

OUR FATHER

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

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN FILM YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

May, 2015

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Abstract

Our Father is a fictional short film that tells a story of two women—a mother (Mira, 53, an immigrant from Croatia) and her daughter (Emily, 30, a born Canadian)—who are trying to set aside their differences while traveling to the cemetery where Mira’s deceased husband and Emily’s father is buried.

Various disputes happen during their time in the car: the daughter’s lack of interest in visiting the grave of her father regularly, Emily’s (in her mother’s view) masculinized appearance, their differing views on death and religion, and the mother’s strict and unforgiving attitude towards life. The main conflict arises when the mother realizes that Emily failed to buy a proper set of flowers, thus exhibiting a lack of understanding and commitment to preserving the tradition of *godišnjica* (a yearly visit to the grave of a deceased relative). After enduring the pain of revisiting their pasts and dealing with their ongoing interpersonal conflicts, Mira and Emily end their visit to the cemetery with an unsettling feeling that their differences will never be alleviated. The last exchange of words between them, in which Mira sends out a prayer to God in Croatian (uttering a full sentence in her native language for the first time during the film), and Emily does not understand her, hints that their oppositions might have an additional level of complexity. As they leave the cemetery, life goes back to ‘normal’, the birds start chirping and Mira and Emily go back to their every-day talk, hinting that the conflicts between them will keep reemerging over and over again, specially during the yearly *godišnjica*.

Acknowledgements

Being accepted at the Master's Program at York will undoubtedly go down as one of the key milestones of my life. It brought me to a country I deeply love and put me in contact with amazing and supportive people beyond my wildest expectations.

My special feelings of gratitude go towards my supervisor, Brenda Longfellow, whose sensibility, insight and support were a crucial factor in the completion of my thesis. Phil Hoffman, my reader, whose wisdom, kindness and passion for film will forever be an inspiration. John Greyson, Nicolas Pereda, Barbara Evans, Steve Sanguedolce, Ali Kazimi, Amnon Buchbinder, Scott Forsyth, Marcos Arriaga and John Headley are among those people from York's film department who provided invaluable support and guidance throughout my journey at York. Finally, Kuowei Lee, without whom I wouldn't have made it through the first week in Canada, was a constant source of support and understanding.

I also have to thank my classmates and dear friends: Sama Waham, Vladimir Paskaljevic, Erik Anderson, Franco Nguyen, Leslie Supnet, Neil Burns, Michal Labik, Mahsa Razavi, Karam el Masri, Kami Chisholm and Zain Burgess.

I also can't fail to mention my parents, Ana Lucia and Antonio Sergio, for supporting me in every imaginable way during the past 10 years I've been in this uncertain yet fascinating craft. And last but not least, my producer, co-writer and partner, Radojka Vrabac.

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Introduction

As a filmmaker with almost ten years of experience working in various positions as a director, editor, producer and screenwriter, I had never had an opportunity to reflect on the process of production through the format of written analysis. However, even though the idea of analyzing and documenting my own creative processes frightens me, I am profoundly intrigued by its potential outcomes. So far, the ongoing relationship between my creative and analytical beings has given me only constructive and motivating thoughts: I learned to balance my intuition with my sense of criticism, and I developed a more sophisticated sense of noticing when that balance gets disrupted. By knowing how to estimate the quality of the relationship between one's creative drives and critical spirits, I believe one can develop a better sense of the quality and feasibility of his/her work. This, I learned, is the key aspect of my educational experience that I gained through working with both production and analytical formats at the same time. By forcing myself into critically processing every step of my creative practice I provided myself with an opportunity to observe my work from a more distanced and 'objective' perspective. Now, I am willing to observe where this learning experience will take me next, as I am convinced that the benefits and further outcomes of my education have just begun.

