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## For Want Of: A Punk Rock Short Film

Jonathan P. Kieran  
*University of New Orleans*, [jonathan.p.kieran@gmail.com](mailto:jonathan.p.kieran@gmail.com)

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For Want Of: A Punk Rock Short Film

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in  
Film Production

by

Jonathan P. Kieran

B.A. Ursinus College, 2007

May, 2015

Dedicated to my mother and sister  
and to my fellow filmmakers.

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## Abstract

In light of the specific challenges of assessing a thesis film—a project which contains artistic and academic components—the author examines his own short film *For Want Of* as a prototype for future work in film and as an opportunity for introspective investigation into the nature of filmmaking and personal artistic process. Reference is made to specific episodes during the film’s conception and production, as well as higher-level insight gained from following the film through an 18-month production cycle.

Film Production, Short Films, Hardcore Punk, Screenwriting, Procrastination

## 1. Introduction

In search of a critical method that gives due place to the thesis film as a thesis (the “capstone” in a degree program) and as a film, I’ve attempted in this paper to integrate two approaches. On one hand, I’ll assess *For Want Of* as a *prototype*, and secondly as an *occasion for introspection*. I’ll briefly elaborate on each of those terms before launching into an analysis that, I hope, gives equal time to each and pairs them without undue awkwardness.

I’ve used the shorthand of the capstone above to refer to a thesis project, but I will admit to some misgivings about the use of this term to refer to my own thesis film. Rather than think of *For Want Of* as an endpoint or a crowning achievement, I’d like to remain conscious of the ground I have yet to cover as a filmmaker. Thus, I’ve conceived of this examination of the project as a tool to further my artistic development and understanding of the craft.

In light of this orientation toward future work, I introduce the concept of the prototype, a consciously imperfect product which is meant just as much to uncover flaws in its design as to serve its the function for which it is intended. *For Want Of* is the result of a multitude of intuitions, borrowed solutions, and best-guesses as to how to create and produce a short film. It is far from being an integrated, perfected product. Which, for me as a student, is perfect. Rather than simply celebrate the film’s existence, which would teach me nothing, I can benefit from a thorough consideration of what went right and wrong.

In the process of examining *For Want Of* as a prototype, I found that I was collecting not just data points (i.e., “this worked, that didn’t”) that would help me when I got back to the drawing board to make a new film, but also holistic, personal and sometimes fairly idiosyncratic insights that I deemed just as worthy of inclusion in this account. As a project to which I committed hundreds of hours over more than a year, and my main creative outlet during that period, *For Want Of* can tell me not just

about how to make films, but about me as a filmmaker, about how I've grown and how I still need to grow, about the systems of intuition and judgment that underlie all of my creative decisions. This material composes this paper's other throughline: an introspective examination of *For Want Of*.

Lastly, a note about the organization of the material to follow: Rather than breaking down the analysis of *For Want Of* on a department-by-department basis as these papers often do, I've structured the text that follows under headings that suggested themselves in the course of writing this paper.

Material related both to specific departments and to the film in general can be found in each section. I hope that you, the reader, will find that this scheme makes for a more engaging reading experience and better allows this paper to serve the purposes set out in this introduction.

## 2. Encounters with Structure

It's a popular stereotype of film students that we're artistic loose cannons, that our expressive impulses have to be carefully disciplined and channeled into the proper course. Otherwise, so the story goes, the work that surfaces will be loud and pretentious, a riot of meaningless imagery and poor technique verging on chaos. The tropes of these Bad Student Films are well-worn and emerge sometimes in pop culture (usually when some pompous Beatnik-type character needs deflating): underexposed black and white, prop-heavy kitchen sink Surrealism, mopey actors, Dutch angles, unappealing nudity, berets. Although this burlesque of the student film has become cliché, it's still as true as ever that young filmmakers can fall victim to their own enthusiasm. Against this undisciplined creativity, film schools apply two antidotes. The first is a matter of mindset (i.e. the ability to self-criticize, to approach one's own work analytically and apply an awareness of one's audience). This is taught through tough-minded and lively workshopping. The second is a rigorous course in story structure.

As a student myself, I've dutifully recapitulated the enduring conflict of Story Structure versus Artistic Freedom in my own work. When I first realized how much of our curriculum would concern itself with the finer points of systems erected by screenwriting gurus (self-proclaimed like Robert McKee, or conscripted to the cause, like Aristotle and Joseph Campbell), something inside me quietly revolted. I resented that old chestnut, "learn the rules in order to break them." I deemed it vulgar, when it came to art, to talk in terms of rules and infractions; it seemed like a petty attempt to wrestle aesthetics into the realm of morality.

True to my lower nature, I failed to resist the dominance of structure openly, instead growing cagey and evasive. Eventually, when the time came to write and produce my first real short script, the result reflected that unresolved conflict. I can very clearly remember what I said in summing up my in-



class review of *Needle Drops*: “If you told me I could only make this type of film for the rest of my life, I’d hang it up and start studying to be a mailman tomorrow.”

Now here I am almost two full years later, at the end of production on another film. My application to the USPS remains unsent. Not that I’ve dialectically triumphed over all the conflicts between story structure and personal expression just yet, but I believe *For Want Of* is a strong step forward. It’s imperfect, and some of that imperfection is rooted in missteps of structure, but I wear it as a badge of progress. If I hadn’t grappled with ideas of structure on my own terms, I feel the consequences would have been far more dire.

By way of an in-depth discussion of story structure and the way it played out through *For Want Of*, I’ll discuss two aspects of story that I took on directly in writing the film, one where (I believe) my approach was effective and the other where I’m really still searching for an approach. The former has to do with the composition of scenes and the latter with characters. Lastly, I’ll cover a device that I used while shaping the story, a cheap trick that helped me get unstuck and onto the page.

One practice that has helped me immensely in my own work has been screening narrative shorts for the New Orleans Film Festival. Not only has it given me an excuse to watch way more short films than ever before (over 300 in the past 2 years), I’m also required to assess each film in words, to try and pin down explicitly what worked and what didn’t, and why.

Every year there are a few films that represent the absolute top of the craft, and of course I learn plenty from them. But I think I learn an even more important lesson from the films that aren’t as easy to watch. The often trying experience of watching these films is a strong reminder to stay mindful of the viewer, to stay conscious of where short films end up and the kind of audience they’re likely to find. Who takes the time to volunteer as a screener? Or pays good money not to take in the latest, hippest festival feature, but to wade into the minefield that is the average narrative shorts program? Who risks fifteen minutes of their scant free time to click on a Vimeo Staff Pick when they could be

surfing Facebook or binge-watching Netflix? I imagine this brave soul, probably bored out of their mind in some darkened room, and I commend the chance that they've taken.

So when I'm the one who's benefitting from it, I want to respect that wager, that gift of time. One of my cardinal rules, when I wrote *For Want Of*, was not to be boring, and a lot of the effort to obey that rule was expended on scene structure. First of all, most scenes were kept quite short: there are 19 of them in the original 12-page script.

I also tried to provide a lot of variety between scenes. There are longish (over a page) dialogue scenes, shorter scenes of mostly action, scenes that are dominated by music or mostly quiet, scenes that employ a lot of cuts and scenes that play out in a single take, scenes that are entirely static shots and scenes that are nothing but dolly moves. The idea was to just keep changing things up, to find ways to seat the subject of any given scene in a concept (e.g., "a dolly shot, music over" or "one take, hardly any background noise" or "standard coverage, background noises") that could somehow reinforce the energy of the scene and signal the forward momentum of the film, the sense of things changing and unfolding.

Looking back on my earliest notes for the script of *For Want Of*, it strikes me how much I was stressing questions of character. Time after time in the early weeks, when I was still feeling out the broad contours of the film, I would jot down a character description as though it were a mathematical formula, the simplest possible description of character's whole behavior. I even put it in my prospectus: "I want to make character the focal point of this film" ... "[t]he effectiveness of *For Want Of* at communicating character [will] be a benchmark of my progress as a writer and director" (Kieran, 2013 1)

From my current too-close vantage point, I can already see that I haven't quite lived up to that task I set myself. As much work as I did in preparation, as simply and elegantly as I tried to state the essence of each of the main characters, I still feel that *For Want Of* doesn't put the viewer in touch with them the way I imagined it could. Jeff's creative impasse seems observed and noted, rather than

intimately felt. Hannah's departure is amply documented but still seems like a simple event, rather than a consequence.

Of course it's disappointing that the characterization in *For Want Of* didn't succeed simply by virtue of the time and effort I put toward it. But it's also enlightening, since that effort was obviously misapplied. It has occurred to me lately that I failed to allow the situation and the characters to really *meet* one another. What I mean is that I worked up a set of characters that I deemed dimensional and playable and placed them in a narrative framework that made sense and had a cohesive logic to it. Those two systems work in parallel, but there isn't a *dynamic* between them, a relationship of character and scene where they actively shape one another. I always asked the question "what would Jeff do in this scene?" but never "how does the fact that we're seeing this scene change what we know about Jeff?"

Around the time that I was painstakingly trying to reduce my characters to elegant formulae, I was also wondering about just what was going to happen in this film. I had plenty of scene ideas, more than enough interesting situations to put my characters through, but no sense of an order, a line to plot all of these happenings on.

