, drinking coffee placed similarly to how I’d orchestrated Audrey to in the opening scenes of the film.



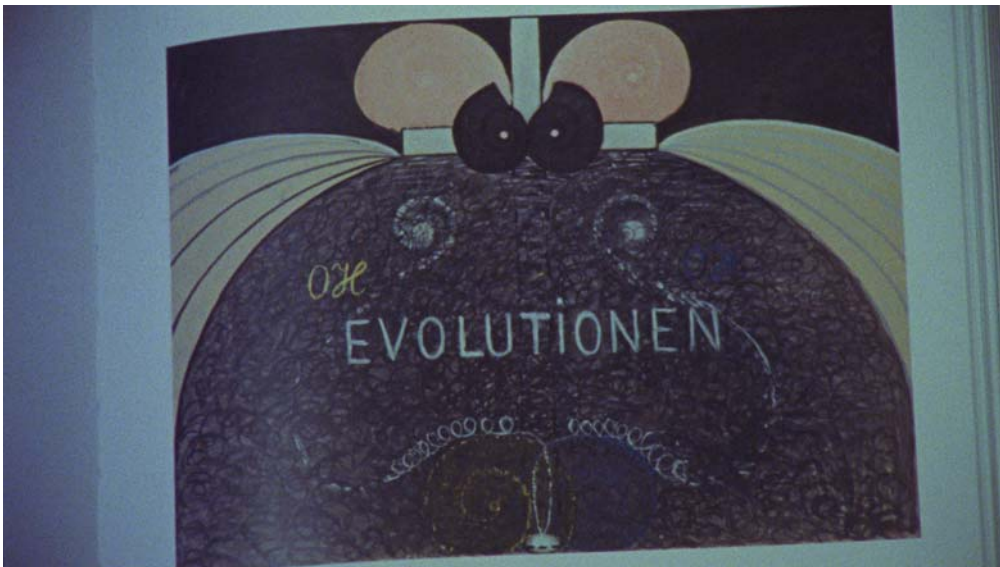
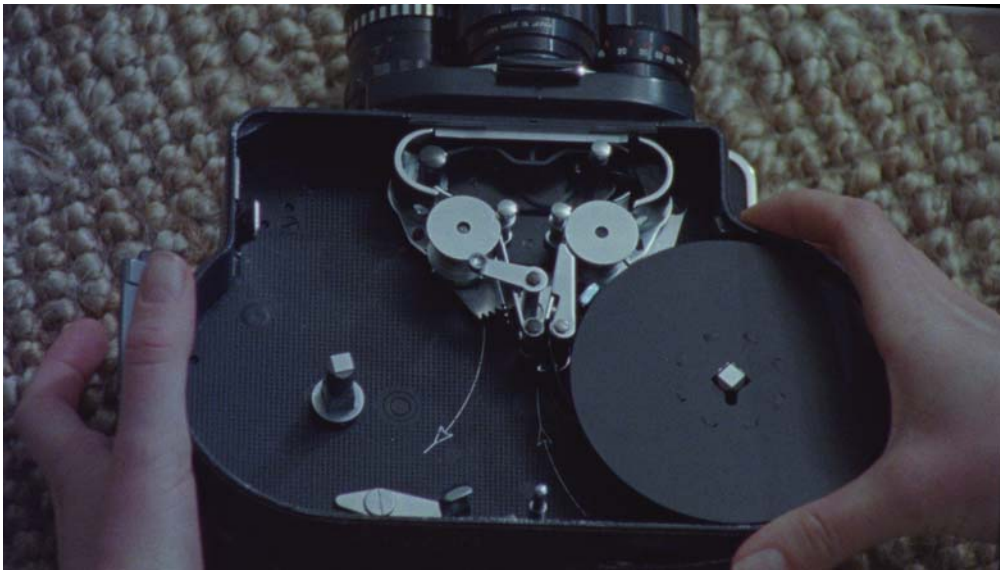
Images (from top) 6, 7, 8. Comparison of a Mozart ball (still taken from *Point and Line to Plane*), Jaan standing beside his painting *Target* (image courtesy of Penny Rose), Hilma af Klint's painting, *Group IX/SUW, The Swan, No.17*, 1915 (image courtesy of the Hilma af Klint Foundation).



Images (from top) 9, 10, 11. Comparison of a crossword puzzle (still taken from *Point and Line to Plane*), image of Poldaa doing a crossword puzzle in his studio and af Klint's painting (image courtesy of Penny Rose), *Group IV, The Ten Largest, No. 10, Old Age, 1907* (image courtesy of the Hilma af Klint Foundation).



The most compelling discovery I made was the realization that one of af Klint's paintings from her *WUS/Seven-Pointed Star Series* titled *Group VI, Evolution, No. 7* (1908) resembled the interior of a Bolex camera. In looking closer at *Group VI, Evolution, No. 7*, I noticed similarities in the Bolex camera's shape: spirals which resemble spooled reels of film, a line that protrudes vertically from the top centre of the form which resembles the arm of a turret, the circles beside the "turret" which resemble lenses, and finally two spirals and a line below the "turret" and "lenses" which bear resemblance to a Bolex's loop formers and pressure plate.



Images 12 and 13. Comparison of the interior of a Bolex camera (still from *Point and Line to Plane*) and af Klint's painting, *Group VI, Evolution, No.*, 1908, (image courtesy of the Hilma af Klint Foundation).

This connection was reaffirmed in an essay by David Max Horowitz from the book *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future*, which describes how the series of paintings “takes on the logic of the filmstrip, forming an incremental, sequential progression that unfolds for the viewer temporally” (Horowitz 131). While Horowitz’s thought is less concerned with connecting the painting to the object of the Bolex, it does connect af Klint’s work to the idea of not only the cycle of life but also the production of images. Horowitz also states that “How spirits were said to relay messages through mediums largely kept pace with developments in communication technology” (Horowitz 132), demonstrating that af Klint would be aware of the device of a camera as a producer of images, and thus incorporated this imagery into her artistic practice.

Interestingly, Kandinsky wrote several books that explore colour theory as well as spiritualism in art. In an article, “Sound in Kandinsky’s Art”, Jerome Ashmore describes how Kandinsky’s art is composed of an inner and an outer feeling (330). The inner feeling of a work represents the psychology of the artist, it is the urgent message that they feel compelled to share or communicate with the world at large. The outer side of a work is the material shape or form that the work of art manifests itself into as a direct result of the energy put forth by the “inner need” of the artist. Therefore, the resulting work of art developed by the artist serves as a “physical bridge between the nonmaterial emotion of the artist and the material work of art” (Ibid). I realized that the interior of a Bolex camera mirrors the “inner” of an artist’s psychology. The mechanical workings of the machine being the spools of film and the loop formers and crank representing how the mind interprets, ingests and outputs. As the camera records what it sees from the outer world, it interprets what it sees through its lens when landing on a frame of celluloid 24 frames per second. These images move through spirals within its body, which creates an impression of the “outer” interpreted by the “inner”. The expression of this spirit is



shared when it is projected and brought back into the outside world. Af Klint's *Evolution Series* seems to be an exploration of the mechanics of capture and articulates strategies of how future artists might metamorphose parts of their soul into vessels for the outside world to engage with and experience.

The two film spools in the bolex camera are reminiscent of the orbs portrayed in af Klint's and Kandinsky's paintings as well as Poldaa's blotting strips. In his book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky claimed that the circle resembled "a serpent biting its own tail (the symbol of eternity)" (Kandinsky 41). In observing his paintings and absorbing his readings, I believe that he used this shape as a symbol of peace or manifestation of the human soul. In my observation of the convergence of orbs in these paintings, I noticed that the form created by its intersection formed a shape similar to an almond. In a lecture published online featuring af Klint scholar Daniel Birnbaum,<sup>3</sup> he stated that this shape – found throughout af Klint's paintings – was called the "vesica piscis". Throughout the course of art history, this vulva-like shape was used to represent the source and centrepoin of creation. "When this oval form appears in Christian art as a surround of the Virgin or Christ figure, it is known as the vesica piscis" (Naumburg 448). The vesica piscis is where "outer" and "inner" world meet to create a third. Similarly, within a bolex, a spool full of film winds itself through a camera's gate, exposes itself to the outside world, latches itself onto another spool and creates a third.