Genesis of the Idea

The idea for this film was born on a very ordinary day. I was riding a bus in Toronto, passing some areas of the city that were not common to me, when the road took me past a snow-covered cemetery. It is still not clear to me which aspect of this ‘magical’ every-day scene exactly struck my memory as being significant, beautiful and deserving of a film. Maybe it was the sheer combination of factors—me being a newcomer to Canada (that had stepped on Canadian ground only a few months earlier) along with the fact that as a Brazilian, I had seldom seen snow before. The wind, the trees, the falling snow and the deserted landscape of the cemetery appeared to me as something strange—a beautiful, sinister and mysterious image that didn't yet have a clear narrative behind it. I decided to add a narrative, or in other words, to find it. Then, I came to realize the fact that these empty and architecturally plain and utilitarian spaces hold testaments to personal and social histories, forgotten and emerging cultures, perhaps even more than some other places that are ‘living’. Maybe it was then, at that moment of unconscious wonder about the snow-covered somber, serene landscape, that my film was born.

Once the idea of the film hit my consciousness, the script followed without much trouble. I am always mindful that one of the most difficult aspects of making films without a budget is securing locations, so therefore I struck upon the idea to have a film with very limited locations: a car and a cemetery. My partner, who is from Eastern Europe (more precisely, Serbia) contributed with vast amounts of intriguing information about the relationship between the living-people and the memory of their beloved deceased in her own country. Even though I was never very much familiar with the

culture of death and afterlife in Brazil, I still found ultimately surprising and fascinating the extent to which certain cultures invest their time and energy into paying tributes to the dead. I started being in love with the idea of making a film in which I would be able to explore the idiosyncrasies of three different cultures—my own, my partner’s and Canada’s—all of them on the grounds of the most diverse country in the world. I thought that the cemetery would be a fascinating space for getting in touch with different cultures since it represents the way in which they value and nurture their histories.

The Writing Process

The first draft of the script happened in just a few days after the first assembly of themes and ideas. The co-writer and I talked about the potential narrative for several weeks prior to writing the script. We discussed our past experiences, revisited some forgotten memories and performed research on funeral practices in Eastern European countries. We also walked through a number of cemetery locations in Toronto in order to find a perfect fit for the film, as well as to immerse ourselves in the atmosphere of the Canadian past. After selecting a solid number of scenes and ideas, the script was ready to be written.

The biggest and most important aspect of our film, we knew since the beginning, was the dialogue. Since we decided to create a very intimate drama about the mother-daughter relationship, we didn’t have much choice but to place all our thoughts and ideas into the words of our characters. We envisioned the film to consist only of two actors and two locations and almost nothing else. Therefore, we invested a significant amount of

time just polishing the narrative in a way that it represents the main themes that we wanted to explore, but that it does so in a ‘non-obvious’ way. In other words, our main goal was to create an atmospheric piece that would exhibit, but not ‘draw’, the main themes of our interest.

The dialogue structure, in short, contains two basic levels: a clear conflict that represents the themes in literal ways (by the fact of actors discussing them) and another, more loosely-based, and even improvisational narrative flow, that represents the conflict in more metaphorical ways. For example, a discussion about the difference between the mother’s and daughter’s respect or disrespect for tradition (the literal discussion of themes) is constantly being interrupted by their random talk about their hairstyles, wardrobe, etc. This structure, I believe, worked well on many levels because the difference between the two levels of the dialogue—one literal and one metaphorical—also represents the division between the two basic emotional states of the characters: one based on antagonism and the other one on understanding and love. This way, the love/antagonism relationship is reflected in the form of the double-structured dialogue in which a passionate discussion about cultures and ideologies is constantly being interrupted by an improvisational narrative flow that reflects an ongoing rift between them.

The co-writing process itself was performed in the following way: both the co-writer and I would write separate chunks of dialogue that we would then show each other and eventually condense into one cohesive whole. Finally, we would read the whole

script from the beginning several times, taking notes and adding new ideas as we went along.

