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Her Closet: Narrative Short Film

Amy Sanderson
University of New Orleans

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HER CLOSET: NARRATIVE 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
The Department of Drama and Communications

by

Amy Sanderson

B.A. University of Idaho, 1998

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a detailed demonstration of the process of writing, pre-production, production, editing and exhibition applied to the short narrative film, *Her Closet*. It critiques the film from story conception, directing and writing applications especially. Contexts for the film are applied in topics of film genre, story form and psychological approaches. This written thesis serves to explain the development of *Her Closet* and demonstrate the interests and inspirations of the filmmaker.

INTRODUCTION

Her Closet was developed from a short story I completed in the spring semester of 2000. At that time I was living in a small studio apartment, typical of the run down historic homes that are commonplace in the New Orleans Garden District. The studio was dark, with thick wooden planks for flooring and high ceilings. Most significantly, the moody place came with an antique armoire. The piece of furniture stood out in the otherwise simple room and it became a sort of fixture piece to spin the tale from.

From a piece of furniture, personal experience was then added. Reading back on early story drafts, I see the very simple structure of a close and isolated relationship, much like the one I left from the Northwest to come here. The story started on ideas of private, intimate space and the interior worlds we all keep as individuals. *Her Closet* came to develop and eventually focus on the human emotion of jealousy and its effect on two people in a troubled relationship.

I have always been interested in mystery, fantasy and fairytale. I wanted to create a fantastical and mysterious film, something that would pull the viewer into the interior and fear filled world of my main character. I would later find that the film had inspirations from horror, science-fiction as well as fairytale and classic narrative drama. So, with an armoire, a bad relationship and the excitement I felt of being in a new sub-tropical city far away from snowy landscapes of home, I began to build the project that became *Her Closet*.

CHAPTER 1: WRITING THE SCREENPLAY

In early stages of development, a main character in conflict over hidden dark secrets began to take shape in my story. I knew that the secret, being ambiguous, would be unnerving to my principal character. I chose to focus the story through the eyes of a professional, young male in a distant relationship with his wife who's avoiding behavior only contributes to the fear of the hidden secret. An armoire came to symbolize locked secrets unobtainable to the main character and then more specifically, the locked secrets of his wife. I chose the secret to be related to the wife's past lovers and jealousy then was introduced as a theme. The secret could have been anything, but I liked the strong motivation of jealousy over past lovers to help with my main character's struggle.

The influence of fairytale and childhood stories contributed to my writing. Einstein once said that the best education for a child and creativity is the reading and exposure to fairytales. I have become interested in how these simple stories ultimately create and shape a collective universal response to imagery, archetype and themes in storytelling.

The most obvious example to childhood story influences on *Her Closet* is The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe. There is, obviously, the direct taking of characters who find an alternate world behind a wardrobe or closet. I also remember from this story the detail of the characters being greeted by snowfall when arriving in Narnia. Something about the snow added to the magic and separateness of this fantastical world.

The story also has references to the French fairytale Bluebeard, a classic tale about a young woman who is taken away against her will by her husband to be. The young woman's captor or husband is a strange, eccentric man with an intricate house full of locked doors; one in particular she is never allowed to enter. The girl, as in modern horror tales, is overcome by curiosity and does trespass into the secret room where she finds the remains of her evil husband's ex-wives. The film I made is not a direct translation but in structure and tone, *Her Closet* certainly calls to the tale. In a way they both contain the nightmarish fear of what a lover or partner may be hiding from you. I wanted to write a script that would allude to the mystery and fantasy of fairytale in other motifs and visual references. At the same time, I wanted the story to reflect something real and current about the nature of psychology and our intimate relationships.

The film's first application on the page was a short story about a distant couple who attempt, in one snowy evening locked at home, to reach some understanding of each other's secrets. Fantastical elements were articulated through the woman's description of a dream and strange memory of a childhood event. This first attempt was very much a short story in that it had verbose paragraphs of description, details about the dreams and thoughts of the characters, and not much action that would play on screen. It was still a very useful process for me. By writing my idea out first as short story, I was able to get the "writer" tendencies out of my system. It allowed me to get tendencies for flowery writing exhausted so that I could then try harder to build a more concrete script. The script required characters to act and not merely pontificate.

Writing the idea out as a short story also helped me to get a feel for the world that I wanted to create. Combing through this first draft, I can still pull out some of the significant and strong visual elements that were included in the screenplay; i.e. the emotionally cold and empty house and the woman's dreams filled with snow falling. This was a way for me to free associate and brainstorm for ideas, much like idea clustering suggestions offered by authors like Micheal Rabiger. With some form of text laid out before me, it made it easier to scan for ways to break the story down into a screenplay with action, dialogue and plot points. Finally, a rough screenplay outline began to take shape.

I decided to focus the film through the eyes of Stephen, a "typical" young professional who is dealing with issues of jealousy and insecurities concerning his also young wife. His internal struggle would get the best of him. Small events in their distant relationship would become overwhelming because of Stephen's paranoia. I think the nature of jealousy and insecurity is to imagine the worse of situations that are otherwise innocent. The jealous person brings the nightmare to themselves. Naomi is hiding something from Stephen all along but it is not what his paranoia would imagine; it is only his Christmas present.

I did do further writing exercises that I found later be helpful in communicating and directing the actors. I wrote a character descriptions for each; thinking of things like favorite music, clothing, childhood history, etc. The plot in *Her Closet* was not complicated enough to use index cards that are shuffled into scene orders, but this was also tried. Creating a detailed outline of the plot was most helpful. I was then finally able to see what the building action was and if it was logical.

The story became a screenplay in Mark Morris' pre-production course. I decided to integrate the dream ideas into reality or the actualized world. Instead of a dream, the main character physically finds a portal that allows him to experience what is inside his wife's head. Being John Malcovich came out around the time that I was beginning to shoot and although this film was not an inspiration, it was interesting how it shared a similar concept. I wanted to have my character trespass into the hidden and interior space of another's thoughts.

From its opening, the film needed to signal to the viewer that they were about to witness something strange or fantastical. I chose Christmas as a time setting because of the magical associations and suspension of disbelief already associated with the holiday. Choices in art direction and lighting that I speak to later also helped to set this unrealistic tone.

Stephen as a character would be created as introverted and passive aggressive. He is reserved in his dress and manner; on the surface he is adult and professional. Stephen delicately presents his concerns about the Christmas card over dinner and feigns to his wife that he is fine. Below this demeanor we find he is obviously obsessed. I probably identified more with Stephen's character than with his wife who remains aloof through out the film, a sort of device for Stephen's demise.

I knew that I wanted the story to have an allegorical structure. I had grown up on the strange morality tales of the Twilight Zone and its modern counterpart series, Creep Show. This is probably one reason the film had success in film festivals under the science-fiction category because it is reminiscent of these series. I still find these examples useful for any filmmaker to gain ideas of how to create structure and dramatize complete short films with limited time constraints.

A morality tale can often be recognized by the device of punishment for the main character and his exaggerated, if human, flaw. The flaw in Stephen's case was insecurity and jealousy. In an allegory or morality tale, Stephen would need to be punished. It is Stephen's own paranoia that gets him lost in the internal, psychological world symbolized in the hallway and locked, safe like room he falls into. There are other elements that make this film a morality tale such as the use of tone and voice. I will discuss more how *Her Closet* is related to allegory and the morality tale in the criticism section of this thesis.

Because the story is about internal struggles, part of the challenge was to create visual conflict; even if my character moved in a quiet way. The arrival of the Christmas card at the beginning creates the first point of conflict for Stephen. The card is addressed to his wife and although it is vague, it hints at the topic of Naomi's past lover. It's a quiet beat, but for Stephen, it becomes his obsession over dinner with Naomi. I knew that with a short film, there had to be fast moving plot points and dramatic beats. I look more critically at these choices in the last section of this thesis where I dissect the screenplay by sections and breakdown the film's dramatic core and plot structure.

I found that writing a short film was a different process than writing a feature. There was little time for development and everything needed to be economized and condensed in writing *Her Closet*. An expectation of having complex characters with changing dynamics in their relationships was at first overwhelming. My initial thoughts were how can I stuff all of this into a piece that I wanted to run under fifteen minutes? In the end, I chose to keep the plot simply Stephen's conflict with Naomi's locked armoire and his own internal struggle of jealousy. My second character, Naomi, served more as the impetus for Stephen's spiral into paranoia. I wanted Naomi to remain distant, icon like. Part of her mystery and the distance that is communicated comes from the fact that very little information is given about her.

There isn't a lot of time for development in a short film. In successful short films I have watched, the story jumps into a dramatic arc from the word go. I was aware of this but I remain critical of whether or not I was successful in fully mastering this idea in the plot. The film's plot moves as follows: Stephen arrives to an eerie although "yuppie" upper-class home. He immediately looks for and calls for his wife in the empty house. Stephen finds a Christmas card addressed to his wife and Naomi appears mysteriously from a dark room.

The first scene with the couple hints at the coldness and strangeness between them. This early scene is really too simple and bare in scripted drama. Actor Scott Cummings' nervous eye shifts and forced smiles over the dry dialogue helped in the end to communicate that something was not right underneath this pretty picture. It is significant to note here that with performance, rehearsals and hopefully direction, Scott was successful in communicating instability. This contributed a great deal to the logic of this film where there were weaknesses in the writing.

The screenplay continues with more questions from Stephen and evasiveness from Naomi. She is either falling asleep or running out at the last minute in their interactions. He stays up into the night and in the next plot point becomes fixated on Naomi's armoire. The next morning he tries to open the armoire and it is locked. He asks Naomi about it and she flies away again.

Stephen starts to unwind; he now is seen coming home with a swagger and smoking. He decides to have a drink before bed. He stares the armoire down one last time. In the last morning scene, he makes a firmer confrontation with Naomi on her secrets and the locked armoire. This time she puts him off. "Wait until I get home", she says. This is the culmination of their arguing and confrontation. It is the final frustration before Stephen decides to break into the armoire.

I now wish that the dialogue in this pinnacle scene more strongly articulated Stephen's goal. "Let me see inside that damn armoire!" he could have said to Naomi. Stephen accomplishes his goal of getting inside the armoire and thus hears the painfully honest thoughts from his wife about their relationship. He is trapped inside this world and his insecurities. The story could have done better at linking the goal of getting inside the armoire with knowing more about his wife. The script does articulate Stephen's frustrations with his wife's evasiveness and it does show that he is troubled by the locked armoire but conflict is weak.

In later courses on screenwriting and additional reading, I have been introduced to techniques that would have proven helpful. Coursework taught tasks like plot diagramming and writing character monologues to create better dialogue. Ideas on how I could have better focused the story and its dramatic premise, or built stronger structure and plot are talked about at the end of this paper.

I presented the screenplay in Steve Hank's 4530 production course and was finally on my way to shooting. I felt that the script was obtainable due to its simple use of location (one home and a simple set). I would have only two actors to work with. I did not want to distract myself with the overwhelming task of managing a large cast or multiple location moves. I wanted to keep the project controllable so that I could concentrate on performance and the creative uses of camera and design. With the screenplay finished, I then focused my energy on the planning and organization of the shoot.

CHAPTER 2: PRE-PRODUCTION

As an eager film student ready to launch into the issues of cameras, heavy grip equipment and shooting film, this stage in production is often overlooked as “nit-picky” or busy-bodied by the inexperienced. A favorite director of mine once wrote that pre-production was everything, (he despised production) adding the actual shooting stage is like following a blueprint or design that has already been labouriously created. Production is a huge, expensive freight train that leaves the station that first day of shooting. With out planning, you lose control, the support of crew and actors, and eventually, the vision that was intended.

I had the opportunity to get useful experience working on many other student film shoots prior to my own. I saw that good planning and design created the opportunity for the director to be able to focus on directing. In some student film projects I'd seen problems ranging from tired actors, forgetting to schedule lunch and a lack of people to haul the dolly track. I came to value being prepared. The worst case scenario, I believed, was to show up with nothing more than a few rough sketches meant to improvise from. When others are volunteering their time and efforts there are risks that the crew won't show the next day, the actors won't give their best because they have no idea what they are doing and the location will be lost because it wasn't planned for correctly. I found it critical to have at least a shot list, schedule, and budget too before credit cards are maxed out and begging ensues for that one more desperately needed can of film.

Pre-production is like setting all the pieces and letting everything fall into place during production. Fortunately, I kept this film simple, knowing that I would be acting as both producer and director. I did not want all my energy going into production elements, people, places, food, and transportation. Energy of course went there, but it was important that I be able to feel in control enough to have room for what I really wanted the experience to be, namely a creative opportunity to work with actors and articulate visual ideas with my crew.

A strong opinion on pre-production has developed from the "holes" in my own process as well as the experience I have had outside of school. *Her Closet* was not a perfect shoot, but it was controlled. Planning and scheduling paid off in the end. I believe that's why this film was successful and received positive reception. I first designed a cohesive story, and then developed

a controllable cast and use of location to minimize travel or company moves. I followed with a schedule and shot list.

The hardest obstacle for me at that time as a filmmaker was my shyness. Since this experience, I've realized that I would have to abandon much of this personality trait if I hope to produce, direct and manage even larger productions in the future. The message that keeps being reinforced is how much of a collaborative medium filmmaking is.

Securing the Crew

Pulling together a crew was the hardest task of the whole process. By this I am only referring to the effort needed to find bodies to help with heavy equipment, run for food, or build a set. I had spent time getting pizzas, sweeping sets, herding extras and other unglamorous tasks on numerous projects. I still feel incredibly fortunate to find people who would give me their time. They were serious, talented and dedicated individuals including Julia Jacobsen for costumes, Mark Bergeron for his cinematography and gaffing skills and Matt McDaniel for camera work, production help and overall general drive on the project. I have to thank my boyfriend for stepping in as A.D. and begrudgingly giving a hand with the set. The two of us built the hallway that was to be my major set into the late hours. I should note, it is a wonderful thing to have access to a studio as a film school student.

I chose people with whom I had good communication and who were excited about the project. Mark Bergeron was already experienced with film cameras and lighting equipment. He was also very energetic about the opportunity to direct the photography. I also was able to take advantage of the wonderful situation at UNO of having a shared building with the theater department. I attempted to enlist talented students in disciplines of acting, design and costuming and it was here that I met Julia Jacobsen, my project's costume designer.

Finding the Location

I needed a historic house to create the fantastical tone I wanted in the film. I wanted something that had a sense of mystery to it. The task of finding a historic home in New Orleans that would allow a film crew to take over seemed easy. I began by creating a list of local, historic bed and breakfasts with the hope that I could at least be able to rent a location for the two weekend shoots.

I found one bed and breakfast which had a unique attic room, reminiscent of a doll house that would contribute to the claustrophobic relationship of my couple. It had low ceilings, dark painted walls and delicate furniture. After some consideration, I thought the space would be too difficult to film; there was no room for a crew, lights or jib arm.

Ultimately, finding the location fell in my lap. A friend introduced me to a home owner on Esplanade, a young lawyer who was in the process of renovation. We went to visit the site and found it perfect. It was a historic home hidden by thick foliage with a New Orleans' style iron gate. The interior included pocket doors and hardwood floors. Much of the house had not been modernized. The homeowner had made choices other than white for wall colors in the living room and bedroom. Mark Bergeron and I had both wanted to avoid a high key look, especially in Stephen's journey into the armoire. The bedroom happily was a deep, indigo blue. Perfect, I thought, for mystery.

The house came with a few large, heavy and expensive antique furnishings that I thought would show the cold and professional characteristics of the couple. The bedroom included a four-post bed, like one Ebenezer Scrooge may have slept in. Most importantly, the room had a very grand armoire. The homeowner was actually excited by the idea of the house being shot on film and an agreement was made to give him a copy. There was also plenty of space in other rooms because of the renovation that we could store equipment and crew.

Other considerations with locations were sound and parking. The corner of Esplanade and Claiborne where the house sat is not quite ideal for sound on a Friday or Saturday night. We thought more about shooting earlier in the evening or during the day. We would also have to limit our vehicles. Since I would pick up the actors, only a van would need to be rented to haul the equipment.

Casting the Film

Casting proved to be one of the easier tasks on this project. I had, after all, only two roles to cast. I contacted theater departments at UNO as well as Tulane and Loyola and talked to instructors from these departments. I explained to them what I was looking for and asked if they could forward any interested parties to a casting call I was holding at UNO.