I remembered reading a profile on *Wired's* website of Dan Harmon, the creator of the NBC sitcom *Community* and renowned Difficult Creative (since I read that article, he has been fired from his own show, then re-hired. Then that show was cancelled, then revived by Yahoo! for their fledgling streaming service). Harmon is a structure freak himself, and the *Wired* profile details how he uses a circular diagram to organize all of his *Community* plots (Raferty).<sup>1</sup>

I decided quickly that a full "Harmonization" of my story was not desirable. It would introduce way too many plot points for a short film, especially one more character-based and contemplative like the one I thought I was making. I decided quickly to try an ultra simple version retaining only the biggest

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<sup>1</sup> You can read his complete and profanity-laden explanation of his approach here:  
[http://channel101.wikia.com/wiki/Category:Dan\\_Harmon](http://channel101.wikia.com/wiki/Category:Dan_Harmon)

of Harmon's plot points, which took it down from 8 to 4. I could divide my story circle based on 2 oppositions: "Band together/band broken up" and "Hannah here/Hannah away," then my major plot points would be 1) Hannah shows up 2) The band gets together 3) Hannah takes off 4) The band breaks up.

And that was more or less it. I had my storyline. The result wasn't as thickly woven as a *Community* episode or as propulsive as a fully-structured feature film, but I found this loose-boned structure supported the easy tone of the film pretty well. And that's how I, a sworn structure skeptic, based my film on a recipe straight out of the cookbook. The whole thing reminded me that I don't hate story structure; far from it. I've always known that any story needs a structure. I just disagreed that you could ever find the one structure that fit all stories. I'm really not sure why that idea has such currency among screenwriting types; it reminds me of when, during the Revolution, the French fell so in love with metrication that they introduced a horrifically dysfunctional metric time system. Some things just call for a change of strategy.

So I've made a little peace with story structure. What, then, of the importance of "learning the rules so that you can break them?" I've done a bit of pondering to try and find a replacement that better suits my position, and I've come up with this:

"Learn the rules so that you can transcend the normative concept of rules."

Just kidding. It's this: "Learn your way past the rules." Because I just have to believe that the work of a filmmaker who works outside rules is far less bad than the work of one who lives by them.

Notice I said "learn" but not "learn the rules." I'm ambivalent about whether exposure to systems of structure is really helpful. It could be that you can intuit a lot of what's valuable about those systems without direct exposure to them. Others, like me, might benefit from having to form a creative reaction to those rules. Althusser famously observed this about capitalist ideology, that the strictures according to which we live and think become invisible, that what we consider freely-formed elements of

our worldview, of our personality even, are actually enforced from outside. Politically, this situation is deeply problematic, but artistically it seems ideal. I believe that our creative choices are far more sound when they arise not from reference to stated theories, but from an unspoken sense of rightness.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "It is indeed a peculiarity of ideology that it imposes (without appearing to do so, since these are 'obviousnesses') obviousnesses as obviousnesses, which we cannot fail to recognize and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out (aloud or in the 'still, small voice of conscience'): 'That's obvious! That's right! That's true!'" (Althusser 172)

### 3. Persistent Vision

“I am the victim of a persistent vision / it tracks me down with its precision.”  
— Rites of Spring, “Persistent Vision”

I hear over and over again about filmmakers who work for years, maybe even decades, to bring a story to the screen. That they find themselves in the grips of their story idea and, in feverish pursuit of it, are swept along on amazing, improbable journeys through the wilds of production. The thought seems to be that the right story will just take you, that a powerful enough idea has an inevitability of its own, and this is what separates the Right Story from just any old story. That might make good copy for indie-film blogs, but it’s not a piece of wisdom that I’ve found particularly useful in my own work. Story ideas don’t come to me fully formed. Most of the time they don’t come at all. When I do hit on something that seems usable, it’s typically not story-ish at all, but an image, a sense of a place, a fragment of a scene, a phrase that someone might say or the way one person might look at another. The very beginning of *Needle Drops* was an image of a dying old man lying in bed with headphones on, and the sound of beautiful music. This image came to me and I dared to believe that I had something special. Transfixed is a strong word, but I was excited, no doubt about it.

I *was* excited, for about a day. They say that any artist has to kill their darlings, but my darlings rarely need my help; they prefer to die an anxiety and skepticism-fueled crib-death. Since I’m unable to effervesce with zeal for the idea at hand, I tend to create in a kind of survival mode, as in “O God of filmmaking, just tell me who I have to human-sacrifice to get me through this scene.” Each new flash of an idea, each new character wrinkle or line of dialogue is like a life preserver. Actually more like a Life-Saver, a big candy one, water-soluble and only partly buoyant to begin with. So here I am, working. I thrash and flounder my way through it. Far from being “swept along” by the current of my own inspiration, I’m kicking against a gulfstream of dread and fear.

And that's just the first draft. You would think, as ideas accrete into scenes and scenes into a script, and that script is filmed and the footage is synched and cut into a film—you would think that as these infinitely questionable products of inspiration gain definite form and undeniable, for-better-or-worse reality—that some of this anxiety would recede. Not in my experience, no. It's a terrible way to work, unnecessarily painful and probably not that good for the end product. On the worst days I wonder whether it's some kind of sign. If inexhaustible enthusiasm is the sign of the "right ideas," and that the ability to generate and develop those ideas is the mark of the "born creative," then does the absence of that enthusiasm mean—you see where I'm going here. Over the course of seven-odd years of making movies I've more or less relinquished hope that this resistance will subside. As the bluesmen say, it's just "dry long so."

And yet. Just because all stories seem equally bad once they've been rattling around your head for a few hours doesn't mean that some aren't, objectively speaking, better than others, or at least more suited to be told by you rather than another teller. This is the reason why I abandoned my original thesis project *Unloveable*. I had a treatment in hand, and an approved prospectus, and was even making decent progress on a script (not to mention the tiny matter of a ten thousand dollar production award). But in the end I had to admit to myself that I wasn't close enough to the material, and I couldn't manage to bring it closer to me. Putting aside the *prima facie* issues of representation raised by someone like me writing a transgender protagonist (and let's be frank, they're huge), I simply found it impossible to write authentically from within the characters. All I had was a fleeting notion of the hugeness of the decision to transition, and a lot of fiery words like "embodiment" and "metamorphosis" to spice up my pitch. There was nothing in the story world for me to hang onto, no Life-Savers in sight.

So I turned to another story idea, one that maybe lacked *Unloveable's* big themes about human bodies and minds, but in exchange put me in touch with a wealth of images and sounds, and a framework of social mores and habits. Researching the DC punk scene that inspired *For Want Of* is like

digging into a treasure chest, full of poignant and telling details, from the way a teen bassist holds himself in a posed band photo, to some basement scribe's fanzine manifesto. I decided that if I couldn't propel myself from within on pure artistic optimism, I could latch onto these indelible fragments and hitch myself along.

So, against my own inner tide, which always pulls me toward inaction, I posed the counterflow of what I came to think of as the "persistent vision." Not in the sense of an encompassing "artistic vision" or a "vision statement," but something fragmentary and pungent, and most importantly easily retrievable, ready to be called up on a computer screen at a moment's notice. I kept a Pinterest board of every show photo I liked, a playlist of my favorite DC songs from '85, a folder full of interviews and scans of ancient, crumbling fanzines. I treated this assembly like a little curio case, a rack of talismans that I could turn to when I felt like I was losing my grip in the contortions of a scene breakdown or the minutia of editing. If I found myself unable to be unapologetically obsessed with my own ideas, at least I could obsess over these trinkets; at least I was still capable of obsession.

This collection of images and sounds also became invaluable later in helping to communicate the particulars of the period to collaborators in other departments. The images of 'zine pages and pictures of messy punk-house bedrooms were crucial in helping the art department design props, costumes, and set dressing whose look and feel placed them in the period. My production designer Ellen Bull readily joined in my obsession, loading the background world of *For Want Of* with a crazy amount of story detail. We emailed back and forth a growing list of fake band names. She dug up era-appropriate slogans to scrawl on T-shirts and filled the inside pages of Hannah's fake 'zine (which never made it into the film) with collages and hand-written pieces. From reference images and screengrabs from other films, she built an onscreen world that was not simply accurate but radiated affection for the time and place.



When I started working with Rainer Holzinger to write Hannah's anthem, the music I had collected in my preparatory work was vital in helping him stretch out of his usual wheelhouse and get a feel for the specific type of intensity required. Rainer is accustomed to writing bouncy rock and roll tunes, what I described to him as "happy-angry music," and he was at first concerned that he couldn't tap into the anguish needed to channel the mid-80s DC bands that I wanted to celebrate. In response I loaded him down with albums by first-generation "emotional hardcore" bands like Embrace, Fire Party, Rain, Grey Matter, and the great Rites of Spring. I took a listen to the demo track he sent me and I knew that the Persistent Vision had struck again.

It's important to be realistic about what these mementos *don't* provide. They have no story logic, they don't communicate a theme all on their own, there's no "drama" to them, not in the sense that a writer or a director uses it. It's still my job to exercise the craft that, with luck, will establish those necessities, but I can't do it without that persistent vision, that little flame that tells me what is interesting and worthy of exploration. However I decide to follow up this film, I understand now that I won't do it without a vision to keep me company.

#### 4. Credible Dirt

One of the more striking aspects of *For Want Of* is its black-and-white photography. I can happily say that the work in this area, undertaken in collaboration with my Director of Photography Thomas Baumgardner, yielded perhaps the most consistent results. So I've chosen to frame this section as a matter-of-fact recounting without much recourse to philosophy and introspection.