Themes

Our Father is a film that strives to represent, primarily, the theme of cultural difference. While representing this theme through the relationship between a parent and a child, I wish to convey a message that cultural differences can be severe and unchangeable, but still supported by love. Mira and Emily have a very strong antagonistic relationship towards each other, in terms of their cultural identities. Mira is a strong, opinionated and intense woman who wants to preserve her tradition at all costs, while Emily is a rational and diplomatic person who wants to avoid conflict. The disputes between them oftentimes end up being aggressive and loud in nature. However, in matters of instance, these emotional flare-ups fade away into a light chatter about their every-day lives.

This underlying theme of parent-child relationship is a very important aspect of the film. Most of its content comes from my own experience with my mother. I am the same age as Emily and my mother is the same age as Mira. Though the nature of our relationship is dramatically different, we've often had to reach common ground about my (and her) choices in life. For this reason, the universal theme of family love is the main pillar of the film.

Another theme, which I hope comes out as the most delicate one, is the theme of generational gap. I did not wish to represent this aspect of the film as the one that is

almost all the time understood as the universal opposition between two generations. Instead, I wanted to represent, in a very subtle way, the social imbalance between the mother (who is from a working-class, immigrant background, but still financially stable and relatively successful) and her daughter (an educated Canadian struggling to ensure her basic survival). This level of conflict is a very important addition to the film as it reflects the social-economic context of our time, where there are very few opportunities for young people and the idea of stability in life and work is rapidly vanishing. Even though not explicitly stated, this theme provides the motif of cultural antagonism with a very important message. Conflicts arise not just because different cultures do not understand each other, but also because they live under different social circumstances and even social classes.

Finally, the issue of gender difference and gender identification plays an important role in this film, especially in the way in which gender roles and its accompanying power relations are constructed within certain cultural contexts. For example, the sheer fact that both roles in the film are given to female characters who are in conflict due to the imposing presence of a deceased male character speak to this film's intention to explore the notion of patriarchy in both Mira's and Emily's cultures. Even though they have different attitudes towards the way in which the memory of the late father should be cherished, Mira and Emily both carry the same amount burden.

The original title of the film, *Abel*, named after the late father, became then, *Our Father*. In a way, this title represents the relationship between the two women as a bond that is mediated through the presence of 'the father'; however, it is not only the 'one',

individual father that stands between them as both a binding and separating factor, but ‘our father’ (which in Croatian refers to God¹) that establishes the rules upon all cultures indiscriminately.

It is through these themes that we wanted to deal with this project; but also, it later emerged, that the choices of these themes did not come entirely intentionally, they arose from partially my experience as a recent immigrant to Canada. Through this film, my co-writer and I playfully observed and contemplated on the diversity and cultural complexity of our new country, and reflected and critically assessed our backgrounds from a new perspective. Gender, religion, traditions and cultures have gained a slightly different meaning in our minds after the completion of this film, and our willingness to adapt and embrace the new country of mixed cultural identities has grown even bigger.

Aesthetic Approach

Throughout my entire artistic career, I have always had an inclination to represent the environment around me in the most realistic way possible. Without always being aware of my reasons, I insisted on making my films appear as spontaneous and documentary-like as possible. In several instances, I resorted to unusual means in order to accomplish that. One of my short films, entitled *Sleepover*, had a story about two young

¹ Oče Naš (Eng. Our Father) can have two meanings in Croatian language: it can have a literal connotation, in which case it refers to what the words literary represent—our father, or it can refer to God (in English more commonly described as Our Lord). However, one of the most often association of the two words is a famous Christian prayer, which in Croatian religious culture has a very significant place. In English, this prayer is most widely known as The Lord's Prayer, or Our Father and Pater Noster.

girls growing up together that took place in a single day, in the form of a real-time depiction of their sleepover party.

After embarking on difficulties while directing very young actors, I decided to let reality take matters into its own hands. I left the camera rolling in the young girls' room and gave them a game to play. After an hour of 'not' directing, but sitting outside the door, I received the most impressive results. The scene of their play is the most effective scene in the film.