I held a tryout that was taped at UNO. A small number of people showed up, about five men and three women. Each was given a page of dialogue to read. While the audition was a good experience, unfortunately none of those who came fit the part.

I then turned to actively seeking out specific actors, which ultimately proved more successful. I had an actor in mind from the beginning that had played in another graduate student's film. While working on that project I was impressed by what this actor, Scott Cummings, could do. I got contact information and sent Scott the script. He was very interested and proved to be a very good choice for the film.

After auditions, I got a phone call from a young woman from Tulane's dance department who was very interested in getting some acting experience. I met Lee White on Tulane's campus and immediately thought she was perfect. She had the physical attractiveness needed to pull off Scott's insane jealousy and also I liked that she had a background in dance since so much of her performance would be non-verbal. She was perhaps a bit too young to already be a distant wife in a cold marriage, but I liked her graceful, ethereal quality. She too was very committed to the project.

Properties and Art Department

Although many of the furnishings in the house were good it was still a bachelor's apartment and there were bare walls and empty corners requiring set dressing. I spent some time visiting local antique stores in search of some dramatic, antique paintings and one important item: a dollhouse.

The dollhouse is Naomi's hiding place for the armoire key and an important property because it was also a metaphor for the story. It is a particularly feminine item, playing to Scott's frustration at not being able to understand his wife. Dollhouses are miniature examples of people's homes and lives. This I thought would help illustrate the interior world to be explored in the film. Through Scott's jealousy, he sought to control his wife, and I thought the metaphor of dolls and dollhouses helped convey this idea. Finally, I thought the dollhouse would serve as an interesting visual device for the camera to be able to look inside and play with illusions of size.

An antique owner on Magazine Street agreed to rent me a large, very heavy, stucco dollhouse. It was exceptional; a creepy color of green with the stucco sides crumbling a bit. It would be difficult to squeeze into a tight budget, but I knew it would occupy a large space in the

bland and somewhat empty living room. Renting from antique stores in New Orleans is a good idea for film students since most places were accommodating. Although with all the current production in town, I imagine rates may have increased.

I still believe that time and effort spent on decisive art direction was critical to the success of the film. I also think themes and topics can be expressed through the use of good art direction and property choices. The needs of the art department, however, could also prove to be very costly. I kept it confined to pieces that I knew would be featured and that would make the difference in the picture I was creating.

I spent some time, especially with the contents inside of the armoire. I borrowed from a collection of vintage slips and undergarments from my boyfriend's mother. I wanted all of the silky slips to be pink, white or red. They also needed to be overtly feminine. I was locked on an image of Scott busting into his wife's armoire and paging through her intimate clothing that matched the red walls of the hallway he would invade further. I felt that the color and fabric would make the images seem more invasive; Scott trespassing into his wife's private space. Friends of mine have carried this image even further. I had considered how the insides of the armoire and hallway called to mind the female interior organs. This became a metaphor that I wanted to keep subtle and implied.

I liked the idea of creating a sense of time and season in this film. The effect required a trip to a French Quarter Christmas store for lights to find a bright red present to fit with my color scheme. A friend lent me a very unusual metallic Christmas tree. Again I thought this would add to the artificial, cold tone of the relationship as well as provide an interesting light for background texture.

I met with the costume designer, Julia, and we discussed the palette: reds, creams, white, green. For the female character, finding costumes was easy. For Scott, an affordable nice suit was harder to come by. Thanks to my colleague, Laszlo Fulop, we did acquire a suit, coat and briefcase. I knew that I also wanted Scott to wear candy-striped pajamas in the film. Many characters in fantastical tales such as Peter Pan, or A Christmas Carol, enter the realm of fantasy in their pajamas. I had allotted seventy-five dollars in the budget for costumes and this was given to Julia Jacobsen, the costumer, to purchase pajamas and outfits for Naomi. It was wonderful to be able to delegate at least some of these pre-production tasks to someone else.

Building the Set

My construction abilities were heavily taxed putting together a simple hallway at the Nims Studio. I was fortunate to have access to leftover walls from the series The Big Easy that was shot in New Orleans several years ago. The walls went up with the loyal help of my poor boyfriend who again spent many long evenings with me with drills in hand and shopping at Home Depot. I chose deep red for the walls. I wanted a heavy, protective looking door at the end of the hall, something that could read as a high security, protected area. Fortunately, I was able to find metallic paint and a heavy door handle from the "Green Project" in New Orleans.

After about three nights of construction and painting, the hallway was built and the screens in place. At the time the Nims Studio was experiencing insulation falling from the ceiling in gigantic white clumps. This later resulted in knocking over two of the screens we had set up during production.

The room that Stephen enters into developed with a combination of elements. A friend of mine had told me about a dream he had where he discovered a secret room with a dinner party enjoying themselves. He later found out in the dream that they were ghosts. Originally in a draft of the script I had Stephen arriving in the room and seeing the figures of all of Naomi's past romances. I later simplified this to Naomi's shadow only. We were lucky to have found the screens at the studio to create this effect.

I wanted the room to appear in snowfall, something that is outside the world of New Orleans and would be apart of Naomi's interior space and memory. The falling insulation became floor dressing in a funny way, acting as clumps of snow piles. The "real" falling snow came from a snow machine borrowed through Cash Carpenter from the UNO theater program.

Meetings with Crew and Actors

I met with Mark Bergeron and visited the house on Esplanade to get a sense of what lighting equipment would be needed. The large windows in the living room would provide a lot of good natural daylight for the daytime scenes. Because I wanted to take advantage of as much depth as possible, we talked about being able to light corridors behind the dining room for one of the morning scenes. We also talked about the trouble with the armoire and the need to shoot around the mirror doors. I also expressed that I wanted the dining room scene to have blue lighting. I was creating a film that was fantasy so I felt the film did not have to be lit

naturalistically. We went a little too far with the blue and later in the transfer I struggled to tone the color down.

It was important to me to have some rehearsal times with my actors before launching into shooting. I had some theater background and really looked forward to this part of the process. I have since that time taken directing with Dr. Hoover and wish I would have had this experience to bring to *Her Closet*.

In readings during reversal lines that sounded awkward when spoken were smoothed or changed. I had each actor read the script with different voices or emotions to stretch their range. In rehearsal too, we talked about characterization. Both actors came up with some creative back stories for their characters and helped to invent where the suspicion had started in their relationship. We created the figure of the ex who sent the card. Lee also built an idea of who this ex was and picked a memory of their best time together that the card brings up for her.

What I wanted to accomplish overall in rehearsal was a comfort and familiarity between myself and the actors, and between the actors themselves. I also wanted to build subtext that could help to extend beyond the bare, simple dialogue. I do think rehearsals accomplished these tasks: my actors were no longer strangers and we developed some clear ideas about obstacles, motivation and subtext.

When watching the film now I see moments where the actors seem natural and relaxed and other times where they seem very stiff. These problems with performance could be attributed to a script that was not clear enough. I also believe that I could have been more observant and effective during production and rehearsal. I do still believe, however, that the actors were a positive and loyal contribution to the film. I owe much to their patience and sincere involvement. They believed in me as a director and were willing to follow my lead and instruction, even though I was aware of my limitations.

Creating the Schedule and Rousing Production

I designed a simple schedule of two weekend blocks because of crew and actor availability. The first block of time, a three day weekend, was reserved for the house exteriors and interiors. The second block would include the studio shoot with some extra time for pick-ups if needed. We reserved the equipment, secured the location and studio time and I went to work to create a shot list. I did not have a prop person so I also became properties and set dresser

as well. Our friend with the house was good enough to let us come a day early. I was able to dress the set and build the unusual Christmas tree. Mark too was able to rough in a few lights.

At this time I had rounded up the rest of a small crew. Jim Lyons volunteered to do sound and did a great job; this was his first semester at UNO. I appreciated his effort in getting good sound, often to the frustration of my D.P. Too often, when I was a film student, sound was not considered important enough to work around or give time too. I've noticed that in rushed productions sound is often ignored almost entirely. I believe that getting good sound in the moment and with the right performance and dynamics of the room really surpasses the magic some believe can be recreated with automated dialogue replacement in post. I have worked on feature film sets since *Her Closet* and I know the effort and concern that goes into getting good, clean sync sound.

The other position I have come to appreciate is the assistant director. My unfortunate boyfriend was enrolled as the A.D. in this production. He had had a short career in film, mostly working as a second A.D. on music videos in New York. He did a great job, although this is not an advisable thing to do on a personal note. I sometimes find that in production even the calmest of directors can become angry, yell or give direct criticism. It is sometimes a reaction for crew and especially emotionally intimate partners to take this personally.

I am aware of the critical role the A.D. plays. I have since seen the close working relationship an A.D. has with the director on professional sets. It is the A.D. who makes all things happen for the director by keeping every department on task and importantly, by building a tight and workable schedule. I've watched an A.D. help the director with coverage choices in the critical moments when time limits required a revamping of plans. I don't think some of us at that time knew what the A.D. did except for calling roll camera and sound. Their job is enormous, like the field sergeant of a very large army, and they are critical to the success of the film. Good assistant directors are responsible for meeting the demands of the director's creative vision under the pressures of time, crew, budget and unforeseen catastrophes.

One of the hardest demands of a production is maintaining focus and confidence as a director while listening and giving instructions to all the various people involved in the production. A good A.D. and production manager can help, but communication and leadership skills still proved to be critical for the director as well.

CHAPTER 3: PRODUCTION

With time invested in scheduling, rehearsals, meetings and with cans of film arriving, I hoped that the pieces of our designed plan would fall together. Production did take up the two full weekend blocks of time originally scheduled. With a smaller crew, we also had to add a half day of work in the first week. The shoot was relatively simple to control, with the house and set being the only locations. The studio shoot was saved for the end and successfully completed in one day.

Mark did an amazingly fast and still beautiful job at lighting. So much of the interior of the house needed to be seen that both backgrounds and subjects needed to be lit in many of the set-ups. I had anticipated this, knowing that I wanted to use as much of the depth and space of the house as possible. Our solutions were really simple in application and didn't require a lot of lighting equipment.

Our problem in production was often not having enough crew or, on the contrary, having too much crew. There was often a lack of individuals who were knowledgeable and fast with the lighting and camera equipment. This is to be expected since we were all learning. Although I was critical of the production process, I was very pleased with the crew and production stage of this project. We were able to produce good work and pretty much stayed within the original time frame of the production.

Day 1

Our first day was short and started with the night exteriors. I had planned to use a jib arm for a creeping shot of Scott through the metal iron gates of the home and thick gardens. I felt that adding movement to the shots would help the film come alive and I also wanted a sense of the camera being a sort of objective eye.

As we got into the thick of the garden with its complicated, unlevelled ground, the jib set-ups proved time consuming. Mark was also suffering from backaches, and, after some attempt to stick it out, I decided that I did not want a crippled D.P by the end of the shoot. Matt McDaniel was anxious for some camera experience and I agreed to let him take over. Matt is a very hard working individual and his camera operating skills improved by the end of the shoot. The first jib arm set-up was for the opening shot of Scott approaching the iron gate from the street. I

struggled with this set-up, and needing to move on, came to a simple solution of just allowing Scott to enter the frame and focus the camera on his hands turning the lock. Even now I feel that this shot is not successful.

The jib was moved to inside the garden for Scott's second return at night. These jib shots were designed originally to sort of parallel Scott's ritual of returning home. The second time Scott returns home he is different in his appearance showing that his character is starting to unravel. The second use of the jib was more successful but still problematic. There was a narrow space in the garden to move in as well as unlevelled ground.

Having done the best we could do with the jib shots, I decided to move on to a low, wide angle shot of the house with Scott climbing up the stairs to enter. The shot seems simple enough, but a good amount of the house exterior needed to be lit as it was completely shadowed by night. The generator continued to chug along and our largest lights were brought out and used as efficiently as possible to get some texture on the house. Lights were tweaked in the interior of the house since the windows were visible.

With a generator and loud night traffic now increasing, it was good that these set-ups were all without sound. In the end, these pieces of night exterior provide a very rough establishing of the house that the main character arrives home to. Although it was difficult to create the scenes with these longer jib shots, in the end I was reasonably successful in constructing the scenes from the footage.

After finishing the exteriors, we moved inside to continue Scott's entrance. I wanted the first day to be easy for Scott performance wise to allow him to warm up to a crew. This was a simple scene. He arrives to an empty house, calls for Naomi and they have a light dialogue before meeting for dinner.

The house was nearly lit throughout for this scene. Our pre-lighting again proved useful. Time was spent keeping lights simply out of view of the wide angle lens. I made sure to rehearse the full action of the scene before shooting. We shot the first set-up as a master. Tighter coverage would be used once the couple embraced.

The dialogue was covered with two over-the-shoulder set-ups on Scott and Naomi, including her entrance. I asked for a wider, two-shot after we completed the dialogue, feeling that I needed to see their opposite exits clearly. I thought at the time that I needed to explain how Naomi gets to the dollhouse once the couple parts.

We moved to get Scott's action at the table and the insert of the Christmas card. Although the camera moved the lighting was able to stay the same. We then set-up the action for Naomi at the dollhouse and some time was spent adjusting tricky lighting to boost the interior.

The last set-up for the night was Scott looking over his shoulder to see what Naomi is up to. Scott escapes into our blue-lighted hallway. As overdone as it seemed, I wanted to have fun with color even if it meant somewhat exaggerated lighting. In the scene, Scott looks concerned as his wife interacts with the dollhouse, but is reassured by her smile and exits.

Day 2

The second day started at an early 7am. We needed to get the light for the living room and dining room day interiors. It was a little difficult at the start since we had shot late the night prior.

We started with the morning scene, in the dining room, after Stephen first discovers the armoire is locked and asks Naomi about it. Sunlight through the windows provided the majority of the light for this scene but we needed to fill areas in the hall where Naomi enters. I condensed the coverage for this short scene. The simple, wider master showed the couple in a conversation with distance between them, good again for theme. I wanted to visually show in blocking and camera choices that the couple had a physical as well as emotional distance with each other. The shot also captured their kiss goodbye, Naomi's exit and Scott's reaction.

I decided to get a tighter shot for Naomi at the entrance way and (for some reason I can't explain) a tight shot of their kiss in slow motion that was never used in the final cut. A tighter shot of Scott watching his wife disappear would have proven useful in editing. So much of the film is about his frustration at his always disappearing wife. I appreciate coverage that can encapsulated the dramatic beats of a scene in one camera move, following an actor with camera movement or allowing blocking to change the dynamics of a scene. *Her Closet* is not the best example of this concept, but in the future it is something I want to strive for. In editing I wanted to avoid cutting to some other angle simply because it was shot. Still, there is coverage that is useful and part of my growth as a director is learning what's important to cover and what is just superfluous.

The shot that was most important to me at the time was the wide, lonely shot of the empty house as Naomi exits. Again, I was working to create visual distance between Scott and Naomi. This shot required lighting the living room so it made sense to move on to the living room scene taking place at the end of the film, the couple's final argument.

We moved on to this scene of the final argument between the couple before Naomi leaves and Scott decides to break into the armoire. We rehearsed the scene to help remind the actors where we had built up the tension and climax. Scott finds Naomi and begins his usual questions again. Finally he gets frustrated and raises his voice to her. She controls him once again and leaves. He is exasperated and huffs away to return to bed.

We first shot Naomi's coverage, starting with her picking up her things to leave. We ran all of her dialogue with this single set-up. I wanted a tighter shot with Naomi in the doorway. Some additional lighting was needed for this close-up. The widest angle and the only angle showing both together in the frame was awkward. Scott steps into the scene from nowhere and watches Naomi getting ready to leave. In retrospect, I needed a better dramatic beat of Scott wandering out, still sleepy, to see that his wife who is anxiously leaving without saying goodbye.

This scene took a lot of time because we needed to relight the background for the turnaround on Scott. In all of the set-ups I wanted to use as much depth in the house as possible. This set-up covered all of Scott's dialogue for the scene. It was rushed and we were running out of time in a demanding day. Again, Scott just enters the frame. In retrospect, the scene could have been better covered.

Day 3

The third day of a three-day weekend started in the bedroom. We began with Scott's first daytime standoff with the armoire. Then we needed to light the bedroom for all of the night scenes. We started with the shots that required Scott to be in similar costume. The first was the scene where Scott watches Naomi sleeping. We moved next to shoot scenes around the bed; Naomi falling asleep during their conversation and Scott's scenes sitting up alone.