In the same way that an artist creates a physical form to thrust their emotional state onto the material plane, I wanted to investigate where the soul or essence (the inward) of Giacomo might exist in an outward, tangible form. I wondered, "Where would I find him?". "Just as an explorer penetrates deeply into new and unknown lands, one makes discoveries in everyday life,

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<sup>3</sup> The lecture can be viewed at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdC5OjRCp2Y&t=1968s>

and the erstwhile mute surroundings begin to speak a language which becomes increasingly clear. In this way, the lifeless signs turn into living symbols and the dead is revived.”

(Kandinsky 26).

Olivier Assayas’s film *Personal Shopper* (2016) was an integral influence for me when I was in the process of crafting this project. The film follows protagonist Maureen (played by Kristen Stewart) as she attempts to resuscitate and communicate with her deceased twin brother. Before his passing, the twins had a pact that if one of them ever passed away that the other would send a sign. Maureen is a medium and she searches for her brother in a home he once inhabited, throughout the streets of Paris and in her research of Hilma af Klint, whom she is pointed to by her brother’s ex-girlfriend. In an interview, “Unlimited Potential: Olivier Assayas on *Personal Shopper*”, Assayas said:

I wanted to make a movie that had to do with the tension between the world we live in—our jobs and the material world—and the world of our imagination, the world of our dreams and fantasies. We live in such a materialistic world, and because of that, we think that the important part of our lives *is* the material world. But in reality, we experience life to a stronger extent in our imaginations, even though we can hardly verbalize or represent what it is that we envision. Movies can help capture that experience.

*Personal Shopper* demonstrates ways in which magical thinking can thrust us into a never ending obsession to encounter a trace of the supernatural with the hope of being pointed to a comforting existence beyond our mortal realm. The research to connect the series of coincidences found throughout my thesis film delineates my own journey to find a way to continue to have an exchange with Giacomo. The delicate experience of possessing an

imagination which impairs how we engage with reality was one that I wanted to map throughout *Point and Line to Plane* and one which I continue to wade in as I struggle to process his passing.

## THE PROCESS OF BECOMING

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent  
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,  
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,  
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.  
(Baudelaire 18)

As the long echoes, shadowy, profound,  
Heard from afar, blend in a unity,  
Vast as the night, as sunlight' clarity,  
So perfumes, colours, sounds may correspond  
(Baudelaire 19)

In the creation of this process driven film, I was guided by a poem titled “Correspondences” by Baudelaire which, at its core, is a 19th century description of synesthesia generated from a state of revelation. The title speaks to our senses and how they are profoundly impacted and vulnerable to one another. He describes how perfumes can invoke visions, how sound can transform into colour and, furthermore, how the tonality of colour describes emotional states. “Odours there are, fresh as baby’s skin, / Mellow as oboes, green as meadow grass” (Baudelaire 19). The poem also speaks to the dissonance between the material and spiritual plane and delineates what can occur if we stray from the sacred through our obsession with the physical: “Nature is a temple, where the living / Columns sometimes breathe confusing speech; / Man walks within these groves of symbols, each / Of which regards him as a kindred thing.”

(Ibid). Baudelaire reasons that if we attempt to bring ourselves back to the devotional elements of the natural world, we can come back to understanding our infinite selves, as our relationship with the environment is so closely tied to our wellbeing. He writes, “Having dimensions infinitely vast, / Frankincense, musk, ambergris, benjamin, / Singing the senses’ rapture, and the soul’s” (Ibid).<sup>4</sup> Thus, through nature we can access a glimpse of the eternal and experience a fusing of sense perception.

Similarly, Kandinsky spoke very candidly on the dangers of abandoning the natural world for the material in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* saying, “If we begin at once to break the bonds which bind us to nature, and devote ourselves purely to combination of pure colour and abstract form, we shall produce works which are mere decoration, which are suited to neckties or carpets” (Kandinsky 47). Thus both Kandinsky and Baudelaire argue that, in order to make a work of art which causes “vibrations” (meaning a work that resonates with the viewer and creates a blending of sense perception), it must contain what Kandinsky called the “stimmung” (German for “essential spirit”) of nature itself.

The theme of catharsis and blending of sense perception is also described in Proust’s *Swann’s Way: In Search of Lost Time* in which he describes a visceral experience of being teleported back to his childhood when eating a madeleine dipped in tea:

I place in position before my mind's eye the still recent taste of that first mouthful, and I feel something start within me, something that leaves its resting-place and attempts to

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<sup>4</sup> It is said that Baudelaire gleaned concepts from the Swedish theologian and scientist, Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg was a predecessor to af Klint’s mentor, mystical theologian, Rudolph Steiner. Throughout his writings, Swedenborg spoke to the “direct correspondences between the physical and spiritual realms, physical objects being symbols of spiritual realities. [...] In fact many previous writers, including Hugo and Lamartine, had compared nature to a temple, and treated the physical world as a reflection of a spiritual one” (McGowan 352). This is particularly interesting in keeping with af Klint’s body of work titled “The Paintings for the Temple” in which she utilized symbols throughout her paintings to depict “occultist beliefs, scientific concepts, and other intellectual trends of her day” (Bashkoff 17).

rise, something that has been embedded like an anchor at a great depth; I do not know yet what it is, but I can feel it mounting slowly; I can measure the resistance, I can hear the echo of great spaces traversed. (Proust 52)

In these examples of acute awareness, there is a portal in which space and time are suspended for the beholder and they are subsequently shuttled through a gateway in which they experience a moment of enlightenment.

Similarly, in the film *Point and Line to Plane*, when Audrey sees Kandinsky's painting *Composition VI*, she experiences a moment of revelation. She metamorphoses a quote from Kandinsky's book *Point and Line to Plane* and says, "There my eyes and ears transformed the slightest vibrations into impressive experiences, voices arose from all sides and the world began to ring"<sup>5</sup>. When Audrey encounters this painting, she begins to understand how the stimmung of Giacomo has found a different locus; she can feel his presence. Thus she gains the impetus to say, "If you can hear me, answer with the sound of colour. I want to know what form you chose to be." We, as audience members, become privy to the very instant in which she undergoes a soaring moment of discovery and its zenith is similar to the theories and encounters described by Proust, Baudelaire and Kandinsky. This connects to the article, "Sound in Kandinsky's Paintings", his relation to sonic reverberations is described by Ashmore:

He was sure that art had a force of life which gave it a definite and purposeful strength and "the power to create a spiritual atmosphere". In facing the question: "How does spirit manifest itself" his simple answer was: "By sound." which he saw as the main feature of the universe. Acting on such beliefs, he subsequently sought to represent or project sound

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<sup>5</sup> The original quote is: "There, the receptive eye and the receptive ear transform the slightest vibrations into impressive experiences. Voices arise from all sides, and the world rings." (Kandinsky 26)

from his paintings and offered an elaborate and sustained account of principles and means to gain this end (330).

Kandinsky was an artist who experienced synesthesia; when he saw colours he heard sounds. In his book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, he went as far to attribute certain sounds to certain colours. “In music a light blue is like a flute, a darker blue a cello; a still darker a thunderous double bass; and the darkest blue of all-an organ” (Kandinsky 38). His paintings were made to be visual representations of the reverberations made by music, hence his titles *Improvisation IV* or *Composition VI*. Kandinsky, similar to Baudelaire, viewed the world as a living breathing organism which was constantly in flux and, through their respective mediums, they wanted to capture these movements.

