MAKING COFFEE

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ABSTRACT

Making Coffee is a fiction film shot in Toronto during the spring of 2014. It is a social drama that explores the father–son relationship within a contemporary Canadian society. The story also touches upon issues of immigration and the importance of friendship in coping with loneliness in a foreign society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

An artist's fight against cliché lies in the constant and honest search for the truth of our reality. The truth can be subjective, but it is the journey that counts.

There is a beast that lives inside every one of us. It hides away in the darkest place of our unconscious, beyond the grasp of our understanding, and it holds the secret to our creative energy. Loaded with courage, the artist decides to face the beast and seize this creativity. Initially, he can only dream. For without the tools of self-knowledge he is nothing but a drifter walking under the shadows of those who came before him.

As an artist I have walked under many shadows. The claws of anxiety and jaws of desperation have bested me many times in the attempt to reach "true creative moments". In facing my own internal beast many times, I have often meditated on how much work I still need to do in order to achieve my true creative potential. It was with this in mind that I began my search and work on my thesis for the MFA program at York University.

The idea for the film *Making Coffee* came about from the starting point of a theme that was close to me in an emotional way. I soon realized that these emotions could be forces placed behind the labor needed to create a film, one that would serve as a reference point in my creative development, a continuum of my understanding of the artistic processes of cinema. It is for this end that I will bring to light, throughout this paper, some aspects of the art of cinema and other arts that have influenced not only this work, but my creative process in general.

At the same time, I want to clarify that *Making Coffee* is not a film about my

relationship with cinema. It is a contemporary social story that explores the nature of the father-son relationship against the backdrop of Canadian society. As I explored this theme, I also wanted to find the constant variable within my work up to this point, and break away from it through the exploration of the cinematic language. This project would become a great opportunity to test myself honing my creative vision while working in a direction I have yet to do before.

Throughout the following pages I will talk about the challenges that I faced with this project. The first of which was starting work on the film from a thematic idea. This completely challenged the process I have followed up until this point in every fiction film I have made. Story always came first for me. Now, I needed to create a story arising from the research I had done and my emotional connection to the father-son relationship.

Finding the narrative appropriate for the theme was probably the longest process in the entire project. The biggest difficulty here was working within the parameters of a short film format. The time on screen is very limited, and it allowed very little room for a classical structure. It was difficult to explore a non-classical structure, but it also became an opportunity to look into filmmaking that would step away from ordinary dramatic forms. What this amounted to was that literature became a very important point of departure for my story. This pushed me to draw from and look more in-depth into Italian Neorealism, a period in film history, which holds a seminal place in my artistic being.

I was very keen on depicting characters that reflected *real* people within our society. I thought it was the best way of treating the main thematic idea of the

father-son relationship. In neorealist aesthetic and theory, we find it possible to rescue cinema from the dull narrative and artificial tendencies of digital technology and instead provide a more accurate and raw reflection of human social relations. I will explore in this text one of the major contributions to Italian Neorealism, the film *Bicycle Thieves* by Vittorio De Sica, along with the writings of Tomaz Gutierrez Alea and André Bazin.

I became obsessed with the raw nature of reality, and my search had me dive into the obscure and grotesque nature of Baroque paintings. The Baroque era was the first to use art as a window that delves into subjects as real as we are. The aesthetic of Vermeer's paintings became the starting point for my visual design, as I felt his style gave me the most simplistic and natural feeling of the painters from that period. The challenge became finding a way of translating this beautiful simplicity into cinema.

All the while, I needed to find a way to juxtapose my love for naturalism against Sergei Eisenstein's theory of montage; editing almost becomes the grammatical structure of a film, and Eisenstein offers a great theory for telling a story through pictures. I have relied a lot on his ideas on montage for my previous work with some success and some failures.

Yet, this theory could break the flow of what André Bazin would consider the most important aspect of the cinematic truth, which is: the Mise-en-scéne. Could I find an organic, natural path using the montage theory?

I find no joy in crawling into a safe zone using what I know to work well. I wanted to set myself an extremely high goal and make things as difficult as

possible. I wanted to allow myself the opportunity to fail only as long as I was able

to rip through the obsession of creating something great, and instead create an

honest piece of work. As Yevgeny Vakhtangov said "Art is search, not final form"

(Moor, 17).

