

A LATE THAW

KIM BARR

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 PRODUCTION  
YORK UNIVERSITY  
TORONTO, ONTARIO

January 2015

© Kim Barr, 2015

## **A Late Thaw: Abstract**

*A Late Thaw* is an eighteen-minute drama based on the loss of my boyfriend in an ice climbing accident when I was nineteen. The film is largely a poetic exploration of love, grief, and hope. The narrative is fictionalized in order to tap into the universal themes embedded in such an experience. It exposes how unresolved grief can be triggered by outside forces, changes and upheavals, or by inner forces such as a desire to hold on to the memory of the loved one. In some cases, feelings of grief can remain frozen until an event draws attention to that which is still in need of healing. These conscious and unconscious forces complicate the healing process. The goal of the film is to recount the story events (cause) while expressing the inner grief process (effect), creating two story worlds and bridging them together in a seamless way. The challenge lay in externalizing an internal process so that the viewer would understand and perhaps recognize the feelings being conveyed. The research behind the film reflects this bridging of inner and outer worlds, as I turned inwards to my memories, the healing process, and physical artifacts of that time, and outwards towards research in Post Traumatic Stress as well as other films that explore similar themes and subject matter. Part memoir, part research, and part production journal, this paper examines the inspirations, influences, and decisions behind *A Late Thaw*.

## **Short Synopsis**

After Tara attends her best friend Carol-Ann's bachelorette party, memories of Glenn, a lover who died years ago, seep into her waking life. To complicate matters, her current boyfriend, Stephane, extends an offer to her of the perfect house for them to buy together, presenting a new level of commitment for Tara. While she is initially reluctant to do so, in finally visiting the house, and through repeated visits, Tara relives her grief around the loss of Glenn, and is forced to face feelings that had remained frozen deep within her psyche. In the end, Tara's experiences at the house lead her to make peace with her memories, allowing her to be more able to commit to Stephane.

## **Dedication**

Dedicated to Glenn Gray (1962 - 1982)

You will forever be in my heart.

### **Special Thanks**

To my committee members: John Greyson, Marie Rickard, and Ali Kazimi.

Mom, the Fuzzy Roo, and Bruce.

### **Thanks**

Amnon Buchbinder, Maureen Dorey, whose feedback was invaluable.

My supportive classmates at York, the Cast and Crew who suited up.

Kuowei Lee, Marcos Arriaga, Bill Byers, Stephanie Adamson. Although I shot in Montreal, they were an important part of my journey through York University's Film

Department

**To view the film, please contact Kim Barr:**

[kim.barr@yahoo.ca](mailto:kim.barr@yahoo.ca)

[alatethaw.com](http://alatethaw.com)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Synopsis.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Development:.....	2
Glenn and The Dream.....	2
Fight, Flight,Freeze: Background Research into Trauma and Healing.....	4
The Search for Glenn: Elements, Motifs, and Symbols.....	7
Climbing Equipment.....	11
Snow.....	12
Houses.....	13
Gothic Motifs.....	15
Romancing the Spectre.....	16
First Attempts: An exploration of Form.....	19
Previous Work.....	20
Other Film Influences.....	22
The Hero’s Journey: Developmental Psychology and The Script.....	25
Pre-Production:.....	26
Locations.....	26

Producing and The Budget.....	27
Casting.....	29
Rehearsals.....	31
Key Creative's:.....	31
Production Designer.....	31
Special Effects.....	34
Make-Up.....	35
Costumes.....	36
Director of Photography.....	37
Production.....	39
Camera.....	39
Directing.....	40
Post-Production.....	44
Editing.....	44
Sound Design.....	45
Film Release and Promotion.....	46
Final Thoughts.....	47
Works cited.....	49
Bibliography.....	49
Filmography.....	50
Appendix: Vision Board	

## Introduction

*“It is important to have a secret, a premonition of things unknown. It fills life with something impersonal, a numinosum. A man who has never experienced that has missed something important. He must sense that he lives in a world that, in some respects, is mysterious; that things happen and can be experienced which remain inexplicable; that not everything that happens can be anticipated. The unexpected and the incredible belong in this world. Only then is life whole. For me the world has from the beginning been infinite and ungraspable. “ (Jung 356)*

Writing a support paper after a lengthy production might seem daunting, but I welcomed the task as both a debriefing, and also, an opportunity to inventory my journey as a filmmaker so far. Initial drafts were largely an expression of the growing pains and challenges of this particular production, with a little research thrown in for good measure. However, my focus has since expanded to examine my influences, conscious and unconscious, personal and academic, to establish the beginnings of myself as a professional filmmaker. That I feel ready to stake a claim at all is the direct result of successfully fulfilling the goals I set out with this film - to craft an authentic story and find my voice as a filmmaker. In truth, these goals are ongoing and I am only just beginning to develop them, but I am closer than I have ever been. It has been a very challenging journey but well worth the effort. It is my hope that fellow students who read my paper, as I read those before me, might feel more confident about their journey - as it is - alternately painful and joyous.



## **DEVELOPMENT**

### **Glenn and The Dream**



**Glenn and me, Montreal, 1980.**

When I was nineteen my boyfriend of almost three years, Glenn Gray, died in an ice climbing accident in the Rockies. He left with his climbing buddy David Fanjoy from the youth hostel where I worked, and they never came back. The week before, while sitting atop a waterfall we had climbed, I started crying for some unknown reason, and told him that if he ever died I would climb mountains for him. The night before he was supposed to come back, I was out with friends but went home abruptly. I felt something was wrong. When he did not show up the next day, and David's workplace called in a panic, I phoned the Rangers. They were unable to disclose anything until the family was notified, but I knew he was dead. It felt as if someone had reached into my chest and

ripped my heart out. As Glenn and I had planned to do the following week, I hitched a ride to Jasper. The man who gave me the lift was coincidentally the ranger who had found their bodies. He told me the story: a large overhang of ice had come loose from the rock, and pulled them off the cliff. They fell 2,000 feet. He told me Glenn looked peaceful. Whether he said this to comfort me or whether it was true, I will never know. To that, and the many other questions I asked after his death, there are no answers.

For a while, I disappeared into the mountains. I needed to be alone with the nature that had claimed him. When I finally came back to Montreal, and the world, I could not move forward with my life. I felt guilty at the thought of moving on, as if to do so meant I was abandoning him. I felt a kind of survivor's guilt. It took all my energy to shut out the grief and pain. Back then, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was less understood, and there were not many grief counselors. When I tried not to think about Glenn, he would appear in my dreams. The dreams were always variations on themes of abandonment and betrayal: he would be alive, but had simply not contacted me. In one of the most memorable, he was sitting on a big chair in what seemed to be a toy store warehouse. As I talked to him, he fell over, so I propped him up with whatever I could find to keep up the illusion that he was alive, with me. This dream was at once so sad and so magical that I wanted to create something with it.

The trauma of losing someone so suddenly is tricky. No goodbyes, no last words, no closure. Not only is the person ripped from you, but also your hopes for the future and the past you had shared. Since his death was an accident, there was nowhere to focus the tremendous rage and powerlessness I felt so I froze, suppressing the feelings with a myriad of patterns and substances. When I finally let the pain emerge, it took years to

work through. The rage, fear, anxiety, and grief seemed endless. Some twenty years later, I stumbled on Peter Levine's work on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It was only then that my lengthy and cyclical healing process began to make sense to me.