Perhaps due to a tired crew, the day lagged. We went on to shoot sequences around the armoire with Scott about to enter and had some difficulty shooting around the mirrors of the armoire. Nowadays, I work sometimes fourteen-hour days for entire weeks on feature films and wonder how we could have felt so burned then. Of course, all of us were juggling the jobs of a

larger crew; Mark setting lights and camera and Matt operating, loading and helping with production needs. I was set dressing, producing, managing actors and locations. My A.D. was providing all of production needs, running to get lunch and helping to lift furniture, light stands, and so forth.

We got the bedroom scenes knocked out, including Naomi's return at the end. Again, background lighting was needed in the living room. We were running out of time and it seemed most important to get the couple's scene together over dinner and wrap Naomi at the location. We broke for Chinese food, a double task that included feeding everyone and picking up properties to be used for the scene. We moved on to light and finish with the scene in the dining room where the couple discusses the card over dinner. I had a test of wills with my A.D., who was doing his job of making sure we got out of there in time before the owner returned. Once in the middle of this scene, I pushed to finish all of the set-ups as I felt it would be difficult to match lighting later. The shot of the fireplace crackling was thus rushed. We were out in time with a bit of a mad scramble. The difficulties of this day are remembered primarily as a result of time constraints.

Day 4

I realized we had forgotten to get a few pieces in the house; a p.o.v. of the armoire and material I needed for the time-lapse of Scott's drink. Mark, Matt, Jeff, and I met and completed these pieces during this pick-up day. We spoke with the owner of the house and he agreed to let us come during the week. I think it is important to keep good relations with those who are providing locations. It is no fun to have an army in your house. I wanted the crew to be careful with hardwood floors, delicate light fixtures, and so forth. Often on sets, crews become sloppy. In production, A.D.s and location managers work to make sure sites are taken care of. I think it is unfortunate to hear about film crews destroying locations. It makes it harder, if not impossible, for other filmmakers to use these places in the future. In New Orleans we still have the opportunity to use locations where people are not yet burned on experiences with film crews.

Day 5

This day started with the shots of Scott at the dollhouse. We were finished in our half-day and considered starting at the studio that night. As the small crew celebrated the house scenes

being wrapped, I realized we would not have the manpower to move the dolly into the studio.

We decided to shoot the next day and a small group of us would travel to the studio to pull lights and check the set. I was thankful we had some time to play with at the end of the schedule. When we arrived at the studio, we realized the screens had been knocked down from the falling insulation. Jeff and I spent the rest of the day cleaning up the set and pulling lights for the hallway and the "white" room where Naomi's shadow appears behind the white paneled screens.

Day 6

We began the day by lugging the dolly in for the hallway scene. Matt, Mark and I began setting lights that had to be pulled high above the hallway walls. I also decided that I wanted the doorway handle to "pop" so Mark created a "snoot" (a fixture to confine the light to a small circle) to light the doorway handle. Mark added dimmers we needed to the soft lights behind the screens. We worked with Scott first, alone in the hallway. I brought in the clothes from the armoire to hang at the hallway end to match the armoire. We covered Scott's walk from many angles: high overhead, dolly front angle and dolly back angle. We even tried a shot à la Spike Lee with Scott on the dolly as we pushed towards the door. In many of Spike Lee's film this use of actor on a moving dolly can be seen. The effect distorts perception with a constant subject against a changing background. This was a fun day with the four of us working together. Having a smooth studio floor for the dolly, controllable lighting and the ability to move to all angles around the set gave us some freedom.

When Naomi arrived, we moved into the "white" room to do her shadow sequences. We got another overhead of Scott arriving and got the timing right on the dimmers. I wanted to get some experience in this controlled environment with the Steadicam, so fellow grad student Brian Burney, who was qualified on the Steadicam, shot the coverage of Scott's fearful reactions of the shadow passing around him with the Steadicam.

At last we wrapped. We still needed to return the lights back to their place and lug the dolly to the van. It was a good day to finish as we had all seen that the images we were getting were good. Thanks again to all of the crew and cast of a successful shoot.

CHAPTER 4: POST-PRODUCTION

The Transfer

Because I wanted to learn as much as I could about the entire filmmaking process with this project, I decided to spend the additional money and travel to experience the film transfer first hand. It was a useful learning experience, even it wasn't completely necessary for the film. I was able to see what the transfer house could do in terms of matching scenes and color correction. I increased the green in the otherwise dull and uninspiring night exteriors. We did some matching with shots in the opening interior scenes. I worked again to tone down some of the blue to create believable skin tones. Shots in the hallway and "white" room were really left untouched.

The Offline Edit

The first cut was edited on an Avid McXpress at UNO. In editing, my film began to take shape. I had to solve a few problems with transitions. The transition to night of Scott breaking into the armoire occurred too quickly. Logically, it would have been day when Scott goes to the armoire following the last argument with Naomi. With shots of Scott in bed from other scenes I created the illusion that Scott went back to sleep and stayed there for some time before breaking into the armoire. I had to work to make the transition I needed once Stephen is locked inside the armoire and before Naomi comes home. I liked the idea of using static shots of the house now empty again before Naomi returns, hopefully creating this through an objective camera viewpoint. We had some static shots but not enough. I ended up slowing down the heads and tails of a few clips to make this transition smoother.

I also cut some fat in the dialogue of the couple's first conversation; they jabbered on about unnecessary details about how it's cold outside or what was for dinner. Some of the camera work did not make it into the film, such as the jib arm shots mentioned. This hurt the set-up for Scott's opening scenes as he enters an empty house.

Sound, for the most part, from location was pretty good. I did ADR Naomi in the couple's first scene together only because the sound here was unusable because of signal noise that could not be notched or filtered out with the Spectral sound application. I had planned to bring my actress in to record the lines heard inside the "white" room anyway. Recording ADR

went smoothly. We improvised with lines I had written with those the actress came up with for the final scene. So here, by having the opportunity to work with my actress one of one, I found that ADR does have its advantages.

In editing sound with picture, I made the choice of overlapping the lines while the music continues underneath. In retrospect, I think it would have been a better choice to let the lines stand out. Some viewers are troubled that her lines are not always clear. I wanted the effect to be overwhelming for Scott; her words coming at him from every angle. I wanted these lines to be harmful because they represented his general insecurities. I didn't want the lines to present particular problems that clearly heard sentences would suggest. At the time I felt that they would have to be explained directly in the earlier scenes of the script.

The sound mix started to take shape. I wanted to add some interesting textures in the ambience and included the sound of a cat meowing while Stephen pulls eagerly at the armoire for the first time. "Curiosity killed the cat" was the metaphor (maybe too big of a leap). I thought the track was at least a bit more interesting than just birds chirping and cars rolling outside for morning ambience. I used sound effects again with Naomi's mother honking outside during the couple's last argument. I wanted the sound to act as an obstacle for Stephen to voice his thoughts.

The Online Edit

The project moved from the offline suite to be online on an Avid Media Composer. The various "stems" of audio (dialogue, ADR, music, effects) were brought in and layered with a newly digitized video track. The music was really applied and finished here. I chose to use music from Andrew Bird's album, Great Bowl of Fire. The music plays an important role in the film and adds a great deal to the tone. It has an eerie, nostalgic effect in the beginning. I used two songs in the film and needed to pare back their use as much as possible. Fortunately, the album was also instrumental and I found pieces of sad lyrical melodies and flying scales performed by violin. The music became critical to the timing of the interior armoire scenes. I believe I was successful in editing this scene in particular as it shows a sense of rhythm and counterpoint between music and images.

I experimented with some of the online features of the Avid trying again to tone down the intensity of color in the dinning room scene. Still unhappy with how dark the opening was, I tried to lighten it, but the image just looked muddier.

The opening title sequence was created using After Effects. I thought this sequence contributed to the tone and cohesiveness of the film by presenting the metaphors at the start of the film. I found images of an old key, an armoire and Christmas present online and used Photoshop to turn them into white drawings. They were animated in After Effects. I rendered the sequence as a Quicktime movie and overlaid the animation I created, using alpha channels, on to footage I had filmed of snow falling.

Final credits were added and the film was shown to my advisor, Steve Hank, before finally outputting to Beta tape. With this completed, my energy moved to sending the film out for festivals and public showings.

CHAPTER 5: EXHIBITION AND FILM FESTIVALS

I started with research before creating a calendar for the plethora of film festivals I wanted to enter. This process involved creating stills from the film and writing different variations of a synopsis. Sending entries to film festivals can be a costly process so I balanced picking festivals that I thought my film could get into with those that were more prestigious. What became important in the end was having the film shown in any film festival. In its first year the film was shown at the Ohio Independent Film Festival, the Thunderbird Film Festival in Utah and at the New Orleans Film Festival.

I attended the New Orleans Film Festival for the film's screening and took part in a question and answer segment at the end of the showing. This was a very rewarding and useful experience. I was also interviewed by Where Y'at for their coverage of local filmmakers in the festival.

Her Closet aired on the New Orleans' local program Timecode several times. The exposure here was great; many people in the city saw the film, including a director on an independent film I was currently script-supervising. He liked the film and I believe he had a greater trust in my ability to script-supervise because of it. Timecode continues to grow and I think it is a great venue for students who want to get wider audience exposure for their productions.

I received a lot of praise on my film. It was very popular with judges at the New Orleans film festival, one even telling me it was one of the most memorable films from UNO. The film made only the first round at the Telluride festival, but I received a call telling me that was an honor in itself. Mark Bergeron, the D.P. continues to use the footage on his reel. He told me that it is some of the best material he has shot and it has helped him in his career in Los Angeles and locally as well.

The film had a funny categorization in many of the festivals; designated to be shown during "sci-fi night" at the New Orleans Film Festival or my favorite, the "weird and wacky" category in Utah. I think the film was seen as a sort of oddball by festival judges. I pay closer attention to many winning short films now and often these films are more socially or politically relevant. I refuse to believe that a successful short has to have extreme production costs, i.e. shot on 35mm, but I've seen that this is a factor in winning selections. Perhaps it is more true to say

that polished image and sound quality, no matter what the medium, is important. Another factor for getting a film shown in festivals is a short running time. It is possible that *Her Closet* could have been edited down even shorter than its thirteen minutes. Many of my colleagues have had a difficult time getting their films shown because their running time exceeds twenty minutes.

The most valuable responses to the film I've had are from the students and peers who continue to offer their compliments, use the film in their classes or stop to tell me they've have another perspective on the story. *Her Closet* was a quiet and strange little film and with some distance now, I do see problems especially with story that might have hindered its reception in film festivals.

CHAPTER 6: REVIEW AND GENERAL CRITICISM

I have had the opportunity to look back with time and experience on *Her Closet*. Despite the many criticisms I have about the project, the film does "look good" and does successfully tell a story. That sounds so simple, but to tell a story that is compelling, significant or even logical is no easy task. I felt it was a great film for where I was at that time in my career, but I feel I could have done better.

Now that I am spending so much time in the world of continuity, I feel that *Her Closet* had some continuity issues, beginning with the script. For example, what happened to the key? The character enters the armoire with a key, gets locked inside and when Naomi returns the key is gone. Did Stephen pocket it in his plain pajamas? How did his wife return to the armoire with a key ready to place her hidden Christmas present?

I have also been asked why I chose to call the film "*Her Closet*." The piece of furniture depicted is an armoire so why then did I not call it "Her Armoire" or "Naomi's Armoire"? Something about the word "armoire" sounded like a historical romance to me. The film could have been called "A Wardrobe" but I was drawn to using the word "closet" because of the saying "skeletons in your closet." I thought this would help convey the theme of secrets. One judge in a phone conversation asked again for the title of my film, believing it had something to do with "coming out of the closet," a different theme altogether. Ah well, sometimes I try too hard to make narrative connections. I continue to wince a bit every time someone asks me about the title of this film.

As a woman filmmaker I also feel a certain pressure regarding female stereotypes. I worried about my character Naomi, who is this sort of beautiful muse in the film. I certainly did not intend to make her a classic victim, but the film is not created to demonstrate her strengths. The story itself is not a feminist story; I even focus on a male character. I didn't create a female character to debunk social myths or stereotypes.

Sometimes peers call my film a "girl's story," maybe because it was about the emotional experiences of a relationship. This could not be true either! Films about relationships and psychology are obviously not only made by women. There is also this idea of creating feminine story structures that don't have a drive to the classic climax and resolution. I think that *Her Closet* does have a classic structure.

Festival and distribution outlets do exist specifically for films made by women. The practical and producer side of me often wonders if I should not try harder to fill this niche. In articles about directors, it is significantly noted when a film was made by a woman director with some unique female perspective. The attention to women's film is as much about the ratio of male to female directors in the industry as it is about the theories of how women have been objectified in cinema. Writers like Molly Haskell have expanded on the problems of women as objects of the male gaze in cinema, and women's roles in films historically were often relegated to secondary romantic interests, devoted supporters, and victims waiting to be saved by a hero.

I do feel some responsibility to debunk female stereotypes in my filmmaking. I should be careful not to present women as victims or visual "eye candy." This is a notion that I have shared with my female peers in filmmaking. I don't claim that I am a woman filmmaker who is making films different from those created by men. I think to categorize a film directed by a woman as a "women's film" can sometimes be limiting.

CHAPTER 7: CRITICISM ON DIRECTING APPLICATION

I have been fortunate to have gained some knowledge on directing from experience, readings and observation as a film student. Directing skills and tools are hard to pin-point. I wanted to study authors like Stephen Katz and Michael Rabiger and try to learn how good directing is defined and developed.

A director is involved in every aspect of the film. She has responsibilities for guiding and nurturing actors' performances as well as leading crew, creating motivated and justified camera work, and developing a unified tone, theme and look to the film. The director takes text from a script and finds opportunities of expression through concrete visual elements. Giving ideas conceptual form as concrete visual and active elements is the first challenge of directing. In this visualization process, one needs to "stop thinking in literary aspects and think in filmable, concrete steps." (Rabiger 41)

Directorial vision happens between drafts of the screenplay, storyboards and rehearsals. It is critical to make ideas visible before they are put in front of the camera. Rabiger pushes for a director to secure time to reflect and build ideas in the pre-shooting process. He devotes sixteen chapters to the pre-shooting process and idea-focusing stages in his text. A director must be prepared to invest in a "long experimental development process" prior to production. (Rabiger 41) Stephen Katz too pushes for what he calls a "physical connection with the medium" and the "opportunity to review and refine work as it is created" (Katz 4) as I understand it, this can only happen with time devoted to the pre-shooting process.

Rehearsals are one important example of preproduction. It is here that blocking, characterization and dramatic beats are built. Rabiger suggests shooting rehearsals in documentary style to get a sense if actors are truly being and not just "signifying" in performance. Shooting rehearsals serves as practice in moving the camera with motivated movements to work with drama built by the actors; not against it. (Rabiger 69)

I worked with actors in rehearsal to define what each character's goals and obstacles were. We worked with dialogue to achieve a range of tone and inflections. We discussed character and story background to build subtext into actions as well as scripted lines. One concept that would have proven useful in rehearsals as well as in the directing process is an understanding of dramatic beats.

Dramatic beats are a tangible way of thinking about directing. They serve as a means to define and keep track of the dramatic momentum in a scene. Using the language of dramatic beats is a clear way to communicate direction to actors. While working as a script supervisor I helped a director keep track of these scene points on a list, or beat sheet, that held all of the dramatic moments that we needed to capture each day on the shoot.

Dramatic beats are the "dramatic fulcrum" points of changed awareness following mounting pressures. They make up or are the building blocks for dramatic units in the film. (Rabiger 18) They are the working tools a director can use to create the pulls and rhythms of drama and can occur in plot points or changes in character thought and attitude. Character beats for action in example can be dispositional, motivational, or decisive. Character thoughts can be emotive, reflective, informative and argumentative. (Rabiger 331, 332) I recall pointing out beats like these to Scott during shooting of the armoire entry sequence in particular. Scott first has the realization of where the key is hidden. He has a beat of discovery when he finds it. Once Scott moves to the bedroom, there is a fast beat of determination to break inside and when he finally does, a beat for surprise. This was a fun sequence to direct since all of this had to be communicated on the screen non-verbally.

There were other moments where I remember working with actors to shift a mood or tone by the use of dramatic beats. In the couple's dinner conversation, Naomi is evasive of Scott's general questions about her day. Scott asks about the Christmas card, probing more until Naomi answers that it was from an "old boyfriend, a long time ago". We rehearsed this scene for moments where naïve questions shift to concern for Scott.