THEME

In an interview David Cronenberg pointed out: "How can you be drawn to theme. It's such an abstraction. Those things come much later, and the lyrical things. Out of these bodies that you're photographing abstract thoughts are generated in the audience. It's through story, through language, through character study, through observation in people that you start to encourage these abstract thoughts." (7:50 min.). This was threatening; here I was trying to create a film out of a theme that I was yet to understand fully. I realized I had to explore my characters in-depth. I needed to look into my own experiences and find my own connection to the father-son relationship. I believed the story would flow out of my own search.

This idea of exploring the father-son relationship came a few years after the death of my grandmother. I became more acute to what had been my mother's relationship with her mother, and for some reason it made me question my relationship with my father. I couldn't understand why I connected the two relationships. My connection with my mother was always clear, but I did become aware that I didn't know much about this man who I love and who had raised me. Our relationship had taken the nature of a friendship where I could feel protection and complete security, but not real closeness.

I eventually realized that being secure was enough, and I became very egotistic in my goals and priorities. It often happens that we disregard the relationship with our parents as we grow up and our priorities change. I don't believe it is a completely negative thing, for I think this unconditional protection

gives us the support and strength we need to break away from home and find our

own way.

According to Luigi Zoja, an Italian psychologist, "The quest for the father is

an always continuing effort that never reaches a definitive end" (Zoja, 35). So the

father figure becomes this metaphor of our need to find an identity and be

secured. When we break away from our father's realm, or if the father figure never

existed like in some cases, we always go out looking for that security, or for that

mentor that would guide us in our journey. Kosta, the father figure in my story, is

birthed from this idea of fatherhood and mentorship. He had to be someone

willing to sacrifice himself for the well-being of the son. The son figure Sebastian,

had to be a character that first gets drawn away by his egotistic nature, putting

other priorities before his relationship with this father, and then he needs to learn

to appreciate having a father figure next to him. There is also a point in our lives

where there is a reversal of the roles and the father will also eventually need some

sort of security.

Even without the close characteristic of a tight friendship, the father-son

relationship can take on the nature of an instinctual connection, where two

individuals might not share every detail but would protect each other

unconditionally against the hardships of society. This became the core of my

theme. It is what the story needed to reflect.

Another thematic element I wanted to work with was immigration within

Canadian society. Morgan Fics who helped me with the script, and I, decided that

Sebastian should be of Cuban descent based on my own background, and Kosta to

be Greek based on his heritage.

Aside from being an immigrant in Canada and having some sort of need to explore this theme in my work, I considered it added another layer to the nature of the father-son relationship. When you emigrate, you don't just leave home, you leave your culture, social norms, and the comforts of familiarity behind. When you enter into a new country and society on your own, you find yourself in need of that mentor figure to guide you and make you feel at home. The material was pulling me in many different directions which made it very difficult to find the creative elements I needed to translate all of it into a workable, simple story.

THE NARRATIVE

I find that for me the most difficult thing about filmmaking is not what to say, but how to say it. From the script stage, it became crucial to start developing a cinematic language that would allow me to communicate my thematic idea. This initial step was just the beast showing me its claws and asking me to dare.

From the start I knew I didn't want to create a film with a classical structure. I even put aside the idea of trying to be a creative individual and instead concerned myself with trying to find a plot and structure that would allow me to achieve a natural and realistic piece of work. Often the anxieties of being creative push us to break the rules for the wrong reasons.

The idea was to open the film in a specific time and space in the life of these characters as if opening the doors into the life of real subjects just as Vermeer had done in the seventeenth century. I was keen to avoid all kinds of exposition and to stay away from establishing characters' back-stories. Some may feel that I was demanding too much from the viewer, but I feel that the most important thing to consider here is that this project, aside from being a work in progress, was primarily a case study for me to understand at a deeper level, the shape and space realism has within my work. Ultimately, the audience can give a final judgment as to the merits of how realism was felt by them.

I approached Morgan Fics, a fellow MFA candidate in screenwriting, to help me develop the story. Our first approach was to look into McKee's ideas on structure. We found that his 'Mini Plot' structure was very suitable to what we wanted to achieve with this story. The 'Mini Plot' is characterized by an open-

ended, multi-protagonist story, and whose characters are usually passive

protagonists. The most important element of the 'Mini Plot' is that its focus lies in

the characters' internal conflicts. This was a key element to our story. Our

characters' journeys needed to be of a psychological type, so that when they both

realize that they need each other, the overarching theme would hit the audience as

a sort of epiphany.