The look of *For Want Of* is the end result of a mixture of artistic and pragmatic concerns, dosed with happenstance. My goal when developing a style of photography was to emulate the jacket photographs of punk and emo bands that, as a teen, I'd scrutinized obsessively: usually taken in some dank basement or half-lit club by an amateur fan photographer, loaded with grain and underexposed with flat grey highlights, and then photocopied a half-dozen times. In a word, these images are dirty, and not in the calculated way that modern band photographers gunge up a pristine shot in Photoshop, but because of real, sometimes unintentional texture that's baked into the medium by poverty of means.

So I set about trying to manifest this ideal of cheapness and dirt, aided principally by the examples of Suki Hawley's *Half Cocked* and Jem Cohen's *Instrument*, one of which is a fictional film whose photography approaches the cheap directness of punk photography and the other, a documentary about the band Fugazi, is a punk band photograph set in motion.

I'm not particularly interested in establishing myself as a trailblazing visual stylist, so I would have been perfectly happy to simply rip off the look of these films. There, however, we faced a major roadblock, namely the digital revolution in cinema severing the technique of their time and of ours. Digital means of production have taken the place of Hawley's low-rent 16mm film (and 8mm film and SD video in the case of Cohen's film). And these digital means are in most cases not prized for their analog

warmth or their down-and-dirty texture, but their crispness and clarity. Resolution and latitude, the hallmark specs of digital acquisition, are all about rendering detail.

UNO's Red Epic, produced by the first serious exponents of 4K, is a child of this era of digital cinema. I had seen the images my classmates were getting out of the Epic, and scuzzy record-jacket photography they were not. At first blush, I was afraid of what I saw: a sterility, baked into the essence data of the Red footage, that I wouldn't be able to pollute to my liking.

After some rabbit-holing research into post-production solutions like 35mm grain plates and full-on film emulation, I began testing out the feasibility of DSLR shooting for *For Want Of*. After all, if cameras like the fancy Epic are the 35mm of their time, then certainly the lowly 5D is the closest we have to Suki Hawley's Bolex, right? I was emboldened in this direction by a new (2012) black and white feature called *You Make Me Feel So Young*, which had a distinct look which felt digital but still human. I learned from correspondence with that film's Director of Photography Nandan Rao that it was acquired on a Panasonic GH2 (hacked to output higher than stock-quality HD video) and a set of vintage Bolex lenses.

My tests on the Canon 5D were mostly to try and combat the issue of gain-related noise in low-light situations. The blocky, distinctively digital image distortion was dirty, alright, but not the type of dirty I wanted. Running the footage through a denoiser plugin smoothed out quite a bit of the offending noise, so with this assurance in hand I started planning for a DSLR shoot.

Those plans had to be revised when I learned that, due to a scheduled class shoot during my production weekends, I wouldn't have access to any of UNO's DSLR gear—camera bodies, lenses, support, nada. With only a few weeks until shooting, we had to retool for the Red shoot I'd been trying to avoid.

Several decisions were made to try and tamp down the Epic's natural cleanliness. The principal one concerned resolution. I knew that shooting at a resolution lower than the available 4/5K would give

the images a more pronounced grain which, while identifiably digital in nature, would still rough up some of the image's glassy surfaces. When I learned, furthermore, that setting the Epic to shoot at 2K would "window" the sensor to an effective super-16mm size, thereby imitating that format's depth of field, I was pretty excited. It seemed like we were trotting back toward the punk roots I admired. Sadly, we had to reverse course when we reflected that reducing the effective sensor size this way would jack up the crop factor to 2.5. This would radically tighten the field of view on all of our lenses, zooming our widest lens in to an effective 60mm, more or less unsuitable for any of the wider shots we had planned in our many interior locations. After some testing we decided that shooting at 3K was an acceptable compromise.

The other major decision that affected the look of *For Want Of* was to shoot many scenes at a higher ISO than strictly necessary. The Red shooter's rule of thumb favors 800 or thereabouts as the camera's optimum ISO from the standpoint of grain and dynamic range. But since we welcomed the grainier, "dumber" image provided by higher ISOs, we routinely pushed the camera into the ISO 1600-2400 range, which Red literature claims is perfectly safe but had an obvious impact on the image. This decision had the fringe benefit of allowing us to shoot using only minimal added light in a couple of low-light locations, such as the Moonwalk.

In the end, I was satisfied with the image we got and I do not regret shooting on the Epic, even if the choice was technically made for us. Along with the aforementioned dirt, I find myself admiring the character imparted by the underexposed grey highlights and the gentle tonal gradients. Even if what we got doesn't quite match the Xerox-degraded images of the fanzines, I feel it effectively evokes the feeling of the time and place.

Our quest for the smudged, slurred, and grimy was carried to an extreme degree when we shot the dreamlike material for the opening scene. In my script I had indicated that soft-focus, partly-identifiable images of a band would resolve into sharp focus. Once we were set up in the soundstage

with Rainer as our guitar player, we went to town trying dolly moves, lens flares, focus racks, and so on. Eventually, Thomas saw some dirt on the lens and was trying to brush it off. I noticed that the movement of his hand holding the lens pen was causing some strange focal behavior, and we started shooting on a tight zoom, using our fingers as a primitive shutter/iris that provoked a spastic jumping bloom out of the image. This effect is used in most of the shots I ended up cutting into the film's first scene, and our found technique is all about taking a supposedly high-fidelity format and making it fallible, volatile, human.

## 5. Collaboration

In times of discouragement or low morale, it helps to have an answer to questions like “why am I here?” and “what do I stand to gain?” If you are struggling, at least you can focus on what you’re struggling *toward*. My best answer to these questions of purpose is this: the need to feel special. If that seems like a selfish reason, I’d answer that the feeling of specialness comes in a lot of flavors. I feel special when someone takes the time to watch my work. I feel special when someone asks me to help on their set and I’m able to do good work for them. I feel special when someone asks my advice or when introduce two filmmakers whose work I admire.

You might say, if the only goal is the warm fuzzy feeling of being needed or being singled out for a positive reason, that one needn’t go to the trouble of making films. I have the same conversation with myself often enough, when I wonder whether it’s too late to learn poetry or brush up my piano and start writing songs. I’m too stubborn to quit film and do any of those things, but also I doubt I’d get out of working in another medium what I get out of making films.

In my personal statement when I applied to UNO, I wrote: “However much I crave silence in which to think, my ideas always flow more freely in conversation” (Kieran 2011, 1) I was tickled to recently read the great Andrey Tarkovsky saying something similar: “To be honest I put myself in the category of people who are best able to give form to their ideas by arguing--I entirely subscribe to the view that truth is reached through dispute. Otherwise I tend to fall into a reflective state which suits the metaphysical bent of my character and is not conducive to an energetic, creative thought process, since it affords only emotional material with which to construct a--more or less well ordered--framework for my ideas.” (11-12)

My natural tendency is to think of any film as a pearl formed in the solitude of an artistic oyster. But I never feel so *inside* the spirit of my films as when I’m called on to defend them, sometimes to fight

for them. And it seems to me that that fight is built into the very nature of the way we make films. We hear over and over again that film is a collaborative art, but how deeply have we really inquired into the nature of that collaboration? Perhaps nothing more is meant than “it takes more than one person to make a film.” We don’t ask whether a film should be run like a monarchy, a democracy, or a republic. Hollywood production, where money has the last word, is clearly plutocratic in nature, but plenty of other examples, both historical and present-day, suggest that other modes are possible and in some ways even preferable.

I confess I’ve never fully embraced Comrade Andrey’s ideal of quarrel, the notion that the strongest films are those whose constitution and composition has been thoroughly contested, on a practical level. I’ve sometimes fantasized, though, about a production model that would resemble a commune, where each member would be given the widest creative latitude possible. “Let one hundred flowers bloom, let one hundred schools of thought contend,” as Chairman Mao said, encouraging dissenters to speak up before brutally repressing them. He learned that it’s dangerous to share power, even the symbolic power of a differing opinion. I imagine every director ever has had to contend with this challenge of becoming open to ideas that aren’t your own.

On *For Want Of*, though I held back from founding a full-on film commune, I tried to approach this liberality with my collaborators, giving them room to practice their craft with only minor interventions. At times this worked brilliantly as was the case with my talented art department. At other times it had serious pitfalls, as when I discovered on our second day of shooting that my sound recordist had, so to speak, hit the wrong button and merged all of our multi-track recordings into a single, sometimes unusable track.

I think, assuming that you’ve chosen your collaborators not just for their brilliance but for their ability to self-govern, that the area of filmmaking that still poses the most challenges under this laissez-

faire system is the work done by the director and actors. Not to generalize overmuch, but many times allowing your actors to roam freely means you've just given them enough rope.

Looking at the cast of *For Want Of*, you could be forgiven for assuming that I made my casting decisions out of convenience. All lead and supporting roles were filled by current or former UNO students. It is true that my casting director Maja Holzinger and I didn't mount the usual open-call casting sessions, choosing instead to meet with hand-chosen candidates one-on-one. I wondered at first if this was laziness on my part, but I knew the chances of finding anyone unknown to us was slim: we already know almost all of the good talent that will work for what we can afford. And anyway, my two male leads needed to be young enough looking, and we were surrounded by college students.