In *Our Father* I tried to do the same. I invited the actresses to 'play', i.e. to improvise on a certain narrative theme knowing that their real-life characters are already correspondent to their fictional counterparts and that their acting will only be an unnecessary addition to their real-life complex characters. I insisted on NOT having them repeat the lines of the script, even though the screenplay was carefully written to encompass all ideas of the story that we found important. I left them to improvise on the main narrative beats of the film. The result was rather satisfying, both in terms of fidelity to the original script, and in terms of the realist aesthetics that I wanted to accomplish.

Production Style

I began working as my own cinematographer the first time I decided to make a project on my own. Whether it was luck, or just a fact that no-budget films are generally welcoming of the 'one-man-show' approach, my filmmaking endeavors were never negatively affected by the fact that I gave directions and held the camera at the same time. As a matter of fact, I always enjoyed and looked forward to doing both, obtaining

good results in every occasion. The very act of operating the camera during a scene puts me in deep contact with the film in a way that would be hard to replicate if I were to sit on a chair watching a scene play out. Constructing my own visual style, and manipulating it in real time, second after second on set, has always left me feeling secure and confident that the visual aesthetics of my films will correspond to my creative demands. In *Our Father*, the feeling was no different. On the contrary, my confidence in the aesthetic style of the film was even more emphasized by the fact that only my partner and I (besides the two actresses) constituted the entire crew of my film. I believe that no-budget, 'do-it-yourself' films are not only a consequence of an imposed financial circumstance (usually a negative one), but an aesthetic choice that can be used creatively and effectively. DIY methods also carry amount of risk in the hands of people who are not capable of relying on each other. In my case, the collaboration between my partner, who was in charge of the sound and production, and me (in charge of directing and cinematography), created a fully operational atmosphere on the set.

As a firm believer of DIY tactics and deeply personal filmmaking, I've been profoundly influenced by the work of filmmakers such as Abbas Kiarostami, Pedro Costa and Ermanno Olmi, all of whom have in one period or another worked as their own camera operators and cinematographers in their projects. By keeping crews small and sets intimate, I feel more comfortable talking to actors and conducting the set as if the film being shot was a documentary. This independence is also another reason why I have tried over the years to invest much of my earnings into owning my own filming equipment. Knowing each piece of equipment inside out has provided me with much confidence

about the technical and aesthetic aspects of my films. Maintaining an efficient exchange between creative and technical aspects of filmmaking is one of the foundational elements of my production style.

Cinematography and Visual Style

In *Our Father* I utilized the Panasonic GH4, a camera that was released in mid-2014, and at the time of writing was the only 4K-enabled DSLR available on the market. This choice of equipment allowed me to shoot the entire film in the high resolution of 4096 x 2160. The extra resolution also aided me in being able to put guide marks on the LCD in order to later crop the image from the aspect ratio of 1.85:1 to 2.39:1 with minimal loss of quality. Being a small and lightweight camera, I was also able to safely mount two GH4s on the hood of the car without any major difficulties.

The two mounted cameras on the external hood of the car, pointed at two actors sitting inside the car presented the main visual strategy for the film, besides the scene that was played at the cemetery in widely framed shots. During the shooting of the car scene, both cameras were rigged utilizing two pairs of Gecko Suction Cups—one for the camera body and one for the camera lens—in order to avoid shakiness and bobbing in the image due to the movement of the car. The first GH4, pointed at Emily (Melissa Paulson) had a Sigma 18-35mm 1.8 lens attached to it, fitted with a polarizer. The second GH4, pointed at Mira (Cynthia Ashperger) had a Panasonic 12-35mm 2.8 lens mounted with a slightly different type of the polarizer. Both cameras were set for the same focal length and aperture and were framed to capture the exact same frame-size of both actresses' faces.

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to monitor the image during the shoot because both the sound recordist and I were hiding in the backseat of the car. However, after every take, I would rise up from the back seat, give instructions, and at various occasions, I would go outside the car to check the cameras' performance.