The film *Tender Mercies* offered an incredible insight into a 'Mini Plot'

structure. It also made us realize the complexity of our goals. *Tender Mercies* could

be considered an episodic film where throughout each of the sequences, the viewer

witnesses how Mac Sledge, played by Robert Duvall, overcomes alcoholism and

manages to leave his troubled past behind. I became very interested in the idea of

an episodic structure since it felt very close to literature and poetry. Although

Tender Mercies was another moment of insomnia and anxiety, which left a trail of

vague ideas and random questions, it opened up the possibility of adapting literary

structure into my work.

For some time now I have acquired an interest in reading the works of J.D.

Salinger and Mario Vargas Llosa. Their structural pattern was often characterized

by a sequence or fragments of events that accumulated significance only through

the last action of the characters in the story. I found this to be very effective in

stamping an idea into the reader's mind, which stimulated a cloud of objective

thoughts, and in the process created pure literary poetry.

Film is a completely different art form, and it proposes different challenges

to the artist. While literature struggles to make the subjective visible, film struggles

to make the visible subjective. According to André Bazin, "The cinema is not necessarily a substitute for the novel in this search after man, it has at least one advantage over it, namely that it presents man only in the present" (Andre Bazin 13). While Salinger and Vargas Llosa were able to wonder and transport the reader into the mind of the characters, I could only show them the actions of the characters. How could we represent the inner thoughts of a character in film?

With the help of Tereza, my thesis advisor, Morgan and I sought to simplify the story to make the structure work. Kosta and Sebastian didn't have to be father and son; they just needed to appear as such in front of the viewer until it would be revealed that the true nature of their relationship is based on a friendship which resembles the characteristic of a father-son connection. This was a strike of fresh air into the lungs of the project. Despite this not being a big reveal, it is enough to project my theme. It was then impossible not to turn to Andre Bazin and his writings on Italian Neorealism, in order to dive deeper into the structure that would help us achieve a novelistic cinema.

Bazin explains, "the conjunction belonging to the theatre is 'therefore,' the particle belonging to the novel is 'then' to the extent that it characterizes the two different movements of the mind in thinking, namely that of the reader and that of the onlooker. That is why a novel may be laid down and then picked up again. A play cannot be cut into pieces. The total unity of the spectacle is of its essence. To the extent that it can realize the physical requirements of a spectacle, the cinema cannot, apparently, escape the spectacle's psychological laws, but it has also at its disposal all the resources of the novel" (Bazin, 71). Therefore, we can incorporate

the particle 'then' into the structure of a film's narrative.

The film *Bicycle Thieves* by Vittorio De Sica shows a clear understanding of Bazin's analysis. The film is a sequence of events that follow Antonio, Lamberto Maggiorani, and his son Bruno, Enzo Staiola, through the streets of Rome as they search for Antonio's stolen bicycle. Each event becomes an independent sequence that pushes Antonio's distress further, much like a water drip causes an already-full container of water to spill over. In the climactic moment of the film, the viewer (along with Bruno) witnesses Antonio steal a bicycle out of desperation only to be caught by a mob of angry men. This has become one of the greatest moments in film history only because De Sica allows us to live every moment of every sequence along with Antonio and Bruno, and each of them feel as real as life itself.

In drawing from this, all we needed was to create a sequence of events that would first establish the supposed father-son relationship between these two characters. Then, we would have them come apart, in order to create an opportunity where they would realize that they need each other. There is no real commitment between these two characters to each other, but this idea of mutual protection establishes a need for the relationship to exist.

Constantin Stanislavski suggests that "The complex of human psychological life is expressed through a simple physical action. The logic of a person's physical actions gives us an understanding of his inner experiences" (Moore 20). We were eager to find these little actions that would give us the inner conflicts of our characters. We wanted coffee to be a part of these actions as a way for these two characters to come together and connect. We weren't sure how to treat this idea of

coffee until we met the Romanian screenwriter Razvan Radulescu. His lecture was inspiring and so was the brief chat we had afterwards.

One of the most important things for Razvan in a story is to charge an object with metaphorical meaning, and create our own semiotics. Coffee has a broad range of significance, so we needed to give it a specific meaning for the purpose of our story. Why coffee? Because it is through this idea of drinking together and eating together that most of human connections are established. Having coffee together, especially at coffee shops, is a favourite past time; catching up with friends, building and maintaining bonds, as well as meeting new people.