The role of Hannah was the hardest to cast. I needed someone who would be able to play old enough to make the contrast in age apparent. I'm still not sure we quite got there with Chelsea, even though she's a bit older than Jordan and Tyler, and as a mother certainly has a bit more life experience under her belt.

Our demands in casting were modest; we certainly weren't in the market for leading men or ingénues. Aside from the age concerns, we were looking for a certain naturalness, an ability to work in a relatively unforced, downbeat way, and a knack for the material. The fact that all three of them were personally acquainted both with me and each other was an added benefit; it minimized the stiffness in early rehearsals and helped get us off to a quick start.

I was glad in preparing and shooting *For Want Of* to have actors who, though not the most experienced or trained, were always sensitive to the scene, always asking questions and open to adjustment. For my part, I basically obeyed my training, trying to steer clear of unplayable direction and to keep the scene from becoming rote or stale. To the lingering questions about what, performance-wise, could have been better or more effective, I have to answer that some things are still beyond the collective reach of my actors and I. All I can do, until I'm directing again, is to examine the choices that



shaped my method on *For Want Of* and attempt to triangulate those blurry areas on the map that indicate things I have yet to learn.

Once I'd discovered the importance of documents to my writing process (detailed in "Persistent Vision" above), I decided I would try to extend this advantage to the rehearsal stage. I handed out photocopied chapters from Michael Azzerad's great *Our Band Could Be Your Life*, to try and give everyone a feel firstly for the revolutionary era of hardcore punk but more importantly for the specific personal pressures and psychological currents among people in the scene. I sent out links to a playlist of my favorite DC punk songs and a Pinterest board stuffed with images from the period. I loaned Chelsea my copy of Cindy Crabbe's anthology of *Doris*, the personal 'zine that had been a huge inspiration for her character. I was thrilled by the idea of doing "table work" like theater companies do before mounting a production of a play. I wanted to hear the actors' thoughts about the sources I asked them to look at, and see if we could use the material to bring out the specificity of the setting and the inner lives of the punks that inhabit the film.

In the end, I'm not sure if this strategy of table work was ever as effective as I'd hoped. In the first place, not every actor wants to do homework, especially if they're already doing actual homework (and a day job, and a double handful of other commitments). Secondly, even though I supplied what I thought was truly engaging material, avoiding anything technical or at all distanced from the subject, there's no way to manufacture inspiration, or to ensure that that inspiration will lead to more honest work. Is it true, I wonder if, to play truthfully in a way that adds rather than detracts from the total film, actors need to be inspired in the same way that I am? I don't know, and I'm not sure how to find out. My instinct tells me that the only way to solve this problem is through flexibility and the willingness to change tactics as needed. One of the problems of our collective inexperience (both mine and my actors') is that we haven't had the time it takes (perhaps years) to have already figured out definitively what works for us and what doesn't. In retrospect, perhaps I was led astray by my enthusiasm for the punk

period and what I saw as the innate connection between the historical facts and the emotions in my script. It might turn out that all of those details are just flies on the windshield, cluttering up an actor's view of the real moment-by-moment work ahead.

Another problem I encountered, one that seems unavoidable in short film directing, is that there's just not that much material on the page to work with. There are only so many times you can run a scene that's a page-and-a-half long before it becomes stale. If your goal is to coach actors until they're "word perfect," then you might see this greater ratio of time to material as a boon. Since I wanted to bring my actors not to a studied and mechanically correct recital but to an awareness of the life of their characters that could generate work that responded in the moment, I found the lack of things for them to say in rehearsal to be a big problem. Improvisation was the major tool I tried to apply to this impasse, inviting actors to work through various scenarios and test out their characters' voices outside the written lines.

I can't quite assess the efficacy of the improvisation we did in rehearsal, because neither its success nor its failure was glaringly evident in the final product. It may have served simply as a way of easing into the more exacting work of running scenes. I would have loved to have experimented with improvisation in generating dialogue, but I found the prospect too risk-laden for a short film format. Improvisation can produce real gems and can powerfully enhance verisimilitude, but I find that without intense editing it can lead to scenes which are prolix and diffuse. I wanted *For Want Of* to maintain a brisk tempo and remove the possibility of wasted words. I even made a point of correcting actors on verbalized pauses like "uh" and "well," unless they were in the script. I wasn't acting out of any reverence for my own writing, but rather trying to sustain the energy of the scene without diverting it into vamping.

If I had to find a thread to string between these two aspects of directing, I guess it comes down to the question of authority and its place in art. I've never been comfortable telling people what to do,

and I was especially leery of bossing my actors around lest they stop trying to feel their own way through the tasks I'd set them in the script. Instead, I attempted just to set a course, to keep the total film in mind and try to steer us into a position that fit that picture.

The communitarian ideal that I've been putting forward here isn't new, but I feel it is underexplored. It's impractical, "not scalable," and no real film with a real budget could be made this way. If I find this reasoning unpersuasive, it's because I still feel that the potential rewards of subverting it are so rich. With the benefit of experience, I can stand by what I said from a position of intuition years ago: "Try as we might to dodge the social imperative, our health and our humanity depend on lessons which we can only teach to and learn from one another. There is no higher manifestation of this truth than collaboration, in which individual effort is joined to the work of others who are following disparate paths to the same goal" (Kieran 1).

## 6. Drowning in an Ocean of Time

“Progress, progress / is a myth / that makes my life worthwhile.”

--Mission of Burma, “Progress”

Prudence: Do you not find sometimes, as if those things were vanquished, which at other times are your perplexity?

Christian: Yes, but that is seldom; but they are to me golden hours in which such things happen to me.

--John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*

It's been almost four calendar years since I signed the letter accepting my place at UNO. I've spent 8 semesters in pursuit of a degree. 5 of those semesters were loaded with coursework and projects, the 6th occupied mostly with preproduction and production on my *For Want Of*. The final 2 semesters have been the most difficult, conjoined as they were into one long year of slow and sometimes excruciating progress in post-production. Rather than battling deadlines on papers, cramming for tests, and squeezing in some filmmaking on the weekends, I've been alone in a room by myself, trying to come to grips with my own resistance to the discomfort and uncertainty of creative work. I feel that overall I've failed.

The primary reason I decided to come to UNO rather than continue making films on my own had to do with rigor. Rigor in advanced learning comes in the form of expectations, plans, evaluations, and mentorship. Of the four, I found I was able to provide two for myself: Planning is a strong suit of mine, since it's more or less just purposeful worrying. I'm adept at making lists and schedules and calendars (which often end up serving to remind me of what I'm not doing). Evaluation comes easy as well, and as the form of this paper might suggest, I give myself quite enough of it already. That leaves mentorship and expectations. Let's leave out the former. In my opinion one has to be “either a beast or a god” to truly be one's own mentor (Aristotle, 12). Expectations, though, shouldn't be impossible to set and keep for oneself. Every day people embark on life-changing journeys and undertake massive projects, or win

the smaller victories of sticking to their own program. All of this is essentially growth, driven by the promise one makes to oneself, even in the absence of the expectation of a reward.

I despair of ever understanding this, the mechanism that binds a lofty goal made in reflective comfort to the relentless, grinding daily reality, the million tiny steps that accumulate to that goal. In what way does “keeping your eyes on the prize” help you when you’re trying to pry yourself out of bed in the pre-dawn cold? I’ve always suspected that people who talk this way are blithely ignoring that for them the grind, the pain, is leavened by an intrinsic reward, one meted out in the moment like a runner’s high. I’ve personally chased after this reward plenty of times, because to me it seems like the only non-fraudulent answer to the question of motivation. But the pleasure I take in work is far from constant, vanishingly small, ready to disappear on the current of discouragement or physical discomfort. Progress isn’t fun; serious work of the type that carries with it the only worthwhile rewards, that work isn’t a game. I even find it hard to take relief from the rest at end of day, the relief that comes from ceasing to struggle. Hannah is using my words when she admonishes the boys to work hard at whatever makes them miserable. As a rule of thumb the important things in my life have always brought me suffering.

Without the benefit of (the expectation of) intrinsic reward, that leaves me with few options (extrinsic rewards like remuneration being out of the question, if that’s even necessary to say).

I know now, at least, that having all the time in the world is the worst possible thing for me. I wouldn’t relive the past year of trying to finish this film by myself, not for a million dollars. As for a way out of my procrastination, which over the years has come to seem less like a problem and more like The Problem, I can identify two prospects, neither of which is remotely “practical.” To be frank, practical methods (Make a list! Set a timer! Get up early!) have profited me very little, because they all share the same drawback of presuming the willpower to execute them in the first place. The work that I’m just

now beginning is an anti-practical, anti-inspirational, deliberately philosophical, two-fold command for staying afloat on the ocean of time: Follow Your Pain and Forget the Future.

The first part is simple enough to decode. If the most important things in my life are painful (discomfiting, guilt-leaden, dread-inducing, unpleasant), then that pain is informative. It's a sign of personal importance and therefore worthy of respect. Maybe if I'd been more athletic as a kid I'd have made this connection earlier, but it's only fairly recently dawned on me that suffering and strength can be placed in an equation.

That brings us to forgetting about the future. When Bunyan's Prudence asks Christian to recall "by what means you find your annoyances, at times, as if they were vanquished," he answers that "when my thoughts wax warm about whither I am going, that will do it" (83). Like any good Puritan, he's talking about his reward in the afterlife, but I think plenty of modern secular people could answer the question in a similar vein. It makes sense: current "perplexities" fade in light of some future reward. As I've already said, I find this mechanism suppressed or non-existent in my own consciousness, so I ask: why should I care about the future if it can't help me now?

