

SELF PORTRAIT

LAUREN GREENWOOD

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

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN FILM
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

May 2017

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ABSTRACT

Self Portrait, a feature length screenplay set in present day Toronto, Berlin, and fictional Kirchenfeld, Bavaria, tells the story of Hugo, a schizophrenic recent art school graduate who wins a painting prize and exhibition spot at a gallery in Berlin. Having just months before found his father's body after he killed himself, Hugo dramatically switches his painting style from his true passion, abstract expressionism, to photorealism, the style in which his father abusively trained him throughout his youth. The pressure to perform combined with his decision to stop taking his antipsychotic medication chip away at Hugo's sanity. Encountering his doppelganger, Hauke, upsets the new balance Hugo desperately struggles to maintain. Hugo is forced to take drastic measures to ensure Hauke does not jeopardize his success as a photorealist. *Self Portrait* is a story of the dangers of self-suppression and the struggle with an untreated mental illness.

DEDICATION

This screenplay is dedicated to my late Oma, Lina Birkle, who helped me discover and define my own identity. So much of the best parts of my life are directly thanks to her: My fluency in German, my connection to my history, my sense of humour and even meeting my husband. I hope I made her proud.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Colleen Wagner, my supervisor, and Howard Wiseman, my reader, who have always been there with feedback and words of encouragement during this sometimes arduous process.

My parents, Susan and Adrian Greenwood, but especially my mother who has read everything I've ever written since I could hold a pen. Thank you for your unwavering support and love.

To my husband, Akif, for listening to me construct, deconstruct and reconstruct this story literally since the day we met. I am so lucky to have you in my life as a sounding board and partner.

My brother Chris, who is a constant source of inspiration to me. I am fortunate to count myself as not only your sister, but also your friend. You teach me how to see the world in different ways and you constantly push me to be a better, more understanding person. Thank you.

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INTRODUCTION

Self Portrait is not the screenplay I intended it to be. Over time, as I grew as a person and a writer over years of development, the story took on a different shape as my experience coloured its development.

When I first conceptualized this story in 2009, I had not already worked as a paid screenwriter. My Oma, who was and continues to be such a great influence on me, was still alive. My brother was suffering from bipolar disorder, but hadn't yet been diagnosed. I was not married to a German-born Turk. I had never lived in Munich (although I had previously lived in small town Bavaria) and had not taken a job that would not only pay my rent, but also give me the distinct impression that I was somehow strangling the creative part of me that was capable of writing a screenplay. All of those experiences have shaped the story dramatically and have allowed it to become the script you hold in your hands.

The following document works to provide a context for the story and its development. If you haven't done so already, please read *Self Portrait* before continuing here.

INFLUENCING EXPERIENCES

In terms of the story, the two major experiences that influenced it most were my brother's diagnosis of bipolar disorder in June 2014 and moving to Munich to be with my now husband, and consequently doing the "responsible" thing by taking a job as a copywriter at a medical technology company.

Confrontation with Mental Illness

My brother, Chris, my only sibling two years my senior, was officially diagnosed with bipolar disorder a few days after my wedding in 2014, during which time he was at the height of a full-blown manic episode. Since a manic episode usually only presents itself after years of depression, everyone in my family believed for almost a decade that he was depressed and had periodically received psychological help and even medication. Although bipolar disorder can also be treated with antidepressants, the more important drug is a mood stabilizer to ensure that states of mania and depression do not reach their dangerous extremes. After being committed to a psychiatric facility by court order, Chris was finally able to get the proper help. Almost three years later, he still struggles to understand "who he is", since he felt that his own mind has

deceived him for ten long years into believing he was someone he was not.

The day we arrived in Canada for our wedding (we were living in Munich at the time), my husband and I were shocked to find my brother in a state of extreme mania. He was thin as a rail, covered in sinewy muscle from riding his bike up to 10 hours a day. He was only sleeping 45 minutes a night but appeared more awake than I'd ever seen him before. He was also covered in Sharpie doodles and writing from head to toe, including his face, because he was convinced he should turn himself into a brand called "Greenwood". His logic was that if people wrote on him, it would work to perpetuate his brand. I put on a brave face but cried with my husband later that day before we got to work figuring out how we could help him.

My brother's story, at least for the moment, has a happy ending. We pulled together our very small family and got him the help he needed. When I initially began writing this story, Hauke was a real person whom Hugo actually kills. Although similar looking, Hauke was not actually Hugo's identical double, but was perceived to be by Hugo due to a delusion that he suffers. Hugo only realized his error after already killing Hauke, at which moment Hugo's veil of delusion drops and he sees the murdered man for who he really is. Hugo subsequently spends the rest of

the screenplay and, to be assumed, the rest of his life, tormented by this deed.

After my brother's diagnosis, my personal feelings about and understanding of mental illness shifted drastically. The idea of using mental illness as an excuse or justification for wrongdoing, as is so often portrayed in film, television and the media, started to leave a bad taste in my mouth. I realized: What kind of stigma am I perpetuating if I contribute to the narrative that sufferers of mental illness are killers to be feared, instead of ailing individuals who need our help and support?

As you've read in my script, Hauke is now merely a hallucination that gives a voice to Hugo's own suppressed self and creativity. When he kills Hauke, the reader may temporarily believe he has killed a human being, but will understand by the end that he was just trying to kill the part of himself that he believed was preventing him from achieving his goal: Becoming a successful photorealist to appease his dead father.