In the story, Kosta insists in making a genuine cup of Greek coffee. His insistence and actions are to suggest that he is hiding a secret. Sebastian is only too worried and preoccupied with other things in life to pay attention. Eventually Sebastian learns along with the viewer that Kosta was leaving for a nursing home. The Greek coffee was a way of Kosta saying goodbye.

As we always tried to draw inspiration from our own experiences, it felt more accurate with Kosta's character to behave that way. By not saying anything, Kosta protects Sebastian. He understands Sebastian has his own life to worry about, and Kosta doesn't want to be another burden for the young man. So, when Sebastian brings the Greek coffee to Kosta in the final scene of the film, the coffee here is supposed to stand for the acceptance of their relationship.

It probably could have been stronger to establish Kosta's motivations beforehand, but taking the risk at suggesting this through the actions of the character seemed more appropriate for the development of the story and my

directing skills. I was determined to avoid anything that made my job easier as long as I was honest in the process—I mean honest with regards to my own experiences.

We also spent a long time debating about dialogue. The anxieties and worries of avoiding exposition led us to create a very subtle and minimal dialogue. I was hoping to sharpen my directing skills by bringing the subtext forward through the lines. In the process, we sacrificed the natural flow of conversation. It was very difficult to understand where to draw the line, and at some point we did cross the line and the subtext became too subtle. The process of artists is a very lonely one as they struggle to have their inner world understood through an artistic language. I was sure realism would help me articulate a precise treatment for the script. I was aiming as high as ever before.

REALISM

I wanted to be very objective in my treatment. My deepest interest at that moment lay in understanding how I could apply the use of the cinematic language to dramatize a fictionalized story in the most honest and realistic way possible. I wanted to avoid dwelling in a philosophical experimentation of the moving image.

The Cuban filmmaker Tomaz G. Alea, explains that cinema is produced from the emotional impact of the spectator with their reality. We don't need to reject technology altogether, but we cannot lose our sense of social and physical reality: "in all of this, the notion of representing 'the real' - real society, real cities, real people - has become more and more compromised and, indeed, co-modified. In this cultural climate, perhaps the time is right to reclaim the real for its radical potential" (Shield, 126).

In this age of the electronic imagery, there is an eminent and urgent need for realism, so I felt the need to revisit Italian neorealism in depth. I was dealing with social relationships and social issues, so social realism seemed a necessity. *Making Coffee* is by no means a Neorealist film. I only mean to draw inspiration from Italian neorealism, as a stylistically and philosophically distinctive cinema, characterized by its disposition to the ontological truth of the visible world. This is only the starting point for my work. For Andre Bazin, neorealism constituted a "triumphant evolution of the language of cinema" (Shield, 9).

Neorealism nonetheless offered other advantages. It allows for a more economical approach to the production. "It has a preference for location filming, non-professional actors, the avoidance of ornamental mise-en-scene, a preference

for natural light and documentary style cinematography, a non interventionist approach and an avoidance of film editing" (Shield, 2). Some of these elements turned out to be bigger challenges than I ever imagined, and others fell short of my artistic ambitions.

Placing this story against the backdrop of Toronto's society was a big challenge for me, especially after the decision of doing principal photography right in the city. Finding the right apartments and a coffee shop suitable to the characters and the story world, with a very limited budget, proved to be an extremely difficult challenge to overcome. Film is a visual art along with everything that is photographed: places, faces, and objects, all have a direct impact on the way the viewer perceives the film and the story.

Many locations fell through, including the ideal coffee shop. After being granted permission to use the facility, I was denied access to it a couple of days before production started. Overall, Kosta's and Sebastian's apartment as well as the coffee shop setting were not the ideal locations I had imagined for the story, but they were the best available locations given the options at the time.

I have learned in my journey as a director that making decisions in a short period of time becomes a skill very much needed in the craft. I had to make a decision, either to wait for the 'right' locations, or to go ahead with the shoot. Waiting of course implied losing a couple of thousands of dollars and possibly the other locations, so I took my chances. Notwithstanding their limitations, the settings of the film do have their own aesthetics, and they add an interesting feel to the design.

Finding the right faces to portray these characters was also a very difficult task. As a neorealist film would demand, I wanted to find true immigrants who could bring a genuine nature to the characters. It was a question of aesthetics and subject matter, not just a whim of getting rid of actors. Bazin explains about *Bicycle Thieves* that "Performance: it calls upon the actor to be before expressing himself. For De Sica, Bruno was a silhouette, a face, a way of walking. Because the director has not relied on an expressionism outside the characters; he builds all his effects on their way of life, their way of crying, of walking, of laughing" (Bazin, 76).