Understanding dramatic beats better and using this language in directing would have allowed me to have more motivated performances and camera work in my film. They, in a way, force a director to measure choices about how they may serve the whole of the story.

Working with actors continues to be a skill I hope to develop. After shooting this short film, I was motivated to take a directing class through the theater program at UNO. The experience I had in directing theater was challenging but very much worth the effort. It was such an eye-opening experience to work with actors in a setting where all the "drama" of the scene needed to be built by blocking, tempo and performance. There were no cameras or editing devices to rely on.

In directing actors I have learned to try to see individual obstacles or handicaps and work to remove them. This was attempted in directing *Her Closet* to some extent. Naomi, for example, had the tendency to slip into a sing-song effect; reading all the lines with the same intonation. In rehearsals we worked to break out of this by reading the script with big exaggerations. For example, I had her read the script as she yelled, whined or whispered.

I believe I was able to accomplish the lessening of personal insecurities in rehearsals. I wanted to build a comfortable, relaxed relationship among the three of us. It was my goal in production to be as supportive and gentle with the actors as possible. Scott, for example, told me he was made vulnerable by running about in his pajamas. He was also exposed by playing a character who felt really impotent in his relationship. "Egos are threatened when they (actors) play contemptible characters or show characters bad parts" (Rabiger 42) It was important to build trust with Scott during rehearsal and production.

Authors all suggest that a director should be ready to improvise and observe what may surprisingly come out of experiment or accidents. "As I understand it, the imagination does not guide the hand, but is led by the hand when we have forgotten ourselves in the application of some craft. Once each stage of invention is committed to some substantial form, it is like a mirror revealing the imagination itself. Suddenly, things we did not see before become clear, or new possibilities emerge, and there is new material to work with." (Katz 5)

I made use other exercises in the pre-production process such as creating a shot list and storyboard. I also wonder if floor plans for lights and camera placements would have proven useful as well. This possibly could have contributed to the better use of screen language in the film, or shot choices, movement and finally edited sequences.

A director seeks to create dynamic elements in the frame that are visually interesting and dramatic. Camera set-ups should be chosen with motivated positions and movements. Using the ideas of depth and starting and ending compositions can help to create dynamic images. Camera style or choices can add overall tonality and layers of meaning to a script. The camera presence too can have its own voice in a way. In subjective filming, for example, the camera works from the view point of a given character. This too can serve as a more naturalistic approach, chosen possibly to serve a story with aims of realism.

A camera can also anticipate action by searching ahead or panning to reveal something inside the scene. It can also choose wider angles and provide a view that is not related directly to a character's visual perception. The objective camera imposes a moviemaker's eye where the camera moves to focus on what a director finds important. This can be related too to an authorial or storytellers point of view. (Rabiger 201, 405) I attempted to use this camera presence in *Her Closet* to create the voice of the watchful eye of a storyteller. There are a few limited examples of this in the final application of *Her Closet*. Unfortunately, as mentioned, some of these shots needed to be scrapped in editing because they were not performed smoothly. One shot that remains is a wandering camera movement to the armoire during one of Scott's evenings alone. I wanted the camera to move about the house in the opening scenes, but again this was not successful in application. Other set-ups such as the wide-angle on Naomi leaving Stephen or the overhead shots in the hallway were chosen to help create this objective camera tone and did remain in the film.

The other visual tools a director has before her besides actors and camera are all of the visual elements of lighting, locations, art direction, and costumes. I chose to maximize these visual elements as much as possible to support the film's themes and tone. I strove to create visual metaphors, like the dollhouse, and worked to keep these metaphors subtle or organic; not heavy handed in the film. The colorful use of lighting in the film served to remove it from realism and allow for the fantastic resolution of entering the armoire. I also tried to keep a consistency in color palette in costumes and set, working with reds, creams and greens.

As a result of this production I now realize how much directing requires leadership and communications skills. It is up to the director to protect and nurture the egos of the actors and communicate effectively and clearly to the crew. Being a director requires a "tough minded leader" who can "function when isolated" and "make much out of little". (Rabiger 41) Given that the crew and cast followed me to the end of a project and that we finished within a limited amount of time and resources, I believe I was successful in this area. Watching the film now, I see how much I still needed to learn about blocking and dramatic performances.

Most of the problems in this production I feel can be related more to script and conceptualization of story. Although the production, I believe, was filmed well, the things I am most concerned with are creating characters and worlds that are credible and compelling. Rabiger offers this perspective, "When fiction screen works fail, they do so not because they are

badly filmed but because the conceptual infrastructure to every aspect of the work is weak or non-existent...there is no unity, individuality or force of story concept which means developing energy and originality in the writing and having something worthwhile and deeply felt to say." (Rabiger xiii) It is these ideas of story conception, dramatic premise and writing application that I evaluate to more extent in the next chapters of this thesis.

CHAPTER 8: SCREENPLAY AND CONCEPT CRITICISM

Short films and feature films require different approaches to writing. Their similarities are limited to the broadest ideas of filmmaking; they both rely on visual action, plot dynamics and characterization at some level. As film students we have the opportunity of learning about writing for both. It is useful to distinguish the two when discussing how I approached writing *Her Closet* and how my approach could have been clearer.

Short films require a great economy due to constraints in running time. In features, there are greater expectations of character complexity, multiple plot points, the existence of a sub-plot and secondary story-lines. Short films must have urgent goals and plots need to build quickly. Short films require a restricted number of characters. Cooper and Dancyger suggest 3 to 4 characters as a maximum. (Cooper and Dancyger 5) There is a condensed approach in creating character for short films and simple plotting is used. There is "no sub-plot" (Cooper and Dancyger 5)

The difference in act lengths is also significant. The concepts of three-act structure are more applicable to feature length films. Features are created with a theoretical time of 30 minutes for act I, 60min for act II, and 30min for act III. The catalytic event begins the second act and the "action" of the film. This idea of the three-act structure and plot development are advanced by authors like Syd Field. The meat of the film exists in Act II where struggles, obstacles and plot turns drive toward a climax and following resolution. Three-act structure can be very confusing when applied to a short film.

In a short film, structure is compressed. There is not the unfolding characterization and developing relationships built in act II of feature length films. It could be said that the longest proportion of time in short films is dedicated to the main character finding a resolution.

Short films, as they are closer to poetry, short stories, and one-act plays, have a wider possibility for using "metaphor" or "other literary devices" to tell a story. In feature films, realism is more expected. (Cooper and Dancyger 5) I felt this freedom to create the unusual tone and fantastical story choices in *Her Closet*.

Finding the starting point

There are many suggestions to begin writing on a screenplay. Ideas such as brainstorming in idea clusters, free-form writing and experimenting with plot with the use of diagrams are all offered in various texts on screenwriting. The methods I used; writing a draft as a short story and outlining proved useful, but I believe that the development process for *Her Closet* could have been stronger.

We all start writing from ideas, images, feelings, friend's lives or our own. Rabiger supports starting from short story format and also suggests "idea clustering" with topics to see relationships. (Rabiger 150) After this is done, a writer then pulls out a sort of dramatist "toolbox" to spot narrative elements and beginning focal points.

All authors point to the importance of the dramatic core, premise or concept of the film. I think that the work I did to define the dramatic core of the film is in part why *Her Closet* was at all successful. Better focus might have created an even stronger film. This would have lead to a better structure and more deeply felt plot and characterization.

Finding a starting place in screenwriting, like many other creative processes, can be difficult because all the possibilities are overwhelming. One concept I found that would have been useful in focusing my idea is Cooper and Dancyger's suggestions on story framing. Cooper and Dancyger suggest starting by choosing what they call "story forms," which is like genre for a short film. The story forms they offer include docudrama, mockumentary, comedy, satire, fable, morality tale, the journey and the event. (Cooper and Dancyger 113-115) Most successful short films use one of these story forms or have combinations of these forms

Her Closet is a morality tale. It is an allegorical story that takes a position on an issue. Stephen pays a price for his negative behavior and final action. The story has an authorial tone with a lesson superimposed on the narrative: jealousy can be a trap. In one synopsis, I used the word fable to describe *Her Closet*. Fables also convey a moral lesson as well, but they further carry with them associations of the "marvelous or mythical." Fables also frequently employ animals as characters. (Cooper and Dancyger 115) *Her Closet* does employ an inanimate object, although not an animal, as the antagonist. The armoire has a magical and mythical quality that could be associated with a fable. Fairytales are classic examples of the fable. As mentioned earlier, *Her Closet* is reminiscent of many fairytales, including the French fairy-tale Bluebeard.

The morality tale and fable provide a life lesson for a particular group. *Her Closet* speaks directly to those involved in intimate relationships.

Her Closet has aspects of other story forms that are worth looking at. When Stephen finally breaks into the armoire and climbs inside, the audience has the excitement for the adventure that would be present in a journey story. Films that use the journey structure promise to take the viewer on an adventure into unknown worlds. The story is structured around a main character leaving home and seeking adventure. This is also considered one of the oldest forms of storytelling. The "Hero's Journey," offered in texts relating myth to screenwriting and championed by Joseph Campbell, is an offshoot of the journey concept.

In the journey story the main character must overcome obstacles to become a hero. *Her Closet* could have been a journey film if I would have focused on Stephen's journey into the armoire and his obstacles faced before finding the final room. Structurally, however, this moment is the film's resolution and not its main body of action.

What a different film *Her Closet* could have if I would have focused my ideas into a journey form structure! The story would start with Stephen entering the armoire and would then follow with his obstacles and encounters in this new, fantastical world. The effect of being locked in the armoire at the end would be much more tragic. He didn't become a hero as we hope in a hero's journey process. Rather, Stephen would be made a victim by this defeat. The audience would feel a need to be rooting for Stephen in the journey form. This is contradictory to what I wanted the experience of the film to be. The story I wanted was a morality tale that would also incorporate ideas of audience distance and authorial voice.

Another design I could have focused on for this story is the event form. In this form *Her Closet* could have started in a "ritual occasion" structure where we see a character stuck in his day-to-day routine. In this form, an archetypal character arrives and shakes the main character into action. (Cooper and Dancyger 14-17) The character's situation is changed and the adventure finds the main character, as opposed to the character seeking it out in the journey form.

In a way, Stephen is stuck in the ritual situation of returning home each night to a cold and distant relationship. He is pulled into this story of jealousy with the arrival, in the form of a Christmas card, of Naomi's old lover. Old lovers and ex-boyfriends could be argued as archetypes, they are easily recognized producers of jealousy and insecurity in romantic relationships. Stephen is pulled out of his acceptance of the cold relationship and is now

motivated to change. He must find out the truth about his distant wife and her relationship with the ex. With this structure, the ex-boyfriend would continue in the story, perhaps playing a more significant role as an antagonist. I knew that I wanted Stephen's principal struggle to be with himself. His insecurities become projected onto the armoire. It is Stephen himself who causes his fate in the end of the story.

Archetypes, myths and psychoanalytical approaches

The idea of archetype is useful to study in developing and writing screenplays. Many authors point to how they are powerful devices that resonate with audiences on a deep psychological level. Because I am interested in creating fantastical and allegorical works, they will continue to be something I try to weave into my stories. "Films that break out of realism connect us to archetypes" (Rabiger 16).

Archetypes are archaic or primordial images that have existed since the beginning of history. They have found expression in tribal lore, mythology, fairy-tales, religious systems and primitive art. The psychologist, Carl Jung, laid the foundation for the understanding of archetypes and myth associations. His theories argue that a collective unconscious exists which links all civilizations to one another on a symbolic level. "The repository for all archetypes is the collective unconscious." (Iaccino xi) Archetypes are not fully developed pictures, but rather "forms without contents" that different influences and experimentations define. Writers take these forms and apply them to all different types of characterizations and story containers.

The persona and shadow archetypes deal directly with Stephen in *Her Closet*. Persona originally meant the mask that actors put on to assume a part in a play (Iaccino xiii) It is our conscious outer face, our social mask that we put on to conceal private self. It is necessary for us to maintain our persona to carry out functions society expects of us.

Shadow is the opposite of persona and it is the aspect of self we tend to ignore and repress from consciousness. All of our inferiorities, unacceptable impulses and shameful behaviors constitute this dark side of our personality. The shadow rarely operates in a civilized manner; instead it uses "pre-logical" types of thinking governed by strong desires and animalistic needs. (Iaccino xiv) Stephen's shadow side gets the best of him in *Her Closet*. It is his irrational side, driven by jealousy that slowly emerges and eventually gives him the push to jump into an armoire. Persona and shadow are struggling forces in Stephen. Seeing this as a clearer dynamic,

I could have worked more to develop this idea in *Her Closet*. Possibly, I could have shown Stephen really trying to repress his shadow side; maybe he becomes embarrassed by his insecurities.

Besides shadow, the gender archetypes of anima and animus could have also been applied to *Her Closet*. According to Carl Jung's theories, the collective unconscious contains a sub-personality to each individual's gender, anima for male and animus for female. (Iaccino xiv) There are issues of gender in *Her Closet* and I wanted to have an awareness of male and female dynamics. Part of Stephen's insecurity in a way is how he is made vulnerable or emasculated by his wife; this could be referred to as the anima archetype being playing out. Perhaps, this could have been amplified by Naomi playing out her animus tendencies; she could be domineering or even violent. Is her cold nature enough to play out the animus? My film's character relationship could have shown this. Stephen is overpowered by his wife and is made even more vulnerable and motivated to break into the armoire. In Jung's terms, Stephen is emasculated by the anima projected by his wife and takes a characteristically irrational approach to solving his problem.

If I would have focused the story on the earlier notion of Naomi being a black widow type, I could have developed the story using the idea of the succubus; another archetype offered by William Indick. A succubus, Indick explains, is a powerful sexual figure in early myths that invaded dreams of innocent people and ravished them while they slept. They represent primal impulses, sex and aggression. They are not limited to harming or seducing, but can also represent "guilt, fear, shame, loneliness, anxiety and doubt". (Indick 73)

Other examples of these negative female archetypal characters are nymphs, sirens, evil mothers, or femme-fatales. Naomi could have had a stronger push on the story and plot by using these ideas of archetype. It's possible that this too could have helped to make the story more powerful and engaging.

William Indick also speaks on the "psychology of opposites" and that every psychological power has its opposing force, such as the shadow and persona and animus and anima discussed earlier. What we strive for is psychological balance or a sense of internal balance. Anytime a "split" in one person exists, or "psychotic split", there is an immediate fear response from the audience (Indick 118) The shadow character represents the human desires and behaviors we often strive to control in society. Horror's villains or serial murders for example are shadow characters that represent this psychological opposite. At the same time, we cannot

run away from our shadows, as Stephen might try to do by pretending it doesn't exist. Characters or individuals must eventually face their shadow in order to become whole beings. Stephen, then, faces his shadow in the final, armoire room.

Another psychological idea that could be applied to *Her Closet* is the idea of neurosis. Neurosis is seen as a repeat compulsive and insatiable behavior. This behavior could have been demonstrated further by Stephen; perhaps he rummages around the house looking for the key every morning or has the obsessive behavior of fixing his hair every minute to keep up appearances. All of these archetypal and psychological applications help to at least brainstorm and visualize potential character behaviors and scenes for a film.

Choosing a voice and point of view

Voice, as I understand it, is how you want the audience to interpret your story or feel about the choices and actions that happen. Should an audience laugh, feel sympathetic, or disturbed? It is also the point of view of the main character and their positioning in the story itself. Are they an observer or in the middle of the conflict?

First of all, *Her Closet* is told from the perspective of the jealous husband, not the wife. The audience traditionally would be inclined to identify and sympathize with Stephen. I wanted the audience to be removed emotionally from Stephen's character. If the audience sympathized too much for Stephen, I thought he couldn't be punished so harshly for his wrong in the end. This would have been a different type of film; a tragedy possibly.

I also wanted to make a film that had a reflexive and thought provoking quality that is created by audience distance and voice. The lesson of the film itself and the audience's reflection are more important than the experience of learning or identifying with Stephen as a character in the film. It is an authorial voice that I strove for that is in keeping with the form of the morality tale. How you decide to position your character to the events in the story is important in creating voice. The further away a character is positioned from the dramatic core, the more a sense of detachment is created. Detachment is not necessarily a negative trait; it is with detachment that "irony" and reflection can happen. (Cooper and Dancyger 191)

Morality tales, like fairytales, create distance with characters and the audience and distance is useful in this form. The audience has a sense that they are watching the events or are being walked through the story by a storyteller. Rabiger discusses this idea of voice as point of

view in his text. An authorial or storyteller's point of view exists when "the film expresses central personality and attitude toward the character and their story" (Rabiger 203) The central personality and attitude being that of the filmmaker.