### **Fight, Flight or Freeze: Background Research into Trauma and Healing**

Most everyone is aware of fight and flight as human responses to danger and trauma, but there is a third lesser-known response, and that is "freeze". Animals freeze or remain immobile when fight or flight is either not possible or not in their best interest. Freezing convinces the predator that the animal is dead, or serves to numb the pain of the gnashing teeth. If the animal survives, once the danger has passed, they shake off the experience. For animals, a deer-in-the-headlights response turns into a leap into the brush and a return to life as it was. Not so with humans. In his book, *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*, Peter Levine proposes that the freezing response is problematic for us because of our capacity for awareness. When confronted with a traumatic or life threatening situation, our rational brains become confused and override our instinctive impulses. "Though this overriding may be for a good reason, the confusion that accompanies it ... can turn us to stone. We may literally freeze in fear, which will result in the creation of traumatic symptoms." (Levine 18) Levine believes that, since humans do not naturally shake off the freezing response, the pent-up energy is not fully discharged. "This residual energy does not simply go away. It persists in the body and often forces the formation of a wide variety of symptoms, e.g. anxiety, depression, psychosomatic and behavioural problems" (Levine 37) in other words, the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He states "symptoms of PTSD develop when we cannot complete the process of moving

in, through and out of the immobility state. However, we can thaw by initiating and encouraging our innate drive to return to a state of dynamic equilibrium.” (Levine 19) Rather than suppress or bypass the process, Levine suggests we tune inwards to access the wounded areas and embrace the “sensation and feeling that accompany our traumatic patterns, allowing them to complete themselves”. This, he believes, will “transform the drives and motivations that otherwise compel us to re-enact traumatic events.” (Levine 187). Often, as is the case for grief, people do not address it at all, or they are encouraged by others to “get over it”, and use substances and avoidance behaviours, or even re-create the trauma to keep the pain at bay. It remains unresolved. “Some traumatized people remain preoccupied with the trauma at the expense of other life experiences and continue to re-create it in some form for themselves or for others...” (Van Der Kolk 137, 141)

Unfortunately, healing is a luxury few of us can afford. As we feel the depth of what was not felt the first time, we often get worse before we get better. “Clinicians need to provide accurate expectations about temporary symptom exacerbation and help patients to understand that feeling fear and other aversive emotions in the short term will achieve the goal of remediating fear in the long term” (Foa, Hembree, & Rothbaum). Research has found that the best cure for PTSD is a combination of exposure therapy and cognitive behaviour therapy, where the patient describes the traumatic event over and over again until it loses its power. According to Levine, “as formerly frozen elements ... are released from their trauma- serving tasks... you have the possibility to become more fluid and functional.” (Levine 61) In this way, healing is counterintuitive. Only by submitting to the pain can you move on.

In the film, Tara’s unresolved grief around Glenn’s death interferes with her

ability to commit to Stephane, but she is not aware of this. At Carol-Ann's bachelorette, the stripper who appears on stage as a climber triggers Tara's repressed feelings and brings them to the surface. Stephane's proposal of a new level of commitment further complicates matters. Reluctantly, Tara decides to visit the house that Stephane has found and falls in love with it. However, this idea of "home" triggers her grief even more. At first, she does not want to know where her grief leads, but as she begins to relive her feelings around Glenn; she conjures him up in the house. When Stephane then fails to arrive home from a trip as expected, Tara's PTSD causes her to relive the anxiety and pain around Glenn's death and his not returning. Unable to find comfort from her closest friend, Carol-Ann, Tara decides to confront her feelings head on. She goes back to the house and faces Glenn, wanting to escape from it all. There she experiences a kind of death until her anger snaps her back to life, and to the fact that she is alone. In the aftermath, Tara reaches a new level of acceptance and a letting go, which allows the needed space for love to enter.



**Island Peak (Imja Tse), Nepai, 1998.**

### **The Search for Glenn: Elements, Motifs, and Symbols**

As promised, I climbed mountains for Glenn. I rock climbed in Italy and Canada. I hiked in the Alps. But the closest I got to the level of mountaineering Glenn was engaged in was when I climbed Island Peak in Nepal, a 6189-meter peak and training ground for people climbing Everest. The climb was varied; starting on a rocky trail, which leads to a glacier at approximately 6000 meters, where one would camp until the next day. The last pitch was a vertical 200-meter climb on snow and ice to the peak. We trained for the climb at Base Camp by ice climbing a few frozen waterfalls while we waited for the weather to clear, and then we climbed. Once we reached the glacier at 6,000 meters, the air was thin and every step was an enormous effort. As I trudged across in my crampons, tied to the others on my team, a voice in my head said, “you can just sit down”, and I understood why so many climbers do just that, and never get up again. Then our guide fell into a crevasse. We stopped him from falling further, and pulling us down

with him using a technique called an ice axe arrest, throwing our bodies down on the glacier and digging our ice axes into the ice and snow. The equipment was our lifeblood.

That night we pitched our tent on the glacier and prepared for the morning's vertical pitch. High above the world, in that strange oxygen deprived place between sleeping and dreaming, I asked myself "Is it worth it?" I thought of Glenn and wondered if, in his final moments, he had regretted his choice. I was conflicted, and I had no answers. The dangerous story continued the next day when we started out too late. We made it to the peak, and caught a glimpse of the world from God's point of view, but then were hit with a whiteout and forced to come down the mountain blind. It was frightening and exhilarating at the same time. I loved the adrenaline rush from the risk, but didn't remember the incident again for three months.

Despite the danger, I was obsessed. I thought of climbing higher peaks but the fact is, the more mountains you climb, the greater the risk of dying. I could not help but make the connection: that the more you engage in your relationships, the more likely your chances are of getting hurt, or of losing the person you love one way or another. You can protect yourself but, like climbing, the thrill lies in being exposed and vulnerable. This film is not only a tribute to Glenn, and to my loss, but also, to the courage of loving again.



**Learning the ropes at Base Camp**



**Ice climbing near Base Camp.**



**On the Glacier.**





**At 6,000 meters, we pitched our tents.**



**View from the ridge before the whiteout**



**Victory on the ridge, Group Expedition, Island Peak, Nepal, 1998**

### **Climbing Equipment**

“ I must not become a shiny equipment climber, it concedes too much faith in man’s domination over nature” - Glenn Gray (from his journal, 1980)

There is nothing better than climbing equipment: The softness of the rope, the clinking sound of karabiners, and the comfort of the right boots. Like most athletes, climbers imbue their equipment with a power beyond its practical use. But in examining the role that the equipment would play in the film, it occurred to me that, for a climber, the talismanic properties that are ascribed to his/her equipment are much more dramatic;

they are meant to ward off death. With that in mind, I began to look at the equipment symbolically. Within the film, like archeological artifacts, the equipment could reveal to the audience what had happened. It could serve as the trigger for Tara's memory and tell the story better than photos, flashbacks, or dialogue. It might even expose the central conflict around loving - the battle between self-protection versus vulnerability. It could encapsulate Tara's struggle.

To achieve this, it was important that the equipment have an organic rhyme or reason in both story worlds. As with dreams, the equipment that would appear in Tara's altered state had to have its origin in her daily life. For example: the equipment in the box of keepsakes appears scattered around Glenn in the attic; the set ropes hanging down from the ceiling in the climbing gym are mirrored in the forest of ropes in the attic. The equipment was also given a character arc. At the beginning of the film, the equipment is symbolic of romance and longing, but by the end it is adversarial. The more personal elements that appear in the film resemble items Glenn owned, such as the big grey sweater that Tara finds in the box, or the journal. These illustrate a softer side of Glenn, and serve to fill out his personality on screen.

## **Snow**

Everyone who knows me knows how much I love snow; the way it quiets the city, the permission it gives me to reflect or to write. Snow also reminds me of Glenn. We fell in love in winter; we went winter camping; and he died while ice climbing. Snow is romantic. It is also dangerous. Deaths in mountaineering are often caused by whiteouts or snowstorms. A clear day can change in an instant, especially on high peaks like

Everest. And if something untoward happens to you in such a case, you are largely on your own. Anyone who dares to rescue you puts his or her and other lives at risk. People who die on the mountain are often left there. On Everest, the bodies left behind are eerily preserved. They may be propped up in the snow in the position in which they died. They look lost, isolated, vulnerable, and strangely alive. Like the Glenn in my dream, they embody ideas about loss, and about the preservation of memory.

The first time at the house, Tara is both attracted to and afraid of the snow. It is romantic and light, yet it fills her with unease. At first we don't know why, but during her second visit to the house, we soon discover the answer when Glenn appears to her. Since he is a projection of her feelings and desires, she wills him to look alive and strong, just as she would like to remember him. On her last visit, however, finally ready, she sees him alone and vulnerable, half buried in the snow, like the bodies on Everest. He is the embodiment of her feeling that she has abandoned him, and in wanting to comfort him and assuage her guilt, she sits down with him in the snow, and "dies" too.