After a long and desperate search for the right physique and the right face, I had to rely on my skills on directing actors, as I couldn't find the genuine people I was looking for. I have always felt a sort of intimidation with regard to directing actors, especially when I am looking for a natural performance. I didn't want to rely on improvisation at all. I used it only as an exercise for the actors to connect with the characters. I wanted to be like a sculptor who through his work with the actors starts shaving layers away to mold the performances toward a realist end. I turned to Constantin Stanislavski and Judith Weston for an epistemological insight into the craft of working the actors.

I first implemented some of Weston's theories about objectives and living in the moment during the rehearsal process. It started to shape my blocking and initial ideas for camera work toward a more natural feel. My problem was that I let myself get obsessed with forcing a memorable performance and neglected my own personal exploration of the craft. Taking theory to practice is like facing a completely different animal. The theories eventually gave way to a hallway of

doubts and questions which allowed me to come to terms with my own fears of directing actors and to free myself to the idea of taking risks.

One specific instance where I allowed myself this freedom was the hallway scene when Sebastian learns that Kosta has moved away to a Nursing Home. At this point, the audience still believes Kosta and Sebastian are father and son, so the situation might have demanded for some sort of emotional reaction on behalf of the actor playing Sebastian. Nonetheless, I wanted to stay away from strong emotions or an accentuated dramatic reaction. Kosta is not really Sebastian's father, and the audience will eventually learn this through the reveal toward the end of the film. Judith Weston says that the task of the director is "to seek and recognize the honesty in a performance" (Weston, 37), and I felt this scene wasn't a moment of deception or anger, but that of meditation. It is the moment when Sebastian begins to realize he had neglected his relationship with the old man.

I also turned to Italian neorealism to draw inspiration for cinematography, but this proved to be a conflicting force against my initial visual design. Neorealism "was accompanied by a cinematography which aspired to documentary-like objectivity and austerity, a preference for long and medium shots in deep focus, an avoidance of unnatural camera movements or camera angles and favoring natural lighting" (Shield, 2).

My ideas for cinematography have always leaned toward the subjectivity of the story or characters I was photographing. My initial instinct was to design each scene according to a specific look and emotion where everything would be preplanned. But, how could I achieve a natural flow with such a rigid form? I had to

find a reason to compromise and lean the scale toward a more neorealist approach, but even when I did, it left me imagining more.

My directing craft has always suffered from some sort of "what if" dilemma: this way would do justice to the work, but what if I try another way, or this way? This constantly creates a cloud of doubts and desires, overshadowing the creative process as a result. Moments like the hallway scene, Kosta's apartment scene, or the coffee shop sequence were easy to treat with a 'documentary like objectivity.' But for most of the other scenes, I was aiming at specific camera movements or angles that would establish a subjectivity that would reach out to the subtlety of the script.

I had an entire cinematographic design planned to establish Sebastian and Leslie's relationship when we first see them together in the bedroom. Once I started rehearsing with the actors and shaping a more natural performance, I had to let go of my camera ideas in favor of a more simple approach that would render the moment in a more genuine form. Nonetheless, there were other moments in the film where the camera work became more powerful than the performance. When Kosta walks on top of the bed to place the picture frame on the wall, I felt it was important to have the camera push away into the hallway. It accentuated Kosta's isolation and loneliness, as he has become one more subject lost in the social system.

There was something else to explore about realism, which I had always disregarded up until this moment. Neorealism "has as its paradoxical intention not to produce a spectacle which appears real, but rather to turn reality into a

spectacle: a man is walking along the street and the onlooker is amazed at the beauty of the man walking" (Andre Bazin 79). Vittorio De Sica beautifully mastered this paradox in his film *Umberto D*. The characters become more and more vulnerable as we witness the most trivial fractions of their existence. Slowly but surely, these characters unwrap themselves and become humans in the eyes of the spectator.

It was always a question whether my characters could benefit from this approach. The idea, as Bazin would say, was to "capture even smaller realities" (Bazin, 174), so that what we eventually witness is an old man arranging furniture to make himself feel at home and a young man searching for an old cassette tape that could bring about old memories. These scenes eventually became an instance of jump-cut sequences as the short-film format proved very difficult to make this work. They felt disjointed from the rest of the film, and they drew attention away from the core of the story.