A third-person narrator is often seen in fairytale or morality tale forms as a means of creating audience distance. Although *Her Closet* did not use a narrator, I believe a storyteller's voice is evoked in the film. The film doesn't pull the audience into a first person, emotional ride. It's true that my main character is in the middle of the situation; I didn't tell the story from the view point of his best friend watching from outside the relationship. My main character is involved in the conflict, so his positioning is close. Still, the voice of the film is not one that is deeply involved with a character in intense situations. I argue more that *Her Closet* uses a storyteller's voice by the use of tone, presentation of symbol and metaphor and the objective, often distant shot choices.

Rabiger suggests that audience distance created by point of view has an old tradition in film and plays. He calls this the "Brechtian discourse". This idea was advanced by filmmakers like Godard, Gilliam, and Greenway to deliberately disrupt the audience's ever-present desire to lapse into "that waking dream of identification" and, "suicidal escapism" (Rabiger 238). *Her Closet* does not use the extreme audience distance seen in many of these films. I did not want my film to be stylized or "artsy" with a deliberate awareness of the present filmmaker at work. I did want the audience to be caught up in the dream, so to speak, but still have the opportunity to reflect on the events taking place and apply it as metaphor and symbol.

Stephen's actions are quieted. A lot is left to the audience to sense the subtle tension in his relationship through abbreviated dialogue, for example. Stephen is involved in the story, but the audience is removed from Stephen as a character. They do not experience his turmoil first hand nor are they expected to identify with him. This hopefully allows for reflection rather than reactions to an emotional experience. We watch his demise and think about it. This voice is supported by the use of objective camera positions. Possibly, the audience's distance in *Her Closet* can be better attributed to how the film used the element of tone.

Creating the film's tone

Tone is an offshoot of voice. Tone gives the audience guidance on how they should feel about what is happening. Tone is created by the type of observation incorporated in the story.

Tone is seen in every visual detail as well as in the style of dialogue. There is a sort of black comedy appeal in *Her Closet* with Stephen's decline into insecurity. During the screening at the New Orleans' Film Festival, I was pleased to hear the sort of sincere and honest laughter by a few viewers when Stephen sheepishly begins his walk into the armoire and when, at the end, the camera pulls back to lock him inside. We don't feel sorry for Stephen and at the same time we don't think he's a monster. I didn't characterize Stephen to be an overly sympathetic or a stereotyped, jealous or potentially violent male. The visual choice of pajamas, for example, serves to help Stephen appear more childlike and naive.

The world the couple lives in has a strange, unworldly and whimsical quality. We see a large dollhouse, an aluminum Christmas tree, and an old fat Santa on a Christmas card. The fact that Stephen faces off to an armoire and finds a secret hallway has a level of absurdity. It's a tragic ending to be locked up forever in a box, but I didn't want the audience gushing with tears at a tragedy or experiencing horror film terror. I think this was achieved by the use of a whimsical tone and the idea of point of view talked about earlier; the removal of emotional connection with Stephen.

The dialogue in the film is short, curt and odd. However, I now think that the dialogue is simply poorly written. At any rate, it was another attempt, like the choices in art direction, to create the antirealist tone in the film.

I also attempted to create tone and point of view in the film with camera movement and placement. I wanted the camera to seem like an observational or storyteller's eye, having its own motivation to move about the rooms in the couple's world. A shot was created originally that wandered across the bedroom in one of Stephen's late nights, eventually revealing the armoire. The shot was scrapped because of its bumpy camera work and serves only as a response to Stephen's look. I chose a very wide angle on Naomi leaving to show both the distance that exists between Stephen and his wife and also to create an objective feeling. This objective feeling is similar to the overhead positioning affect a camera has to create a god-like point of view. An overhead position was chosen in the red hallway sequence for this reason also.

I certainly had a sense of tone and voice when writing and directing the film. How successful voice and tone was in final application of *Her Closet* is arguable. Later experiences and readings continued to help me build a clearer understanding that will hopefully build more cohesive, consistent and powerful works in the future.

Characterization

The importance of characterization depends on the story form. Characterization is often looked at as the aim to create whole and not flat characters. Flat characters are easily recognized, but can serve the story in different ways. Cooper and Dancyger argue that plotting is emphasized more than characterization in a morality tale like *Her Closet*. (Cooper and Dancyger 190)

Characters in *Her Closet* then, can be more archetypal or allegorical. The energy of the film has to be created in the plot. I had a desire to use my characters as allegory, but because the film is so much about psychology, it is also inherently character driven. I wanted to make the characters believable, not just flat symbols for large human themes or painted characters like in Kabuki theater. I have learned with the film's reception that creating allegorical characters is hard to do. Audiences still have expectations of realism. It is hard to accept characters that are representational and not fleshy, believable beings that could have walked out of the everyday world.

I saw *Her Closet* as an allegory, but still built characterization. It is somewhere in the middle of allegory and realism, (perhaps this is a problem because it doesn't take a clear stand on either side of the spectrum). Stephen does have specific and intentional physical characteristics. He wears glasses, reflecting his more quiet or vulnerable side. He is professional in appearance; we first see him in a suit with a briefcase. When he wears those stripped pajamas it has the effect of being humorous because it is out of character. Stephen keeps it all in; he is quiet and passive in nature. Scott once described the character in *Her Closet* as "a tight-wound package about to explode." This notion contributed to the animated title sequence.

Stephen lets his wife fall asleep and doesn't pursue the issue. His choice to drink alone in bed and his action to break into the armoire the way he does make him all the more vulnerable and passive-aggressive. He doesn't break into the armoire with an axe and he doesn't bully Naomi into opening it. His way of standing off to Naomi is to sleep in late and tell her that he want to take the day off. He's not a brazen, jealous male. He brings the conflict on himself, taking it out on himself. His character can be read as a seemingly refined adult male with a childlike insecurity.

Naomi is allegorical. She's beautiful; with that long blonde hair, I thought reminiscent of the unobtainable, classic examples of feminine beauty. She's distant, not responsive in

conversation. In a way she's the unobtainable goal of male desire. She says she's sleepy in the beginning when Stephen arrives. She falls asleep on him and by doing so, cuts off their conversation. The idea of her always falling asleep is like the fairytale princesses who seem to always be in some state of slumber. Naomi wears her purple, silk pajamas with hands folded effeminately under her peaceful face.

She also is always slipping away from Scott (with a thin dancer's body). She leaves dinner early and is already on her way out when Stephen wakes up. She's the fawn or image he is chasing. Her character becomes just a shadow taunting Scott inside the armoire. Her reaction in the last scene after Stephen is gone is intentionally unreadable. We still don't know what she is thinking, even if it is she who we are left alone with at the end.

In the hero's journey, the main character is made more heroic or victimized by what the antagonist amplifies. Stephen was not on a heroic journey. His character needed to be drawn out using other devices. Cooper and Dancyger offered suggestions of humor or having the character stepping out of public self by showing us their private moments.

We are alone with Scott in the evenings and while he is getting dressed alone with the armoire. He shakes on the armoire door with curiosity. Could Stephen have revealed other traits here that I wish I would have employed in this private moment? Yes! Maybe Stephen shows insecurity by pretending to be stronger in the mirror. Maybe Stephen shows his jealous obsession by sneaking about the room smelling his wife's things.

The drive of character can be looked at as manic energy or as a drive to fill a deep seated need. Understanding motivation, a writer can then imagine physical and behavioral characteristics. Tension between thought and action should be used. Stephen wants to ask more about his wife and her ex-boyfriend in the first night but holds himself back. Thus the conversation continues and we see that Stephen, even after time has expired, is still stewing over the topic in bed.

Another suggestion for characterization is to use "signage". (Cooper and Dancyger 134) Some characters have a particular phrase associated with them or a marked behavior in response to situations. Stephen could have kept responding at the end of every argument with "I'm fine". How wonderful and even comical that could have been! Any repetitive behavioral patterns like signage are useful. Repetitive behaviors also show that "emotions are winning out", (Cooper and Dancyger 134) This would follow in Stephen's case. Perhaps drinking while in bed could have

been demonstrated as more repetitive; maybe by just having a plethora of bottles and empty glasses set about. Maybe Stephen continues to straighten a tie that he can never fix in the mirror. Using Stephen's reflection in the mirror would allow other fun devices to play with the role of the armoire. Maybe the armoire always shows a very unbecoming reflection of Stephen; a good idea that also brings in another fairytale motif.

A final idea I relate to Stephen's characterization is the importance of change. Dramatists and authors on screenwriting generally agree that character must show some growth or change. Stephen does change. I wanted to use the two repeating sequences of Stephen returning home to help show this. In the opening "arriving home sequence" he is dressed up, seemingly normal, briefcase in hand and bounding up the stairs with dinner for two. In the later "coming home sequence," Stephen walks through the gate but this time he is smoking with his jacket open. This time he sort of swaggers towards the house. When Stephen discovers his wife is already sleeping he stares at her for a moment before eying the armoire again. I'm not sure if these sequences were strong enough to show that Stephen does slowly unwind. It is possible my ideas were too subtle in the final application. Stephen does go from asking mild mannered questions in an adult facade to breaking into an armoire in stripped pajamas; a big change, but perhaps his transition could have been stronger.

Dialogue

Many short films do not rely on an absolute sense of realism and I had created the dialogue for *Her Closet* in a style I hoped would show that the story was not realistic. In genres such as fable and parable, the balancing between realism and fantasy is the challenge for the writer. If it is too "objectified," it will flatten out the fantastic dimension of the film. If it is too "passionate" or subjective, it will undermine the parable by appearing to be too much from viewpoint of a character. (Cooper and Dancyger 140)

I knew I wanted to create the sense of a cold, artificial and distant relationship by having characters talking curtly to one another. In the dinner scene the wife responds evasively, only answering direct questions. The husband can only respond passively, loading his small talk with other meanings or subtext. With this said, I feel that the film's use of dialogue, in the end, was still not successful.

Many student filmmakers seem to be intimidated by dialogue. Advice I later read is that less is better. "Too many scripts are ruined by inappropriate dialogue...our message is you can always get away with less dialogue". (Cooper and Dancyger 147) *Her Closet* is not an example of brilliant dialogue. I think in its most humble aims it does show what each character wants. Stephen asks questions; Naomi avoids him. With practice, I hope to one day acquire stronger skills in writing better dialogue.

Conflict, plot and creating energy in the script

The idea of energy is discussed by Rabiger as well as Cooper and Dancyger. Creating stories that have energy is a critical aim for any screenwriter. Energy can come from great characters, snazzy dialogue or engaging plots. Creating energetic plots requires conflict. Conflict is the posing of character against character, setting, community, and society. This is what creates dramatic action, "the movement of spirit or psyche that produces a character's behavior directly, turning psychology into behavior." as expressed by Elia Kazan.

Because I chose to have a distant voice I had difficulties in creating engaging conflict from the start of this project. "Clearly a more distant voice neutralizes some opportunities for conflict". (Cooper and Dancyger 117) Authors don't argue against this distant voice, but building conflict is more challenging because the character is not essentially in the throws of it. We are not on a dynamic ride that is immediately engaging because of its emotional intensity.

I feel that this was and is still a hard problem in keeping *Her Closet* engaging, particularly in the first half. Once Stephen breaks his cool a little and starts acting more "dramatically," the pace picks up.

What I learned with feedback and in screenings of the film was that audiences become engaged once Stephen gets into the armoire and discovers the hallway. This is also because of a related screenwriting topic, the use of surprise in plot. Surprise is a method of adding energy to plot. The surprise happens when we discover that the armoire is actually a functioning hallway and thus the film picks up energy.

Another method of creating energy in plot or characterization is using polarity. In character polarity is created with opposing behaviors, goals and situations. It is the existence of opposing traits or needs. Cooper and Dancyger offer the examples of a blind detective or a weak athlete. It can be a character's physical traits or behaviors. Looking at my film, I thought that

the use of my character falling asleep in broad daylight was an example of polarity. A clearer example is Stephen's opposing goals of finding out his wife's secrets and keeping her; not losing her to his jealousy. In their dinner conversation Stephen does not want his wife to know he's jealous. "I'm fine" he feigns to her as she falls off to sleep. Another example of polarity is seen in Stephen's actions and appearance. His decision to break into the armoire in his stripped pajamas is unmannered and childish, heightened more by the professional garb of tie and briefcase.

One of the best suggestions I found in the plotting process was to write down a generous list of plot points. With this list, the writer can then look for logic and proportion in events. Plot points are then organized into to the dimension of form, i.e. the journey has beginning, middle and end. Having a better understanding and language for screenwriting, I now dissect my film from beginning to end to look for where it could have been stronger.

Beginning

Where you begin sets the stage for script, "it's the invitation to engage audience in story... here a writer should maximize the dramatic possibilities of story" (Cooper and Dancyger 85). The opening of *Her Closet* still bothers me. The first shot is of my main character, coming out of darkness and entering through an iron gate. He proceeds up a flight of grand stairs to his home. Once inside, he calls for his wife and we know that the house is empty as opposed to welcoming with love and people.

When I wrote this opening, I wanted to convey something about my main character and the current situation of his relationship. He's the routine business man; with a briefcase and suit, returning to a quiet and cold house. The quiet, empty house is indicative of his relationship to his wife.

The inciting incident and first plot point are combined in the short film. This is what I wanted the mysterious and suspicious Christmas card Stephen finds to be. It's the first cause and sign of insecurity from Stephen and it launches the first conversation at dinner.

In these first seconds, Stephen discovers that the Christmas card is addressed to Naomi (assuming we know this is his wife) and that it is signed with a male name. Scott's expression shows concern, but does the Christmas card alone show that an ex-lover is contacting his wife? The card chosen is a large, pointing Santa Claus; something I thought eluded to a powerful male

almost challenging Stephen. This is a loose and abstract articulation. The card could have been more intense, possibly with words of missing love visible on its surface.

I wanted a sense of mystery about this male figure; it is Stephen's imagination, as in jealousy, that causes his ruin. If the card and the ex-boyfriend had really warranted an understandable response from Stephen, his jealousy would not seem so appropriate. Again the idea of voice comes up and positioning Stephen away from intense emotional conflict.

I sometimes thought of opening the film with Stephen spying on his wife through those large windows before he finally decides to enter. I can still visualize a scene with him sneaking about his front yard with habitual demeanor and a pair of worn binoculars. This would have been engaging no doubt to start with. By starting with such a heightened level of jealousy and emotional intensity in action, it would have then seemed natural to escalate it. Would Stephen the end have to break through the armoire with an axe? Thoughts of running axes through very expensive furniture began speaking to the very different side of the producer in me. I also thought if I pushed the throttle higher and higher, the film would be a different type of film. Sounds more like a thrill ride.

As mentioned, the story picks up after Stephen and Naomi's last argument. Stephen then makes a choice to do something; to get into that Armoire. This idea of getting into the armoire could have been developed in earlier scenes. Getting into the armoire becomes more of an obstacle. Maybe he tries different means unsuccessfully or calls up a locksmith who can't do it. Maybe he trashes the house looking for the key. These ideas would have been developed into a better act II or middle section of this script.

Building the middle

In the middle of the story, the adventure begins. Here is where the mechanics of struggle, confusion, and desire to achieve a goal are developed. In short films, as discussed, the act structure doesn't apply and we won't have time to develop the story into and full act II and act III set-up. The act II section in a short could be best described as how difficult the undertaking is for the character to achieve the goal. Stephen's goal is to get inside the armoire and to learn more about the secrets of his wife.

The middle of *Her Closet* is made up of four conversations between the couple that grow into an argument at the end when his wife leaves. In each of their interactions, Naomi is always

running away or falling asleep and thus cutting Stephen off. Possibly this is a fine choice for structuring a film, even if I sometimes wish I would have made more interesting choices. We do understand that Stephen is frustrated with his wife, who is secretive and avoiding something. Stephen's insecurities and jealousy grow.

Watching the film now, I know Naomi's last exit should have been heightened; she needs to be storming out after their discussion, clearly upset at this point with his nosing around. Although I wanted a delicate film with small actions magnified, I should have found places to up the throttle more and not shy away from conflict.