At the end of the story, Hugo receives the help and support he needs. He is able to return to a normal life in which he has been freed from his demons and can now paint what he likes. Without having witnessed my brother's struggle, Hugo may have ended up a killer after all.

Necessary Change to Career Trajectory

The other major influence on my script was taking a job that didn't creatively fulfill me, but was the responsible financial choice. The story begins in the summer of 2011. At the time, I had just gotten a job as contributing writer on the Canadian television series *Out There with Melissa DiMarco*. Although mockumentary television was never my desired type of screenwriting, it was still thrilling to be involved with the creation of an on-air series. Working at a bar supplemented my small income from the show. Before starting the job, I decided to take a three week trip to Europe to visit some old friends, and that is when, on a particularly chilly day in June, I met my husband in a bar in Munich. Seven months later, I quit both my jobs and moved to Munich to start a life with him. No part of me regrets that decision, but it did result in a major trajectory shift for my career and ultimately my thesis script.

The first three months in Munich were both euphoric and challenging. Having British citizenship and at the time being considered a European citizen by extension, the administrative side of moving back to Germany was simple. Since I majored in German during my undergrad at the University of Toronto and had lived in Berlin for two years previously, the language was also not a problem. Finding work as a screenwriter (or any kind of creative writer), however, was. For months I applied for any job

that remotely related to my field. Finally, dwindling finances nudged me to accept a position as a content developer at a medical technology company. Over the years, I applied for numerous other jobs, but was never able to get a foothold in another area. I still hold this job today, now working remotely from home since we moved back to Toronto in April 2016.

Ending up somewhere unexpected in a career is not unusual. Through circumstance, opportunity or need, people will end up far from where they thought they would be. I have a job that allows me to travel back to Munich often to see my in-laws and friends. I am fairly compensated and I have the freedom to create my own projects and see them through. I have even managed to stay involved in film by gigging as a German to English translator specializing in script and creative writing.

Despite all that, somewhere inside of me gnaws the knowledge that I am being actively forced to suppress my true writer self. I write every day for work, but it doesn't take much imagination to see that writing for a medical technology company that is bound by the FDA and other regulatory bodies' rules requires minimal creativity.

Hugo similarly forces himself to suppress his true creative self, so in that way, a part of me exists within him. Some days I feel like I have lost myself all together, not knowing how I strayed so far from the writer I wanted to be. Hugo's reasons

may be different – his is a self-imposed suppression stemming from his need to appease his deceased father – but the result is the same: A loss of self.

BACKGROUND

Germany

Long before I could speak German, I was fascinated by German culture, especially film. When I was 15, I watched Tom Tykwer's *Lola Rennt* (English: *Run Lola Run*) for the first time and vowed to myself that someday I would speak well enough to understand every line of dialogue. This fascination began with my close relationship with my Oma (German for "Grandma"). She was born in a German-speaking colony in the Crimea, Ukraine in 1925. She eventually moved to Canada with her siblings in 1950 after being forced out of the region by Russian forces before and during World War II. My grandmother married, ironically, a man of Russian decent and spoke no German at home. My mother, therefore, does not speak German.

Being one of the greatest influences in my life, I decided at the age of 17 to major in German in my undergrad so I could communicate with my Oma in her native language. From the age of about 18 until she passed away two years ago, we hardly spoke English together again.

As a student, I realized fairly quickly that I would never become fluent in German if I didn't live there. This resulted in a summer working at a hotel in Schlüsselfeld, Bavaria – the basis for my fictional Kirchenfeld – an exchange year and a

subsequent year teaching English in Berlin, during which time I absorbed the settings and cultural nuances that would find their way into my script years later.

Doppelgängers

Doppelgängers appear in my writing again and again. The dichotomy of doppelgängers, the idea of two identical people with contrasting personalities and motivations, has fascinated me since my childhood. In fact, the script I submitted that would lead to my acceptance into the York MFA Screenwriting program was a romantic comedy about a guy who finds a girl in real life who looks just like the girl he sees in his dreams every night.

The archetype of the doppelgänger, however, most often presents itself in stories of horror and is usually present as a result of either unexplained paranormal forces or comes from inside the protagonist themselves.

Jack Finney's *The Body Snatchers* is a great example of this type of paranormal force, in which aliens occupy the bodies of the people of Mill Valley, California.

"I think they prove at least this; that strange things happen, really do *happen*, every now and then, here and there throughout the world. Things that simply don't fit in with the great body of knowledge that the human race has gradually acquired over thousands of years. Things in direct contradiction to what we know to be true. Something falls up, instead of down."¹

Although the townspeople may question their sanity when confronted with the situation, the doubles are a result of an inexplicable external force.

The other type of doppelgänger in horror stems from within the protagonist themselves and is usually a result of full blown "madness" or at least a temporary period thereof. Although it does have certain supernatural story elements, an example of this which has influenced my "uncanny" view of doppelgängers is E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story, "Der Sandmann", in which the protagonist Nathaniel loses his mind when he encounters the double of a man that traumatized him as a child.

In my script, I wanted to explore the creation of a doppelgänger by the mind itself, literally embodying the classic narrative conflict of "man versus self". The double, in the case of *Self Portrait*, is a physical manifestation of the protagonist's repressed passion and self-doubt, fueled by childhood trauma and the cessation of his anti-psychotic medication.

¹ Finney, Jack. *The Body Snatchers*. New York: First Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1998, p. 82.