## **Houses**

My mother renovated Victorian houses when I was in my teens. She chose houses she deemed soulful, and restored them as we lived in them, careful to preserve their cachet. We had recently moved into one of these houses when I started dating Glenn. The mystery of this man, who I had known and yet not known for years, became infused with the mystery of my new home. Both were familiar and mysterious, comforting and dangerous. In between dates, I would roam around the house and feel all the excitement and trepidation that a new relationship brings. The house contained my feelings and

came to represent a psychic space full of romance and longing. After Glenn died, I could not commit to any one place, and moved many times. Not just apartments, but cities, provinces, countries, and continents. I longed for somewhere I could call home, but the minute I would settle in, I would begin to feel anxious, so I kept moving. Maybe I was afraid of what might catch up to me; perhaps in feeling secure, I would remember that security could be lost in an instant. For the film, it made sense that Tara would be both drawn to the promise of safety and security that a relationship and a home can bring, but also that this could sow the seeds of anxiety around the possibility of losing them.



**MacDougall Manor**

## Gothic Motifs

The MacDougall Manor held all the romance and mystery that I wanted to portray in *A Late Thaw*, yet it was only when John Greyson pointed out the obvious gothic subtext, that I realized the house represented the first of many Gothic motifs that subconsciously found their way into the film.

Looking as though it were transplanted from the English Moors of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, with an attic that was reminiscent of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, such a manor evokes a major motif in Gothic Literature, castles or mansions that are strange and mysterious, and typically fallen into disrepair. The Manor also implies that an aspect of the story takes place in the past, setting the modern or present day against what is ancient --“...where everything that characters and readers think that they've safely left behind comes back with a vengeance.” (Bowen, The Gothic, Video)

In *A Late Thaw*, the manor house is empty, and in need of care. That there are no occupants increases Tara's vulnerability to the present, and the past. In the empty rooms of the house, she projects both her hopes and fears.

In a British Library Board video, Professor John Bowen lists other typical motifs of Gothic literature: a vulnerable heroine moved by forces beyond her control, “the past erupting in and deranging the present”, and a “transformation in space ... a shift in time from normal world to another world with its own rules and spaces”. He goes on to describe Gothic as a world of doubt “intended to give us the experience of the sublime, to shock us out of the limits of our everyday lives with the possibility of things beyond reason and explanation, in the shape of awesome and terrifying characters, and inexplicable and profound events.”

Gothic literature is fascinated with the sublime and the uncanny; experiences that are not considered pleasurable such as a storm at high seas, or a shipwreck. I would add an ice covered cliff, or a stark snowy mountaintop, in keeping with the aesthetic concept's introduction by 18<sup>th</sup> century British philosophers to describe their experience in the Alps. The sublime is not harmonious or balanced but beautiful and terrifying. This is what I hoped the image of Glenn in the snow at the end would convey. I wanted the scene to be beautiful to watch, but disturbing for what it represents. Bowen describes the uncanny as something new that is imbued with the power to recall our past, like the Manor House. In placing snow in the house and dressing the attic like a snowy mountaintop, the house becomes the place where the uncanny and the sublime meet, a place of romance and horror in which Tara can conjure up her beloved.

### **Romancing the Spectre**

I admit to having tried to summon Glenn's spirit on more than one occasion, to ask the many questions I had, and to say goodbye. When Jerry Zucker's film *Ghost* was released in 1990, though I felt the crime thriller plot trivialized the themes of loss, I was able to identify with the Demi Moore character. Through her, I connected to the grief I was still feeling after eight years. That the character felt the presence of her lover while engaged in her art also resonated with me, but for opposite reasons. Glenn was a true Renaissance man: together we listened to Bach, studied philosophy, wrote, drew, and painted. He bought me my first flute. After he died, every time I picked up my flute or pencil, I would feel his loss more deeply. I was unable to create. In this way, I died with him. Watching *Ghost*, I thought that perhaps if I had closure, like the Demi Moore

character at the end of the film, I could be released and free to pursue my artistic ambitions.

Not long afterwards, a friend recommended Anthony Mingella's film, *Truly, Madly, Deeply*, with a warning. I later understood why. Though this film subjugates its themes with comedy, it examines the complex feelings around grief. When someone dies and leaves you with pain, that pain is the only thing you have left of them, so it is very difficult to let it go. The film also expressed the rage and powerlessness that comes with loss and the twisted guilt around abandoning the person whom you feel abandoned you. *Truly Madly, Deeply* offered me an opportunity not only to identify with my grief, but also to normalize my rage and guilt. In that film, as with Tara in mine, the main character is angry with her lover who died, and feels guilty at the thought of loving a new man.

In *Ghost*, the ghostly lover is channeled through a medium, played by Whoopi Goldberg, and so, in a sense, maintains a certain distance from the main character. He never takes a solid form. The special effects make him appear like a projection. He also maintains his perfection. In *Truly, Madly, Deeply*, the dead lover takes full form and is fully present (though only visible to the main character). In both films, the dead lover is a ghost of the actual person and it has a motive. In *Ghost*, the spectre's goal is to protect the main character and to help her solve the mystery of his death. In *Truly Madly Deeply*, he is there to help her move on. To do so, he crowds her out of her flat and renovates it, pushing her out of the comfort of her grief and back into the world.

In *Ghost*, the conflict of the film happens through the relationship rather than within it. The relationship thus avoids or bypasses the sublime. There is no hint at the horror of death, and no threat to the memory of relationship. *Truly, Madly, Deeply* puts



the conflict directly into the relationship. When the ghost first appears to the main character, they revel in their reunion. But as the spectre takes more space in the flat, inviting all his dead friends to visit, she begins to remember the negative sides of their relationship. Her flat, as her own psyche, is the battleground for her conflict. He eventually pushes her out of the flat, and towards living and loving again. Though shown in a comedic light, the aspects of grief explored were more akin to what I was experiencing. The film expressed the romantic perfection and the doomed quality of my time with Glenn, and reminded me of the less pleasurable aspects of our relationship.

In both films, the goal is closure and the spectres play an active role in achieving that goal, even if its agenda is hidden from the main character. In *A Late Thaw*, the goal is also closure but spectre plays a less active role. First of all, his physical manifestation is less about the person and more about the visceral quality of longing. Like *Truly, Madly, Deeply*, Tara infuses Glenn with “real” life so we are offered a glimpse into her memory and psychological process, but the story is less about a person who comes back from the dead to help his lover find peace and move on. Unlike the ghosts of the other films, Glenn remains fixed in one space within Tara’s psyche - the attic, and has no focused motive, aside from the one Tara tries to project with her questions.

## **First Attempts: An exploration of Form**

“ Everything in the unconscious seeks outward manifestation, and the personality too desires to evolve out of its unconscious conditions and to experience itself as whole”  
(Jung 199)

Years before any screenwriting classes, I wrote a treatment for a romantic drama about Glenn, called *Two of Twenty*. Because our time together had all the makings of a tragic romance, I thought I could simply copy and paste our story onto the page and I would have a screenplay. I knew nothing about translating personal events into universal themes. The result was a melodramatic history of events, so I abandoned the idea. My next attempt was a short comedy called *Reincarnation*. The only connection the story had to my experience was its inspiration, my dream about Glenn, whereby he appears without the use of his limbs.

Revisiting the idea this time was very different. The pain of many unsuccessful scripts by virtue of their lack of connection to anything personal far outweighed the risks of delving into a heartfelt subject matter. After completing a disappointing first draft, I sought guidance from Marie Rickard. I spent time describing the inspiration for the film, which was still my dream about Glenn. I went into detail about the images and feelings that the dream evoked. Slowly ideas for the screenplay began to take shape in a way that felt true to my vision and voice as a filmmaker.

The subject of my films often involves psychological or spiritual processes that I seek to externalize or express through evocative images or stories. Magical-realist novels

like Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or Isabel Allende's *House of the Spirits* fuel my interest as they challenge our notion of truth and convey a magic and mystery about our existence. Formally, they experiment with alternate means of storytelling. They upset the structure of the narrative to tap directly into the themes therein. The formal choices for *A Late Thaw* reflect my fascination with this genre and approach, and build on my previous work.

### **Previous Work**

*Black Rock Burning*, a short experiential documentary on the Burning Man Festival, begins with a description of the festival as “the inner life turned outwards”; a place where inhibitions are discarded and creativity reigns. Though there are a few light interviews, I focused on creating a visual and auditory experience that would give the audience a feeling of what it was like to attend the festival. I collected sounds, music, and images from the festival and edited it together in an engaging way.