What is seen finally in this last argument is Stephen's desire to talk to a wife who still keeps blowing him off. (I did attempt to employ a use of sound to show this. The honk of Naomi's mother's horn waiting outside heightens the tension of the argument and literally makes Stephen drowned out, impotent again.) He can't know anything about her. He must trust her to return home and tell him. She says, "Wait, I'll talk about it with you when I get home." Stephen's not satisfied and can't wait; instead he decides to take the leap. We understand Stephen's need to know more about his wife, but is their conflict really clear or strong enough together?

Stephen's "triangulation" of goals (another new learned screenwriting term) is the desire to know more about his wife or the locked secrets in the armoire and at the same time keep his pretty wife. His breaking into her things could lose her. Their conversations show that she does not want him in the armoire. He asks her why she locks it and she says "It's a secret." Dialogue in these scenes could have emphasized this conflict. He could argue how he wants to open the armoire and she continues to refuse. He has a goal, getting into the armoire, and she opposes his goal by keeping him out.

I wonder too if I could have made the obstacles harder for Stephen. Naomi continues to not to give up the key despite Stephen's begging and insistence. Maybe Naomi has to hide the key several times from him. What happened is that I made the antagonist in the story the armoire and not his wife. But even knowing that the armoire is the antagonist and feeling more confident with that choice, I should have pushed the dynamic more. My idea of using mirages in the mirrors was a way of showing that the armoire was teasing Stephen; this could have been pulled off better. Maybe the armoire could reflect unbecoming images of Stephen to heighten his insecurity. Maybe too the armoire refuses to take Stephen's key.

The armoire as antagonist is shown in a scene with Stephen in bed, having a sort of stare down with his opponent. Stephen's now having a drink in bed, showing he's cracking. He lowers his eyes and we see that it is the armoire that's receiving his angry stare. The armoire had magical life. When shooting, we set-up a shot with snow falling in the armoire's glass doors. This was to make the object animated, displaying the armoire's life within. I also wanted the armoire to be taunting Stephen with the mirage of snow falling in its glass doors. The mirage disappears when he blinks and Stephen wonders, as does the audience, if he is just crazy.

In the editing, the mirage shot was found not to work. Perhaps a better choice could have been having the armoire reflect an unbecoming image of Stephen as he straightens his tie in the morning; this accompanied by ominous laughter rolling inside. Although this is over the top, the point is that by standing with the idea of the armoire as the antagonist to Stephen's goal and working to get more out of this, might have made the film more exciting.

Endings and resolutions

The end of a screenplay, or act III in features, typically provides a resolution. Films don't have to have resolutions, but I believe *Her Closet* does. A way of looking at resolution is whether or not the character achieves his goal. Stephen achieves the goal of getting inside the armoire. He pays a horrible price and hears every negative thought his wife ever thought of him along with getting trapped. Since this is a morality tale, he's punished for his bad behavior of jealousy, or violation of another's private world, and is locked inside.

Stephen's wife was just hiding Christmas presents all along in that armoire. Stephen caused his own fate. This is not a Venus-fly trap story as some responders thought. Some viewers also saw Naomi as this sort of black widow type that likes to trap men in her wardrobe. This is a great idea, but a different film. Stephen would have then found a group of ex-boyfriend's commiserating inside the armoire, asking him what he was in for.

Although Stephen's goal is resolved, the final scene in *Her Closet* is intentionally ambiguous. Naomi returns home, places the present inside and shuts the armoire again. She only pauses for a moment, her expression still unreadable. We still don't know what Naomi is thinking or if she is aware that her husband is gone. We are back to reality and the armoire has returned to its ordinary state. What really happened? We are not sure what to believe. With this scene the story could be said to be unresolved. Still, the ending is satisfying because it is a

morality tale. The punishment of Stephen follows as promised. I think the greatest problems in the story are in the middle section where plot and obstacles should have been more engaging.

The differences between plots employed in comic vs. tragic forms are interesting. With a comic character, the plot provides for him, not against him. Tragic characters are presented as victims of the plot. They are always struggling not to be made a victim of what is being thrown at them and there is an expectation that the character won't give in too easily. The idea of a character sacrificing too easily to plot is a problem with *Her Closet*. Stephen doesn't try that hard to get to the secrets and the armoire.

Stephen's accomplishment of unlocking the armoire should have been made more difficult. Finding the key was too easy. He remembers where Naomi hid the key in a flashback. (I had to use the offensive flashback to make the story cohesive in editing.) Even a little more of an obstacle would have helped the climax. Stephen could have hurt his finger trying to pry the key out of the dollhouse. Anything additional would have been helpful.

The importance of dramatic core and premise

Along with using these earlier suggestions, I think having a clearer, shorter statement of my dramatic core from the beginning would have helped to create a more interesting film. Creating a solid dramatic core is essential. This is the heart of story, all action and events derive from the core idea. It is the "energy source" and "magnet" for the character and his actions. (Cooper and Dancyger 119) In *Her Closet*, the idea that jealousy is a trap is the dramatic core although this was not expressed so simply in the script.

Cooper and Dancyger emphasize that the dramatic core of a story can otherwise be called a premise or concept. Rabiger offers that the premise or concept is the dramatic idea of a scene or the whole movie. *Her Closet's* energy was fueled by the idea of jealousy, something I saw much clearer while directing and editing.

This story started with ideas of individual private space; the private and individualized world that we have inside ourselves. Being John Malcovich took this idea to the notion "what if we could experience what others experience from inside themselves?" *Her Closet*, as a morality tale, strove to show the dangers of violating another's private space with harmful consequences. With too much psychotherapy and analytic self searching a sinking relationship can be trapping. We get trapped in our own rationalizations, thoughts, insecurities. Manipulating or trying to

over psychoanalyze others can be a terrible thing to do as well; we should tread carefully in the interior worlds of others. This was a problem seen in relationships, where interior worlds open up, blur, and are crossed with our intimacy.

So yes, jealousy was simpler. It provided very clear ideas for plot, dialogue and character behaviors and actions. When I called it jealousy it made it much easier to direct and explain motivation to actors. I think I could have gone farther with the film or just made it more engaging if I had just focused on that as the dramatic core.

I hope the film was successful without having to be such a direct study of jealousy, and that some of these other layers about interior space and primal, internal insecurities do come out of it. Not everyone who has responded to the film has said, "Oh, it's about jealousy". Some colleagues asked me if I had studied human psychology and many had different interpretations of why Stephen paid a price for his action of breaking into his wife's armoire. This was hopeful. Maybe the film did probe a little deeper into the primal, interior worlds we all have. Would the film have been a cliché with the jealous male and pretty wife without the other layers I attempted to put in?

Focusing my idea more simply certainly might have helped create a more engaging story. In retrospect, the idea of focusing the film with a clear premise, using story forms and building energy with plot and characterizations would have helped the film significantly.

CHAPTER 9: GENRE CONTEXTS

Her Closet was often categorized in film festivals as fantasy or science fiction and it is appropriate to apply a study of genre in this criticism. This context was useful to me as a filmmaker because it enabled me to examine the contexts and types of films I am interested in and influenced by. I suppose I wanted to understand where *Her Closet's* roots were as "all art must exist in some relation to the forms in the past, contrast or continuation" (Braudy 435)

Her Closet is not a genre film, but it certainly has relationships to science-fiction and horror genres. *Her Closet* has fantastical elements, but it is not really related to the fantasy genre. I did not apply a discussion of fantasy because structurally and thematically *Her Closet* is very different. Works of fantasy include films such as The Lord of the Rings trilogy or the children's film, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. These films structurally represent a hero's journey form with underlining themes of universal good versus universal evil. Fantasy films like these do play on myth; often they resonate with stories deeply rooted in our history. Similarly, *Her Closet* plays from fairytale, but this is arguably only one possible connection. I found it more relevant to focus on the genres of science-fiction and horror because they contain more directly the themes, metaphors and structure of my film.

It is important to explain what is meant by the term "genre film." "Genre films invoke past forms" and can be said to be "a deep exploration of craft rather than explosion of inspiration". (Braudy 436) The genre film lures its audience into a seemingly familiar world, filled with reassuring stereotypes of character, action, and plot. Genre films are often snubbed by self proclaimed film artists because they are not wholly original works but merely carbon copies or formula films. I believe that there is something powerful in using universal elements that an audience recognizes and relates too. They can be useful because they create a story framework that is easily understood and can create surprises based on audience expectations. There are many problems with categorizing genre films, and often compound categories exist in classifying modern films. I was not aware of choosing a genre when I developed *Her Closet*. The film was not meant to be a parody or a nostalgic return to some genre.

Much of the inspiration for *Her Closet* came from an exposure to The Twilight Zone episodes as a kid. Stories that appeared in the magazines "Amazing Stories" and "Weird Tales" by authors like H.P. Lovecraft shared similar qualities and also influenced *Her Closet*. Often

called science-fiction, these stories were basically morality tales. Characters were punished for extreme flaws or psychological dementia. Often characters were struggling to be human in the social conformity of the 1950's or in conflict with sterile technological advancements and progress. There was a general theme running through many of these works of repressed characters battling to be human in a cold or sterile world. This is similar to what *Her Closet* presents thematically. Stephen is in a cold, sterile and distant relationship. He struggles against his feelings of jealousy

At first I was perplexed by this categorization of science-fiction in film festivals. *Her Closet* does not show a character struggling against a world dominated by robots, computers, aliens or scientific advances; nor is it a vision of the future to come. With a closer study, I was finally able to see the relationship the film has to the science-fiction genre. What the film shares with science-fiction or horror genres is common themes, visual elements and underlying messages.

Science-fiction deals with the ideas of opposing forces of human qualities such as feelings, emotions and intuition with the demands of scientific objectivity or rationality. My character is, in a way, struggling with irrational behavior in a world where he must be contained, normal and adult. There is an artificiality to his current relationship that his more primitive human side is rebelling against.

Science-fiction often offers the ability to travel in space, time and scale. Examples of this include The Time Machine or The Incredible Shrinking Man. (King and Krzywinska 25-28) Although Stephen was not shrunk in size to explore the armoire world, he is able to explore another dimension with the armoire acting as a sort of portal. As in science-fiction, then, this allowed Stephen to explore some unknown territory outside of the everyday reality. Science-fiction promises to transport us to new worlds and to fictional universes. It's this flight of fantasy or promise of adventure that draws an audience in. *Her Closet* in a way does that by the revealing the interior of the armoire and hallway. Yet, this is the resolution of the film, not an offering into the main body of the story. The film could have focused on this journey into the armoire and possibly been more like a science-fiction film in that regard, but it does not.

Realism and fantasy overlap in science fiction and the ordinary can become fantastic. There is often a sense of "disorientation with familiar environments" also seen in the example of

films about scale. (King and Krzywinska 28) *Her Closet* in a way does this too; an ordinary relationship and piece of household furniture provide for a fantastical flight out of the everyday.

Another related theme from science-fiction, and horror as well, is the idea that when the order of the universe is disrupted, chaos or punishment ensues. "To break the rules of nature is to bring about Greek nemesis, which involves at least, the death of the transgressor." (King and Krzywinska 53) This idea of breaking the laws of nature or disturbing nature is a theme commonly seen in science-fiction as well as horror films. Frankenstein is an example of both. Stephen breaks a law of nature by finding a portal into his wife's interior thoughts. It is unnatural to read the minds or explore the interior world of others.

Science-fiction provides a means by which we, as a society, try to work out difficult problems in an imaginary or abstracted world. This is also in keeping with the ideas of allegory, myth and fairytale. It is this fantastical world that deals with deeply, often primal, human concerns. Both science fiction and horror are imaginary ways of resolving societal or shared anxiety problems.

The horror genre especially offers a way to work through our nightmares and anxieties. This is true of fairy-tales as well. Fairy-tales historically served as a catharsis for children to deal with the most deep-rooted fears of parental abandonment, horrific child eating witches or evil stepmothers. Authors use the word "anxiety" to describe the emotional core of science fiction as well as horror. Both genres work by playing off of our shared fears; fears that technology is moving out of our control or primordial anxieties of loss of body control from cloning or simply fears of the dark and monsters.

Her Closet too plays on deep rooted psychological anxieties. Stephen expresses many primal fears that audiences could relate to. The fear of losing one's mind and isolation are hinted at. Our insecurities as sexual beings and relationships to jealousy also play a part. Stephen makes a journey into the fear of the unknown; a bizarre and strange world. The final ending is a deep-rooted fear of being trapped, akin to the idea of being buried alive. Stephen calls from inside the hallway, knocking at the locked door. The camera pulls back to the length of the hallway, distancing him, and the clothes return to their position. Stephen's screams won't be heard by anyone. Many works of science-fiction play on this anxiety as well. "In the depths of space - where we all know no one can hear you scream, provide for an allegory for the deepest levels of the mind" (King and Krzywinska 53)

For a writer to play on anxiety there needs to be the understanding of myth and archetype spoken too earlier. The ideas are related. Archetypes and myths, like fairytales, have a deep history in our consciousness and fears of the world. Horror, science-fiction and *Her Closet* are similar in psychological ways. They all address our latent or subconscious fears and the changes we can't control. Writers like Bruce Kawain argue too that horror and science-fiction films appeal psychologically to their audiences; "Science-fiction to consciousness, horror to the unconscious" (Kawain 554). Arguments grounded in Freud and Carl Jung explain audience experiences to horror and science fiction in terms of myths and dreams. Beyond connections in psychology and story themes, choices in visual or audible elements also contribute and encompass the genres of science fiction and horror.

Music in science-fiction and horror often play a critical part in creating tone. They also can provide a "context for the viewer to read beyond what is directly represented on the screen." (King and Krzywinska 70) This is relevant in *Her Closet*. The music helped to create the moody and strange atmosphere as well provided irony to the actions Stephen was performing. As he looks for and finds the key leading him to break into the armoire the music croons "...you let me in your house with a hammer." Or in the opening Stephen for his wife we hear "...you spent some time in a mental institution"

Design is very important in science fiction, horror or fantasy genres. "Design does not only contribute to the spectacular dimension as it is often closely associated with narrative themes and issues" (King and Krzywinska 73) One example of this in *Her Closet* is the dollhouse as metaphor for the couples' controlled life and the miniature or inner worlds that were to be explored in the story.

The use of light in the final room of *Her Closet* has another connection to science-fiction and horror. The blinding light of space ships or the finding of the truth of the universe is often shown as bright, radiating light. Stephen is put in the spotlight of truth when he stands surrounded in the room, having to bear the verbal lashings of his insecurities. The lights come up as he enters, giving the room another quality of animated life as if an intruder has arrived and activated the alarms.

The snow was originally intended to relate to Naomi's memory of her old flame. She has a strong romantic memory of the two of them enjoying a snowy memory together in her old home. The snow is foreign to the new couple's setting, New Orleans, just as Naomi's memory is

foreign to Stephen. Snow again has a magical connotation. I thought its coldness and fragility also related to Stephen and Naomi's relationship.

The armoire was filled with pink, white and red silken slips. The hallway color was also a deep red. I wanted to have the inside of the armoire to be as feminine as possible and even subtly make visual references to physical appearances of the female sex. Stephen is breaking into his wife's secrets, the root of his own insecurity. I have no problem with this vaginal reference. The science-fiction film Aliens, which plays on gender role reversals, was discussed in one article as using the feminine shape in the creation of the spaceship. "As a number of critics have suggested, the film (Aliens) appears to displace some of its concern with gender onto this kind of production design...the alien spacecraft is entered through an opening that has been interpreted as vaginal" (King and Krzywinska 80, 81) All of these metaphors help to support a story's theme and lead audiences to feel and sense psychological dynamics on an almost subconscious level.

What I think is critical about the connection between science-fiction and my *Her Closet* is the notion of the authorial warning. Science-fiction has an overtone of providing strong warnings to the audience; warnings against our progress, tampering with nature or reliance on technology. This strong warning exists in morality tales like *Her Closet* and is the purpose of the old forms of fairy-tales for children. The horror genre too makes use of an authorial warning. Here the lessons are to maybe just not go into the dark, engage in teenage sex or disturb some buried and sacred relic out of curiosity.