I would argue that Baudelaire and Kandinsky’s quest to capture the “*stimmung*” in a work, by gleaning living components from the world which was expanding and contracting around them, bears a resemblance to “Process Cinema”. In the forward of the book *Process Cinema* edited by Janine Marchessault and Scott Mackenzie, they speak to Alfred North Whitehead’s theories in *Process and Reality* where he “distinguished a process approach to art that did not see the world as a fixed entity but instead as one in constant change and movement - in a process of becoming” (Mackenzie and Marchessault 3). The form of process cinema enables filmmakers to utilize the resources around them during production. The product in question then morphs, twists and bends itself to accommodate the variables that present themselves (or disappear) as the work is created. As a result, process films take on a lively aura which reflects the essence and conditions in which the work was created. “*Process Cinema* situates films that are made within this process-driven methodology and phenomenology and that are not tied to the simple replication of the real. This means that such films rarely rely on a script or screenplay as

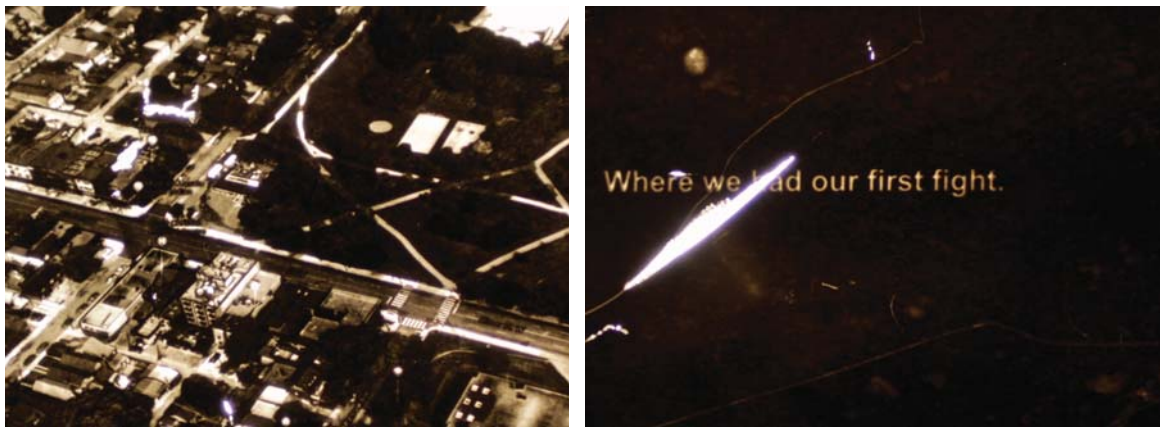
an overarching document that “guides” the work. Instead, the filmmaking process is replaced by a fluid integration of writing, shooting, and editing, and not necessarily in that order” (Mackenzie and Marchessault 4). I adopted this practice of working from the outset of my filmography, although I hadn’t been able to label and articulate its formula and inner-workings beyond “intuitive” until I began studying the concept with Professor Phil Hoffman.

Through Hoffman, I have learned how to let a film tell me what it is instead of forcing it to conform to my preconceived imagining. In his course offered at York University, aptly titled “Process Cinema”, Hoffman taught me how to look at the flaws that can occur during production or post-production as gifts instead of disastrous occurrences. He encouraged us to look at the imperfections not as blemishes but as messages from the film itself that tell us what form it wants to take. For example, in his class I made a short film titled *Where*, in which I originally planned to map all of the locations in Toronto that concerned the story of an abusive relationship I had survived many years before and film them with my Bolex camera. However, when I began the exercise, my camera began to freeze up and malfunction as I was shooting in the peak of winter and was forced to go home. In addition to the problems I was experiencing with my camera, I felt unsafe and embarrassed, anxious that I might see my ex-partner again. I came home and realized that I could still visit these places from the warm vantage point of my home: I could use “Google Maps” to tell this story.

Inspired by Toronto filmmaker, Blake Williams’s *Coorow-Lantham Road* (a film using Google Maps which I had seen in a Wavelengths program at TIFF in 2011), I began to photograph and tell the story of this toxic relationship from the computer screen of my home office. When I screened the film in class, Hoffman made the comment that it seemed as though, instead of confronting the locations directly, I confronted them from a place of safety. In



combination with the way that the film was hand-processed in a bucket and endured violent slashes by the emulsion which smashed against itself as it developed, Hoffman pointed out that the film described the severity of the relationship through a degree of separation. From this experience, I learned how to incorporate elements of resistance during the production process as signs which beckoned me to consider an alternative. I learned how not to label these shortcomings as failures but as offerings which would bring a new dimension to the work itself.



Images 14 and 15. Stills from the short film *Where* (2018)

In Hoffman's elegiac and enlightening film, *What These Ashes Wanted* (2001), he pieces together ephemeral fragments of the relationship that he once shared with his partner Marian McMahan. His camera wanders from Toronto to Egypt, London and Helsinki, creating a travelogue of emotion and memory where he describes his own passage of grief with curiosity and intimacy. In the opening moments of the film we see Hoffman's hands piecing together shards of ceramic paired with staccato like jump cuts that hiccup from moment to moment. In the following scene we see his partner McMahan walking amidst golden light in a temple in Egypt, a voice over accompanies the image, it is the voice of filmmaker Mike Hoolboom reading Hoffman a passage from Mark Doty's book *Heavens Coast*:

I've been trying to write myself a poem about those ancient Japanese ceramic cups, rustic in appearance, the property at some point of a holy monk, one of the few possessions he allowed himself. In a later century someone dropped and broke the cup, but it was too precious to simply throw away. So it was repaired, not with glue, which never really holds, but with a seam of gold solder. And I think our poems are often like that gold solder, repairing the break in what can never be restored perfectly. The gold repair adds a kind of beauty to the cup, making visible part of its history ... (Doty 45)

Hoolboom is describing the Japanese tradition of "Kintsugi", which is enacted to repair broken ceramic works with powdered gold and lacquer. The beauty of this method is that the breaks are no longer seen as imperfections but narrative traces which point to the item's history. "Each Golden seam tells a story of use, of abuse, and of healing in jagged gilded scars, which glisten from the places where once they had been shattered" (Aguilar-Valdez and Rockford, "BOOK REVIEW"). I believe that this visual metaphor traces back to the crux of what process-cinema strives to be. When filmmakers embrace the serendipity of the unexpected throughout their process, they can discover new and innovative methods that can be incorporated into their practice.

When I was in Russia shooting portions of *Point and Line to Plane*, I had an accident with my Bolex's pressure plate where it popped out during a shoot without my knowing. When I opened my camera and saw that the pressure plate was unlatched, I spiralled into a vortex of doubt and paranoia. In doing research as to what would happen to the footage *if* the pressure plate had been unlatched, I read that the footage would "pulsate, shake and breathe". Thrust into a state of panic, I reminded myself of Hoffman's practice and tried to ask myself what form the film was seeking to take.

It wasn't until I was home and waiting for my footage to be processed that I came upon a passage from Kandinsky's *Point and Line to Plane* and the shape of the film became clear to me. "The street can be observed through the windowpane, which diminishes its sounds so that its movements become phantom like. The street itself as seen through the transparent (yet hard and firm) pane seems set apart, existing and pulsating as if "beyond" (Kandinsky 17). When I was filming in St. Petersburg I began shooting from my apartment window because I was too afraid to begin shooting on the street. There I watched tourists take photos and locals go to work without hearing the respective sounds which accompanied their actions. The method I chose to shoot was completely dissociated from the outside world. I felt as though what Kandinsky was describing mirrored my experience in St. Petersburg. I had two layers of separation, the window from which I was shooting and the camera's pane of glass from which I was observing the street. In this passage, Kandinsky is describing the act of looking and observing the world in a way which is removed. He describes the street as a place which is "set apart" and that "exists and pulsates" as if "beyond". Thus he denotes that this method of capturing is voyeuristic as the artist is depicting a universe that they cannot truly understand and in which they are not an active participant.

However, Kandinsky goes on to describe how the outside world can resonate when an artist becomes engaged and active in the world they are portraying. "This foundation is not the capacity merely to observe the 'street' through the fragile—although hard and firm— 'pane of glass', but consists of being able to enter the street. There, the receptive eye and the receptive ear transform the slightest vibrations into impressive experiences. Voices arise from all sides, and the world rings" (Kandinsky 26). Within a Bolex camera, the pressure plate (a physical point and line running vertically from the camera's gate) is what keeps the camera's film in place as the

film rolls from one spool to the next. As previously stated, when it is removed, the way in which the camera depicts reality becomes obscured: the image pulsates and embodies the vibrating energy of capture. I encountered these passages and this occurrence as an opportunity to engage with Kandinsky's theory and the world around me. I became "receptive" to the offering which had materialized. I saw it as an idiom of the supernatural which was transpiring through the materiality of film.