NOTE ON THE GENRE

I classify *Self Portrait* as a psychological thriller. Peter Hutchings describes psychological thrillers as "narratives with domesticated settings in which action is suppressed and where the thrills are provided instead via investigations of the psychologies of principle characters"². *Self Portrait* uses many of the common devices, such as an unreliable narrator and plot twist, and addresses classic psychological thriller topics, such as reality and the perception thereof, as well as identity.

Referencing psychological thrillers of the 1980s in which the main character themselves become the "psycho", Robert McKee in his book *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting* writes, "These Psycho-Thrillers spoke to this threat, to our realization that our toughest task in life is self-analysis as we try to fathom our humanity and bring peace to the wars within".³ Hugo's "war within" is waged between two conflicting artists: The highly trained photorealistic who yearns to please his father and the true abstract expressionist who yearns to paint in his own way of his own will. When Hugo's father kills himself, the guilt-ridden photorealist takes control, suppressing his counterpart to

² Hutchings, Peter. *The A to Z of Horror Cinema*. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2009, p. 253

³ McKee, Robert. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*. New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1997, p. 94

appease his father's memory. This suppression, however, cannot hold and in the second act, bubbles to the surface in the form of Hauke.

STORYTELLING CHALLENGES

Externalizing Conflict

With *Self Portrait*, I wanted to write a film that visualized the narrative conflict of "Man vs. Self". The challenge to write this type of conflict in screenplay form is that action must be external, unlike other forms of literature in which the reader is privy to private thoughts and feelings: "Screenwriting is the art of making the mental *physical*"⁴. To externalize this conflict, I created Hauke, who is the personification of the suppressed "authentic" side of Hugo's personality.

Point of View (POV)

Another challenge was to ensure that Hauke is "seen" through the eyes of Hugo without relying on point-of-view shots. Although the perspective is not POV, the film is very much filtered through Hugo's experience. I sought to create an entire character that no one else sees or interacts with, similar to Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*, while staying true to my character and his descent into madness.

Hugo catches his first fleeting glimpse of Hauke at an art gallery in Berlin, but Hauke isn't seen by anyone else. His next

⁴ McKee, Robert. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*. New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1997, p. 230

sighting is later that night after walking Aylin home. During this encounter, Hauke pursues Hugo all the way to his apartment, causing him to ask Aylin the next day if they can leave the city. The next glimpse is in the town square in Kirchenfeld when Hugo thinks he sees Hauke in a Geselle. Aylin also catches a glimpse of the Geselle, but as we find out at the end of the script, this Geselle was a different man altogether. Hugo simply uses this Geselle as the framework upon which to build the Hauke he encounters later that evening. When Hugo first speaks to Hauke, he's alone. All further encounters occur when no one else is around, thereby eliminating the question of Hauke's existence by the other characters in the script. Hugo twice mentions Hauke to Aylin: The first time when he's delirious with fever and the second time after she's already discovered his schizophrenia from his mother, which both make his account of Hauke unreliable from Aylin's perspective.

Recently, I watched the psychological horror *The Voices* (2014), written by Michael R. Perry and directed by Marjane Satrapi, which excited me in its portrayal of the schizophrenic serial killer's perception of the world around him when he is on versus off his medication. The portrayal is counter-intuitive but worked well within the world of the film. While off his medication, the protagonist sees the world in its best iteration: He converses with his cat and dog, his apartment is

pristine, and the heads of the women he's murdered that he keeps in the fridge joke with him. On his medication, however, the horror of his actions are revealed in all their gore. He can't talk to the cat and dog, the apartment is horrific, and the heads of the women he murdered decomposing. His medication shows him the way things are, therefore, he chooses to stop taking them and embrace the world he wishes was real.

Similarly for Hugo, he knows he must stop taking his antipsychotic medication after his father's killed himself if he wants to become a photorealist once more. Not only is he able to give the detailed, high pressure painting style his full attention, he's able to see things how they "really" are: Himself as a penitent son who can live up to his father's unreasonable expectations.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY RESEARCH

Initial Research

Since my story has changed significantly from my initial idea, much of the research I conducted years ago is no longer relevant. As an explanation for seeing Hauke as his double, my original idea was to have him suffer from a rare mental disorder as a result of neurological trauma called Capgras' Delusion, a delusional misidentification syndrome, in which the patient believes that someone close to them has been replaced by an identical imposter⁵. In extreme cases, the delusion can even extend to the belief that oneself has been replaced by something or someone else. In the original story, Hugo's Capgras' Delusion was caused by brain trauma sustained during a car accident. That syndrome also gave me the (arguably inferior) original title of *Grass is Grüner*.

At the time, the town Hugo and Aylin (who was named Maija) go to was called "Kloß", a fictional village located in Brandenburg, the lowlands province that surrounds Berlin. I traveled to small towns in Brandenburg with a travel grant awarded by the York film department to research the environment and people. I have since renamed the town "Kirchenfeld" and

⁵ Ramachandran, V.S., Sandra Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain: Probing the Mysteries of the Human Mind*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1998, p. 248

relocated it to the Bavarian countryside. First and foremost, I needed more distance between Berlin and Kirchenfeld, and after living in Bavaria for almost five years, it was easier for me to paint a realistic picture of the people and setting.