According to Bert Cardullo, "the certainty of failure doesn't rule out the necessity for each artist to strive to honor reality according to his or her own lights and those of the time. All it requires is a leap of faith" (Bazin, 10). My faith might have taken me too far into the shadows of Italian neorealism, but my quest for reality has taken me right to the doorsteps of what I will always consider one of the most impressive periods in art history, the Baroque.

THE WORLD IN A PAINTING

Italian neorealist films came about in part as a rejection of the Hollywood classical film structure. The Baroque came after the Renaissance, a period in art history which saw the nostalgic revival of the classics. The two styles seemed to evolve as a reaction to the idealization of the human psychological and physical form. They instead depicted the non-flattering nature of humanity, and aimed at solving some sort of identity crisis. In the process they became gritty, grotesque and brutally honest.

Throughout the process of completing this project I was in the midst of an identity crisis. I kept exploring different film forms to try and find my place within the realm of film history. Even when I found myself pushing the boundaries of reality, or falling completely outside of it, I felt that realism always marked my creative path. I then felt it was important for the development of this project to revisit the Baroque period.

Just like in Italian neorealism, regular and ordinary street people became the models for the biblical scenes and epic stories of the Baroque paintings. It became a style of details. The posture and rendering of the figures, the meticulous still-life objects, the shadows and lighting contributed to its theatrical qualities and raw nature. There was a necessity to find inspiration in the common man and ordinary things. I started exploring the possibilities in my work to adapt these qualities. I wanted the film to become a portrait of a common immigrant and for ordinary everyday things to become part of the story, like a still life in a Vermeer painting.

In Vermeer's work I found an inspiration and a point of departure to start building the visual design for *Making Coffee*. Vermeer's difference lies in the technique and in the still, silent, and serene atmospheres he created. He observed what appeared to be there rather than what he knew to exist. His lighting falls into an interior, usually from windows, flooding the scene with the simplicity of everyday life. After Vermeer, I started considering windows as a source for natural lighting, but for me, they also defined the enclosed spaces my characters would inhabit.

Like a painter I wanted to sketch out my ideas on scene design before production. I shot a small scene taking Vermeer's *The Wine Glass* painting as a starting point. I recreated the color pallet of the painting; I arranged the characters by a window and composed the lighting as if it were the sunrise coming through the window. I then created a small domestic scene about two characters dealing with the tension and silence in the aftermath of a fight. I wanted to explore the possibility of bringing a painting to life through the movements of the characters and camera angles.

I tried to implement the idea of the sketch in different scenes throughout the film; nonetheless, the geography and style of some of the locations, made this task very difficult. For example, the location of the kitchen scene at the beginning of the film where Kosta and Sebastian are deciding whether to get more coffee or not, had no windows. I wanted to shoot this particular scene from one camera position as if staring at a painting, yet I couldn't find a satisfactory camera angle so I had to break it down into different shots.

One scene I was very satisfied with in this regard was Kosta's scene at the nursing home. The light that comes in through the window creates a very natural and serene mood, which was a beautiful juxtaposition to the character's anxiety. As the scene progresses we see this old man struggling to make a home out of this alien place. I point with the camera to the different objects in the room, as to allow the still life surrounding the environment to become part of the moment, just like in a baroque painting. The inspiration for the long dully shot that takes us out of Kosta's room came from Vermeer's painting *The Love Letter*. The painter took a risk with this composition because the foreground is dark and dominated by domestic objects while the main subjects are portrayed in the background. It works nonetheless because it emphasizes the subject matter, which is the letter, by creating a very enclosed environment around the subjects. It was important to see Kosta against the empty walls and stale colors of the room and then push away from him.

The empty walls and pale bluish colors of the room were important to project the feeling of a place that didn't belong to anybody. I treated the color scheme in this scene very differently from the rest of the film. It was important to have warmer hues and earth-bound tonalities dominate the color scheme of the rest of the film. I wanted the colors to have the feel of the fall, as this was a warm social story with a positive change.

It was difficult to achieve my ambitions. We were very inexperienced at using the world of a painting to bring the story to life. To communicate better with James Poremba, the cinematographer, and Meghan Forrest, the production

designer, I started creating a photo journal from the early pre-production stages which would help me visualize better lighting possibilities and color compositions. Many times during production, I found myself giving up control over everything and allowing the cinematographer and production designer to do some exploration of their own. This was a very important development for me as an artist. By trying to control everything, we take away from the natural flow of things, and we might miss an opportunity to reach out to a creative moment.