To clarify: Of course I still want things. Lots of things. A creative community, meaningful work, being able to manifest my values in the form of something bigger than myself. Stability, security, friendship, perhaps someday the sense that I've passed the benefit of my experience on to those who will outlive me. I want those things and more, because I'm human. I just don't expect them to get me out of bed in the morning when it's cold and I'm still half asleep. I feel grateful to know what I want, and not to have wasted too much time chasing after empty but safe surrogates. I just think that there comes a time when I have to forget about those things and begin to act. Also, I don't think that forgetting the future means not acting in consideration of the future. I still plan projects, imagine consequences, prepare for potential emergencies, steel myself for setbacks and failures. The challenge is not to erase those things from my mind but to keep them from taking total control over what I can do today.

I also have a few things to say about the practical work I've been doing during post-production. I can say, however, that though this stage of the process has been too prolonged and angst-ridden, I have fulfilled my original intention to learn the post process more intimately by doing it on my own rather than taking a hands-off approach and farming out the work. I've honed my technical craft in editing, but also learned the value of being able to set my own priorities in post. Whereas working with an editor to assemble a first cut and then taking the reins from there would have no doubt saved some time that I frittered away waiting to begin, I reaped the benefit of being left to my own devices. Having to watch all of the material before starting my edit gave me a clear grasp early on of what would and wouldn't be possible in assembling the scenes, and saved me from a lot of dead ends. I also had to grapple with the consequences of my sometimes Spartan coverage, as in the scene towards the end of Jeff writing at his desk, where the lack of cutaways forced me into what I felt was a rather too-long version of the scene.

It's not hard to see why some directors have found the process of editing so seductive, and sometimes spend months, even years longer than are patently necessary to finish a project. It's not because cutting a film is always enjoyable; in fact it's sometimes overtly painful, as Joel Coen once admitted: "when you see it the first time you put the film together, the roughest cut, is when you want to go home and open up your veins and get in a warm tub and just go away." (Grossman). The best explanation that I can muster as to what can keep a director in the editing bay long past their deadline, long past the dictates of reason and the human need for sleep, is the search for the right cut. Lost in the immense complexity of the task--the problem of creating a fluid series by harmonizing movement in the frame, camera movement, the minutiae of continuity, composition, human expression in its infinite variety--and the seemingly unlimited number of potential versions it engenders, you begin to believe that one of those versions is perfect, and attainable if you only take the time to uncover it.

In my own case I find this editing-room perfectionism to be especially egregious in the case of sound editing and mixing. I'm usually pretty good at picking out cheated synch lines, ADR, faked line

phrasings, and other common sound editing artifacts in features and TV shows, so they really haunt me when I'm working on my own films. Having a discerning ear is probably really handy for sound professionals, but for me it leads to a case of ambition outpacing skill. I don't have the finesse with the tools to smooth out the bumps in the soundtrack that I can't help but hear.

Another important learning process within my year of post-production has been about integrating feedback, translating the impressions of a lot of different viewers into choices that benefit the film. My first decision in soliciting feedback was to keep the sample size small; I watched several colleagues send their films out to enormous lists of people, hold multiple test-screenings, paper their audiences with questionnaires and bury themselves in a mountain of input from others. I believe that the instinct to gather as much input as possible is rooted in a creative version of the golden-mean fallacy, that the best solutions are located in the average of all available pieces of advice. If that were the case, then no doubt the best approach would be to seek advice from as large pool of people as possible.

On the contrary, I find that the mass-solicitation of feedback mostly serves to decrease the signal-to-noise ratio. In a test screening with a roomful of viewers, there's a diffusion of responsibility at work, where no one respondent feels obligated to answer as deeply or as broadly as possible, falsely confident that someone else will cover what they've missed. A lone respondent with the time to answer at their leisure will usually return more extensive and thoughtful notes, since they aren't rushed, and they'll feel empowered by the trust placed in them by the filmmaker.

Also, the most helpful respondents are those who understand at least a little about the goal of the piece and the sensibility driving it. Two objections might immediately arise to this scheme: 1) That a film's goals and sensibility should be communicated by the film itself and 2) That by insisting on a pre-existing agreement between the filmmaker and the viewer as to what the film is "about," the filmmaker



places themselves in a creative echo chamber and seals out dissenting views of the film's strengths, weaknesses, and possibilities.

To the first point I'd say that I generally agree. A film should not ordinarily require gallery notes to explain what it's trying to do. On the other hand, we're not talking about "a film," but an unfinished film, one whose incompleteness might interfere with its ability to speak to any old random sampling of audience members.

To the second point: yes, some variance in the taste and point-of-view of the respondents is necessary. However, as long as they are carefully chosen for their judgment and ability to communicate it, the feedback they provide will always shed some light. For instance, all of the people I solicited feedback from are filmmakers in my peer group, and the majority of them had read the script, but I received a wealth of useful information from many different perspectives, much of it focused on the same points in the film and some of it even contradictory. Rather than seeking to find a middle ground between a tumult of voices, I heard a clear mandate to work out specific problems that came up over and over in the responses, and I had the license to work out my own solutions that reflected the core sensibility of the film.

I can tell that there are more lessons learned here whose true importance will be proven in time, but at the moment they're very much clouded by the everyday struggle to stay above water. The best thing about procrastination is its transience, which is also the worst thing about it. Many times you forget how hard the work is five minutes after it becomes easy, but that also means that what came easily yesterday you may find impossible today. The most you can ever say is "today, I am winning." Which means, of course, that you should say it as often as it is true.

## 7. Conclusion: Prospects

In the fall of 2012, when I was sitting my comprehensive exams, I already recognized the tension between the principles of orderly filmmaking that I was studying in the classroom and the inner voice that told me to explore, negate rules, break down systems, break *through* them into my own innate and humane style. In my responses to the essay questions, I stood and delivered: recalling my copious notes and chapter summaries from the screenwriter's handbook, I dutifully expounded on the virtues of goal, tone, thematic communication. Elsewhere, in the design of my MFA program I was asked to write as a part of the exam, I was freestyling. I called for a filmmaker's need for freedom, for a malleable structure built not for enclosing and channeling a filmmaker's creativity but for launching it, aiming it squarely into the unknown.

That spring, I went on to make *Needle Drops*, a film that I've come to think of as a capitulation to the rules that I'd been given, rather than a grappling with that unknown. That Spring and Summer, I struggled with a project that I'd formulated not because it kindled a fire in my gut but because I thought it would make a good story. Then, in the fall, I gave up the Nims award in order to pursue something, anything, that I could make from the heart. I've come to think of giving up that money as my first step in the right direction. So began my wandering in earnest, and the feeling of being adrift has dogged me for much of the 18 months that followed. Although *For Want Of* doesn't signal an end to that uncertainty, it does bear witness to it, and perhaps affirm its value.

The period after graduation is a dangerous time for film students. The volume of students who leave MFA programs never to make a film again attests to the seriousness of the situation I am now entering, as does the number of filmmakers who make it out of school and grind out a few shorts or a first feature, and then stop. There are a lot of reasons for this rate of attrition: support for emerging filmmakers is scant and competition is cutthroat. Private funding is non-existent. Festivals and

fellowships are expensive, often poorly organized, sometimes even predatory. Not to mention the generational forces we all face: student debt, low wages, rising cost of living, decaying social safety net, and so on.

I happen to know the real reason why filmmakers drop out (or perhaps the Reason that is the culmination of all these smaller reasons), and that is uncertainty. Simply not knowing whether you'll ever have the resources to film the script you're writing, or where you'll get the money to finish it, or who would want to help you for free or cheap, is enough to shake even the stoutest of hearts. For myself, I've more or less always lived in uncertainty, even when I was still relatively sheltered in the halls of film school. So I have high hopes, setting out from the narrower stream of my own self-doubt into the wide and precarious sea of independent filmmaking, that I'll be sufficiently prepared to swim through it.

As I write this it's the first day of spring. Not calendar spring, which won't start for another three weeks. But it's spring all the same, moist and sudden and unpleasant. In every direction, life is lurching into sweaty motion. Other days will be more temperate and pretty but today is a day for beginning, for the beginning that Spring is. Today is for unnerving embarkations, for painful discoveries, for squirming to life. The opening chapters of flawed first novels are unspooling inside restive brains. Dangerous plans are being hatched, brutal but necessary adventures opening up. The earth is forcing things up; out of pure irritation it pushes up shoots like skin working out a splinter. Today is a reminder that all growth is uncomfortable, perilous, exhausting, but also exhilarating, enlivening, and perhaps, finally, inevitable, and that the cost of disobeying the command to growth is to fall back rootbound like a plant abandoned in its pot.

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For Want Of  
By  
Jonathan Kieran

Draft 2-17-14

Jonathan Kieran  
jonathan.p.kieran@gmail.com

1 INT. CLUB - NIGHT

1

Something grey and hazy catches the light, swimming across a rich pool of black and dissolving into it like a sugar cube in hot coffee. A guitar chord hits and resounds, hits again. A voice, reading from a journal.

JEFF (V.O.)

When I hear this sound...I go to  
another place.

Drawing closer, the patches of grey gain hard edges,  
swinging across the light again.