In Kim Knowles's essay in the book *Process Cinema*, she speaks to the benefits of working with a medium which absorbs the environment in which it is used: "Film's physical nature is precisely its draw - its organic materials are a reassuring reflection of our own bodies. In a world of complicated algorithms, mysteriously impenetrable black boxes and intangible data, film is something we can understand - it can be touched, smelled, tasted, and felt" (Knowles 75). I discovered that the film I was creating was naturally taking on the properties of my circumstances and the energy I was emitting. My grief moved into the material and tools I was using to capture my experience and revealed itself in its output. The dislodging of my camera's pressure plate enabled me to have a moment of revelation. From this accident, I decided that I would surrender and let the film materialize by forces which I could not control.

## THE SEARCH OF NEW IMAGES

I'm not interested in seeing a film just made by a woman — not unless she is looking for new images. (Varda 89)

My first film, *falling with force*. (2009), was an experimental short that I wrote based on a poem that described a rift with a past partner. I shot it on a mini-dv camera with 16 women who each embodied a line from the poem. The film premiered at the Ann Arbor Film Festival in 2009 and screened in a program titled, “Feminist Travelogues”. I was 23 at the time and didn't have much experience in the realm of experimental film. My work screened alongside Jodie Mack who presented, *Yard Work is Hard Work* (2008), as well as Barbara Hammer who, after surviving ovarian cancer, screened her film, *A Horse is Not a Metaphor* (2009). Giacomo accompanied me to the film festival as my producer and I remember feeling an affinity with the films presented in the program. Each work represented a different stage in a woman's life and gave insight from those diverse perspectives. It was my first contact with the work of women who would become role models for my filmmaking practice.

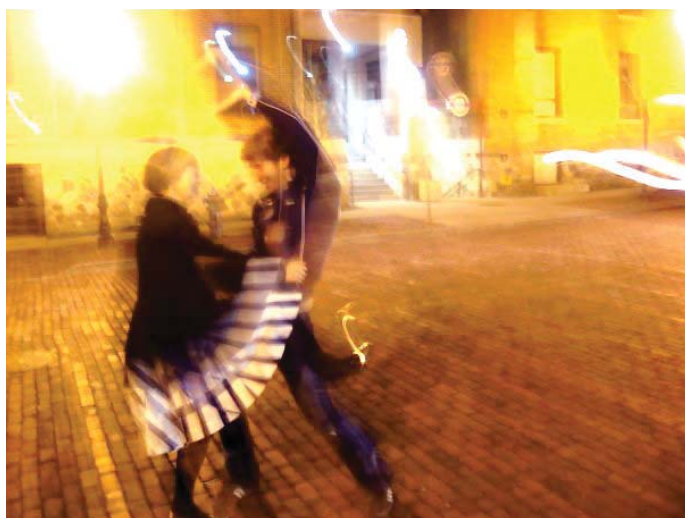


Image 16. Giacomo and I celebrating my first screening at the Ann Arbor Film Festival in 2009.  
Photo credit: Anni Spadafora.

During my first Q&A at the festival, a young woman asked, “What does it feel like to be a female filmmaker in 2009?”. I began to answer the question and spoke to how I was so honoured to be a part of the program, but I was nervous and wasn’t exactly sure what to say. Jodie Mack took the microphone and responded confidently saying, “I feel like a human being”. I was dumbfounded: it was in that moment that I began to understand how marginalized women’s voices were (and remain) within our industry and popular culture at large. I had made a film about a woman’s experience but realized that within the program my voice was being labelled as niche. I suddenly felt resentful and wondered if work made by women would ever be considered as work from artists who were simply seeking to share a “human experience”. As Agnès Varda once poignantly articulated, she didn’t want attention for being a “female filmmaker”; she wanted to be considered as a direct competitor with her male colleagues in the French New Wave. She wished to be viewed as an artist who was “searching for new images” and did so with her first feature film, a docu-fiction titled, *La Pointe Courte* (1955).



Image 17. Still from *falling with force.*, 2009.

Moving from this formative experience in Ann Arbor, I became inspired by the works of great feminist filmmakers such as Chantal Akerman, Agnès Varda, and Barbara Hammer. This

reinforced my priority to investigate honest and realistic representations of women and the integral role they play in nurturing families and communities through an interplay of documentary and fiction. I asked myself, “What new images and perspectives could I capture?”. The work of these filmmakers influenced and impacted my practice throughout the development of my filmography.

Akerman’s films *Hotel Monterey* (1973), *Je, Tu, Il, Elle* (1976), and *News From Home* (1976) played an essential role in the evolution of my practice. These works instructed me on how to capture space and depict time in a way that was rigorous and straightforward. I observed her re-staging of domestic tasks in all their specificity and duration; I observed that she allowed the images to speak for themselves and in turn allowed the complexity, violence and oppression beneath them to surface. I was transfixed by the tactics that Akerman used to uncover and unroot her family’s history while simultaneously weaving her voice as an artist into the landscape of her work. A poignant moment in viewing Akerman’s filmography was *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), in which a woman (Delphine Seyrig) is depicted performing domestic chores for three hours. The thrill of viewing this work, which was direct yet full of intricacy and humanity, moved me to begin highlighting the invisible labour of matriarchs as acts of resistance. From this point onwards, I was determined to carry on the tradition of rendering the emotional and physical labour of matriarchal women visible in order to ascribe it value and meaning.

The first subject in my body of work came when I discovered the poetry of my great-grandmother, Zofia Bohdanowiczowa. She was a Polish poet who survived WWII by escaping Poland and taking refuge throughout rural Eastern Europe and Northern Africa. She

finally came to Toronto after her only son (my grandfather Andrzej Bohdanowicz) moved there to find work. Previously having lived only in the countryside, she had a hard time adapting to the harshness of urban life. I discovered her poem *Dundas Street* in 2011 and, the following year, I co-directed my first fiction film of the same name with Joanna Durkalec. The film's narrative is guided by the structure of the poem and aims to depict her experience as a newcomer living in the Junction Triangle. I found that even though her work was written in the 1960's, I was able to relate to her descriptions and relationship to the city generations later:

Whoever is marked as I am marked

By pilgrim's staff, wanderer's sandal

The wind awhistling through a cape,

a disregard for light and night -

Must flee, must flee this Dundas Street (Bohdanowiczowa 23)

The connection I felt to her person and her work lead me to make four more short films based on her poetry, which together make a series entitled *Last Poems*. Three films in the series focus on my relationship with my paternal grandmother, Maria Bohdanowicz. Shortly after discovering the poems, I learned that my grandmother was diagnosed with terminal cancer. The trilogy thus came together swiftly and organically as suddenly there was further impetus to capture, re-stage and, in turn, memorialize. Using poems written by Zofia, the three films follow the passing of my grandmother and chronicle the dismantling of her home after her death. It was my first experience with deep mourning and I felt the urgency to document my grandmother's home in order to archive, honour and historicize the universe in which I was raised.





Image 18. Still from the short film *Wieczór (An Evening)* (2013).

Similarly, Barbara Hammer's film *Nitrate Kisses* (1992), has a sense of urgency to document marginalized lesbian histories to prevent their disappearance and encourage future archival strategies and practices. In the film she states: "What is unnamed, un-depicted in images, whatever is omitted from biography, censored in collections of letters, whatever is misnamed as something else, made difficult to come by, whatever is buried in the meaning under an inadequate or lying language - this will become not merely unspoken but unspeakable" (Hammer, Barbara).

My study of Hammer led to my interest in the archive as a way to recover female histories deemed irrelevant and bring them into the sphere of public consideration. My first feature film *Never Eat Alone* (2016), features my real life grandmother, Joan Benac as she seeks to reignite a past romance with the help of her granddaughter, played by actor Deragh Campbell. This diverged from my short films as it combined archival material and documentary footage as well as staged conversations with an actor. This film marked the birth of the character Audrey Benac, which Campbell and I developed together to act as a stand-in for me in semi-fictional

reenactments of my own experiences. The film chronicles Joan's day-to-day as her granddaughter Audrey attempts to reunite her with a man she once loved. In "Passage(s) of Time: An Interview with Sofia Bohdanowicz", written by critic Adam Cook, he stated: "Taking place mostly in domestic spaces, the film focuses on quotidian details, mundane interactions, the passage of time, and the dignified solitude of Benac".