Photorealism

More recently, I have researched art and art history in order to give that aspect of my script believability. In order to better understand photorealism, I reached out to three photo- and hyperrealists around the globe to gain some perspective on the philosophy behind the medium as well as the technical execution of a painting of that kind. These artists are British contemporary painter Simon Hennessey, French hyperrealist Jacques Bodin and American hyperrealist Denis Peterson, who gave me insight into the painting process and style, the history of the medium, the nature of photorealism and the sometimes contradictory relationship between abstraction and realism.

Recently, to take in the smells and sights of a functioning studio, I paid a visit to the Academy of Realist Art in Toronto and was given a detailed tour by Fernando Freitas, Director and Senior Instructor. Thanks to this excursion, I was able to see each phase of the realistic painting process and understand the limits that process would impose on my protagonist. I learned,

for example, that a realistic painting can take up to a few months to complete. In my original version, Hugo was set to complete his piece in just two weeks. The knowledge I gained there allowed me to adjust my story to create a more believable timeline and dial up the time pressure even a trained hand like Hugo's would be under to complete a painting of that granularity.

Schizophrenia

Since my brother's diagnosis, I am constantly researching mental health and illness to better understand his mindset. For the purposes of my script, I researched schizophrenia from the medical and pop culture perspectives. Watching films on the subject, like *A Beautiful Mind* (written by Akiva Goldsman, directed by Ron Howard) and *Das Weisse Rauschen* (English: *The White Sound*, written by Hans Weingartner, Tobias Amann, Matthias Schellenberg, Katrin Blum, directed by Hans Weingartner, Tobias Amann) has also given me additional insight into not only the illness but its portrayal in popular culture.

After viewing so many pop culture interpretations of schizophrenia and in light of my brother's struggle with mental health, it was critical to me that I portray Hugo's schizophrenia authentically. The book I found the most helpful in this research was *Surviving Schizophrenia: A Family Manual* by

Dr. E. Fuller Torrey due to its inclusion of the symptoms of schizophrenia as described by patients themselves.

Fear comes from the unknown. As I learned more about schizophrenia, my initial fear and misunderstanding (which I feel is shared by a large percent of the population) transformed into sympathy and empathy for those afflicted. At the beginning of the book *Surviving Schizophrenia*, one quote from a patient in particular allowed me to slip into Hugo's shoes to ensure that the portrayal of his illness was not only accurate, but also empathetic: "My greatest fear is this brain of mine.. The worst thing imaginable is to be terrified of one's own mind, the very matter that controls all that we are and all that we do and feel."

Some of the other schizophrenic attributes that Hugo exhibits are supported by these direct patient experiences, including changes in **visual perception** ("Colours seem to be brighter now, almost as if they are a luminous painting", "Lots of things seemed psychedelic; they shone"); **difficulty socializing** ("Social situations were almost impossible to manage. I always came across as aloof, anxious, nervous, or just plain weird, picking up on inane snippets of conversation and asking people to repeat themselves and tell me what they were referring to"); **inability to interpret and respond** ("[...] persons with schizophrenia prefer to spend time by themselves,

withdrawn, communicating with others as little as possible");

paranoid delusions ("The paranoid person may try to strike first when the threat is perceived as too close"); **auditory hallucinations** ("In the vast majority of cases, the voices are male voices and are unpleasant. They are often accusatory, reviling the victims for past misdeeds, either real or imagined"); **visual hallucinations** ("And at the far end of the spectrum are things that are seen by the person with schizophrenia when there is nothing there; this is a true hallucination"); **altered sense of self** ("Alterations of the self may range from such somatic perceptual distortions to, on the other end of the spectrum, confusion in distinguishing oneself from another person"); **ritualistic behaviour** ("There are reasons why they do such things, as explained by this woman who felt compelled to beat eggs in a certain way when making a cake"); **echolalia**, or the psychological term for repetition of another person's words ("Chapman believes that repeating the words probably is useful to the patient because it allows them time to absorb and synthesize what was said"); **internal logic** ("To the outside observer the behavior may appear irrational, 'crazy,' 'mad,' the very hallmark of the disease. To the ill person, however, there is nothing 'crazy' or 'mad' about it at all"); and **anosognosia**, or the decreased awareness of illness ("Generally, insane persons do not regard themselves as insane,

and, consequently, can see no reason for their confinement other than the malevolent designs of those who have deprived them of their liberty").

Hugo exhibits all of the above behaviours throughout *Self Portrait* as he transitions from being medicated to slipping back into a schizophrenic state.

Finally, to ensure that Hugo's experience of schizophrenia is as accurate as possible, I sought the guidance of a mental health professional, Dr. Marisa Leon, psychiatry specialty, from St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto. She provided me with specific feedback in terms of the probability of Hugo's early onset schizophrenia and the timeline of his symptoms after cessation of his antipsychotic medication. She confirmed that these are indeed accurate. Her only concern was the presentation of his hallucinations, as it is extremely rare for a schizophrenic to have such a sustained and detailed vision as Hauke. Usually, schizophrenia is more aural and less visual in its hallucinations. I have, however, taken artistic license in the creation of Hauke, as is often done in film, to better depict Hugo's internal struggle in a compelling way. When defending this choice, I turn to such examples as *Fight Club* (written by Jim Uhls based on the novel by Chuck Palahniuk, directed by David Fincher) in which insomnia is sufficient to cause the

protagonist, the unnamed Narrator, to mentally project an entire character throughout the film.