JEFF (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Walking across a Hungarian square  
in the snow, or feeling the wind  
whip under a grain elevator in  
Texas.

The patches of grey resolve into human figures. A teenage  
kid is wailing on a guitar, fronting a four-piece punk band.

JEFF (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I heard this music before I ever  
knew it. Maybe I wrote it in a past  
life.

The band strikes a last resounding chord.

2 INT. JEFF'S ROOM - NIGHT

2

Jeff, 18, writing in his bedroom. His head's so close to the  
page it's almost resting on his desk. He's small, with  
staring eyes and greasy black hair stuffed under a snow hat.

The music is now inside his room, wrapping him in a blanket  
of sound.

JEFF (V.O.)

I see my life like a picture. I can  
almost hold it.

He looks up and hits stop on a cassette player, cutting off  
the music. Looking down at what he's written, his face  
curdles.

JEFF

(to himself)

Nope. Not even close.

He tears the sheet out of the journal and crumples it up. He  
grabs his coat off the back of the door and exits.

3

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

3

The band onstage is packing up their gear. The small crowd has already turned away from the stage and begun talking in groups.

Over by one side is FRANK, 19, broad and grimly jocular like a Soviet hockey player. He talks to a shave-headed PUNK in a jean jacket.

FRANK

How is that scary? Just some poor jackass in makeup.

He ponders for a second.

FRANK

I mean...I wouldn't trust a clown.

Jeff appears behind him. They exchange a nod.

FRANK

(to Jeff)

Gadget's leaving on tour, Chaco's too busy with the anarchists, and dickbreath here tells me he's taking a break.

He throws some serious shade back at the punk, who leaves.

Jeff scans the room and his eye lands on a WOMAN IN GLASSES, noticeably older in the youthful crowd.

JEFF

So maybe we just try some gigs as a two-piece.

He keeps his eyes on her as they talk. Lugging a guitar case through the crowd, she passes out little handmade stapled BOOKLETS.

FRANK

A two-piece. With five instrumentals. Genius.

JEFF

You're right, it's impossible.

The woman with the guitar case walks out the door into the night. His eyes snap back to Frank.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

It's not impossible if you'd just  
help me out. Talk to someone. Or  
write some lyrics in that gay  
little journal of yours.

4

EXT. BY THE RIVER - NIGHT

4

Music fills the air. Electric lamplight writes in ripples on the water's surface, ripples that are echoed over Jeff's face as he watches HANNAH, 30, the woman from earlier. She sits alone on a park bench, strumming her guitar and singing.

As he approaches, the playing begins to wander. She stops and starts again, testing out different chords, shaking her head.

JEFF

Did you write that?

HANNAH

Sure.

JEFF

It's not bad. I mean...yeah. It's  
pretty good.

She unstraps her guitar and lays it in the case.

HANNAH

Oh. Okay. Thanks.

JEFF

I like that you're still doing the  
acoustic thing.

She does the clasps on the case and picks it up.

JEFF

Hey! So...I'm actually...I mean we,  
uh, my drummer and me, we're  
looking for someone to...we've got  
a bunch of songs, right, and we had  
some shows lined up but our old  
guitarist...well, you know how  
dudes...fizz out...

Silence.

HANNAH

Uh, yeah. That can be tough.

(CONTINUED)



JEFF

Right. Yeah, so...so I dunno if  
you'd wanna, maybe you could help  
us out...we've got a practice space  
to ourselves...

She stands for a moment, unconvinced.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Like, we could work on your last  
verse there, you know?

She puts her case back down, digs in her bag, and comes up  
with one of the little photocopied booklets, a copy of her  
ZINE. It says STARVELING #4 on the front.

HANNAH (O.S.)

My number's in the back.

He looks up and sees her walking away.

5 INT. GARAGE - DAY

5

Extremely loud music, slowed down to a thundering roar.

Hannah's face, large in the frame. Nodding her head to the  
beat, she opens her eyes and sings into a microphone.

Jeff's face. He looks left to Hannah, then quickly down at  
his hands to change chords.

Frank behind the drums, looking first right to Jeff, then  
left to Hannah, his hands going the whole time.

A line of bright daylight moves up Frank's chest as he  
plays. Jeff and Hannah squint.

In front of the three, a garage door slides open, filling  
the garage with blinding light.

6 INT. CLUB - NIGHT

6

The blinding daylight becomes bright stage lights. Time  
speeds up, and the music speeds up along with it as the  
three crush out the last chords of their set.

As the cheering of a rambunctious crowd erupts, the faces  
repeat, now sweaty and panting: Frank looks at Jeff. Jeff  
looks at Hannah. Hannah looks first down at her guitar, then  
up into the faces of the crowd.

7

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

7

Frank and Jeff sit at the table, slurping cereal. Hannah's zine is flattened out on the table in front of Frank's bowl.

FRANK

'd you read this thing?

JEFF

Yeah, why?

FRANK

Nothing.

The sound of cereal crunching.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Just some kinda fucked-up stuff in here. Think it's all true?

JEFF

Probably. Why don't you ask her?

FRANK

Yeah, right. Hey, I'm going to work later. You need anything photocopied?

He eyes Jeff's notebook sitting on the table by his bowl.

JEFF

No, nothing's finished yet.

8

EXT. WOODS - DAY

8

The woods is a tangle of dead vines and bare branches. Frank walks, his steps unsteady as he picks his way around fallen limbs and tangled weeds.

FRANK

I like meeting people, y'know, like touring bands...just meeting new people and...and, like, making things happen. It's like, we're our own thing, our own community outside of the mainstream, we have our own lives and we don't need to...to do what everyone else is doing. Know what I mean?

He turns to Connie, 20s, a librariansque music writer wearing a grandmotherly wool coat and horn-rimmed glasses. Her camera, a brickish Nikon auto-focus, swings around her neck.

(CONTINUED)

She scribbles in a small notebook, seemingly contemplating Frank's wisdom. She looks up.

CONNIE

So what about the age difference? I suppose you catch a lot of shit for that.

Frank exchanges looks with Hannah, who has caught up and stands beside him. They consider Connie for a moment, and film crunches through the camera as she takes the opportunity to snap a picture.

Connie looks up from the viewfinder of her camera to watch Jeff, who is shimmying up the trunk of an overhanging tree.

CONNIE

(to Jeff and Hannah)

Is...is he gonna--

Her eyes follow the arc of Jeff's flight toward the ground. With a whoop of surprise she hits the camera's shutter release. The auto-advance whines.

Close up on a grainy dark PHOTOGRAPH. Jeff's body is a dark blur against the branch-clawed sky.

Pulling back, we see Hannah and Frank beneath the tree. Hannah looks straight into the camera, while Frank looks away.

9

EXT. OUTSIDE CLUB - NIGHT

9

Jeff sits on the sidewalk, back resting against the brick wall of the club. His notebook rests open on his lap. From inside, noise of a band's preliminary tuning.

He stares at an empty page. His mind is a screaming blank.

Hannah pokes her head out of the door.

HANNAH

Hey, they're starting.

JEFF

Yeah.

She sniffs the fresh air for a moment.

HANNAH

You coming?

(CONTINUED)

JEFF

No.

HANNAH

Come in here. These dudes drove all day and there's like 5 people in there.

JEFF

I'm sure they're used to it.

She steps closer. He's still staring at the blank page.

HANNAH

Why do you look so sad?

JEFF

There's just too much bad music, every day. And everyone playing it, lugging their own amps and skipping meals so they can afford to go on tour. You don't think it's sad?

HANNAH

I think if we're nice to them we'll have a place to sleep in Reno.

JEFF

So long as we're being nice, let's convince them to quit before they all turn 30 and realize they've wasted their lives.

HANNAH

They don't need a child to tell them that they suck. They're gonna play whether you watch or not, just to piss off everyone that thinks they should shut up and get a job. They're going to drive ten hours and play to an empty room if that's what they need to do to get some release.

JEFF

Sounds like they should see a doctor instead of making us pay for their therapy.

10 INT. CLUB - LATER 10

Again, the faces reappear. First Frank behind the drums. He looks to his right, a stare of disbelief.

Jeff's face fills up the screen. We see that Hannah is screaming into his ear.

Hannah again, this time unstrapping her guitar and letting it fall to the floor, walking away from the camera.

11 INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT 11

Muted sounds of a band tuning filter through from onstage. The bored face of THE HESHER, 20s, his long hair in a ponytail and a death-metal band's indecipherable name spattered across his worn T-shirt.

He watches the argument ping-ponging around him.

FRANK (O.S.)  
We haven't seen--

JEFF (O.S.)  
No. NO.

FRANK (O.S.)  
We haven't seen her in a week!

JEFF (O.S.)  
She'll show, she knows what time to be here.

FRANK (O.S.)  
Right, like she knew what time to show up for practice this week? And last week?

Silence. Jeff puts a hand to his face.

JEFF  
Did you show him the songs? Does he know--  
(to the Heshier)  
--do you know what we're doing?

12 INT. CLUB - NIGHT 12

The face of the Heshier, now framed by a loose mane of hair, betrays no emotion as he sweep-picks an extremely technical solo. His head bobs robotically.

Frank and Jeff mash their instruments desperately, struggling to keep time.

(CONTINUED)

As the song comes limping to its conclusion, Jeff looks frantically back at Frank, then out across the crowd full of bemused and bored faces.

A shock goes through him as he sees a flash of glasses and black hair near the exit. He steps quickly to the mic.