Image 19. Audrey and Joan Benac reading letters in a closet in, *Never Eat Alone* (2016).

Stemming from the traditions of novelist Georges Perec, it is important for me to document and reflect on my everyday experiences and interactions as a strategy to preserve and better understand my own environment.

To question the habitual. But that's just it, we're habituated to it. We don't question it, it doesn't question us, it doesn't seem to pose a problem, we live it without thinking, as if it carried with it neither questions nor answers, as if it weren't the bearer of any information. This is no longer even conditioning, it's anaesthesia. We sleep through our

lives in a dreamless sleep. But where is our life? Where is our body? Where is our space? (Perec 177)<sup>6</sup>

In order to make work that is engaged, rooted and grown from reality, I have learned how to extract the extraordinary by closely observing the ordinary. I document what is undesired or ignored and challenge myself to “question my teaspoons”, as Perec once stated. Agnès Varda employed this approach when she made the film *The Gleaners and I* (2000), and captured a variety of individuals and their methods of gleaning. In her approach to document what was perceived as average and normal, she intuitively uncovered a spectrum of narratives which were both significant and touching.

Perec’s concept of “examining the everyday” was, of course, naturally embraced within my grand-parents’ generation when they would write each other letters which described their immediate surroundings in detail. Although the contents may have been perceived as banal at the time, their words accumulated value through what Akerman describes as “the passage of time”. In *Never Eat Alone*, I used letters that my grandparents wrote to each other when they were courting, which describe gestures of their age such as the drinking of double malt milk-shakes in diners or voyages to Europe on steam ships.

I expanded my study of the quotidian outside of my family with my second feature film *Maison du bonheur* (2017). I spent the summer of 2015 living in Paris with an astrologer named Juliane Sellam and documented different elements from her life with 30, 100 ft rolls of 16mm film on a Bolex camera. Each roll of film was used to depict a different pillar which was integral to Sellam’s life in order to create a portrait and study of the world she had built for herself in Montmartre, Paris. As I captured her balconies full of flowers, her closet filled with shoes and

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<sup>6</sup> I was introduced to this particular Perec quote by curator and collaborator Melanie Scheiner.

recorded an interview in which she described her routine, I kept Varda’s approach of being curious and intuitive in mind. In her film *Les Daguerriotypes* (1976), she filmed the inhabitants living on her street “Rue de Daguerre” and documented their comings and goings, their shops, labour, family life paired with a voice-over that shared her own internal observations. From this I learned to delicately incorporate my own voice into a work in order to give another narrative layer.



Image 20. Astrologer, Juliane Sellam in *Maison du bonheur* (2017)

In my third feature film *MS Slavic 7* (2019), I returned to my collaboration with Campbell to explore a new narrative with Audrey’s character. After the discovery of letters written by my great-grandmother, Zofia Bohdanowiczowa, in an archive at Harvard University, Campbell reprised this role to continue exploring additional strands of my family history as well as of my own auto-biography. Using the content of the letters as a baseline of the film, Campbell and I co-directed a film which depicted a correspondence between my great grandmother and a

nobel prize nominated author, Józef Wittlin. The film confronts ideas of ownership of family history, the development of artistic voice, as well as the attraction and dissonance one can experience in the archive. The challenge of the film, since it was about individuals who had passed away, was to find methods to bring them to life in the objects they left behind and in the words that they exchanged with one another.



Image 21. Deragh Campbell reprising the role of, Audrey Benac in *MS Slavic 7* (2019)

A prominent theme that unifies my filmography is my desire to exhume the past by reanimating fragments that individuals have left behind. In *Point and Line to Plane*, because of the grief I was experiencing, my autobiography becomes the center of the narrative for the first time. The courage to explore this new and vulnerable territory came from attending the Barbara Hammer screening of *Evidentiary Bodies* at the Berlinale in 2018, nine years after encountering her work at Ann Arbor. She made the film in what would be her second to last year of life in which she was struggling with the reemergence of cancer. One moment in the film featured Hammer's naked body walking upon a strip of celluloid from one of her previous works, and,

after a few long moments, she eventually dissolves into the material. During the Q&A a woman asked her, “Why did your body disappear into the strip of film?” and Hammer responded, “It has become clear to me that this is the end of my life. Throughout the course of my career as an artist I have completely devoted my life to film, my body is physically disappearing into the medium”. A year later, in her last months, she decided to speak to the *New Yorker* in an interview titled “Barbara Hammer’s Exit Interview” in which she said: “What is it like to die? Why don’t we know? I try to take notes on it. It is harder to write now. I don’t really feel like going into so many details when pain hits hard, though I kind of feel like I should. I mean, what am I? An investigator, an archeologist”.<sup>7</sup>

Through witnessing these profound moments in Hammer’s career, I learned how to take delicate aspects of my existence and incorporate them into my work. In *Point and Line to Plane*, I attempted to create a conversation that explored my regrettable behaviour surrounding Giacomo’s passing. In the film I confess to the embarrassment of being unaware of my friend’s final struggles, Audrey’s voiceover stating, “In his last months, Giac would call me but there wasn’t a point to our conversations. He would talk about things that didn’t seem to matter. I didn’t understand what he wanted. I wasn’t listening.” Although I was drenched with heartache and anger at my own actions, it was important for me to understand the micro-movements and gestures that occurred before his death. Much like Hammer and Percec, I felt compelled to examine these last moments in my relationship with Giacomo in order to understand them and also to forgive and accept the circumstances surrounding his passing.

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<sup>7</sup> To read the full interview visit:

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-interview/barbara-hammers-exit-interview>



## MAPPING EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPES

Grief turns out to be a place none of us know until we reach it.

(Didion 188)



Image 22. Shooting “Point and Line to Plane” in Iceland, 35mm film processed in seaweed.  
Photo credit: Jacquelyn Mills.

Through the creation of this film, I traversed many new and foreign emotional and physical landscapes to capture its images. In the past year of my career, I’ve had the privilege to tour my work across North America and Europe and decided to incorporate my nomadic lifestyle into the production of *Point and Line to Plane* by capturing footage throughout my travels. In addition to my prolific travels, I was also moving through the grief of losing my friends, Giacomo and Jaan. In this section I will detail how I embraced the subconscious and my intuitive abilities to capture the essence of my mourning period as well as practical production strategies which I have honed throughout the course of my filmmaking practice.

Unbeknownst to me, the production process for *Point and Line to Plane* began in February 2017, when I filmed the blotting strips hanging next to the paintings in my neighbour Jaan Poldas's painting studio.



Images 23 and 24. Filming Jaan's blotting strips. Photo credit: Rachael Watson

The footage remained in my fridge for an entire year before I took the opportunity to develop it for an assignment in Phil Hoffman's "Process Cinema" course. The method for developing colour negative film is toxic and requires the intense minding of intricate instructions, therefore it is not frequently done by filmmakers. Typically only about 100 ft. of film (three minutes) can be processed in one evening. The developer, bleach, and washes need to be heated and maintained at certain temperatures, which is time consuming but gratifying when it is successful. There is also a layer of black ink called rem-jet that needs to be removed after processing the film which results in beautiful watermarks and residue on the image once it's dry.





Images 25, 26, 27 and 28. Photos from left to right: Preparing to remove remjet from 16mm film, removing remjet from 16mm film with a cotton swab, leaving the film to dry on racks at LIFT and examining the results of processed film on a lightbed at LIFT. Photo credit: Rachael Watson

My colleague Rachel Watson and I processed four rolls of film over the course of four days throughout the months of February and March 2018. When we finished processing the film, we ran it through a projector at LIFT and filmed the projection off the wall with our iPhones. Watson pointed out the fact that she could see faces in the intersection of colours, an observation I used when writing the script for *Point and Line to Plane* eight months later.