To achieve the stylized reflections on the windshield, that were supposed to represent the imposing presence of the urban landscape on the characters, I initially considered not using any polarizing filters at all. However, during early tests I realized that without polarizers the audience would not be able to see inside the car at all. Also, I realized that the polarizers allowed reflections only in circular sections of the glass—a happy accident that proved itself useful because it allowed me to aim the cameras exactly towards the actresses' faces.

I felt it was very important to achieve this exact effect of the reflections on the windshield considering how the car scene, which comprises roughly 70% of the film, is composed of only two shots, intercut together. I have tried in my previous films to use a serene visual style, where the film does not dramatically change its visual treatment in favor of a particular character or moment (such as using a close-up or piece of music to punctuate an emotion), but only in this one did I achieve a full effect of the film 'closed-up' in a single, minimally-structured style of framing. I believe that the insistence on utilizing two opposed, nearly identical shots aided me in conveying a sense of fairness and equanimity towards my characters.

The use of reflections also allowed me to have exterior city shots in the film without having to insert direct shots of it, therefore breaking the claustrophobic

environment of the car. The primary influences for this technique come from the work of two cinematographers: Slawomir Idziak's work in Krzysztof Kieslowski's *The Double Life of Veronique* and Harris Savides' cinematography in Gus Van Sant's *Last Days*, which have similar driving sequences that seemingly commit the 'mistake' of not polarizing the windshield of the car, which is what the vast majority of films do.

For the second day of shooting, I also kept the crew to a minimum, because I planned to film quickly and without an official permit. For that goal, I again utilized the Panasonic GH4, with the Panasonic 35-100mm 2.8 lens and an UV filter. Since I had envisioned filming the entire cemetery sequence in long, wide shots, the use of the telephoto lens allowed me to get a distant perspective that counters the tight, constricted shots of the car scene. For the opening shot of that sequence, when Emily and Mira walk down a long path looking for the late father's grave, I had my camera set up atop a hill, far enough from the actresses and had the sound recordist hide behind a tree to record a long dialogue. We communicated by cell phone throughout the first part of the cemetery scene.

Finally, the last shot of the film mirrors Mira and Emily's antagonistic relationship by separating them, not by the separate framing, but by placing them on opposite sides of the tall tombstone of the father in a single frame. The particular tombstone in the film was chosen for being tall and imposing—in fact taller than both women—therefore visually representing the towering presence that the late patriarch still has over Mira's and Emily's relationship. The men working in the background and foreground were a complete (and fortunate) accident, which added a subtly ironic twist to the end of the film

by subtly implying that no matter what our beliefs and plans are, the small chores of daily life will always go on in its own way and pace.

Another important element that affected the visual style of *Our Father* was the choice of camera settings. In order to maximize my flexibility during post-production and to obtain the visual style that I envisioned, I configured the camera with sharpness, saturation and contrast turned all the way down. This allowed me to obtain softer and more subdued colors in-camera. Contrary to more expensive 4K cameras like the Red One or the ARRI Alexa, cinematographers working with the GH4 must try to obtain a very close image to the desired final result, since the camera records a compressed, 8-bit H.264 image that, while beautiful, has little room for fixing exposure or white balance mistakes in post production.

I do not expect to remain the Director of Photography in my own films for the rest of my career (as projects get more complex and larger, I will happily collaborate with other Cinematographers), but for now, where budgets are low (or non-existent) I feel this system provides me with great speed, creative potential and learning experience that I will make use of in the future in a variety of professional circumstances.

Sound

Early on I knew I would not use any music through the film, not only for budgetary reasons, but also because I feel music should only be used when it has a very justifiable and adequate meaning in the piece, which this particular film did not call for. In addition, the use of music can often present a 'biased' view of the action onscreen,

which I tend to avoid. My cowriter and I also envisioned the film to have two distinct sonic landscapes: the city of Toronto around the car and the silence of the Cemetery. After completing my MFA at York I hope to be able to complete a high-quality 5.1 Surround Sound mix of the film.