CREATIVE PROCESS

Writing for me, as possibly for many other writers, usually only happens one of two ways: When I am struck by an inspiration or when I have a deadline. The former is, of course, the more glamorous kind of writing, the kind that whole film montages are dedicated to in which the writer frantically bashes at a typewriter, culminating in a final image of them pulling out the last sheet out and adding it to a stack of completed pages. Most of the short stories and short scripts I write are written this way.

The other kind is the one that is infrequently discussed and even less frequently admitted to: Writing because you must. It's not sexy and it's certainly not how writers would like to be seen, but the reality is, a deadline can be equally as motivating as a sudden strike of inspiration. I consider myself extremely lucky that I do my very best writing under pressure with a deadline looming like a guillotine over my head. I must admit, I love the thrill of it. I thrive on pulling all-nighters for my craft and revel in the subsequent giddy exhaustion of getting it done.

The progress of *Self Portrait* has suffered as a direct result of this. Setting my own deadlines has never been one of my strengths and adhering to them even less so. Compounding that

with working 45 hours a week for the last five years on another continent, my script was often victim to my priority list. I am not particularly proud of the drawn out development of my script, but the purpose of this section is not to indulge in self-praise but rather be truthful about my writing process.

A NOTE ON THE TITLE

The title *Self Portrait* doesn't just refer to the painting that Hugo must complete, but it also reflects the varied ways that Hugo sees himself (and ultimately Hauke) throughout the story.

In one scene, Aylin's father gives her a self-portrait her mother painted before she passed away. He tells her that her mother painted it to show them the way she saw herself. *Self Portrait* is very much about how Hugo is and wants to be seen as an artist.

THEME

Theme has been a "recurring theme" throughout the creation of this script. Although my intention was to always communicate the theme "If a person is not true to themselves, they risk losing themselves entirely", I was not always successful, especially in earlier drafts. The problem of Hugo actively stopping his medication complicated that theme, since the implication would be that Hugo would lose himself regardless after an extended period of being non-medicated.

The theme, however, lies in Hugo's decision to stop taking his medication. Once he was diagnosed and went on anti-psychotics as a late teen, he lost his desire and even ability, to an extent, to create photorealistic paintings. They numbed the part of his brain associated with the trauma and training his father handed down to him. When his father commits suicide and Hugo decides to dedicate himself to fulfilling his father's wishes, he must stop the medication in order to create photorealistic paintings again. It is this decision to actively suppress the abstract artist within and become a photorealist that expresses theme. Stopping his medication is merely a consequence of that. Without this initial decision, Hugo would never begin to unravel and lose his grasp on his true self.

Self Portrait is also very much about "nature vs. nurture". Hugo's nurturing, or lack thereof, leads him to become a photorealist that battles constantly with his natural tendency toward abstract expressionism.

CHARACTERS

Hugo Streich - Protagonist

Hugo suffers from early onset schizophrenia. He became symptomatic at the age of 14 and has taken anti-psychotic medication since the age of 15. As a child, Hugo was pushed to become a photorealist painter by his father, enduring hours of intense training in the method and technique administered by his father. He was never truly permitted to have the freedom of childhood or youth, so once he enrolls at art school and moves away from the suburbs into a small studio apartment in the city, he uses the distance from his father to pursue his true passion: Abstract expressionism.

Attending university is an awakening for Hugo. He discovers his joy for life and revels in being able to do what he pleases whenever he wants. He has many acquaintances and, due to his good looks, has never been short on female admirers. Hugo, however, having had little experience with girls as a youth, struggles to express his feelings and often lets a crush go unrequited. Tam is the first girl that he sees a chance at a relationship with, since their mutual attraction stems from a shared passion for abstract art and a meaningful friendship. He manages, however, to ruin that chance by misdirecting his anger, bitterness and resentment toward his father at her, causing her

to lose interest in pursuing a relationship, at least for the time being.

Whenever his parents come to visit him at university, Hugo meticulously stages his apartment to give his father the impression that he continues to pursue a career as a photorealist. Not one for spontaneity, the risk of Hugo's father showing up unannounced was almost non-existent, so maintaining the lie proved to be simple for Hugo over the years.

Deep down, Hugo is not the highly organized, meticulous and disciplined artist his father tried to make out of him. He is easily distracted, he loves irregular forms and asymmetry, and he yearns for disorder and the messiness and naturalness of life and art.

Although he loves his mother, he avoids her once he moved out of the house in an attempt to also avoid his father. Hugo could hardly get his mother alone when they lived together, so realizing that he wouldn't be able to have a close relationship with her outside of his father's presence, Hugo made the difficult decision to reduce the amount he sees his mother, too. Deep down, Hugo also feels a certain resentment toward his mother, since she never properly intervened in the militant training his father subjected him to.

When Hugo's father kills himself and Hugo believes that he is directly responsible for his death, Hugo must suppress his

true nature and struggle to be the man his father always pressured him to be. These feelings are often at odds with each other. Compounded by stopping his medication, these two inner conflicting selves struggle for control and even manifest themselves in an imagined foe: Hauke.

Aylin Eichendorf

Aylin was raised in a loving home full of contrasting attitudes and experiences. Her mother being Turkish, Aylin inherited a passion for the arts and familial closeness. Growing up in a small town in Bavaria, she was constantly confronted with the sense that she didn't belong. If not for her mother's fierce insistence that she could be and do whatever she wanted, Aylin may have succumbed to the prejudiced treatment handed to her by her German classmates and teachers.