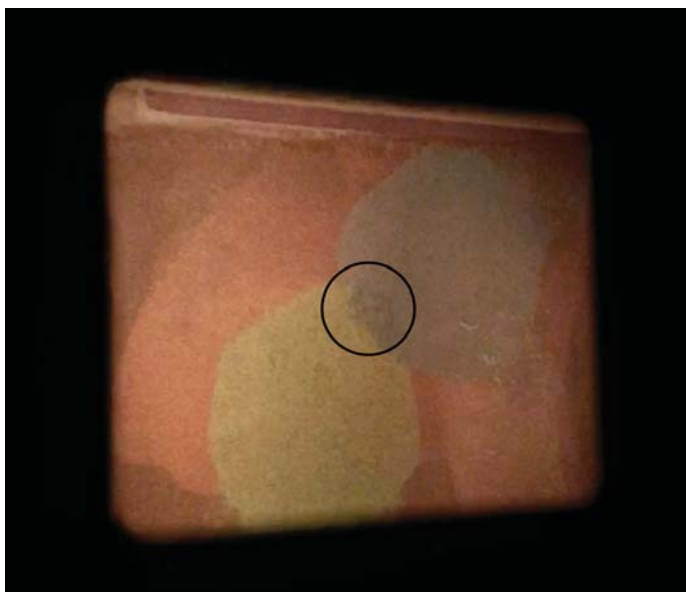


Image 29. A face which Watson found when we projected freshly processed footage onto a wall at LIFT. Photo credit: Rachael Watson.

When I began to write the first draft of the film, it was in the form of a letter to my grandmother Joan in late November of 2018. I felt an urgent need to write down a moment of clarity I was experiencing about Giacomo and immediately reached for a pen and paper. I called my grandmother and, after reading what I'd written, I felt encouraged that my revelation could be made into a film. I wrote the letter out on a Klint postcard, which I had bought from the Guggenheim, as an exercise. In the first iteration of the film, I imagined it would begin with my grandmother receiving several postcards from Audrey in the mail and narrating the film with what her granddaughter had written. In order for the postcards to be postmarked authentically, I needed to send them in the mail to a friend in New York and have her mail them to my grandmother's address. I decided that it was important for the letters to travel the passage from New York City to Toronto as a conceptual gesture that would be interwoven in the film's subtext. While I departed from this narrative idea, I used one of these postcards in the scene where Audrey finds a smashed picture frame on the ground in the middle of the night. It is important for me to incorporate "sacred objects", things that hold a special significance or meaning to me, into my production design as a way of imbuing authenticity and narrative richness.

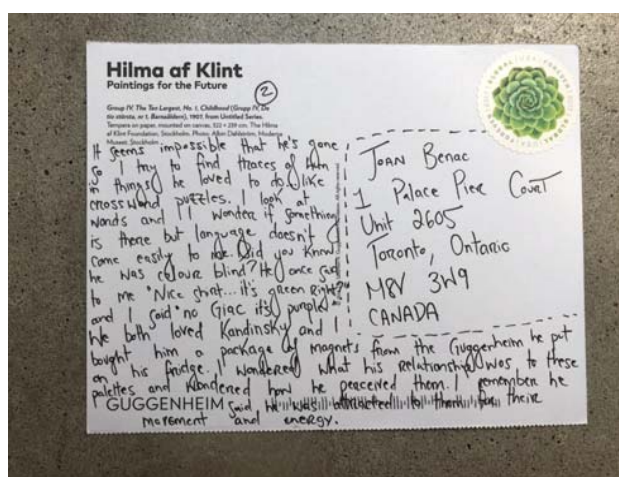


Image 30. One of the postcards which was sent to my grandmother Joan from New York to Toronto. Photo credit: Sofia Bohdanowicz.



Image 31. A still from *Point and Line to Plane*, Audrey picks up a picture frame with one of the Hilma af Klint postcards sent from New York to Toronto.

The footage that I began accumulating at the Hilma af Klint show at the Guggenheim was shot on my Apple iPhone 7 on 4K mode at 24 fps. I was inspired by Andrea Bussmann's film *Fausto* (2018), which I had seen at the Locarno Film Festival previously that summer, that was shot entirely on a Sony H7S and then transferred to 16mm film. Bussmann was able to successfully shoot in New York's Museum of Natural History due to the pocket size of her camera. Due to technological progress, filmmakers are able to shoot inconspicuously and therefore not call attention to their actions or move through the bureaucratic process of obtaining permits. I was impressed with the 16mm transfer Bussmann's partner Nicolás Pereda had executed with an Aaton camera and his 24 inch Mac computer screen. The result was a dream like aesthetic with soft lines, a pastel palette and a sand-like image texture. Since *Point and Line to Plane* explored movements through memory, I realized that this post-production process would compliment the melancholic undertone that I wanted to achieve. I also concluded that it was an excellent method by which I could bind together the aesthetic value of a film when shooting on different formats.

In March 2019, I participated in an internship with filmmaker Jacquelyn Mills as a part of my degree and joined her in Blönduós, Iceland for two weeks to assist her with the production and post-production stages of her film. I brought 16mm film with me as well as a Super 16mm camera from York University and, though I wasn't certain what I would film while I was there, I knew instinctively that inspiration would surface and wanted to be prepared.

I had two impulses to film during my stay: the first was to film in the church where Mills and I were staying which had an open concept and featured windows with pastel palettes that were reminiscent of af Klint's paintings. I took time to capture these palettes illuminated by Icelandic winter light on two rolls of Kodak 50D. The second impulse was to film the mountains that surrounded our small town in the North of Iceland as well as the Westfjords that we could see across an inlet over the ocean. It wasn't until I began editing the film that I realized that my urge to film these mountains connected me to Hopkins's poem (mentioned earlier) which describes the sheer vertigo and mental turbulence of grieving, "O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall / Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed" (82). When re-reading this passage and examining the footage, I realized how effectively our subconscious functions if we are capable of following its queues.



Image 32. Shooting mountains in Blönduós, Iceland for *Point and Line to Plane*. Photo credit: Jacquelyn Mills

After my time with Mills in Iceland, I went to St. Petersburg, Russia with a grant from York University to pursue research on my original thesis proposal concerning Kathleen Parlow. I had an additional reserve of film set aside for my time in Russia and had no set plans for what I would capture. Being in St. Petersburg for the first time was an anxiety inducing experience for me as a woman travelling in a foreign country with a Bolex camera (which resembles a gun), unsure of how to enter or capture public spaces. In Russia, it is illegal to film government buildings, therefore it was important for me to investigate whether the areas I wanted to film were in fact government buildings or not. In constructing my approach to filming in St. Petersburg, I relied on advice from filmmaker Steve Sanguedolce (whom I assisted in his Film Production course at York University), who had shot several times in the city and advised me on strategies to ensure my safety during production. In addition, I also checked in with my supervisor Professor Longfellow halfway through my journey to detail my struggles with filming in public. Longfellow was also able to provide encouragement and guidance as to how I could ensure my own comfort while continuing to shoot various images and scenes that I was interested in capturing during my stay.

Once I had accumulated footage from these various locations, I decided that I would expand my original letter to my grandmother to describe my travels to St. Petersburg. The next step in my process was to organize a four day shoot in which I would re-stage moments of my journey with Deragh Campbell as Audrey and use this to suture together the footage I had collected. Over our five years working together, Campbell and I have developed a dynamic working relationship in which we're able to enrich our projects through a dialogue that begins in pre-production and continues until the fine edits of the film. Throughout my filmmaking practice she has become a confidant and valued partner when I conceive my work.

Before principal photography began, we held several meetings to discuss the arc of her character and the gestures she would be performing. In order to shape her performance, I showed her a rough edit of the pre-existing footage so she had a better understanding of the character's background and the film's tone. In addition, we recorded Campbell's voiceover narration before we filmed these extra pieces, as a temporary placeholder to get a deeper sense of the film's timing and rhythm. Campbell and I have a tradition of shaping and choosing Audrey's costume and wardrobe together. For Audrey's costume in *Point and Line to Plane*, we went to Uniqlo and decided on a white outfit which we thought would enable Audrey to be absorbed into the gallery setting in which she was trapped. We decided that she would wear the same outfit throughout the film in order to subtly communicate that Audrey's entire journey might be more of an emotional voyage which occurs within a dream.