*Attachment*, my first short fiction, explored how a businessman's self-important negativity affects the people he meets everyday. The idea being that, when one person's negative behaviour triggers another's, it creates a psychic attachment. To externalize this idea, I had the other characters (a café worker, a bike messenger, etc.) physically become attached to the businessman once they had been affected by his behaviour. By the end of the film, the businessman is a monster-like figure comprised of a dozen people. The only person who is unaffected is a young boy. Because he does not react, he does not attach, and can therefore act as a mirror for the protagonist, and a catalyst for his transformation.

*Elevator*, my second short fiction film, was written by Miranda Handford and is

about a black man and white woman stuck in an elevator on their way to the same job interview. The film is about the lengths we go to bury our humanity in a bid to project perfection. The characters begin as peers in competition and in control, but the longer they remain in the elevator (in which they are stuck), the more their facades crack, revealing their less appealing qualities. In their descent into pettiness and manipulation, they expose their humanity. The elevator acts as a crucible from which they emerge somewhat transformed by their ordeal.

*Marker 1*, a three-channel vertical installation was my first attempt at creating a less linear expression of psychological process, and the first time I explored trauma as a subject matter. The premise was that psychological wounds are invisible to others, and that a rich psychological process is always at work behind our mundane lives. To illustrate this idea, images representing trauma were juxtaposed with images from a day in the life of the character. The middle channel ran images of the character going about their day. The top channel represented the idea of repression, while images in the bottom channel represented the memory of the trauma. Each channel ran its own narrative to emphasize the disconnectedness of the character. Once in a while, images from one channel would invade another channel; an apple from a frame above would drop into a frame below. The climax consisted of a coming together of all three channels. There is no resolution but, as with my previous work, there is a moment of realization.

The goal for *A Late Thaw* was for the film to be a visceral experience, like *Black Rock Burning* and *Marker 1*, but not a purely poetic or impressionistic film. Like *Attachment*, it should have magical or absurdist qualities, without descending into parable or caricature. To further illustrate and explore the idea that a rich symbolic life exists

alongside our mundane existence, the film had to be steeped in a classic fiction drama. The viewer should understand that Tara's memories of Glenn were about her engaging in a meaningful process, and not simply waxing poetic about her lost relationship. This meant staying clear of conventional devices such as flashbacks or expository dialogue, anything that would detract from a more engaged or experiential relationship with what was happening on screen. My hope was that by creating a visual and tonal experience, the audience would be called to access those places within themselves, at least in the more magical sections.

However, the state that Tara experiences, and we experience along with her, had to be grounded in truth, or at least, a truth to her character. The snow, the vision of Glenn, the shift in time (slow motion), had to feel organic to the plot. It also had to be such that one would not be caught up in wondering whether she was having a waking dream or a vision. For help in achieving these goals, I turned to films that had successfully bridged two worlds.

### **Other Film Influences**

Many films leave their classic narrative structure to explore other worlds (Terrence Malick's, *Tree of Life*, and Darren Aronofsky's, *The Fountain* are two examples) but often they are esoteric and lose their connection to the heart of the story. Of all the films I examined, Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* was the best example of a film that explored strange territory, but was grounded in solid storytelling. In the film, the main character Joel, like Tara, is undergoing a psychological process. His reaction to the grief over his lover Clementine leaving him is to elicit the

services of a memory erasure clinic, as she has done. The process results in his being in an altered state for most of the film and we, the audience, are its witness. Like Tara, Joel's state is grounded in his personal history, mainly the events in his relationship with Clementine. But instead of having this relationship exposed in straight flashbacks, which implies that memories are static and true, the memories are at the mercy of both erasure and subjective design. They are malleable, as evidenced by Joel's eventual capacity to affect or escape them. As the memory erasure evolves, it also reveals Joel's suppressed feelings around the events, bringing them up to the surface for him to examine. Even in this state, Joel is conscious of the world around him, which implies a direct relationship between his inner and outer life. When Joel realizes that he does not want to lose his memories of Clementine, he asserts his will, and tries to hide Clementine within deeply shameful memories, allowing her to witness his vulnerability, something he could never do before, but it is too late. As his last, and first, memories of Clementine are stripped from him, she whispers for him to meet her in Montauk. She is transformed from being the instigator of their break-up, to actively pursuing their connection. In the end they meet as strangers and fall in love again. This implies that connection to another in love remains even when they have forgotten us or, as in the case of *A Late Thaw*, when they have ceased to exist. The psychic opening only serves to make Joel (and Tara) more determined to get to the root of their issues and expand their capacity to love. Joel's ordeal has changed him in a way that promises that their new relationship will be more grounded, not in spite of their previous connection, but because of it.

Similarly, Tara's process brings her closer to the truth about her relationship with Glenn. In succumbing to the process, and her feelings, she does not become more

distanced from Stephane, but closer to him. In both cases, the previously shadow-like figures of Glenn and Clementine, are transformed into positive projections that point the way to both characters becoming whole. Through her interactions with Glenn during her episodes, Tara is able to access her latent grief, anger, guilt, and sadness, and release it. Tara's love for Glenn is not erased; it is transmuted into her love for Stephane.

Despite the formal influences of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *A Late Thaw* is a very different film in its tone and pace. I wanted it to have the deliberate, suspenseful tone of psychological dramas with a twist, such as M. Night Shyamalan's, *The Sixth Sense*, to speak to the risks and dangers of Tara's journey. I also wanted there to be the sense of the mystery and unfolding of Alain Renais' *Last Year in Marienbad*, so I structured the narrative to include sections where the action is repeated, namely Tara's revisiting the house. With each visit, more of the house, and more of the details of the story are revealed.

*A Late Thaw* is also different because I feel the short form can allow for more creative license than a feature, particularly more allowance for the unexplained or unanswered. In researching the short form, I found a film entitled *Hope* by Pedro Pires. Similar to *A Late Thaw*, the film is about memory, loss, and longing. It is ephemeral and poignant, with no breaks in its poetic treatment of the story. Though it leaves one with questions as to the events depicted, the feelings of longing and sadness behind the events are clear. Since the grieving process and letting go are not a static and immutable states, I could not imagine there being complete closure at the end of either film.

## **The Hero's Journey: Developmental Psychology and The Script**

In Jung's memoir, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, which traces his own psychological process and heroic journey through a difficult time in his life, Jung describes having a waking dream, where he finds himself "insistent on its reality and at the same time on (his) being awake... in this sort of dream, as opposed to ordinary dreams, the unconscious seems bent on conveying a powerful impression of reality to the dreamer, an impression which is emphasized by repetition, the sources of such realities are known to be physical sensations on the one hand, and archetypal figures on the other." (Jung 4071) Jung likens his experiences and development to the hero's journey as explored through the field of Developmental Psychology. This type of interpretation applied to literature and to life has always greatly interested me. Writing the script I was aware that my previous readings of the psychoanalytic theories of Jung, Joseph Campbell, and Eric Neumann, were directly influencing my work. Clearly, Tara's waking dream is, as with Jung, a platform for her heroic journey complete with Archetypes.

In his book *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell enumerates seventeen stages that the classic hero must go through in order to become Self-Realized. The general headings for these stages are as follows: the Separation, the Initiation, and the Return. Though Tara does not fulfill all of the sub-stages, most of the stages he outlines are at play in *A Late Thaw*. She is called, tested, killed, and reborn a better version of herself. The Separation begins with a Call to Adventure -- in this case, Tara is called to a higher level of commitment by Stephane as represented by the house. Her reluctance to visit the house is her Refusal of the Call, a normal initial reaction. (Though one could argue that the refusal takes place when Tara does not follow the snow upstairs



the first time). Tara decides to visit the house and, in doing so, elicits the help of the real estate Agent, Gail, who has the mysterious traits of a wise mentor. Gail warns Tara of the dangers/opportunities of the house. When Tara follows the falling snow, she Crosses the Threshold and enters the Belly of the Whale i.e. she has left the safety of her former life. She is an initiate.