Editing

The editing process began with the synchronization of video and sound, a process that was lengthy and laborious because of the fact that both cameras, placed outside of the car, could not be automatically synced with the internal sound made on the recorder. The sound recordist and I decided early on not to slate the film in order to maximize our shooting time, allow our actors to improvise as much as possible, and keep the production as inconspicuous as possible as we drove around Toronto.

The 4096 x 2160 clips were imported into Final Cut Pro X and then transcoded into Pro Res for snappier editing and subsequent color grading. Early on, I had decided that the film should avoid being too ‘cutty’ during the back and forth between Mira and Emily. I wanted long stretches, especially at the opening of the film, where the two characters are represented separately from each other and in long takes. This decision added another formally effective element in which the antagonism between the characters is represented by a slow-cutting editing strategy. An empty seat (before Mira enters the car) is the first frame of the film; then, Emily appears next and the audience is being introduced to her character while hearing Mira’s off-screen voice; finally, the audience is being introduced to Mira in the same long-take style as the previous two shots while

Emily's voice is being heard off screen. This way, the character's feelings and most importantly, their reaction to each other, are revealed full-forced through the use of the long opening takes. Furthermore, by the fact of placing the two characters in a very 'separated' editing fashion, their conflicts and differences are much more emphasized. The rest of the car scene assumes a slightly more 'cutty' rhythm as we enter the drama of their disagreements and elevated tensions.

Two films worked as a strong influence on this technique: the first, Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*, which famously repeats an intimate confession scene between two women two times during the film, each time focusing on only one of the women, without any cross-cuts. The second is Abbas Kiarostami's *Ten*, where a camera is similarly set up in a car and we hear characters driving and speaking for long periods of time without them being visually identified right away. That film is also radical in its refusal to use any other shots rather than the main, medium shots from the dashboard of the car.

I chose to incorporate some of the techniques used in the aforementioned films to emphasize the communication problem that Mira and Emily have, their differing worldviews and perspectives. I believe that offering audiences enough "space" in an edit helps them project their own thoughts into the expression of the characters. As such, even though the film ends at around 17 minutes, it only has 7 shots. Though this was intentional from the start, our available shooting days precluded me from shooting from several angles or for too long. I believe this was a lucky example of how the lack of resources is capable of giving the film innovative and creative powers.

Post Production

Once the picture was locked, I exported a Final Cut XML to Blackmagic Design's Davinci Resolve 11 in order to color grade and conform the film into the final 2.39:1 'Cinemascope' aspect ratio. It is my personal belief that many low-budget films use this aspect ratio for completely gratuitous reasons, to simply look more 'cinematic' or emulate mainstream, high-budget films. In Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt*, German director Fritz Lang famously said about the Cinemascope ratio: "*Oh, it wasn't meant for human beings. Just for snakes – and funerals.*"² Perhaps he was right in that the human figure seems small and awkward in such a wide image, but in the case of my film, Cinemascope is a very appropriate format, and even Fritz Lang might agree since *Our Father* is extensively a film about a cemetery.

It is my opinion that there is more serious, 'truthful' meaning hiding behind Lang's statement. Cinemascope turned out to be a perfect choice for the film because it restrained the two main characters into a very narrow space, a space that is aimed more towards earth than to the skies. As both characters are figuratively 'pressed' by the event of the *godišnjica*, Cinemascope serves as a formal tool that emphasizes this 'earthly' nature of Mira's and Emily's relationship.

Finally, I utilized a plugin called FilmConvert Pro, which adds color curves that emulate the look of classic film stocks as well as their grain. I wanted to emphasize through the colours and the subtly faded images the repetitiveness of Mira's and Emily's yearly pilgrimage to visit the late father's grave, as if the film was simply a snapshot of

² Fritz Lang. *Contempt*. Directed by Jean-Luc Godard. 1963. Los Angeles, CA: Embassy Pictures. DVD

one of those visits, an event that will repeat itself for decades in the future, like Christmas or a birthday.