JEFF

Hannah?

He steps forward to the very edge of the stage, waving his arms. His guitar lets out a screech of feedback. The Heshes wince.

JEFF

HANNAH! HANNAH!

13 INT. DAY - JEFF'S DOOR 13

A mail slot clanks. An ENVELOPE with JEFF neatly lettered on it slides across the floor.

14 INT. DAY - FRANK'S ROOM 14

Frank's sleeping face. Offscreen, his mother leans into the doorway.

FRANK'S MOM (O.S.)

Francis.

He grunts and rolls onto his back. He snorts as an identical envelope with his name lands on his face.

Still unseen, she steps out of the room.

FRANK'S MOM (O.S.)

Five more minutes, boy-o.

HANNAH (V.O.)

Dear Jeff,

15 INT. DAY - JEFF'S ROOM 15

Swallowing coffee, Jeff peers at Hannah's letter over his "Don't Tread on Me" mug.

HANNAH (V.O.)

I won't be around for a while. My friend Peter's going backpacking and I said I'd go with him. I'll write again soon and maybe send you an address if we find a place.

He sets the mug down, smooths out the letter on his desk.

(CONTINUED)

HANNAH (V.O.)

I guess I owe you an explanation.  
I'm not sure what to say.

16 INT. DAY - FRANK'S ROOM

16

Bleary-eyed, Frank sits up in bed reading.

HANNAH (V.O.)

I've always asked a lot from other  
people. Maybe too much. When I say  
something I want everyone to  
listen, and to understand just what  
I mean.

17 INT. DAY - JEFF'S ROOM

17

Still reading, Jeff warms his hands on the mug.

HANNAH (V.O.)

Music isn't an event for me. It's  
not something outside my life.

He looks out the window.

Well, anyway. My advice to you two  
is to forget about happiness and  
work hard at whatever makes you  
miserable. Those are the only  
things that'll still matter when  
we're all dead.

18 INT. DAY - FRANK'S ROOM

18

Jeff scratches his nose.

HANNAH (V.O.)

...or something.

19 EXT. BERLIN STREET - NIGHT

19

A dimly lit street with stark Neo-Brutalist buildings rising  
up on both sides. A group of punk boys and girls stride down  
the street, laughing loudly and chattering in German. Hannah  
is there.

A broad-shouldered guy in a leather jacket reaches into a  
planter-box and plucks out a flower, cartoonishly small in  
his big hand.

He offers it to Hannah with a courtly gesture then, when she  
reaches for it, lifts it to his mouth and rips the top off  
with his teeth, chuckling broadly. A curious smile bubbles  
up onto her face as he chews the flower lustily.

In a few more steps, she notices her shoe is untied and she drops to one knee to fix it. Standing up, she watches the big group of punks striding away from her. Suddenly beaming, she rushes to rejoin them.

20

INT. JEFF'S ROOM - DAY

20

Jeff back at his desk, writing. The familiar jackhammer rhythm of hardcore punk plays low in the background.

JEFF (V.O.)

Dear Greg. Thanks for reading our interview in OTHERWORLD and thanks for the offer to book us in Cleveland. It looks like our plans for a tour this summer are on hold...

He puts the tip of the pen to his lips in thought.

JEFF (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...maybe forever. I'm listening to your tape right now.

Picking the cassette case off the desk, he turns it over.

JEFF (V.O.) (CONT'D)

If it's cool with you I'd like to write it up for a fanzine I'm gonna put together. It might take a while before I get it to you...

He hears a pebble rattle against the windowpane. glances toward the window, pen still moving, but doesn't move.

JEFF (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...since I'm only just getting started.

As he's starting to fold up the letter, the sound of a large rock chunking against the wall outside. He rushes to the window and yanks up on the sash.

21

EXT. JEFF'S WINDOW - CONTINUOUS

21

Looking up at the window, Frank stands in the street. Jeff leans out. We see that Frank has already released a third rock...

JEFF

What--

...which pelts Jeff in the head. He recoils, stunned, then pops back into the window, boiling mad.



Frank desperately tries to free his bicycle from the fence where it has become caught. Hearing the front door slam, he gives up and makes a break for it.

22

EXT. JEFF'S STREET - CONTINUOUS

22

Frank's sneakers dig at the cracked pavement as he flies down the street. Jeff appears behind him, lagging at first but catching up.

Veins of tar and ancient potholes roll out from under their pounding feet.

Panting like a dog, Frank breaks into a grin, his tongue poking out between his teeth.

From up ahead Jeff hears a high, defiant giggle and can't keep himself from cracking into a grin.

# FOR WANT OF - ADJUSTED FINAL BUDGET

	Budgeted	Actual Costs	Difference
<b>Art Dept</b>			
Props & Set Dressing	\$250.00	\$104.25	\$145.75
Wardrobe	\$200.00	\$205.00	(\$5.00)
<b>Pre - Production</b>			
Tech Scout Lunch	\$100.00	\$60.00	\$40.00
<b>Locations</b>			
Gasa	\$200.00	\$200.00	\$0.00
French Market Parking	\$126.00	\$126.00	\$0.00
Sidearm Gallery	\$150.00	\$150.00	\$0.00
Red House	\$100.00	\$100.00	\$0.00
City Park	\$100.00	\$100.00	\$0.00
<b>Production</b>			
Craft Services	\$1,200.00	\$915.16	\$284.84
Grip Truck Gas	\$200.00	\$100.00	\$100.00
G & E Expendables	\$100.00	\$91.00	\$9.00
Sound Dept. Rentals	\$180.00	\$180.00	\$0.00
UNO Gear Replacement	\$25.00	\$53.00	(\$28.00)
Petty Cash/Contingency	\$500.00	\$155.98	\$344.02
<b>Post- Production</b>			
Hard Drives	\$500.00	\$363.08	\$136.92
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,931.00</b>	<b>\$2,903.47</b>	<b>\$1,027.53</b>



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The University of New Orleans  
Film, Theater, and Communication Arts  
2000 Lakeshore Drive - PAC 307  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70148  
Office: 504-280-6317 - Fax: 504-280-6318

PROD. #:

PRODUCTION TITLE: For Want Of

PRODUCER: Lynsey Brown Aldridge

DIRECTOR: Jonathan Kieran

### ACTOR RELEASE FORM

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I hereby certify and represent that I am over 18 years of age and have read the foregoing and fully understand the meaning and effect thereof.

Name: Nathan Tucker

Address: [REDACTED]

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Signature [Signature]

Date 04/10/15

Character Name: Hesher

[Signature]  
Producer Signature

4/12/15  
Date

[REDACTED]  
Producer Telephone





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Name: Jordan Prince

Address: [REDACTED]

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Signature [Signature]

Date 4-10-15

Character Name: Frank

Producer Signature [Signature]

Date 4-10-15

Producer Telephone [REDACTED]





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Name: Susan Gordon

Address: [REDACTED]

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Signature

Susan Gordon

Date

4.10.15

Character Name: Connie

[Signature]  
Producer Signature

4/10/15  
Date

[REDACTED]  
Producer Telephone





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Name: Eric Millman

Address: [REDACTED]

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Signature [Signature]

Date 4/10/15

Character Name: Austrian Flower Boy

Producer Signature [Signature]

Date 4/10/15

Producer Telephone [REDACTED]





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Name: Tyler Laperouse

Address: [REDACTED]

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Signature [Signature]

Date 4/10/15

Character Name: Jeff

[Signature]  
Producer Signature

4/10/15  
Date

[REDACTED]  
Producer Telephone





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Name: Chelsea Bryan

Address: [REDACTED]

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Signature: [Signature]

Date: 4/10/15

Character Name: Hannah

[Signature]

4/10/15

[REDACTED]

Producer Signature

Date

Producer Telephone





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COURSE NAME AND NUMBER:			
PROD. #:	PRODUCTION TITLE:		For Want Of
PRODUCER:	Lynsey Brown Aldridge	DIRECTOR:	Jonathan Kieran

### STUDENT PRODUCTION LOCATION RELEASE

#### LOCATION

PROPERTY OWNER Jonathan Kieran  
ADDRESS 2913 Maurepas  
New Orleans LA 70119

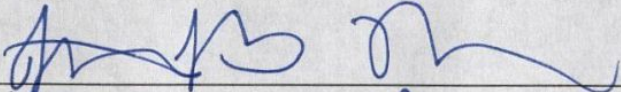
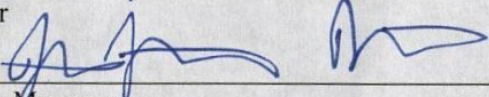
Owner of the property described above and in the Student Production Location Contract between the Student Filmmaker and Owner dated 3/22/14 ("Property") hereby acknowledges that the Property has been returned to Owner in substantially the same condition it was in prior to Student Filmmaker's use of the Property.

Owner further acknowledges that:

- (a) The Property does not need to be repaired or improved in any respect as a result of the Student Filmmaker's use of the Property; and
- (b) Neither Owner nor any individual who entered the Property at the invitation or on behalf of the Owner suffered any loss or damage arising from or relating to the use of the Property by the Student Filmmaker.

Owner hereby releases and forever discharges Student Filmmaker and the UNO Film, Theater, and Communication Arts and their respective successors, assigns, agents, and employees from any and all claims, debts, demands, liabilities, judgments, obligations, costs, expenses, damages, actions and causes of action of whatsoever kind or nature, whether known or unknown, whether in law or in equity, whether now existing or hereafter arising, that relate to or arise from Student Filmmaker's use of the Property.