In the Initiation stage, Tara meets Glenn, the Shadow, and struggles with her impulses and with her best friend. In returning to the house to confront Glenn, she assumes responsibility for her feelings, and faces her fears. There, she succumbs to the full weight of the Shadow, which encompasses her unresolved grief. Her old self dies. Tara is then called to return by Stephane's voice urging her to "get up". When she wakes up to find Glenn lifeless beside her, Tara expresses her last subconscious feeling, anger. She slaps him, and in so doing, she is released. However, a Hero has not completed the stages unless they can master both worlds. When Stephane joins her at the house in the last scene, a small snowflake dances around her. This symbolizes Tara's capacity to behold both her memories of Glenn, and what grief may resurface in the future, and her love for Stephane.

## **PRE-PRODUCTION**

### **Locations**

Though I had already written a treatment for the film, it was after I visited the McDougall Manor in Montreal that the script flowed out. I wrote as I looked at pictures and watched the videos I had taken on my location visit. The house is owned by the City of Montreal and used primarily for film and photo shoots. The cost to rent the house for a

short film was \$250 per block of eight hours. Even at two blocks a day, \$500, the cost was very low. After spending a day looking for a comparable house in Toronto, I settled on shooting in Montreal.

Having been a locations manager in Montreal for many years, it was easy to find the rest of the locations I needed. I had contacts at Café Cleopatra, a strip club, and I decided to use my mother's condo as Tara's apartment. All I needed was a loft for Stephane and a rock climbing gym. I made sure that these secondary locations, ones we would use for only half a day each, were close to each other to facilitate production moves. The final schedule was as follows: one and a half days in the condo, linked with a half day at Stephane's loft, three days in the Manor House, and a day split between the rock climbing gym and the strip club.

### **Producing, and the Budget**

The first rough estimates, with the deals I hoped to have, put the final projected budget at approximately \$25,000, but this was wishful thinking. The final budget is closer to \$50,000. The difference between the estimates and the final costs have to do with several factors: the production schedule, the fact that 2014 was the busiest filming season in Montreal in ten years, and that I wanted to pay everyone. As I am a member of ACTRA, the actors union, and AQTIS, the film technicians union, I can't produce a non-union shoot, and I have to act responsibly in the deals I make.

The production took place in May and was scheduled as a six-day shoot. Because it was the beginning of a very busy season, it was difficult to find people who were willing to work for less money than they could elsewhere. The equipment houses were

also taxed, and unable to let their equipment go for free or at a discount. Equipment was available free through York University, but the estimated cost of moving it to and from Montreal versus the initial quotes I received from Cinepool, a grip and electric equipment house in Montreal, was almost the same. And, should something go wrong with equipment from York, I would be stranded. The final deals I managed to get from Cinepool, Cineground (for the camera), and Cineffects (for special effects), were good but not as good as they might have been under different circumstances. Also, at a certain point you run out of favours (Cinepool had already given me equipment for free on previous films).

Unfortunately, I could not find a production manager or line producer, the key collaborators I needed in order to focus solely on directing. I found someone to help with some of the production tasks, but I still ended up being much too involved in producing. As far as compensation went, it was important to pay my cast and crew something for their efforts, especially since the shoot was six days long. Early on, I spoke with a producer who pays everyone the same amount of money - \$100 per day, and now I understand his reasoning. At that time, I was still negotiating package deals for the six days at \$400 per day. However, as we got closer to the first day of shooting, and technicians became scarcer, my negotiating powers lost their edge. The last technicians hired (camera, electric, and grip) received \$150 per day, while the Director of Photography was even more. At a third of their normal rate, it was still much more than I had anticipated and hoped for, but I was running out of time.

For the cast, I chose the Member Initiated Production Agreement. Under this agreement, the actors own a percentage of the film, and will profit should it generate any

revenues. I also gave them an honorarium. This choice gave me more time with the actors on set, and I felt comfortable asking them to do free Additional Dialogue Recording (ADR) session's months later. It will also give me more freedom to distribute the film.

## **Casting**

We were lucky to have Andrea Kenyon and Associates provide the space and services for casting. Though they did not have a role in choosing the cast, being able to work through them was invaluable. Our casting breakdown was sent only a few weeks before shooting and our first concern was in casting Tara, since everyone else would be cast around her. Tara had to fulfill the role of the vulnerable heroine in a compelling way. I had imagined, and described, a slight, pixie-like woman but it was an actor friend, Helena Marie, who gave the best audition. Once we decided on Helena, at 5'10 and 160 pounds, we had the challenge of casting around her.

In the first selections of the roles of Stephanes and Glenns, there was no one of interest. Some of the male actors who auditioned were 5'7 and, as talented as they were, I did not want the audience to make the leap and imagine that a tall, voluptuous woman would date a guy she could throw out the window. For dramatic purposes, she had to appear vulnerable against both men. Finally, after we made a call for older actors, we had a day where most of the men were over six feet tall, including Lucas Chartier-Dessert at 6'5 and Ivan Peric at 6'7. Lucas was natural in the role of Stephane, and credible in the role of the guy we would root for; the man we would want Tara to end up with. He did not have the mature lawyer look I wanted, but his character would suit Helena's, and he had warmth and charm. As for Glenn, there was not a lot of dialogue in his scenes, so

casting was mostly a matter of finding a compelling look. He would have to personify the adventurous outdoorsman, but also be a man of mystery. During auditions, most of the actors made melodramatic choices in their performances, all except Ivan.

Finding the rest of the cast was less challenging. Michelle Boback, a friend of Helena's, had all the right elements to play Carol-Ann, Tara's tough-love friend, including tattoos and a funky hairstyle. Kathleen Fee, appearing wise and knowing, with a twinkle in her eye, fit my idea of a sage-like Mentor.



Initially, for the strippers, I booked Canada Sexy Males, real strippers, to be the strippers, but then decided to work with choreographer Sonia Clarke and let her choose dancers instead. This choice gave me more support on set, as Sonia could help me direct the dancers. The bonus was that Sonia also taught Ivan how to dance though I had to un-teach him once on set, so that he was not stiffly executing moves, but was connecting with his own sensuality instead.

### **Rehearsals**

I had only one day for rehearsals, four days away from shooting. I used it to block some key scenes, and have the actors interact so as to make choices about their relationships to each other. When it came to actually rehearsing the scenes, I did not overdo it. I now regret that decision. Only after the shoot did I realize that some of my cast was either less experienced than I had thought, or was just getting back to work after a long break. I should have allowed for at least three days of readings and rehearsals. I had worked with Helena before so I was confident in her abilities and knew how to work with her. We had also had time to discuss the story and character since she was the first to be cast. As regards the other actors, I did not have enough time to work with them and it showed in their performances on set.

## **KEY CREATIVES**

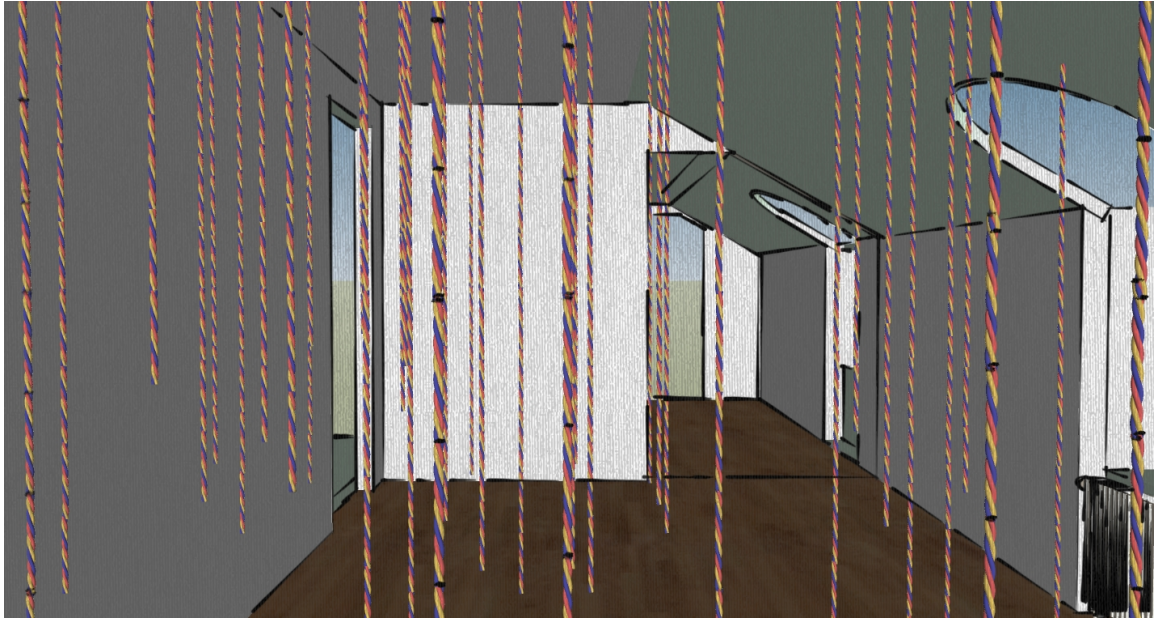
### **Production Designer**

Elisabeth Williams, the production designer, was the first creative person on board. I sent her my director's vision, which included ideas for the palette, tone, casting, costumes, and effects. She created her own vision board, and these together acted as visual references for the other creative crewmembers. Our biggest production design challenge was the budget, so in terms of set dressing, we had to work with what was already available to us on location. We had to ensure we would have enough money to pay for the practical visual effects at the Manor House. To make my mother's condo work as Tara's apartment, we exchanged some of her furniture for pieces that we borrowed from friends to make the condo look more youthful and modern. We were stuck with the yellow walls, but that contrasted nicely with our palette of greys and blues.