In order to merge the two art galleries which I had shot at previously (the Guggenheim and the Hermitage), I knew that it was important for me to stage scenes of Audrey walking through a similar space in order to merge this footage conceptually and aesthetically. Over the course of two days, Campbell and I took time to visit the Art Gallery of Ontario to plot how and where we would shoot these scenes with my pre-existing footage in mind. In order to give the illusion of Audrey's visit to the aforementioned galleries, it was critical to correctly execute Campbell's eyeline for the audience to connect that she was gazing at the setup of the af Klint show at the Guggenheim and experiencing a moment of revelation in front of Kandinsky's *Composition VI* at the Hermitage. In order to accomplish this, Angela Saviñon, a bachelor of fine arts student from film production department at York University, accompanied us and walked around specific points in the gallery in order to give Campbell a moving point to focus her gaze. Since we were shooting these scenes with a cellphone, employees of the gallery assumed that the



focus of our photography was for social media and we were able to move seamlessly through various different spaces in the gallery and capture what was needed without question. It is a testament to Campbell's skill as an actor that she had the ability to evoke such strong emotions and to perform so openly within such a public setting.



Image 33. Campbell and I working through a shot on set during principal photography for *Point and Line to Plane*. Photo credit: Calvin Thomas.

During the staged portions of principal photography, I relied on another long-time collaborator, my partner Calvin Thomas, to work as the Director of Photography. Thomas and I have been working together for eight years and he has had an instrumental impact on the development of my body of work. He has worked alongside me as my producer on three feature films, as well as nine shorts. It was a natural decision for me to work with Thomas on this portion of principal photography in which I wanted to execute lighting setups which were more staged and less naturalistic than in previous films. We decided that we would shoot the film in our apartment which is a large loft with white walls throughout, which suited our budget and also perfectly embodied my original concept to frame Audrey within the confines of a white room

that suggests a liminal dream space. Before moving into the stages of principal photography, Thomas and I did a walk through in our home and decided how we would capture each scene. Thomas was keen to find different angles and depth within the limited options we had in our space. In order to do this, we used large white boards to create fake walls behind Campbell to give the sense of her being trapped in a living museum.



Image 34. Thomas and I setting up a shot on set during principal photography for *Point and Line to Plane*.  
Photo credit: Angela Saviñon

One element which was new for me to explore, was experimentation with LED aperture lights with brightly coloured gels that put an even wash of colour over Audrey during the fantasy segment of the film, in which she describes waking up in af Klint’s “Spiral Temple”. This recalls a technique that Krzysztof Kieslowski used in the movie *Blue* (1993), starring Juliette Binoche as a grieving widow and mother. During key moments in the film, Kieslowski saturated Binoche’s face in the colour blue to pull out a plethora of emotion and intensity. In addition, I incorporated fractal prism filters to reflect af Klint’s paintings into the lens of the Bolex camera. Within each lighting set up, I chose paintings that complemented the brightly coloured gels that were used for each scene. We projected the af Klint paintings onto a white board on a grip stand and then used



the glass fractal filters to reflect the image back into the Bolex. When the film was processed, the painting appeared as a spectre on the left side of Campbell's face.



Image 35. One of Thomas' lighting setups and experimentation with projection for *Point and Line to Plane*.  
Photo credit: Angela Saviñon.



Image 36. Campbell examining the effect of the fractal filter through the lens of a bolex camera.  
Photo credit: Calvin Thomas.

I used glass fractal lenses again for the ending scene in which Audrey experiences a blending of sense perception when viewing Kandinsky's painting *Composition VI*. In order to visually embody this sensation I used footage that I had shot previously at the Hermitage on my iPhone, edited it and then subsequently re-shot it off my computer screen. I put a glass fractal lens in front of the camera's lens and took time to experiment with different positionings in order to achieve a variety of ghost-like movements. The result was an abstraction of the painting and gave the illusion that it was a breathing, vibrating canvas. The inspiration to use these filters came from Ryan Welsby, a student in the Film Production course I assisted in the last year who used them in his own work and generously shared the lenses with me.



Image 37. A segment of Kandinsky's painting *Composition VI* without a fractal lens.



Image 38. A segment of Kandinsky's painting *Composition VI* with a fractal lens.

Before moving into the editing stages of the film, I was able to gain much needed distance from my footage over the two weeks it took to process and digitize 16mm film at MELS Laboratory in Montréal. Since I had recorded a preliminary guide track of narration with Campbell, I was able to use a lot of the raw cell-phone footage that I had captured in the mean time to gain an understanding of the film's pacing and structure. Once I received the footage, I was able to move to a rough cut stage within two weeks. I subsequently shared the film with fellow filmmakers and collaborators to receive notes and incorporate their feedback into the edit. In addition, I shared the edit with my supervisor Professor Longfellow and reader Professor Hoffman who gave me invaluable notes and suggestions which strengthened the film's final cut.

Since I shot on film, I had to approach the soundscape for *Point and Line to Plane* as a process of reconstruction. I studied the movements and gestures in the film and embarked on two days of foley with Zainab Fatima. She assisted me throughout the course of production and noted different sounds that we could incorporate to build the ambient landscape of the film. Once a rough cut of the film had been established, we made a list of sounds to recreate with a Tascam Mixer and Sennheiser ME66 microphone. After several days of experimentation, we inserted the sound effects into the film and tested their placement until they felt natural and seamless within the edit.

In the further development of the film's soundscape, I collaborated with sound designer and filmmaker Jacquelyn Mills, who I worked with previously on my short film *Veslemøy's Song*. I was impressed with Mills's sound design in her feature film *In the Waves* (2017), which followed her grandmother who was mourning the loss of her sister. The film oscillated between diegetic and non-diegetic sound which moved us back and forth between moments of reality and

surreality. I therefore knew that Mills would understand the atmosphere I was trying to create and that her use of room tone, flourishes, wind and otherworldly ambient noises could sonically convey Audrey's loss.

The score for the film was designed by experimental sound artist, Stefana Fratila. I encountered Fratila's work when I was walking through the campus of York University one day and noticed a ringing tone in the hallway which I had never heard before. I thought it was an alarm but when I listened for a longer period of time I was charmed by its calming effect. I discovered that the sound was coming from the Art Gallery of York University and contacted Fratila through the gallery's curator. In order to produce the film's score, she used samples of crystal bowls which she had archived and collected over a number of years. While conceiving the score she noticed that the palette of colours that I utilized in *Point and Line to Plane* complemented the pinks, blues, yellows and greens of crystal singing bowls typically used to create these sounds. Fratila spent time carefully listening to different samples, after studying the film's montage, in order to create a symphony of sonic textures that transported audience members into Audrey's interior landscape.

The final version of the film's voice-over was recorded by sound engineer Lucas Prokaziuk, who I have collaborated with on my last two short films, *Veslemøy's Song* and *The Soft Space*. Campbell and I spent a day with him in Dark Studios in Toronto re-recording the narration with the film's final edit. Together, Campbell and I found a way to find subtle moments of contrast within her performance of the text in order to embody a spectrum of emotions. Upon suggestions from Professor Longfellow, I directed Campbell to speak from her gut and had her smile while reading melancholic passages of the script in order for her voice to represent various time periods as the narrative structure of the film unfolds.

Since I define *Point and Line to Plane* as a short film but also a docu-fiction work, I will aim to showcase it in festivals that celebrate and encourage this genre defying form. Targeted festivals would include: Locarno, TIFF, True/False, HotDocs, RIDM, Cinéma du Reel, New Horizons, Berlinale Forum, and CPH:DOX. It is my goal to study the trajectory of hybrid works, which have played these festivals to ensure that *Point and Line to Plane* yields the same kind of success as my previous work and reaches a wide and diverse audience across Canada.

My short film *Veslemøy's Song* had a very successful festival run and screened in festivals such as Locarno, TIFF, NYFF and BFI. Since I have already developed strong relationships with many of the programmers at these venues it will be very easy for me to submit new work. In addition, my feature *Maison du bonheur*, was theatrically released in cities across Canada and had a weeklong engagement in New York City. For its American premiere in 2018, I worked with publicist Michael Liebermann in order to garner momentum, criticism, and press for the film. We succeeded in landing numerous positive reviews including being named a Critics' Pick in *The Village Voice* and the *New York Times*. In screening several films internationally I have many connections with film festivals, press and programmers whom I am certain will be keen to see *Point and Line to Plane* and continue to support my career.