Aylin always wanted to escape the small town that made her feel like she was permanently under scrutiny and go to the big city: Berlin. She had been in love with Berlin since her and her mother first visited her uncle Engin at his art gallery there as a child. Her father didn't usually join them because he was busy running the brewery in their village. Although he was often busy with work, Aylin was always showered in love by her father.

When Aylin was old enough to leave home, she went to Berlin to go work for her uncle at the gallery and study museology. Due

to her mother's passion for art, Aylin knew she wanted to be a part of the art world, though she lacked artistic talent or tendency herself. Despite the distance, Aylin would come home often to visit, as she was very close with her mother. After her mother died of cancer, Aylin was heartbroken and found it painful to return there. She knows she should visit her father more often and help him through his pain, but her own pain makes it almost unbearable to return to her family home knowing the hole her mother's death has left there.

Romantically, Aylin has always had a thing for brooding artists. She has been known to begin affairs with artists associated with the gallery, which has caused her uncle a few headaches over the years. Aylin falls in and out of love quickly. When she meets Hugo, he is just her type and she is immediately attracted to him, though she knows she should restrain herself for the sake of the show and gallery. Aylin's attraction becomes legitimate care and concern as she sees what has happened to Hugo as a result of the mounting pressure to complete his painting and especially when she finds out about his schizophrenia diagnosis.

Hauke - Antagonist

Hauke appears to be a Geselle – travelling tradespeople who work for room and board – who is traversing Germany, working when and where he likes and painting in his free time. Hauke paints for the love of painting, and not to attain a certain objective. When he meets Hugo, he challenges Hugo's notions of art and life because they are so different from his own. Hauke may work hard, but he gives the impression that he hardly lifts a finger.

Hauke is actually a manifestation of Hugo's underlying desires: A literal personification of "man vs. self". He embodies the side of Hugo that yearns for artistic freedom and expression, his need to exude confidence and charisma and a desire to shrug off the weight of responsibility he feels toward his father. Hauke hates his own father and has no qualms with stating this fact. He paints what he wants, when he wants because he feels like it, not because he feels he has to fulfill an obligation to anyone else.

When Hugo kills Hauke, he does so with the subversive belief that he will finally be able to free his path to success as a photorealist. He truly believes that Hauke is literally blocking his path to success. What Hugo discovers, however, is that Hauke is merely a part of himself. Killing him doesn't stifle his true artistic self, but rather heightens it.

Jill Streich

Jillian Streich (née Holmdell) is Hugo's mother and a librarian. She was taking library studies when she met Hans, Hugo's father. She fell for him immediately because she was drawn to his moodiness and artistic spirit. Soon after they met, Hans was kicked out of his shared apartment and Jill asked him to move in with her. Jill became pregnant a few months after they met and agreed to marry Hans, as even in the late 80's unmarried mothers were stigmatized. They were married in a civil ceremony when Jill was six months pregnant.

A few weeks before the baby was due, Jillian couldn't feel it moving anymore. She went to the hospital, only to discover that the baby had died. She called Hans who came to be by her side as she had to give birth to the stillborn child. The event was traumatic for both of them. Afterwards, Jill stayed busy to keep her mind off the loss of their child, but Hans fell into a deep depression. A few months later, he was forced to drop out of art school due to lack of attendance. He took a job as a house painter to make ends meet.

After she finished her studies, Jill got a job at a branch of the Toronto Public Library. At home, the relationship between Jill and Hans had become strained, his job as a house painter only exacerbating his existing depression. After a fight in 1992, Hans moved out to live with a former school mate. During

this separation Jill discovered she was pregnant again. Hans immediately moved back in. That child was Hugo.

Due to the loss of her first child, Jill tended to over-mother Hugo throughout his life. She did, however, allow Hans to train Hugo for hours on end in photorealism, because he insisted that someday Hugo would thank him for the intense training. She never fully supported the idea, but was unwilling to cause tension in the small family that was already so precarious to begin with.

When Jill found out that Hugo had early onset schizophrenia, she blamed herself entirely for not having stepped in during what she now recognized to be Hugo's verbally and emotionally abusive training. She becomes convinced that without that mental stress, Hugo would have never become symptomatic. This causes her to want to over-mother Hugo even more and makes her sad when he pushes them both away after going off to university.

Hans Streich

Hugo's father, Hans Streich, born in Heidelberg, Germany, moved to Toronto as a teen with his family. His grandfather was a realist painter, having studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris from the age of 13 in the early twentieth century. His father, also a painter, was a strict man who achieved a moderate

level of success. Hans, however, wanted his work to be even more realistic. He decided to take his career a step further with photorealism after seeing Chuck Close's "Close-Ups" at the Whitney Gallery on a trip to New York City as a youth.

Hans taught his son Hugo to speak German with the same militant training style he employed to teach him painting. To support his family, Hans worked as a house painter. He used his free time to paint himself and to train Hugo to become a photorealist. Hans is rigid, inflexible and believes that his word is law. He sees Hugo's future laid out for him as a photorealist and works tirelessly to ensure that Hugo achieves that dream.

Michael Eichendorf

Michael is a brew master at the local brewery in Kirchenfeld. Michael is a simple man with a huge heart. He's not the type to ever read a book, but could have a conversation with anyone about anything. Although outwardly her polar opposite, he and Aylin's mother, Leyla, shared a deep unshakeable love for one another. They met in Munich right after Leyla finished university when she travelled there to attend an art exhibition. After her death, Michael doesn't mourn, but chooses to daily celebrate Leyla's life in everything he says and does. He speaks of her often, a lot of the time as if she were still alive. This

behaviour has been problematic for Aylin since her mother's death, since the mere mention of her sends Aylin into a profound state of sadness. Michael knows that Leyla never would have wanted him to mope around, so he chooses to keep as active in his daily life as possible and not let his sadness get the better of him.