Stephane's loft was the only location we found after Elisabeth was hired. The challenge was to find a masculine looking loft that hinted at wealth so that Stephane's ability to afford the manor house was believable. It also had to feel a little clinical, so that the new house would be more desirable to them than either of their two homes. We were lucky to find a loft we could afford that had elements of wealth - a large stainless steel and marble kitchen, a view of the city, and a cold slate bathroom. When shooting, we simply chose angles that would reveal those areas. For the bedroom scene, we moved the bed to the living room to take advantage of the view. We shot Tara alone against backgrounds that were devoid of warmth and life, except for the bed scene.

The Manor House was where Elisabeth would have the most work to do; not in terms of dressing since it was supposed to be empty, but in terms of creating and

managing the special effects. For the forest of ropes, Elisabeth designed a rig that hung from the ceiling. We were fortunate that the climbing gym gave us their used ropes, so they would be the same ropes as Tara sees when she goes climbing with Carol-Ann, and they also matched our palette.



**Production designs for the attic of the McDougall Manor by Elisabeth Williams.**



## Special Effects

*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* was also an inspiration for the practical effects for *A Late Thaw*, as they were largely created on set rather than digitally produced. In the early stages of the writing, I consulted with a digital visual effects house to determine what effects could be created on set and which would need to be treated digitally. I did not know a lot about either practical or digital effects, as I had never really worked with them except for one scene in *Attachment*. The digital effects house encouraged me to work with practical effects as much as possible, stating that the best use of visual effects is to enhance what was already there practically.

Elisabeth introduced me to Ryal Cosgrove at Cineeffects, a special effects house in Montreal. We examined different types of snow and I was given a box of three sample snows to play with: Paper, salt, and potato starch. Paper snow comes in different sizes and can be blown around: it is also great for creating footprints as it sticks to shoes like real snow, but it is very white and needs to be shot from a distance. Potato starch looks beautiful, very much like a crystal flake, but it is a little yellow and can get very sticky when it is wet. Salt is great for creating snow banks because it is very heavy and accumulates well, it also has a granular reflective quality, but if you blow it around with actors present, it can get in their eyes, and sting their skin.

For the falling snow, we used Soap blown out of a machine that controls both the size of the flakes and the amount of the snow falling. The effect is stunning, but it can look like soap bubbles once it lands on something and “melts”, because it does not accumulate like paper or salt – also, the machine, is extremely noisy. Still we decided on a combination of paper snow and the soap snow machine. Both types of snow are hard on

the respiratory system. The soap snow creates a film that can be inhaled and paper snow creates a fine dust. I provided masks and enforced breaks in the action so that everyone could get some fresh air. We could only use the snow machine when there was no dialogue but that encouraged me to cut dialogue in places where it was not needed.

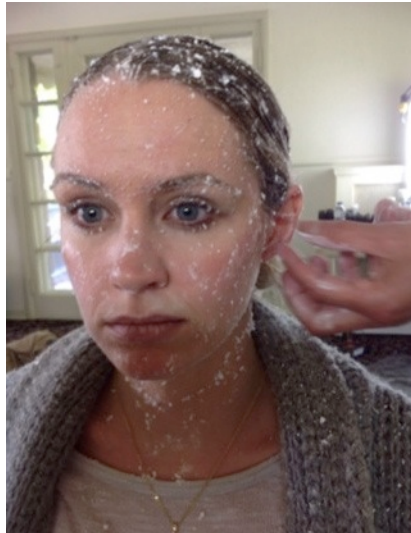
For the scenes where I needed both dialogue and falling snow, Alchemy 24 in Montreal will add digital snow effects (for example, when Tara first finds Glenn in the house.) They will also be used to create the two hero snowflakes, snowflakes with a motive and specific path: the first is the one which lands on her face the first time it snows in the house, and the second is the one that swirls around her when she hugs Stephane in the last scene. I will also have them enhance some of the snow effects by making the snow look more crystal-like, specifically the shot of Tara eyes.



### **Make-Up**

Make-up artist Julie Brisebois is known for her remarkable work on Domenic Sena's *Whiteout*, about a U.S. Marshal who tracks a killer in Antarctica. For *A Late Thaw*, she took her cues from images in the vision boards: faces with actual frost on

them, or faces where a frosted look was created using make-up. The goal was to have them look “frozen” but not dead. She used a combination of water-based gel to create the



sheen, light ink to create a white/blue tinge, and zinc and alginate for the snowflakes.

## **Costumes**

Oleksandra Lykova, the costume designer, took her cue from our palette of cool tones. We decided that, for the most part, Tara would blend in with her environment except at the very beginning and at the very end. The only stipulation the DP had with regards to wardrobe, was that Tara should wear a colour that stands out from the background when we shot the establishing scene outside at the house. He wanted her to stand out from the greenery so that we could have more flexibility in the colour correction in post; i.e. we could create a special look in the background house and foliage that would not change the look of our actors' clothes. For the wardrobe, we used the actors' own clothes and bought an item here or there. Oddly, Ivan owned a big grey sweater almost identical to the one that Glenn had when he was alive.

## Director of Photography

I met with DP Benoit Beaulieu less than a week before shooting. I had gone through two DP's already (one withdrew from the project without notifying me; the other was in the midst of personal problems.) I left the meeting with Benoit thinking 'what have I done?' He was inspired by my script and the ideas I had for executing it, but envisioned the film as a tableau with a camera on a tripod and the actors moving within the frame. For me, a moving camera would better express the idea that Tara was on a journey of discovery. I wanted the camera to follow her as she discovers the house, with the camera on a Steadicam or dolly for most of shoot. The only things we agreed on was that neither of us wanted to make just another short film, and any angle or shot we chose should be grounded in the story being told, and not simply there to ensure that every angle was conventionally covered.

As we began to speak about palettes, looks, and equipment, it became clear that our tastes in filmmaking were quite similar. We screened scenes from films as diverse as Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan*, Gus Van Sant's, *Good will Hunting*, Jane Campion's *The Piano*, and Robert Ford's *The Assassination of Jesse James* to examine the work of other cinematographers and directors styles and methods. Benoit introduced me to an Internet site: <http://moviesincolor.com>, which is dedicated to the analysis of colour palettes in films. We visited Cineffects to do snow tests, and the Manor House to review and discuss the location. It was all a little hurried and unfinished, but we were doing the best we could in the short time we had before the shoot.