Working with Actors

Our Father was the first film I directed in English, which confronted me with the question of how to direct my actors in a language that isn't my mother tongue, and most importantly, how to direct actors that are used to different acting techniques and sensibilities.

Brazilian Portuguese (my native language) has a very intriguing character in that the spoken and written languages are to a large extent different, where common speech is informal and full of mistakes, yet sounds natural to the ears, while the grammatically correct speech (spoken by actors in certain traditions—in soap operas and in mainstream films) is often devoid of its natural charm and fluency. Through much of Brazilian Cinema, filmmakers tried to use a form of proper diction that would correct the widely spread use of incorrect language, often exhibiting performances of questionable value. In 2002, when Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund directed a film that would become the most internationally acclaimed piece of Brazilian cinema, *City of God*, the cinematic tradition of carefully sculpted diction was shattered. One of the keys to both its international and domestic success was its remarkably realistic acting and natural diction, which is usually credited, by many critics and audiences, to one woman—theatre professor Fátima Toledo. In 2011, I had the opportunity to take a 2-week long acting workshop at the Fatima Toledo School of Acting. The experience permanently changed

my view of acting. In one of his blogs on the experience of working with Toledo, Emilio Fraia claims:

In this method, the idea of character does not exist. In true cinema, the person shouldn't think about creating a character, they have to truly live the situation. The scenarios are fiction, it's not our real selves, but it's also not a character, because we are there, living everything. After the director says "cut" that's it: the actor goes back to life, but in that moment it's the person herself that's living it.³

Therefore early in my career, out of necessity, I got used to the idea of asking actors not to memorize lines perfectly and, rather, speak the text loosely in what could be called a "rehearsed improvisation" system. I realized very early in the development of my artistic sensibilities that following the written dialogue verbatim was never a preferred choice of mine.

I conducted rehearsals with the two actresses—Cynthia Ashperger (Mira) and Melissa Paulson (Emily)—in which I led lengthy discussions about the particularities of their characters. During the rehearsals, I tried to make them incorporate their own personal experiences into the role (their relationship with their respective mothers, their backgrounds etc). Cynthia Ashperger, due to some very unusual circumstances, had a misfortune to experience events that perfectly corresponded to the script's narrative: her partner of 19 years died and she was in the process of finding a burial place for his ashes during the production of the film. She is also an immigrant while her daughter is a

³ Emilio Fraia. "How Not to be an Actor", *Piauí* 28(January, 2009), accessed May 10, 2015. <http://revistapiaui.estadao.com.br/edicao-28/questoes-de-interpretacao/como-nao-ser-ator>

Canadian born without the knowledge of Croatian language and her parents are religious Catholics who were always very insistent on maintaining the tradition of *godišnjica* in regards to their deceased relatives.

Even though the similarities between the scripted characters and real-life actors had a large amount of overlay, *Our Father* turned out to have a more ‘scripted’ acting aesthetics than I predicted. This likely happened because both actresses were experienced professional actors who were very attached to the method of studying the script in depth before the shoot. However, the raw emotions that Ashperger carried from her recent life experiences gave an additional believability to her performance regardless.

If there is something, however, that I would like to improve in my future work in film, it is the preparation of actors for their role, as well as the on-set directing. I was quite satisfied with the performance of *Our Father* actors, however, in future projects I would like to obtain more naturalistic and improvisational performances from my actors, professionals or non-professionals. This is a lesson that I will happily carry from this experience into my future projects.

Observations and Conclusions

The experience of making *Our Father* and its accompanying paper came as a two-fold surprise: I discovered an unknown aspect of my aesthetic taste, so far hidden from my conscious persona, and I got introduced to a remote region of my subconscious, which had been tangled within the cluster of my memories.