During pre-production I also started developing the idea of juxtaposing enclosed spaces against open spaces. I placed the characters mostly in enclosed spaces; inside the world they inhabit, as to represent their isolation and alienation from the outside world. The picture frame itself also becomes an enclosed space, or a window into the past. Besides an opportunity for natural lighting, the windows were a constant reminder of the world outside. They became little gaps of light and air which would eventually become a full breath at the end of the film when we see both characters out in the open by the lake.

MONTAGE

My research into realism and painting did not keep me away from an inclination toward subjective representations. Exploring the idea of montage or editing as a way of reaching into the inner struggles of the characters became very important in my previous work. The concerns I had coming into the thesis project were related to how this idea of montage would contribute to the natural and realistic flow of the film I was trying to make.

The writings of Sergei Eisenstein, the Russian filmmaker and theorist, offered great insight into the unlimited possibilities of montage. His theory of montage becomes the poetry of the cinematic language where scenes are like verses and shots like lines in a poem. Eisenstein said that the task is "to transform this image into a few basic partial representations which in their combination and juxtaposition, should evoke in the consciousness and feelings of the spectators, reader that same image" (Eisenstein 33). In his films, the overall composition of the image and sound does come together as a form of poetry. On the other hand, I find them to suffer from an unnatural flow. The acting especially suffers from a staged and unnatural delivery.

Besides its tendency to create an unnatural flow, montage can turn the film work towards a more specific direction. Italian neorealism, which favors mise-en-scene and minimal editing, could lead to a more vague interpretation and carries the risk of becoming too ambiguous. The opening sequence of *The Stolen Children* by Gianni Amelio, or the scene in *Billy Elliot* by Stephen Daldry, where Billy first gets drawn in by the ballet class, are just two of the many cinematic moments

where montage has become the grammatical structure to write the story through image and sound without the need for dialogue. However my main inspiration for the use of montage came from the Italian film *Maléna*, by Giuseppe Tornatore. The sequence where Renato, the protagonist, Giuseppe Sulfaro, first sees Malena, Monica Bellucci, is a beautiful example of how the essence of montage when treated in a simple and efficient way, could turn a cinematic moment into a lyrical image without losing the natural flow of the moment.

We first see the turning of the radio, which establishes the musical score for the sequence, and then the camera pans to Malena's cleavage accentuating the sensual connotation of the scene. Jumping ahead, there are two important moments in this sequence that create the thematic image of the film. As Malena walks pass the boys, the camera pushes slowly into Renato as the film cuts back and forth between the two of them. Then, as the camera stays on Renato, it pans down to his crotch to reveal his excitement by showing us what appears to be an erection underneath his shorts. The camera pans back to Renato's reaction, and then we cut back to Malena's close-up. Later on in the sequence, we have another intimate moment with Renato, but this time the film goes from an extreme close up of the protagonist to an extreme close up of Malena's legs as the fabric of the skirt accentuates the clips holding her lingerie. The film explores early male sexuality through the eyes of an adolescent boy.

I attempted something along these lines with a couple of scenes in *Making Coffee*. In the bedroom scene, Sebastian uses the scarf to pull Leslie back into bed. She rejects him and as she slowly steps away, she pulls the scarf out of Sebastian's

hand. I cut from a medium shot of Leslie to a close up of the scarf as it leaves Sebastian's hand, and then I cut to Sebastian's reaction as we hear Leslie walking away. Though this moment is not meant to be as representative as the scene in Malena, I intended to portray an image of disconnection. Leslie is slowly pulling away and Sebastian is left empty handed.

I also applied the montage theory more abstractly in the scene where Sebastian wants to make coffee for Leslie and she rejects him. In this case, it is Sebastian who uses the coffee as an attempt to connect with Leslie. After Leslie walks away, Sebastian places the pot full of coffee under the kitchen faucet. From a profile medium shot of Sebastian by the sink I cut to the close up of the pot as the water runs the coffee down. The water gets turned off and I cut back to Sebastian in a close up. By juxtaposition Sebastian's close up against the irritating sound and image of the running water I draw attention to the anxious inner state of the character. Here is where Sebastian makes the decision to move on.

Transitions were also an important part of the composition of the film. It was important to emphasize the temporal space of the story so the audience could follow the thread of the plot. If we were to create the image of 5 o'clock, Eisenstein explains "our imagination is trained to respond to this figure by calling to mind pictures of all sort of events that occur at that hour (tea, end of work, rush hour, shop closing, evening light.). We will automatically recall a series of pictures - representations - of what happens at five o'clock" (Eisenstein, 57).