## QUESTIONING THE HABITUAL

When Giacomo passed away, I was not informed how he died. This was a great challenge for me as I was far away struggling to comprehend how my friend had passed so suddenly. When I attended his funeral, it became clear to me that I wasn't going to get any answers in regards to the circumstances of his death. In response to the question of how Giacomo passed, an old family friend said, "It doesn't matter how it happened. God called. It was his time." This response infuriated me as I felt myself and Giacomo's friends were being kept in a suspension of disbelief, our healing process stalled. It wasn't until months later that I discovered how he died and the family's reasoning for not sharing this information. Upon learning these details, I felt a sense of relief, since I finally had the opportunity to absorb the shock of what had happened. I decided that, although I believe it is important that the truth surrounding his death is known, I could not in good conscience include these details publicly in the film's narrative and felt I had to respect his family's privacy.

With this decision in mind, I began to reflect on ways that I could depict the emotional weight of Giacomo's death without revealing the circumstances. At the suggestion of Professor Longfellow, I realized that I could detail more about mine and Giacomo's relationship. Therefore I began to, as Proust said, "question the habitual" surrounding my last months with him. I began to retrace our last conversations, encounters, and text messages. I started to recover and reconstruct my memories of Giacomo and, by expressing this yearning and desire for meaning, I was able to convey a proxy of what his absence felt like. Secondly, I realized that the "dying" Bolex camera could act as a visual metaphor for Giacomo's sudden passing. The act of working with celluloid is very tactile and, if there is something wrong with the Bolex camera, the final

image reflects these malfunctions. Since shooting on film is extremely expensive and time consuming, it is important to pay close attention to the technical features and sounds of the camera in order to ensure that the footage exposes correctly. When 16mm doesn't come back perfectly exposed, filmmakers naturally retrace their steps to better understand what happened so that they can strengthen their practice and prevent future mistakes (or re-create happy accidents). Similarly, the trauma of losing Giacomo, propelled me into a state of examination. I wanted to understand how I could have been a better friend, acknowledged signs of decline and prevented his death in the same way that was similar to obsessively examining and acutely listening to my faulty camera months later. Through both the study of the habitual and the practice of shooting and processing with the Bolex, I was able to find ways to express the grief of losing my friend while still respecting the privacy of his family.

In order to acknowledge how I felt I may have failed Giacomo, it was important for me as an artist to implement self-care throughout the creation of this work. Naturally, in order to re-stage my own grieving period and vulnerable acts of magical thinking it was important for me to frequently revisit the flow of thoughts and feelings that I had experienced. Although the revisiting of these sentiments was creatively stimulating, I recognized that at times it would thrust me into states of deep depression. Throughout the process of making this work, I developed strategies to maintain my mental health in order to protect my own wellbeing. I navigated this last year with regular visits to a therapist and committed to a regular exercise and meditation regiment. In addition, I had many conversations with my key collaborators, Campbell and Thomas, and could not have made *Point and Line to Plane* without their attentive emotional support. I learned that although the creation of this film was cathartic, that it was important to

prioritize my own safety (and the welfare of others) while in the act of deepening and exploring new territory within my artistic practice.



## A GLIMPSE OF THE ETERNAL

Never stop thinking of yourselves as history, there's a place for you in the archive.

(Hammer, *Nitrate Kisses*)

Throughout my filmography I have focused on recovering the histories of matriarchs who have been isolated, neglected, and forgotten by their communities and families. My films employ memory and documentation and I work with old journals, photos, letters, books, and records to recreate archives and reanimate these forgotten lives. From the outset of this project, I endeavored to answer the following questions: What kind of meaning can we glean when processing the passing of a loved one? How do we archive and organize our thoughts as we move through grief? Furthermore, how does mourning impact, infect and infirm our intellect? Is it possible to halt the disintegration of memories by remounting them to film? Lastly, can a deceased person's essence be recaptured through moving image?

*Point and Line to Plane* is a departure for me as a filmmaker as it focuses on a different kind of recovery process, one which narrows in on my uncertainty and anxiety about my own mortality. By conceiving this film, I concluded that, by incorporating my relationship with Giacomo into my filmography, I was seeking to make a space for him in my auto-biographical archive. Furthermore, I believe that the historicization of this period in my life and the need to outline Giacomo's role in it, is an act to preserve his memory from decay. Finally, I have realized that my effort to embody his essence or "stimmung" within my filmmaking practice is a strategy that I have utilized to expedite my own rehabilitation. However, I now know that there are no actions which can quicken this course.

As I complete these last stages of *Point and Line to Plane*, I can confirm that this project has assisted me in my comprehension of Giacomo's death. However, I am far from accepting it. In the examination of the coincidences and inner-workings I have outlined, organized, and archived, I refuse to dilute my undertakings and manner of thinking as the tracings of an individual whose intellect is infirmed by the grieving process. In doing so I would be welcoming that Freud's concept of "magical thinking" is merely an act to negate one's own mortality. I believe that the motions to create *Point and Line to Plane* go beyond Freud's narcissistic assumptions of grieving individuals. I would argue that my effort to organize my thoughts and trace coincidences is an act of love to honour Giacomo's memory within my everyday existence.

By turning my attention to Kandinsky, I found an alternative way of framing my painful reality. In the preface to *Point and Line to Plane*, artist Hilla Rebay, a descendant of Kandinsky's methods wrote:

To unfold the human soul and lead it into receptivity of cosmic power and joy is the tremendous benefit derived from the non-objective masterpiece, so intensely useful and conceived from the primary essence of creation. In loving Kandinsky's paintings, we assimilate ourselves with expressions of beauty with which he links us to a higher world. Kandinsky's message of non-objectivity is the message of Eternity. (Rebay 12)

In the careful study of Kandinsky's work, I have come to understand that Giacomo's essence is far from gone. While his spirit cannot be recaptured through film, nor can his memory be frozen in time, the gift of our interactions and the illuminated path which his death has drawn me to is one I will continue to observe. As I accumulate distance from this challenging period, I am surrendering myself to the fact that my memory of Giacomo will continue to transform into

various different versions, iterations, and renderings. Even my recollections of this passage of grieving will undoubtedly fade as these fleeting moments take their course. Lastly, although they have been described, the stories around making this very film will unquestionably recast themselves as I age and gain new experiences and perspectives. In his film *Sans Soleil* (1983), filmmaker Chris Marker said, “A moment stopped would burn like a frame of film blocked before the furnace of the projector”. I have come to understand that it is essential for me to move forward from this period of suspension. The making of *Point and Line to Plane* has brought the realization that there is no way to seize the passing of time or prevent its aftermath, it is a natural phenomenon to which we do not hold magical powers or thinking to resist. In my embracing of this concept, I have found a vessel which brings me closer to Giacomo, a glimpse of the eternal.

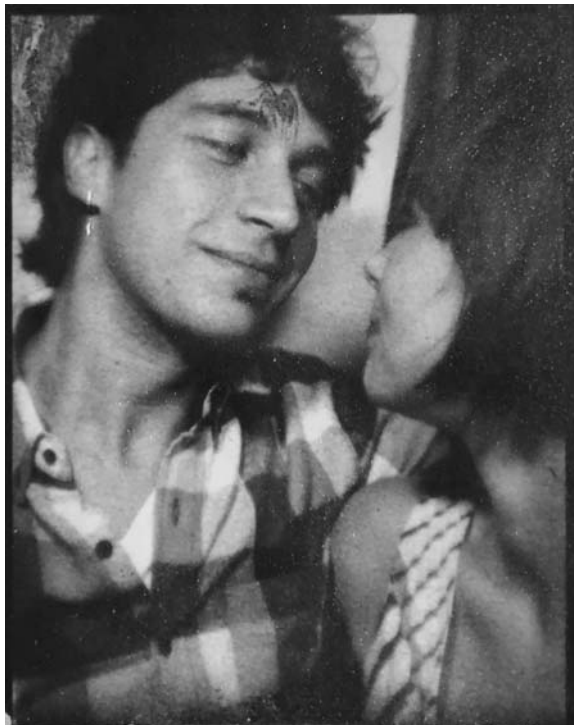


Image 39. Giacomo and I in Ann Arbor, 2009.

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