In regards to the first discovery, I learned that whichever previous aesthetic preference I had, I should not allow myself to be entirely governed by it. For example, while writing *Our Father*, I kept insisting that the final film should have a very clear sombre style. While working on the script along with my partner (who, apparently, had a slightly different aesthetic vision in her mind) I embarked on an aesthetic approach which assumed that a work of cinema does not necessarily have to be ‘lugubrious’ in its form in order to reflect and represent a ‘sombre’ content. The moment I realized that *Our Father* would have a delicate touch of humor, the one that accompanies our every-day realities even when we are not aware of it, I discovered that all the films that I appreciate and revere have a sense of humor incorporated into their narrative and visual structures. It also came to my knowledge that all those magnificent, classic films that I admired, but for which I did not feel the same personal, intimate love and adoration, lack exactly that touch of humor that, in my newly formed opinion, forms a necessary ingredient for a complex and beautiful work of art. It is my belief, now, that a delicate sense of humor lies at the core of our identities as human beings.

On the other hand (and even, paradoxically), I discovered that certain elements of my directorial style should be maintained and never compromised. For example, during the work with the actors, I never gained enough will to make my actors drop their fixations with the written text. Even though my initial plan was to make them improvise almost entirely, I decided to let go of my previously gained knowledge and let them do what they felt most comfortable with. Of course, I wasn’t entirely pleased with the results. But, for the sake of my future work, I will take this experience as a learning

process through which I will learn how not to abnegate the wonderful knowledge that I got from Fátima Toledo. Acting should and must remain an interpellation of real-life into performance and not *vice versa*. Even though I am fully aware of the fact that acting is an incredible skill that demands strenuous work and exercise, I will keep nurturing my tradition of working with actors (either professional or non-professional) through the use of improvisational methods that involve more discussions and contemplations and less traditional performing. It is not that I find the taste of well-developed and brilliantly performed ‘Meyerholdean’ constructivism unappealing, I just find the style of naturalist acting (the one that is more close to representing reality of actors on set as it is, with all its unpolished qualities) more compatible with narrative and formal properties of my aesthetic imagination.

Finally, while working on the pre-production part of my film, which involved location scouting and scriptwriting, I experienced a profound connection with the process of memory creation in my own mind. Walking through the cemetery and observing the snow-covered landscape sparked a strange feeling in my mind that resembled the sensation of a long-lost memory reemerging in front of my eyes. Of course, I had never been to the cemetery in my entire life, nor had I seen snow before coming to Canada, but still, I admired the phenomenon of past being created right there in the present moment. This made me imagine memories as the intersections of our envisioned pasts and imagined futures. I should, then, learn from my characters and embrace the new and unfamiliar snowy landscapes of Canada while still cherishing my past histories and traditions. The experience of immigration, thus, equals the experience of memories—our

imagined, past realities emerge from everywhere and do not reside in any single place at any given time, they migrate.

“The present contains nothing more than the past, and what is found in the effect was already in the cause⁴”

Henry Bergson

⁴ Henry Bergson. *Creative Evolution* (1907), Chapter I, translated by Arthur Mitchell. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911., 14.

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Appendix

Referenced and Influential Films

10 on Ten, Dir. Abbas Kiarostami, Iran, 2004

35 Shots of Rum, Dir. Claire Denis, France, 2008

Cigarettes and Coffee, Dir. Cristi Piu, Romania, 2004

Cria Cuervos, Dir. Carlos Saura, Spain, 1976

El Sur, Dir. Victor Erice, Spain, 1983

Las Acacias, Dir. Pablo Giorgelli, Argentina, 2011

Murmur of the Heart, Dir. Louis Malle, France, 1971

Ten, Dir. Abbas Kiarostami, Iran, 2002

The Dekalog, Dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski, Poland, 1988

The Double Life of Veronique, Dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski, France, 1991

The Fiances, Dir. Ermanno Olmi, Italy, 1963

The Green Ray, Dir. Eric Rohmer, France, 1986

The Skywalk is Gone, Dir. Tsai-Ming Liang, Taiwan, 2002

Thursday till Sunday, Dir. Dominga Sotomayor, Chile, 2012