We decided to use available light as much as possible, especially at the Manor House, so the shooting schedule was reworked accordingly. The day before shooting we

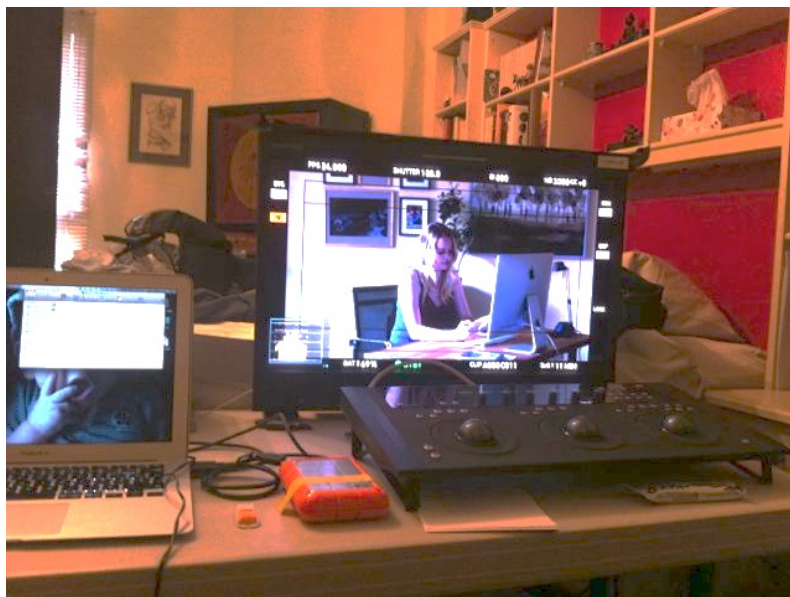
talked about our shot lists. We spent a few hours reviewing the angles we would shoot from in each location and discussed almost every scene. By this point, Benoit had come around to my idea of a moving camera, and I had appropriated some of his ideas. The approach to shooting the film would progress as Tara's emotional state progressed. The camera would start still on a tripod for her first visit to the house, to a camera on a Steadicam for the first time she explores, and end with the camera on an easy rig, which is less steady, to exaggerate her distraught state. Benoit insisted the camera follow and shoot from behind her most of the time.

Benoit asked me questions about the story all the time. We challenged each other. Neither of us had to apologize for defending our positions and both of us were able to admit when the other person's idea was better. It was a very satisfying relationship. My only regret is that my insufficient preparation, and willingness to compromise out of inexperience, resulted in my not shooting many moments and angles that, in retrospect, I wish I had. For example, Benoit's suggestion of following Helena (Tara) from behind, inviting the audience to discover the house along with her would, as John Greyson pointed out, be all the more compelling if we had the reverse shots showing her reactions to that discovery.

## **PRODUCTION**

### **Camera**

The camera used was an Arri Alexa because, of all the cameras within my budget, it records the most filmic and stunning images. There is very little digital noise, it is sensitive in low light, and it has incredible latitude. Since we were shooting using available light from the windows, these were important considerations. Benoit prefers to record raw data and not manipulate or apply any looks to the image in camera while we are shooting. Instead he works with an on-set colourist, Ewan Stringer, who applies looks to the images on the monitor, to give an idea of what the final product will look like. Ewan then makes a record of the settings, a look-up table, which is available as a reference for the colour correction applied in post-production. By default, Ewan was also our data wrangler; transferring all the video and audio files on to hard drives at the end of each day.



**Ewan's monitor set-up in Tara's (my mother's) condo.**

## Directing

Aside from a strong vision and a thorough understanding of the material, directing is about drawing out the best in the talent around you, especially the actors. While this may seem obvious, its practical application is an ongoing challenge and learning experience. There is never just one way to accomplish this goal, and working with different crew and cast members demands a constant re-examining of one's methods and practices. There are also so many other challenges and questions that provide opportunities for one's focus to be drawn elsewhere. At best, directors are problem solvers and troubleshooters, so the more prepared we are, the more flexible we can be when problems arise. In the best of circumstances, there is plenty of time to prepare, revise, and hone this work. But in most cases, that level of preparedness is a luxury, a luxury I had hoped to afford for this film.

For *Attachment*, my preparation was focused on fashioning the look of the film, rather than on perfecting the script or rehearsing with the actors. The result was a visually compelling film with unconvincing dialogue and performances. Having learned from my mistake, with *Elevator* I dedicated my preparation to the writing, even though it was not my script, and to the actors. The film became a collaborative effort between the actors and writer Miranda Hanford and myself. Together we fleshed out the script and characters. Through rehearsals, I learned how to communicate with the actors and they trusted me. On set, I watched the performances closely and asked myself questions: Do I believe what the character is saying? Is it grounded or connected to who they are, or are they just saying words? If I found their performance was lacking authenticity, I would ask them questions about that section in the material. We would discuss what the lines

meant both in terms of the story and in terms of the character. I would help them find a context to connect to, or remind them of the background work they had done on the character. Because the bulk of this work was done in rehearsals, the additional direction did not take much time on set.

For *A Late Thaw*, I was not well prepared. Though I wrote the script, I put off doing a script breakdown. Usually I examine the action and dialogue in the script, and reflect on the characters' motives, with a focus on the heart of the scene. I make a choice about the intention behind almost every line so that, once on set, I know what I want performance-wise, and am able to direct the actor. They will then likely make better choices, which I may not recognize if I have not done my homework. I also did not revise my initial shot list, create a solid floor plan, or draw any storyboards. In pre-production I had been busy acting as a production manager and, once on set, I was too preoccupied with ensuring the production ran smoothly. Overall, I am pleased with the results, but I feel the performances suffered from this lack of preparedness, primarily due to my having too much responsibility for the production aspects.

The most intimate and difficult scenes took place in the first two days of the schedule. The first was the bedroom scene between Tara and Stephane. The scene was crucial in setting up the story and delivering a satisfying conclusion. It had to convince the audience that this was the relationship to root for, and that Stephane was the quintessential Mr. Right. To develop the intimacy, as we waited for the dolly to be set up, I directed Lucas and Helena to invent an issue in their relationship and improvise a discussion around it. Their complicity grew and they were actually quite funny, so I assigned a moment in the scene where they would be free to improvise. The second most



important scene was when Carol-Ann confronts Tara near the end of the film. Looking back, I think the scene needed to be rewritten as it encouraged a level of over-acting. In terms of performances, I didn't know Michelle as an actor, so I did not know how to communicate what I was looking for. Consequently, most of the takes were, in fact, over-acted. In the edit, the difficulty cutting around these takes was exacerbated by my lack of coverage for the scene. I learned that if I am not getting the performance I need after several takes, it is important to add more coverage, shots, to have more choices in editing. Having cut-aways (for example, a shot of the equipment on the couch) would also have helped.

Once we were in the Manor House, we had three days to work. Most of the scenes were MOS, without dialogue, and involved Tara exploring the house in the snow. These scenes were about creating a mysterious look, tone, and pace. Our first task was to pay attention to how the light was affecting the house. Some of our best shots were a result of shifting our scenes around to accommodate the light. In the scene where Tara goes back to the house for the last time, the sunbeams that stream through the arched window on the stairs are an example of that flexibility. We were scheduled to shoot a scene in the upstairs corridor but, when we noticed the light, we decided to shoot that scene instead. It was a decision that enhanced the storytelling as it made her third time at the house, and the climax of the film, stand out from the first and second times. We were already altering that scene with a day for night filter, since it takes place at night, but it is the light that makes it so special. Most of the scenes with snow were shot in slow motion, at 48 or 60 frames per second, to enhance the otherworldliness, and to ensure the snow would be visible.

The scenes with Tara and Glenn were difficult not only because they involved special effects but also because, as with Michelle, I did not know Ivan very well, and I did not know how to reach him with my directions. The scenes were challenging for both actors in that much of the communication between them takes place without dialogue. The dialogue that is there is difficult to deliver without investing it with affected emotional context. The homework involved in steering it away from this potential for melodrama should have focused on the relationship between Tara and Glenn, as I had Lucas and Helena do. Unfortunately, Ivan was unwilling to do such exercises on set. I also only realized, after the fact, that Ivan was not a very experienced actor and had not done sufficient background work on his own character, or around climbing. Had I spent more time with him in rehearsals, I would have known this and encouraged him to do so. I also would have invented creative ways for him and Helena to connect.

For the climbing scene and the scene in the strip club, I also feel that I did not get enough coverage. I am missing close-ups in the climbing scene, while in the club I am missing wide shots and cut-aways. However, even with all that I missed, I feel my directing goals, in terms of the specific challenges that I had set for myself, were accomplished; the first goal was that the performances come across as more natural than previous films. Performances in both *Attachment* and *Elevator* are stagey and self-conscious, whereas in *A Late Thaw* they show the beginnings of a more natural performance style. The second goal was to create a suspenseful and dramatic tone, coupled with a rich visual experience, which I feel I have fulfilled. These accomplishments give me more confidence in my abilities and encourage me to push myself still further with the next film.