Horror and science-fiction arguably approach the treatment of curiosity differently. Horror emphasizes the dread of knowing and there is a danger to curiosity such is the old horror cliché "there are things we are not meant to know." (Kawain 558) This is close to the thematic core of *Her Closet*. Stephen's desire to know more about the secrets of his wife and the contents of the locked armoire is dangerous to him. I spoke earlier of how I used the sound track to help with the metaphor that "curiosity killed the cat." The inspiring story Bluebeard takes this horror concept of dangerous curiosity even further with the presence of gory heads and body parts, remainders of the husband's ex-wives.

Science-fiction appeals to consciousness, some argue, and it is different in that the danger comes from the "irresponsibility of the closed mind" (Kawain 558). I disagree with this

differentiation since some science-fiction films provide warnings against curiosity as in scientific curiosity.

The horror genre has other ties to *Her Closet*. In horror, for example, there is a return to magic and the supernatural. The armoire is an example of magic. In horror too, anxiety dreams or nightmares are emphasized. It is also suggested that horror "anthropologically expresses nostalgia for contact with the spirit world." (Kawain 553) One theme in horror is the pain and anxiety at the prospect of acting out our unconscious desires; such was The Wolfman's fate. Another idea presented in both genres and *Her Closet* is the fear of the monster within. This relates to Stephen's internal conflict with his shadow side in *Her Closet*. Our fears of going insane or losing our minds to the shadow side are truly shared, human anxieties.

Her Closet shares other horror devices such as instilling in the audience a desire to glimpse the truth, no matter how horrible. Other horror themes are used; I chose night as a setting and created events of the unknown or supernatural taking place. The armoire in a way has a sort of devouring monster quality. It could have been developed to be an evil Venus-fly trap as it does already invite and trap Stephen inside. With different choices, i.e. a violent resolution or malicious Naomi, *Her Closet* could have made the transition to horror very easily.

Psychological themes, uses of archetypes and shared anxieties and fears can all be seen in science-fiction, horror and finally *Her Closet*. *Her Closet* shares many themes and visual elements of the genres of science-fiction and horror, even if it truly can not be categorized as a genre film. Psychological pulls, uses of archetype and myth will continue to be topics I hope to weave and develop into future film works. I believe these elements resonate and have a universal power with film audiences.

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Her Closet
By Amy Sanderson

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

① STEPHEN, an attractive man in his early 30's, returns home from work. He is dressed in a classic, modest suit and carries a briefcase and paper grocery sack. He approaches a large, turn of the century, New Orleans home. A Christmas wreath hangs on the door. He pauses for a moment on the porch having trouble with the lock.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

② Stephen enters the home. It is silent and mostly dark in the large house.

STEPHEN
Hello, I'm home.

CHRISTMAS MUSIC plays on an old radio. Stephen stops to look inside a large, antique doll house set out nearby.

2a INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Stephen enters. A Christmas card depicting a simple snowy landscape sits out on a large dining table. He leaves his briefcase and sack there and picks up the card. There is only an illegible signature inside. The sound of a key turning a lock is heard. The light to the an adjoining bedroom is turned off. Naomi, an attractive twenty-something enters.

STEPHEN
There you are What were you
doing in there?

NAOMI
I was sleeping actually, I just
woke up.

He embraces her.

STEPHEN
It's so cold tonight. You might
get your white Christmas after
all.

NAOMI
Sure.(she laughs and rests her head
on his shoulder) You smell nice,
like curry.

STEPHEN
I brought something home from
The Siam.

NAOMI
That sounds good. Let's eat

STEPHEN
I'll get some plates.

Stephen starts to exit towards the kitchen. He stops to look over his shoulder at Naomi. He can see that she is kneeling by the doll house but it is not clear what she is doing. She turns and smiles back at him mysteriously. He exits.

3 INT - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Stephen and Naomi sit at long dining table. Remnants of take-out sit in front of them. They sip on wine, remaining in silence for a moment.

STEPHEN
Anything happen today?

NAOMI
Mmm. I sold a painting.

STEPHEN
Really? Which one?

NAOMI
Steve Bloodgood's, another
landscape piece.

STEPHEN
I saw that we got a Christmas
card from someone. I couldn't
read the name.

NAOMI
Oh. No. That was from an
old friend of mine.

They sit in silence again. Stephen watches Naomi as she stares out the window, her eyes distant.

STEPHEN
You heard from Sara?

NAOMI
No. It's someone I new a long
long time ago in Maine.
An old boyfriend actually.

STEPHEN

Oh.

Stephen takes another sip of wine. They remain in silence for a moment.

STEPHEN

Is there anything I should be worried about?

NAOMI

No, Stephen. Just a ghost from the past. Haven't you ever heard from someone you've nearly forgotten?

Naomi is lost in thought.

STEPHEN

It looks like the someone hasn't forgotten you.

NAOMI

What do you want to know? He's just sends a Christmas card once a year maybe.

STEPHEN

Al right. I'm not worried.

NAOMI

It just reminded me of a time I haven't thought about in a while.

STEPHEN

I'm fine.

NAOMI

OK. (she laughs and gets up to kiss him) I'm off to bed. You coming?

STEPHEN

In a minute.

He remains seated at the table for a moment as she leaves.

④ INT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stephen and Naomi lay together in bed. Naomi is turned away from him, trying to sleep and avoiding his questions.

STEPHEN
What was his name? The
boyfriend?

NAOMI
Alex.

STEPHEN
How did you know him...

NAOMI
Stephen, please don't do this.
There's nothing to be jealous of.

STEPHEN
You've never talked about
him.

NAOMI
There you are. Maybe he wasn't
worth mentioning. Stephen, this
was ages ago. I'm here now. And I'm
beat. I've got to get some sleep.
(She mumbles as she starts
to fall asleep)

STEPHEN
What?

There is no response. Naomi is asleep.

Naomi?

Stephen gives up. He gazes around the room eventually landing
on the armoire. It sits like a foreboding stranger in a dark
corner of their room. Stephen rubs his face. He rolls over
next to Naomi and watches her sleep.

⑤ INT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Stephen wakes up. Naomi is gone. Dressed in pajamas, he gets out
of bed and pulls a robe from his closet. His attention is caught
by Naomi's armoire. Stephen tries to open it and surprised that it
is locked.

⑥ INT - DINING ROOM - MORNING

Stephen enters the dining room dressed for work. His tie hangs
loosely around his neck. Naomi calls to him from the kitchen.

NAOMI
Good Morning. Did you sleep well?

STEPHEN
Well, not really.....Naomi,
since when of you locked your
closet?

NAOMI
Why?

STEPHEN
I tried to open it...

She enters and stops to look at him.

NAOMI
I'm keeping something safe in
there. You haven't been peeking?

STEPHEN
Well...No.

She smiles at him

NAOMI
I've got to go. I'll see you
tonight.

She finds her purse and exits. Stephen is left alone still
standing in the dining room.

EXT - HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephen is returns home again with briefcase in hand. He
frustration with the lock shows when he tries his key again.

INT - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Stephen enters and passes by the dollhouse.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stephen enters their bedroom. It is dark and Naomi is sleeping. He
exits and returns again with a drink. He gives the armoire a
challenging look and begins to undress. He takes another drink. We
dissolve from his now empty glass to a new one, now full.

INT - BEDROOM - NIGHT (cont)

Time has passed, Stephen is dressed in pajamas and sits next to
Naomi on their bed. He watches her for a moment. His gaze follows
the wall again to the armoire. The snowflake shadows appear again.
Stephen squints in the dark again. The door to the armoire now
cracked open reveals a figure standing inside. Stephen sits up. He
gets out of bed and approaches the armoire only to discover that
the doors are locked.

INT - HALLWAY - LATE MORNING

Naomi pulls a black rain coat from a closet. It is raining outside. Stephen enters in his pajamas, looking very haggard.

STEPHEN

Where are you going?

NAOMI

I'm shopping with mother. She'll be here any minute.

STEPHEN

Today, haven't you done most of your gift shopping?

NAOMI

I have a few left to buy.

She looks at him and notices he is still in pajamas.

NAOMI

Aren't you going to work?

STEPHEN

I don't feel well, I thought I'd take the day off...

Naomi finds her purse.

STEPHEN

Naomi, we need to....can't I talk to you for one.....

A HORN HONKS from outside.

NAOMI

Oh, that's mother. I think were eating out together. I'll be late.

STEPHEN

You've been so odd, with this this strange person and the locks...

The HORN HONKS.

NAOMI

I got go.(she crosses to him and kisses him) Please don't be worried, I promise we'll talk later if you want, just wait.

The HORN HONKS again. Naomi makes for the door.

STEPHEN

Naomi...I...

NAOMI
I got go. See you later.
(from outside) Coming!

Stephen growls in frustration.

12 INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

Stephen is lying in bed having slept through the afternoon. He wakes and approaches the armoire. He pulls on the doors shaking the armoire. Stephen stops; realization hits him.

13 INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Stephen approaches the doll house and reaches inside. Finding the small Christmas package he opens it and discovers a key.

14 INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Stephen approaches the armoire now with key in hand and is able to unlock it. Inside are Naomi's clothes, nightgowns, suitcases, etc. He pulls apart the clothes and is captured by what he has found.

15 HALLWAY - TIME UNKNOWN

Stephen stands before a long hallway. His attention completely captured by the hallway and a safe door at the end of the stretch.

Stephen approaches the metal door. It begins to snow above him. He turns the safe's handle. The door opens and he steps inside.

16 ROOM - TIME UNKNOWN

Stephen walks into a dark room. Snow covers the floor and blows in the air. He looks around him as the walls become visible. He is surrounded by screens. Light fades up behind them revealing shadowed figures. There is one of Naomi's father, Naomi as a little girl and finally a couple; Naomi and another man. They dance and kiss. Stephen can only watch. Eventually the sight is too much for him. He begins to move toward the door again.

17 HALLWAY - TIME UNKNOWN

The safe handle shakes as Stephen pulls on it from the other side. The camera begins to dolly back out of the hallway, through the rack of clothes.....

INT - BEDROOM NIGHT

....and out of the armoire.

18 INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Still shots of the house reveal that the bedroom, dining room and living room are empty and silent. Naomi returning home from work is heard off screen.

NAOMI
Stephen? Hello?

19 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Naomi enters carrying a shopping bag.

NAOMI
Stephen?

20 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Naomi looks around the room questioningly. She pulls the door to their room closed. From her shopping bag she pulls out a present wrapped in red foil. She approaches the armoire and with her key in hand, unlocks it. It is now just an armoire. She makes a space for the present on the top shelf. She closes the armoire and locks it again.

THE END

FILM PROPOSAL
DRCM 4500/4530

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Working Title <u>The Box</u> | Genre <u>Drama</u> |
| Director <u>Amy Sanderson</u> | Producer <u>Amy Sanderson</u> |
| Sound/Silent <u>Sound</u> | B&W/Color <u>Color</u> |
| Originating Medium <u>film</u> | Release Medium <u>video</u> |
| Length <u>7 minutes</u> | Film Ratio <u>5:1</u> |

Tim is a young man obsessed with his wife's secrets and the locked box she keeps that he eventually finds his way inside to discover a strange, hidden place in her mind.

The Box

Tim and his newlywed wife Naomi, a quiet and secretive girl, are a young couple with still much to discover about each other. When Naomi shares part of a memory one night, Tim becomes both insecure with this new information and overridden with curiosity for more.

Tim's dangerous curiosity becomes focused on a carefully locked box Naomi keeps in their small studio apartment. Tim becomes more and more frustrated at the fact that he can neither see what is inside the box or more of Naomi's secrets.

Waking up from a dream, Tim sees the box has become just as exaggerated as his obsession. It sits in their room now the size of a closet. Tim steps into the box and makes a final journey into Naomi's psyche. Here, inside a strange corridor of locked doors and Alice in Wonderland-esque imagery, Tim discovers the price and of digging to deep into another's secret place.

Set in the claustrophobic confines of a studio apartment, the box is a story about the mysterious, hidden and protected nature of the secrets and memories we keep stored in the farthest places of our minds.

1. In a montage like sequence. Tim and Naomi leave a party together. They ride home on the street car together, something catches Naomi's attention. She is suddenly preoccupied and sad.(ala The Dead).
2. Their still early love shows, they unlock all the gates and doors to their house.
3. The box is waiting for them.
She complains about the cold, its not suppose to be cold in New Orleans, blah, blah. She walks around the corner to the kitchen, still talking to him.
4. Naomi starts up the stove to stay warm.
5. He finds the odd package wrapped underneath their said attempt at a Christmas tree. Afraid he is going to get caught peaking, he does not open it or say anything to Naomi. He turns the corner of their living room to the kitchen
6. Kitchen - Naomi, looking spooky in candle light and deep thought. What have you been thinking? Her spookiness distracts him from playing with the presents. She begins to tell him the snow story.
7. She and Mr. X were sledding at night, she got hurt. She never felt so much trust before. As she talks images her voice is played over abstarct, close - up images of the scene. Someone running through the snow, Naomi's scared face, snow falling, someone kneeling next to her in the snow. Kind eyes and hands.
8. She finished her story and it appears that snow is falling in the shadows of their dark kitchen. Tim is jealous, curious.
9. A shower, Naomi's, is heard. Tim wakes up. It is the next morning. The box looks bigger. Tim eyes it and gives a scoff, refusing to look at it. He kicks it with his slippers farther behind the tree.
10. Naomi enters the kitchen and kisses him on the cheek. Your wrinkly, that was a pretty long shower. The hot water felt good. I kinda lost myself I guess for awhile, just spacing out.
She is very pretty in the morning sunlight. He kisses her on the cheek hopefully, she gives him a limp welcome. They sit over breakfast. Tim dominates the conversation, she gives simple yes or no answers. Eventually he probes her for questions about Mr. X. She catches on and gets up to leave. A cat sits at the window sill. She leaves to waitressing job.

Tim, unable to get the cats attention, gets its curiosity by creating cumotion with a paper bag. "So curious, aren't you...meow, meow" The cat enters it, Tim traps it inside. He stares at it for a moment, a moment of reflection. Curiosity killed the cat, foreshadowing, all that.

11. Tim spends that evening waiting for Naomi and trying to write. The box becons him. He tries to ignore it. It is a challenge. The box, now about doll house size, opens as if a light is on inside of it. He approaches it to get a closer look inside. Voices and laughter seem to emmit from it.
12. More pieces of the story are revealed. Bits of imagery, similar to what Naomi had told; snow falling again, Naomi's relieved face.
13. Naomi comes home, startling Tim. Tim sits in the dark. Naomi's face can not be made out. Dammit Tim, did we forget to pay the lighting bill. Maybe a light bulb is missing. How long have you been sitting here. I must have fallen asleep. He goes to find a light bulb. As he is fixing it, she holds a flashlight. You know, you better not have been peeking. She holds the flashlight up to her face. Besides, you will never find my secret hiding place, she smiles simply. I don't want to fight. Ok? Tim has fixed the light. Now we can turn it off and go to bed. Once the light is off, Tim probes Naomi for more information. Did you love him? How much? More than me? What happened to him?

Tim, maybe you shouldn't ask questions like these, if you can't deal with it. Don't you think the answers are going to hurt then? Maybe you just shouldn't know too much about something. This is not going to work if you keep doing this. Please stop.
14. Naomi's retaurant where she plays. People laugh and drink, eat, be jolly.
15. Tim is at home, staring at the clock. He is waiting for her call. She is late. He stares at his blank computer screen, typing random letter and at a large dark shadows underneath their Christmas tree. The phone rings, startling Tim. On the phone, bar raucous is heard,
16. Naomi tells him that she is running late. Christams eve traffic. She is with friends and Tim should come down.
17. Tim is suspicious. He refuses to come down. He starts a jealousy argument. Tim, if you could just look inside my heart you would see there's nothing to worry about. Tim snaps again at Naomi. She hangs up on Tim.