#### ACCEPTED AND AGREED TO

	<u>4/14/15</u>
Producer	Date
	<u>4/14/15</u>
Location Manager	Date
_____ Owner/Agent	_____ Date

ADDRESS [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
TELEPHONE [REDACTED]





The University of New Orleans Film Program

The University of New Orleans  
Film, Theater, and Communication Arts  
2000 Lakeshore Drive - PAC 307  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70148  
Office: 504-280-6317 - Fax: 504-280-6318

COURSE NAME AND NUMBER:	
PROD. #:	PRODUCTION TITLE: For Want Of
PRODUCER: Lynsey Brown Aldridge	DIRECTOR: Jonathan Kieran

### STUDENT PRODUCTION LOCATION RELEASE

LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

PROPERTY OWNER Joseph Laura

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

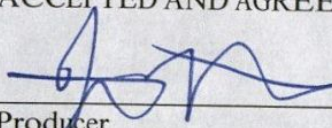
Owner of the property described above and in the Student Production Location Contract between the Student Filmmaker and Owner dated 3/21/14 ("Property") hereby acknowledges that the Property has been returned to Owner in substantially the same condition it was in prior to Student Filmmaker's use of the Property.

Owner further acknowledges that:

- (a) The Property does not need to be repaired or improved in any respect as a result of the Student Filmmaker's use of the Property; and
- (b) Neither Owner nor any individual who entered the Property at the invitation or on behalf of the Owner suffered any loss or damage arising from or relating to the use of the Property by the Student Filmmaker.

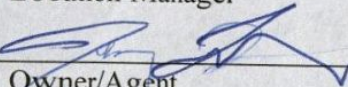
Owner hereby releases and forever discharges Student Filmmaker and the UNO Film, Theater, and Communication Arts and their respective successors, assigns, agents, and employees from any and all claims, debts, demands, liabilities, judgments, obligations, costs, expenses, damages, actions and causes of action of whatsoever kind or nature, whether known or unknown, whether in law or in equity, whether now existing or hereafter arising, that relate to or arise from Student Filmmaker's use of the Property.

ACCEPTED AND AGREED TO

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Producer

4/13/15  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Location Manager

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Owner/Agent

Date

4.13.15  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_





## LOCATION AGREEMENT

Dated: 3/17/2014

For good and valuable consideration, the receipt and sufficiency of which is hereby acknowledged, French Market Corporation (“Owner”) hereby grants to University of New Orleans - Lynsey Brown (“Company”), and Company’s subsidiaries, parents, affiliates, licensees, designees, and assigns and their respective employees, agents, independent producers, contractors and suppliers, (collectively “Released Parties”), permission to enter upon and use the property located at The French Market Corporation – 1008 North Peters St. 3rd Floor, New Orleans, LA 70116 (“Property”) for the purpose of photographing and recording certain scenes for a television program currently entitled “For Want Of” (“Program”) commencing on or about March 23, 2014 / March 24, 2014 (subject to change on account of weather conditions or changes in production schedule), and continuing until completion of all scenes and work required.

Company may place all necessary facilities and equipment, including temporary sets on the Property, and agrees to remove the same after completion of work and leave the Property in as good condition as when it was received, reasonable wear and tear from uses permitted herein excepted. Signs on the Property may, but need not, be removed or changed, but, if removed or changed by Company, must be replaced. Owner represents and warrants that the Property is maintained in compliance with all federal, state and local laws, rules, regulations, codes and ordinances and is free of latent defects or illegal conditions of which Owner is or should be aware except those of which Owner has notified Company.

Company agrees to use reasonable care to prevent damage to the Property, and will indemnify Owner, and all other parties lawfully in possession, of the Property, and hold each of them harmless from any claims and demands of any person or persons arising out of or based upon personal injuries, death or property damage suffered by such person or persons resulting directly from any act of negligence on Company’s

part in connection with the work hereunder.

Company shall have the right to photograph, record and use in any manner whatsoever any name connected with the Property and any signs or other materials located thereon and any logos and verbiage contained on such signs and other materials (including, but not limited to, any tradenames, trademarks and copyrights) in connection with or as part of the Program and the right to refer to the Property by any real or fictitious name and the right to refer to any real or fictitious events as having occurred on the Property. Company shall have the right to reproduce, exhibit, advertise, and exploit and license others to reproduce, exhibit, advertise, and exploit all of the photographs and recordings made hereunder in connection with the Program in any and all media, whether now known or hereafter devised, throughout the universe in perpetuity, including, without limitation, the right to use or authorize the use of any portion(s) of the Program containing the photographs and recordings made hereunder in connection with any derivative work of the Program and/or in connection with the exploitation of any ancillary rights with respect to the Program or any derivative work thereof. Company shall be the sole owner of all right, title and interest in and to the Program and any photographs and recordings hereunder.

CHARGES: In consideration of the rights granted hereunder, Company shall pay to Owner \$ 0.00. No charge shall be payable for construction, holding or striking. All charges shall be payable upon completion of all work contemplated, unless specifically agreed by both parties, in writing, to the contrary. Company is not obligated to actually use the premises or produce the Program or include material shot hereunder in the Program. Company may at any time elect not to use the premises by giving Owner written notice of such election, in which case neither party shall have any obligation hereunder. If Company requires use of the premises for additional use in connection with the Program, Owner shall permit Company to re-enter upon and again utilize the premises for such purpose. The dates for such additional use shall be subject to Owner's approval, which approval Owner shall not unreasonably withhold, and Owner shall be compensated for such additional use at \$100/hour therefor.

Owner's sole remedy for any breach by Company shall be an action at law to recover such damages as may have been actually suffered by Owner (if any) as a result thereof and Owner will not have the right to terminate or rescind this Agreement or to enjoin the distribution, marketing, advertising or exploitation of the Program or any derivative work thereof.

Owner agrees not to make any commercial or any other use of the fact that the Property appeared or may appear in the Program.

Company may assign its rights hereunder in whole or in part to any person, firm or corporation and this Agreement may be assigned by any assignee thereof; provided, however, that Company shall remain secondarily liable hereunder unless such assignment is to any "major" or "mini-major" studio (as those terms are commonly

understood in the entertainment industry) or to any other similar financially responsible party which assumes all of Company's obligations hereunder in writing, in which case, Company shall have no further liability hereunder. This Agreement and Owner's rights and obligations hereunder are not assignable by Owner and any purported assignment thereof will be null and void from the making thereof.

Owner hereby represents and warrants that Owner has the right and authority to make and enter into this agreement and to grant Company the rights set forth herein. Owner hereby agrees to indemnify Company and Released Parties from and against any and all losses, liabilities, damages, expenses and claims (including reasonable attorney's fees) as a result of any breach of said representations and warranties or agreements made by Owner in this Agreement. This is the entire agreement and supersedes and replaces all previous agreements and negotiations. This Agreement may not be modified or terminated without the express written consent of both parties. No other authorization is necessary to enable Company to use the Property for the purpose herein contemplated.

AGREED TO AND ACCEPTED:

Lynsey Brown/Inc  
("Company")

Jon Smith  
("Owner")

By: Lynsey Brown

By: Jon Smith

Print: Lynsey Brown

Business Address: 1008 N. Peters St. 3<sup>rd</sup>  
Floor, New Orleans, LA 70116  
Phone: 504.522.2621

Title: Producer  
"For WANT OF"

Fed ID# or SS#: 433 718458  
Lynsey Brown



# CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

## MAYOR'S OFFICE OF CULTURAL ECONOMY

### FILM PERMIT

#### PROJECT:

<b>Project Name:</b>	For Want Of	<b>Project Number:</b>	14-0228
<b>Valid Dates:</b>	3/23/2014 to 3/23/2014		
<b>Description:</b> Student Film			

#### APPLICANT:

<b>Applicant Name:</b>	UNO	<b>Contact Name:</b>	Lynsey Brown
<b>Applicant Address:</b>	2000 Lakeshore Drive New Orleans, LA 70148	<b>Contact Phone:</b>	(225) 603-1985
<b>Applicant Phone:</b>	5048974718	<b>Contact Email:</b>	[REDACTED]@uno.edu

#### LOCATION PERMITS:

Number	Location	Film Date	Description
14-07601-FILM	Moonwalk	3/23/2014	Filming [pending approval]

This company has obtained the necessary sub-permits and insurance requirements to conduct the project detailed above within the city of New Orleans. Please keep this certificate and all of the certificates in this packet available on location, so that they may be reviewed by any city officials.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Katie Williams".

Katie Williams – Director

3/11/2014

Date

Mayor's Office of Cultural Economy  
1340 Poydras Suite 1000  
New Orleans, LA 70112  
504-658-4315

The DVD copy of the thesis film *For Want Of* is located in the Earl K. Long Library

## Vita

Jonathan Kieran was born in Essex County, Massachusetts and still considers himself a Puritan at heart. He graduated with a B.A. in Philosophy from Ursinus College, where he completed his honors research on the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. While managing a historic house museum in Salem, Massachusetts, Jonathan made two short films set in 17<sup>th</sup> century New England, *Carver's Woodlot* and *The True Historie of John Godfrey*. In 2011 he accepted a Master's Scholarship to study Film at the University of New Orleans, where he has worked on over two-dozen student productions and produced 4 of his own films.