It was important for the audience to know that the first time we see Sebastian and Leslie together in the bedroom, is the following morning after the

coffee shop sequence. I cut from Kosta to a couple of roof top shots, which show the sunrise, and I juxtaposed them to the sound of traffic and birds. Then I cut inside the bedroom to reveal Sebastian and Leslie. The transition works in terms of showing Sebastian's priority with regard to his relationship to Kosta, but I still have my doubts whether this transition effectively creates the image of the 'next morning.' Nevertheless, it was worth the effort.

I also realized that this idea of montage couldn't just lead to a shot list, but in a larger scale, could also be applied to a sequence and even the entire work. In other words, this theory falls in line with the literary structure Andre Bazin praised when he referred to the narrative style of Italian neorealism. The same way we break up a scene into a shot list, we can break theme into determining sequences, and the combination of these sequences would bring to life the intended image of the theme. This led me to rearrange the sequences of the film during the editing process several times in order to arrive at the order of sequences that would best deliver the core of my theme. Tereza was a great creative force behind the editing process.

The script was completely put aside. Some scenes were taken off and others rearranged resulting in some continuity problems. In the end, the most important part for me was the process rather than the final product. I was rewriting the story but this time, using only sound and image, and sequences became my paragraphs. I wasn't sure if I was speaking the cinematic language or if I was just one more artist who had faced the beast and couldn't breach through to creativity. Nevertheless, the quest for realism and montage offered me a great starting point

toward understanding the wide spectrum of the artistic process and more

specifically the cinematic language.

THE LANGUAGE OF CREATIVITY

Montage takes the risk of encrypting the message, or the dramatization of the story, to levels where the regular audience, with no previous knowledge of the work, will not reach. In other words, the message could be lost in the translation. But in art there is always the question of where the artist draws the line. Eisenstein demanded too much from his audience, and maybe I fell under the same spell.

Reality can also be manipulated, and the truth of the moment can be questionable. Sometimes the lack of editing can make the work too general, and without a specific direction the audience can miss the intentions of the artist. Bazin himself said, "How could anyone be fool enough to suppose that the cinema was capable of recording reality directly, when the reciprocal insights of semiotics and Lacanian psychoanalysis had demonstrated that human perception is always mediated by language?" (Andre Bazin pg15).

Is art ever conclusive, does it lie in the eyes of the beholder, or is it a never-ending search for truth? As I cannot give a definite answer, I can only reason that: a conclusion involves a finite quest, and if art is an expression of humanity, which is in constant motion and knows no finite end, then art cannot be finite or conclusive. Stanislavski always said, "Create your own method. Make up something that would work for you! But keep breaking traditions, I beg you" (Moor 37).

For me the final quest did not become about finding a middle ground between the two forms, for that will involve a finite conclusion, but it became a

quest for rejection. It is only after exploring form and style, then disregarding them completely and reinventing oneself again through the process, that a filmmaker can continue the search toward higher cinema. This is a search that can only be done inwardly and in constant revolt.

As artists we strive to find a sort of style, voice or something that would set us apart, separate us from the bunch, and if we are not careful, we could get lost in the attempt. An artist should not be concerned with finding a finite form to fit his craft, but to allow for the creative process to become a constant search toward the truth. The great secret that most artists don't realize is that the 'beast' never dies, but it becomes the constant guardian of our creativity.

I do not believe an artist should explain his art. It is the art that should explain the artist, who should reach a level of dominance over his craft so that he can express himself freely the way one dominates the speaking language and communicates through it. Since I am yet far from achieving this point, I wrote this paper as a way of making more evident my intentions with the film *Making Coffee* and the level of understanding I have of cinema. Through the writing I explored my own process as an artist, and I have been able to reach a clearer understanding of the cinematic language.

At the end of every process, the artist always wonders why he did it. Where does this need to create, to make films, to depict some trivial or social vivid reality, with the intention of communicating with an incognito audience, come from? This necessity is the truest thing I can claim to know as an artist. It is the existential crisis of our lives and the enigma of our reality. It is also the way

we understand ourselves as human beings. I undertook the creation of *Making Coffee* to understand how my work falls in the spectrum of film history. On a personal level, it gave me a new understanding of my relationship with my father. With regards to my creative process, I realized that I had just begun to scratch the surface.

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WEB CITATION

David Cronenberg Interview (part 1)
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