In recent months, Michael has begun a romance with the brewery accountant, Ingrid, which he keeps secret from Aylin. Before her imminent death, Leyla made Michael promise her to move on and not be alone too long. Leyla was the one who even suggested Ingrid, having known her for many years and learning that Ingrid's husband recently left her. Michael thinks Aylin won't understand or will be angry with him for moving on too quickly.

Michael works hard and loves his job. Making beer is his form of art, as he always jokes when people find out his wife was an amateur artist. He loves Aylin more than anything and is only saddened by her reluctance to visit him. Being more comfortable in the countryside, Michael avoids large cities and therefore has only come to visit Aylin twice since she moved to Berlin almost a decade earlier.

Engin Kaplan

Much like his older sister, Leyla, Engin also wanted a career in the arts, but decided to approach it from the more "practical" (according to his parents) side, in the form of gallery ownership and art sales. He has lived in Berlin his whole life, having been born there slightly after his parents emigrated from Izmir, Turkey. Aylin is his only niece, so he took special care of her when she moved to Berlin to study and especially after her mother passed away.

Engin is interested in discovering and breaking the next big artist onto the art scene. He's always exploring new artists and is generous with chances, however, he will drop an artist quickly if he realizes they are not as serious about their success as he is.

Tam Nguyen

Tam is the life of the party. Daughter of second generation Vietnamese Canadian immigrants, she managed to walk the line between traditional home life and being a wild youth in a major urban center. Her parents aren't necessarily happy with her career choice, but ultimately support her emotionally and financially. She is an abstract artist and an utter free spirit.

She never holds back how she really feels, especially when her short fuse has been lit.

Tam has had her eye on Hugo since she first met him in first year at college. She stayed respectfully friends, not wanting to destroy the friendship they built over the years, but she is always thinking about how a relationship with Hugo would be.

Leyla Eichendorf

Leyla was always a free artistic spirit and never really fit into the mold her family created for her. She moved to Berlin from Izmir, Turkey with her family when she was a baby after her father was offered a "guest worker" position. Instead of focusing on getting married and having a family, Leyla wanted to focus on art. Her father, who doted on her, finally agreed to send her to Toronto to study. When she returned to Germany years later, she met Aylin's father, Michael, in Munich and eventually settled down with him in his hometown of Kirchenfeld. She ran art classes for the local children but never stopped creating herself.

Aylin was the pride and joy of Leyla's life and later, when Aylin was old enough, the two shared a bond as close as best friends. Aylin and Leyla shared everything and were inseparable until Aylin moved to Berlin for school. Leyla was heartbroken,

but so happy that she could support her daughter in fulfilling her dreams.

Leyla always managed to rise above the ill intentions of small minded people of Kirchenfeld and was never really bothered by their comments or sometimes outright racist attitudes toward her.

STRUCTURAL BREAKDOWN

"Structure is the foundation, the base, the blueprint of the screenplay; as William Goldman says, 'Screenplay is structure'."⁶

When I think about screenplay structure, I often wonder if it's a bit of a "chicken and egg" situation. Do scripts adhere to a structure because that is what an audience has come to expect, or does the audience expect it because it's become part of the fabric of film? Regardless of its origins, I believe that structure is what helps the audience connect with the material by establishing an unspoken promise of the story they are about to read or watch and delivering on that promise. And as I know from writing screenplays and also being a cinephile myself, nothing feels better in film than the payoff of a good setup.

Syd Field in his book *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* says that the functions of plot points – the tent poles that hold a story up, giving it structure – are simple: They move the story forward and hold the paradigm in place.

⁶Field, Syd. *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*. Kindle ed. New York: Bantam Books, 2005.

Act I

Ob Ordinary World

The character's ordinary world⁷ is the world in which the viewer initially discovers the protagonist. Everything seems fine in this world, or at least there is a status quo in which the protagonist appears to function normally.

For Hugo, this status quo is attending art school, taking his medication regularly, painting in the style of abstract expressionism (and hiding that fact from his father when he occasionally comes to visit), going out with his friends and enjoying the luxuries and pitfalls of being a young person in higher education.

The status quo is maintained until the moment of the inciting incident, which wrenches the protagonist from the comforts of their ordinary world into the world of the story.

Inciting Incident

The inciting incident⁸, also referred to as the "call to adventure" by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and Christopher Vogler in *The Hero's Journey*, sets the story

⁷ Vogler, Christopher. *The Hero's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. 3rd ed., Studio City: Michael Wiese Productions, 2007.

⁸ Field, Syd. *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*. Kindle ed. New York: Bantam Books, 2005.

in motion and thrusts the protagonist out of their ordinary world.

Hugo's inciting incident is when he discovers his father's body after he's killed himself, the ultimate expression of disappointment in Hugo's rejection of photorealism. In order to atone for his father's disappointment, Hugo must become a photorealist and suppress his dangerous and now deadly passion for abstract expressionism. In the world of the story, Hugo will now do whatever it takes to become the photorealist his father wanted him to be.