## **POST-PRODUCTION**

### **Editing**

Soon after production, I made a first cut of the film. After repeatedly searching for an experienced editor, I found a less experienced editor to help me, and it is probably the best thing that could have happened to me as a budding director. I have learned so much about storytelling and directing, both practically and creatively, through editing this film that I am likely to look back at this time as holding some of the richest lessons in my development.

The rough assembly was 45 minutes long. The slow motion scenes took up a lot of screen time but they were so beautiful to watch that it was difficult to cut into them. It was also then that I noticed areas where the dialogue sounded stagey or the performances were poor. I was still attached to the story I had written, and I worried that the final film would not be as successful as I had hoped. Scenes like the Skype scene weighed the story down, yet they held story information that I initially held was crucial. As I became less attached, however, and cut the scenes down, the film began to take shape. The rough cut, at an acceptable 23 minutes, was already much better. It was this cut that was sent to Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF).

After that, I had no access to the synched material so I watched the footage without sound. Feeling my way around the footage and editing scenes without dialogue allowed me to get to the heart of the piece and pay attention to areas that were tugging at me. The next cut was already better and showing it to John Greyson and Marie Rickard helped tremendously. John made suggestions on where I might be able to cut exits or entrances, or around poor performances, to make the scenes tighter and add emotional

impact. Marie and I went over the story's structure to see if changing some of the scenes around might give the story more of the build-up it needed to create a cathartic climax, essentially rewriting the film in the edit room. These changes had an immediate positive effect on the film. In the last cut, the goal was to add poetry to the areas that were part of the classic narrative, so that they would blend in with the more impressionistic scenes.

### **Sound Design**

My intention was always to have the sound design play an integral role in establishing the tone of the film. The way the story was written meant that the background story around Glenn's death would only be fully understood at the end, but that hints in the dialogue, action, and sound would be planted throughout. After the rough cut was edited, Bruno Pucella and I sketched out a sound design to test our ideas. In editing the slow motion shots, I noticed areas where some of the dialogue and sound was out of sync with the image, I then began to imagine the dialogue running under areas where it did not belong, becoming free-floating narration. Bits of dialogue could also be placed in a different scene altogether, or as a transition between scenes.

Mixing dialogue with different images could create another layer of meaning. It could also mirror the role that dialogue plays in our memories. In life, we seldom remember a whole conversation but can easily retrieve a line or two, often completely out of context.

When I expressed my ideas, Bruno suggested I re-watch both versions of *Solaris* (Tarkovsky's and Soderberg's), as well as Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*. The use of this idea in these films gives us direct access to the protagonist's perspective, and/or enhances the disconnectedness between the main character and the action he is engaged

in. The viewer is left to make a connection between the state of mind of the character and the rest of the action. It is haunting. In order to have more choices with *A Late Thaw*, I had the actors come into the studio to record some Additional Dialogue Recording.

Ideas for the sound scape included the mountain climbing sounds: the clinking of karabiners, the swooshing of ropes, wind, and ice. Bruno showed me a sketch called *The Blizzard*, from Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams*, which is a good example of this idea. We decided that any musical score would run second to the soundscape, or blend in. Through contacts I discovered composer Olivier Alary, who willingly sent me haunting compositions to use. They worked perfectly with the film, and helped to enhance the suspense. The one placed after the climax of the film and into the last scene, or resolution, helps make the ending feel less resolved. The end was always meant to be bittersweet, not story book. Unfortunately, these compositions have been used in other films, notably Yung Chang's *Up The Yangtze*.

### **Film Release and Promotion**

The film's digital effects, sound design, music, and colour correction at this point are all extensively worked out but not final, as I ran out of funds to finish the film. I have since raised 70% of the budget necessary to complete these post phases in a fundraising campaign on Indiegogo, so I am now able to proceed. The final film will be completed in the spring or early summer of 2015 after which I will send it to mainstream festivals like Sundance, Palm Springs, and the Vancouver Film Festival. The first and very rough cut sent to Toronto International Film Festival, received this response from Canadian Shorts programmer Magali Simard: "We liked the film, I'm sorry it didn't make the lineup

ultimately. Nice VFX, good cast, story well developed”. While she has also since expressed a desire to see the finished film, TIFF does not accept repeat submissions.

If the mainstream festivals continue to reject the film, I will submit it to genre and underground festivals. It may garner more interest from festivals like Montreal’s Fantasia Film Festival. Once it has finished its festival run, I hope to get distribution and broadcast on short film channels. Otherwise, I will find distribution and broadcast on the Internet. My hope is that the film will resonate with others who have experienced loss. I plan to donate it to bereavement organizations for therapeutic use with patients struggling with unresolved grief, to facilitate conversations around grief, and/or to encourage art-forms as a way to express the complex feelings in bereavement.

### **Final Thoughts**

Choosing a personal experience as a subject matter was a strong leap forward in developing my voice as a filmmaker, but did it bring any new insights to my experience of personal loss? I am not sure. I may gain more perspective as time passes. During auditions Howard, an actor/friend of both Glenn and I, wrote me this note: “just saw the breakdown for your new short. glenn.” It was all he said, but it was the first time I felt the emotional impact of my project, coming as it did unexpectedly through the industry. Howard had witnessed our romance and also happened to be in Banff when Glenn died. In developing the film I had revisited the feelings, thoughts, and artifacts of my time with Glenn in order to write the script and in order figure out what I wanted to say. I had done this while fictionalizing the events so as to remain removed from their emotional content. Making the film was not a cathartic experience for me. I have done so much work on this

event that much of the emotional effects have been dealt with. Though I admit that I often imagine the worst when a loved one is late coming home. My objective in exploring this experience was twofold: I wanted to express difficult feelings to an imagined audience dealing with experience of bereavement, or those who wish to understand it; and I wanted to pay tribute to a man and an event that significantly shaped my life thereafter, for better and for worse. The aspiration was to immortalize the purity of the romance I felt in my early grief, before healing, maturity, experience, and new information interfered with that experience. In this regard, I think I have been successful.

## Works Cited

Levine, Peter. *Waking the tiger: Healing trauma*. North Atlantic Books. 1997.

Grof, Stanislav. *The Cosmic Game: Explorations of the Frontiers of Human Consciousness*. Albany, New York: State University of New York (SUNY) Press. 1998

Jung, C. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Vintage Books. 1989. Random House. 1961,1962, 1963. Print.

Van der Kolk, Bessel A. "The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma: Re-enactment, Revictimization, and Masochism". *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*. Volume 12, Number 2, Pages 389-411, June 1989.

Bowen, John. "The Gothic." *Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians*. British Library Board. Web. <<http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/videos/the-gothic>>.

Foa, E. B., Hembree, E. A. and Rothbaum, B. (2007). *Prolonged exposure therapy for PTSD: Emotional processing of traumatic experiences: Therapist guide*. New York: Oxford University Press.

## Bibliography:

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. 2d ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1972. Print.

Jung, C. G., and R. F. C. Hull. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. 2nd ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1980. Print.

Garcia Marquez, Gabriel. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970. Print.

Allende, Isabel. *The House of the Spirits*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985. Print.



"Sublime (philosophy)." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 24 Nov. 2014. Web. 25 Nov. 2014.

## **Filmography**

*Black Swan*. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2011. DVD.

*Dreams*. Warner Home Video, 2003. DVD.

*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Universal Studios. 2004. DVD

*Ghost*. Warner Bros, 2009. DVD.

*Good Will Hunting*. RCV Sell Thru Entertainment, 1999. DVD.

*Last Year at Marienbad*. Dir: Alain Renais. Criterion Collection. 1961. DVD

*The Piano*. Artisan Home Entertainment, 1999. DVD.

*The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*. Warner Home Video, 2008. DVD.

*The Sixth Sense*. Hollywood Pictures Home Entertainment: 2000. DVD.

*Truly, Madly, Deeply*. Touchstone Home Video, 1990. DVD.

*Up the Yangtze*. National Film Board of Canada. 2007. DVD.

*Solaris*. Criterion Collection. 2010.DVD

*Solaris*. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. 2003. DVD

*The Thin Red Line*. Criterion Collection. 2010.DVD

*Hope*. "Pedro Pires Films." Web. 25 Nov. 2014.

<[http://pedropiresfilms.com/en/index.php/hope\\_movie/](http://pedropiresfilms.com/en/index.php/hope_movie/)>.