Turning Point One

Turning Point One, or as Syd Field calls it "Plot Point 1", is the true beginning of the story⁹. This point in the film, the last big event before Act II begins, is sometimes considered the "commitment": The moment at which the protagonist commits to the journey that lies ahead.

For Hugo, this commitment is going to Berlin with the intention of creating a new self-portrait to replace the one he destroyed in Act I. From here, we are launched into the action of Act II: Hugo goes to Berlin and later Kirchenfeld in an attempt to successfully complete the painting.

⁹Field, Syd. *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*. Kindle ed. New York: Bantam Books, 2005.

Act II

Midpoint

The midpoint, sometimes also referred to as the “pinch”, is often considered the point of no return for the protagonist, or the point at which the protagonist becomes fully committed to their goals¹⁰.

For Hugo, the midpoint is when he is chased by his doppelgänger and subsequently asks Aylin to help him get out of Berlin in order to safely continue working on his painting. He is fully committed to finishing the painting at all cost and takes drastic action to do so. For Hugo, ironically, staying focused on his painting becomes increasingly difficult after this point, as the time since he was last medicated increases and he begins to see his double, Hauke, more regularly.

Crisis

The crisis moment, also referred to as the “All is lost” moment by Blake Snyder in *Save the Cat!*, occurs just before the final launch into Act III, known as Turning Point Two or Plot Point 2.

10 Trottier, David. *The Screenwriter's Bible: A Complete Guide to Writing, Formatting, and Selling Your Script*. Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2005.

"The protagonist's quest has carried him through the Progressive Complications until he's exhausted all actions to achieve his desire, save one. He now finds himself at the end of the line. His next action is his last. No tomorrow. No second chance. This moment of dangerous opportunity is the point of greatest tension in the story."

11

As the name implies, it is the moment when the circumstances force the protagonist (and the audience) to believe that the protagonist will not accomplish the goal they've set out to achieve. They are backed into a corner and now must take extreme measures to see their goal through.

For Hugo, this moment comes when he wakes up from his illness to discover that Hauke has "painted over" his photorealistic painting with an abstract piece. After a month's work and with the exhibition so close in sight, Hugo knows that there is no way he can complete another piece in time. Hauke has destroyed his one chance at earning recognition for his photorealism and thereby appeasing his father's spirit. The only option that Hugo has left now is to move onto Turning Point Two: Kill Hauke and steal his painting.

11 McKee, Robert. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*. New York: Harper Entertainment, 1997. p. 303.

Turning Point II

This second turning point is also sometimes considered the "recommitment" to the goal. It is another active event: An event the protagonist sets into motion themselves (as opposed to passive events, like the inciting incident, that happen to the protagonist). This turning point is the last ditch attempt at accomplishing the goal. With a new commitment to achieve their goal, there is no holding back.

For Hugo, Turning Point II is when he kills Hauke thereby reestablishing the balance that he believes Hauke has thrown off. Hugo believes that if Hauke is destroyed, he will somehow be able to escape the forces that Hauke creates and that are holding him back. What he doesn't know at this point is that the forces holding him back (and indeed Hauke himself) are coming from within him.

ACT III

Climax

In my opinion, Robert McKee best describes the climax when he writes, "This crowning Major Reversal is not necessarily full of noise and violence. Rather, it must be full of meaning"¹². Those who haven't studied screenwriting often assume that the climax in a script, like the climax in a piece of music or other areas of life, is the moment with the most action. In some films, the climax happens to coincide with the moment of most action: For example in films in which the story leads up to a great battle. As McKee mentions, in a screenplay, it's a moment that's full of meaning. It is the moment that answers the central question posed by the events of Turning Point I.

In the case of *Self Portrait*, the central question is: Will Hugo manage to finish the painting and thereby achieve recognition as a photorealist? The climax comes at the gallery when Hugo is lauded as not only a photorealist, but also an abstract artist for the two pieces that he's completed. While this moment is the climax for the audience, it is actually anticlimactic and deeply disappointing for Hugo, since being recognized as an abstract artist goes against everything he

¹² McKee, Robert. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*. New York: Harper Entertainment, 1997. p. 309.

struggled for since his father killed himself.

Denouement

The denouement, or the "Return with the Elixir" as Vogler calls it, is when the protagonist returns to their ordinary world, this time with the key to improving it with the knowledge and experiences they gained during their journey through the world of the story.¹³

In *Self Portrait*, the denouement shows Hugo on his medication, accepting his true calling of abstract expressionism, rekindling a romance with Tam and rebuilding his relationship with his mother. These are all elements that Hugo had in his original ordinary world, but now with the lessons that Hugo's learned along the way, he's able to approach those with a new appreciation. He's gone through an arduous struggle that saw him reach the brink of insanity, but now he's smarter than ever before and better able to tackle the everyday challenges of his life.

¹³Vogler, Christopher. *The Hero's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. 3rd ed., Studio City: Michael Wiese Productions, 2007.

PRODUCTION PLANS

The film production company Schöne Neue Filme based out of Munich has already shown interest in reading the script. I have been working together with them for the last five years translating scripts and subtitles of their productions into English, so they are familiar with my work.

Ideally, I would aim for a Canadian/German coproduction, since the setting and content lends itself to funding from both countries.

CONCLUSION

Writing *Self Portrait* has taken me on a journey that was longer than intended, but in many ways necessary. The story evolved alongside me all these years. *Self Portrait* is very much a story about my own struggle to establish who I am in this industry and as a person.

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