18. Naomi's friend runs up to her, Naomi is saddened by Tim's reaction. Her night of drinking and carousing begins there at the bar.
19. Parrell editing with Tim and Naomi. Tim approaches the box, it is as tall as he ala Lion Witch and the Wardrobe. He walks into it, it is snowing.
20. Naomi drinking then noticing a toy vendor set up near the restaurant. She plays with a jack in the box, looking thoughtful. Opening it and closing it.
21. The kalediscope music of the jack in the box is heard as Tim walks into the box and Naomi's snowy world. Tim looks for Naomi, he becomes frantic. He can hear Naomi's cries. As he gets closer it sounds more like laughter.
22. Naomi is drinking heavily with friends laughing around her.
23. Tim approaches Naomi in the snow but is beat out by Mr. X, he hunches over as he watches them kiss, obviously deep in love. He must watch their scene. They turn their heads, hearing something and disregards Tim as a deer or something. having had enough, he rushes into a blizzard. Snow covers the image.
25. A taxi pulls up to the house. Naomi steps out, pays the drives and slowly walks up to the house. Unlocking the door, she calls out to Tim. He is no where in sight. Believing he has left her, she grabs a pillow and punches it saddened. Seeing the strange box now back to its' normal size, she picks it up hopefully then angry, tosses it across the room.
26. Naomi is on the phone with a friend. I don't know what to do with it. It's like he left in on purpose or something, maybe he just wants to give me a guilt trip. No, I don't think I'll open it. Why? Just so I can get upset again. He hasn't called or anything. Stupid jealous asshole. Yeah, I know shitty Christmas. Does anyone have good holidays?.....
He voice becomes background then fades out as the image of the box sitting in the room eventually fades to black.

INT - ROOM - NIGHT

Boxes are placed into a closet/armoire.

EXT - HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephen comes home

INT - FOYER/STAIRWAY - NIGHT

Stephen searches for Naomi

INT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stephen finds dollhouse. Male doll and little Christams package. Naomi appears and startles him.

INT - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Stephen and Naomi have dinner. Naomi tells beginning of story. Snowflake shadows fall.

INT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stephen still preoccupied with story. Naomi takes sleeping pills and sleeps. Stephen sees shadow move across to armoire. Cat?

INT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Stephen wakes up. Washes face. Pulls a tie from his closet. The cat is there scratching at the armoire. Stephen approaches it, it is locked.

INT - DINING ROOM - MORNING

Stephen has conversation with Naomi from around the corner. He asks questioningly about the package. She explains no peeking. Hands him his briefcase, get to work.

EXT - HOUSE - NIGHT

Carrying his briefcase. Stephen comes home from work.

INT - STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Stephen makes journey up stairwell.

INT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Naomi is sleeping in their room

INT - LOUNGE - NIGHT

Stephen enters, makes a drink

INT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stephen enters. Sits next to Naomi on bed. Tries to read. Watches Naomi. Follow wall to armoire. Shadow in armoire.

INT - DINING ROOM - LATE MORNING

Naomi pulls a black rain coat from a closet. It is raining outside. Stephen looks haggard. I let you sleep in, want to go over to Christmas eve party tommorrow. Glad to have some time off? Aggressive with Naomi. Horn honks, mother is waiting. She leaves. Stephen upset.

INT - BED ROOM - DAY

Stephen begins looking for key. Walks into room. Remembers doll house.

INT - ROOM - DAY

Remembers key in doll house box.

INT - BED ROOM - DAY

Stephen opens closet. Cat sits by watching. Stephen sees a red foiled package. Pulls clothes apart.

INT - FANTASY HALLWAY

Stephen finishes pulling clothes apart and sees hallway. The door at end closes. Handle turns tight. Stephen approaches door, it is snowing in the hallway. He turns the handle and opens it.

INT - SHADOW ROOM

Stephen enters. Shadows play out scenes behind walls/black and white video projection act out scenes of Naomi's past. Stephen is overwhelmed, too much of the truth is revealed. He can't take it. Tries to leave, door is locked.

INT - FANTASY HALLWAY

Camera pulls out from shaking door nob, through hallway, and through clothes....

INT - CLOSET/BEDROOM

....camera pulls through clothes and out armoire. It shuts tight...camera pulls out to wide shot of room.

INT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Naomi returns home. Carries present.

INT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Calls after Stephen. Looks for key it is gone. Angry. Approaches armoire, it is locked. She is confused. Taps package questioningly. Gets a chill up her spine.

THE END

HER CLOSET
SHOOTING SCHEDULE

FRI, OCT 27 1433 Esplanade

Call 5p

Shoot 6:30p - 11p

SC 1,7 EXT House, Night; Stephen comes home

SC 2 INT Living Room, Night; Stephen finds card, Naomi hides key

SAT, OCT 28 1433 Esplanade

Call 7a

Shoot 9a-6p (lunch 2p-3p)

SC 6 INT Dining Room, Day; Stephen questions Naomi

SC 11 INT Living Room, Day; Couple's final argument, Naomi leaves

SC 3 INT Dining Room, Night; Couple talks over dinner

SUN, OCT 29 1433 Esplanade

Call 11a

Shoot 12a - 10p (lunch 2p-3p)

SC 5 INT Bedroom Day; Scott checks armoire first time

SC 4 INT, Bedroom Night; Scott and Naomi talk in bed

SC 9, 10 INT Bedroom Night; Scott watches Naomi, Armoire

SC 12, 14 INT Bedroom Night; Scott Sleeps, later enters armoire

SC 19,20 INT Bedroom Night; Naomi returns and places present

SAT, NOV 5 1433 Esplanade

Call 5p

Shoot 6p-8p

SC 13 INT Living Room Night; Scott finds key in dollhouse

8P LUNCH AND SMALL CREW MOVE TO STUDIO

SUN, NOV 6 UNO STUDIO

Call 10a

Shoot 12a - 5p (lunch 3-3:30p)

Her Closet
13 minute Short Narrative Film
Production Budget Estimate and Equipment List

Estimate

CAMERA

Film: 5 rolls, 100 ft 16mm color film @ 40.02 with shipping.....\$250.00

Equipment:.....in-kind

CP-16 16mm camera

lenses: zoom, wide 5.9

2 magazines, changing bag, Didi Bag

Tri-pod

Baby Legs and Hard Hat

Steady-cam package (1 day)

GRIP AND LIGHTING

Equipment:.....in-kind

Generator (1 day only)

Tweeny light kit

1: 100k Lights

2: 50k Lights

Light stands

Grip kit

Dolly (1 day only)

Jib Kit (2 days or 1 weekend)

Sand bags

Miscellaneous (gels, tape, china ball, visquine).....\$50

SOUND

Stock: Dat Audio Tape (1);..... \$15

Equipment:.....in kind

Tascam Audio recorder

Boom Mic and pole

Lavalier mics, 2

TRANSPORTATION/TRUCK RENTAL

Van Rental: 1 week @ \$35 per day..... \$245

ART DEPARTMENT

Set dressing and rentals..... \$100

Costumes..... \$75

Make-up..... \$20

Hallway set: paint, building materials..... \$100

CRAFT SERVICE:

Lunch for approx.13 people per day; @ 5 days..... \$350
Water, snacks, drinks per day @ 5 days.....\$150

POST-PRODUCTION:

Film Transfer (estimated 1hr plus prep).....\$200
Sit in cost (@ 50 per hour student discount).....\$100
Beta tape Master.....\$40
Edit and Sound Mix.....in kind
Postage and Transportation.....\$50

CREW AND CAST:.....in kind

LOCATIONS:.....in kind

INSURANCE:.....in kind

MUSIC USAGE RIGHTS.....fair usage only
by permission

CONTINGENCIS:.....\$200

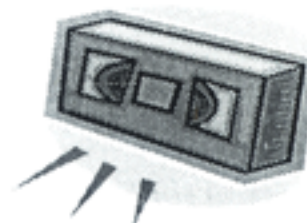
TOTAL.....\$1895



*Congratulations! Your film has been chosen for the
2001 Best of the Thunderbird International Film Festival Video.*

Please list the address you would like your complimentary copy sent to and return.

Name: _____ Film Title: HER CLOSET
Address: _____
Phone: _____ Email: _____



Thunderbird International Film Festival 2001

June 8 & 9

Souvenir Program

Presented by the SUU College of Performing & Visual Arts, Theatre Arts & Dance Department

Saturday June 9

Cedar Twin, Main Street

Brigham City 9am

Screen 1

Grandfather's Birthday 11:30 am
Judgement FF

Screen 2

Shooting People 11:30 am
The Friggin' Mafia Movie BN/V

Screen 1

Trade Day 1:30 pm
Left Behind FF

Screen 2

No. 11 1:30 pm

Odessa or Bust
Ship Builder
*Oscar Niemeyer: an architect
committed to his century*

Weird and Whacky Films 4:30 pm

Her Closet
Subterranean Passage
Breeding Space
nowhereland
The American Bickman Burger

SUU Sharwan Smith Theatre

The Art of Waiting 10 am

Shooting People SL/V

Internet Addiction

Utah Hot Springs

Spa-tel 12:30 pm

Jingle Hell A

Odessa or Bust 3 pm

*Daydream for an Insomniac** FF

The Spanish Temp

Buddha Weeps in Jadugoda

*Blind in Both Ears** 5:30 pm

Sheriff David "Dude" Benson FF

on Telemedicine: A Parents Perspective

When Nothing Rhymes with Farm

Grandfather's Birthday

SUU Sharwan Smith Theatre

Appearance by "Bud" the Golden Eagle, our mascot — 7-9 pm

Award Ceremony - Free — 8 pm

Best Picture and selected winners — 9:30 pm

For complete descriptions of each film, consult the Film Synopsis beginning on Page 11.

FF= Family Friendly, A=Adult situations, V=Violence, SL=Strong Language, BN=Brief Nudity

*Local filmmaker

7PM >>

SHORT BUT SWEET: MIXED BAG

» ORNAMENTS

Lumiere Award

3D short about a mischievous little Christmas decoration with a powerful hunger for some milk and cookies. Directed by Aaron Erimez. Beta. 5:40 min.

» JIMMY RITZ

Jimmy Ritz is the top criminal defense lawyer in town, but when he witnesses a hit ordered by a local labor boss, his world starts to unravel. Directed by Bill Flannigan. 16mm. 16:20 min.

» THE PICKLE JAR

Lumiere Award

In the middle of Suburbia, in Dan's bedroom, an armored stink bug attempts to befriend and advise Dan, ending in an unlikely romance. Festival premiere. Directed by Benjamin Goldman. 35mm. 7:15 min.

» THE WAR WITHIN

Set during the Civil War, this ironic tale of love and betrayal explores an obscure point of honor between two friends. Based on a short story by Ambrose Bierce. Festival premiere. Directed by J. Wendkos. 35mm. 16:07 min.

» SURFACE CALM

LA Filmmaker

While her husband is away on business, a lonely housewife slowly loses her mind. Festival premiere. Directed by Mike Miley. 35mm. 18 minutes.

» JANE

A burnt-out screenwriter makes a life-changing discovery while stranded in the desert. Directed by Dominic Ciencio. 16mm. 7 minutes.

» COFFEE DATE

Super straight Todd and openly gay Kelly argue over the last table in a gay coffee house while waiting for their respective blind dates. Directed by Stewart Wade. DigBeta. 16:55 minutes.

9PM >>

SHORT BUT SWEET: MIXED BAG

» VOICE OF AN ANGEL

When Stan Feldman gets a call to tune Celia Rodriguez's piano, he can't help but wonder could it really be the Celia Rodriguez after all these years? Directed by Josh Marston. 16mm. 15 minutes.

» NIGHT ON THE TOWN

Three children are left alone while their parents enjoy a night out. One night on the town, one family forever changed. Directed by James Holland. 16mm. 19:50 minutes.

» GRANDFATHER'S BIRTHDAY

Based on the short story by Rudy Joe Mano, this is the touching story of an elderly widower excited to celebrate his birthday. Directed by Gayle Knutson. 35mm. 17:22 minutes.

» FAITH AND BETRAYAL

11PM >>

SCI-FI/FANTASY

» WHAT'S HE BUILDING IN THERE?

Lagunette Award

An experimental music video for the Tom Waits track "What's He Building." Mr. Waits is flattered by the video. Directed by Jeremy J. Doherty. Digital Video. 3:30 minutes.

» WILLIAM P

The most famous criminal in the world is finally caught. Festival premiere. Directed by Peter Meloy. Digital Video and 16mm. 7 minutes.

» E=MC²

What if Einstein was wrong? Festival premiere. Directed by Jean Bodon. 35mm. 11:30 minutes.

» GUARDIAN ANGEL

Andrew is desperate to improve his life, and finds the answer in a mail order Guardian Angel. Festival premiere. Directed by Jamie McBride. 35mm. 21 minutes.

» HER CLOSET

LA Filmmaker

A short fable about a jealous husband who pries too far into the secrets of his wife's locked armore. Directed by Amy Sanderson. 16mm. 13:02 minutes.

» HALFWAY THERE

In a world where communication is forbidden, actions speak louder than words. Directed by Adrienne Briggs. 35mm. 19:52 minutes.

» DEAR XXX

One man alone in his house with his record collection. Directed by Daniel Cavey. 16mm. 8:55 minutes.

» SLOW BOAT

LA Filmmaker

A nautical fever dream. Festival premiere. Directed by William Looewere. Digital Video. 12 minutes.



OFF THE LOCAL FILMS

At the least of the New Orleans Film Festival's many functions is the spotlight it provides for local talent. Every year the fest offers a venue for student filmmakers and other local impresarios whose work might otherwise go unexposed. Despite their common base of operations, the Louisiana-based directors in this year's lineup have produced a richly varied program of features that encompasses just about every format and style under the sun. Here's a brief overview of some of the local talent on display:

INTERVIEWS:
IRA BROOKER



AT THE GHETTO CLINIC

Paul Deo

Paul Deo describes his animated/live action short *At the Ghetto Clinic* as "a beauty and the beast story about a kid figuring out what love is all about." In this case, the "kid" is actually an animated purple bulldog and his romantic quarry, a beautiful worker at the titular clinic. As the woman grows tired of the rudeness of her demanding patients, she begins to appreciate the bulldog's inner goodness. "It's a pretty funky, avant-garde film," says Deo, a professional painter whose previous film experience includes working with art and set design on Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*. Financed by grants and out of Deo's own pocket, portions of *At the Ghetto Clinic* were shot in 16mm, 35mm, mini-DV, and DHD, just to name a few, making for a decidedly unique visual experience. With such a diverse approach to filmmaking, Deo's list of inspirations is hardly surprising. "I look at films like dreams," he says, "my favorite directors are people like Spike Lee, the Coen Brothers, David Lynch, Kubrick; people who tell stories in a non-traditional way."

HER CLOSET

Amy Sanderson

Speaking of her cinematic inspirations, University of New Orleans grad student Amy Sanderson is almost apologetic. "Every film student talks about film noir, and it's kind of beaten to death, but I've always loved dark films," Sanderson's student film *Her Closet* is certainly in keeping with that tradition. She describes it as a "dark fairytale about a jealous husband obsessed with the hidden contents of his wife's locked armoire." She claims a long-standing fascination with the works of Tim Burton, and admits that friends teased her during production for her use of snow effects ala *Edward Scissorhands*. Sanderson spent around \$2000 on the project, much of which went into set design and rental of antique furniture. *Her Closet* has played at a few small festivals already, and Sanderson hopes to parlay that into a regular filmmaking career. She currently does freelance graphic design and post-production work because "You can't really just call yourself a writer/director and expect to make a living. My other jobs are really a way to support myself so I can have more time for films."



HIGH VOLTAGE

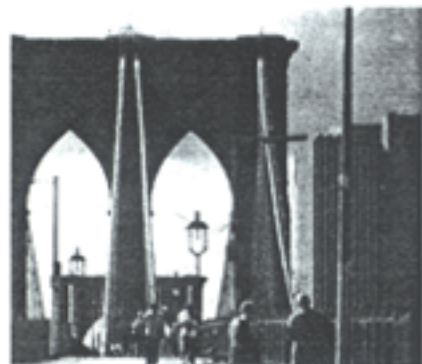
Katherine S. Johnson

Not too long ago, becoming a film director was one of the furthest things from Katherine S. Johnson's mind. In 1993 Johnson, along with Positive Impact and the Coullier Center in Jefferson Parish, started organizing guidance camps for at-risk youths between the ages of 16 and 21 in the Iberville and Covenant House developments. As the camps became increasingly popular, they were opened to the community at large. Youths in attendance were encouraged to deal with the issues that mattered most to them by finding creative channels of expression. In 1997, campers re-enacted scenes from *New Jack City* as one of their projects, and Johnson was struck with an idea that eventually blossomed into the group's first TV camp. Throughout the summer, campers earned high school and college credit for attending scriptwriting and acting classes and receiving training from the New Orleans Media Center and New Orleans Video Access Center with the goal of developing a pilot episode for a series developed by kids for kids. *High Voltage* is the final product, and Johnson couldn't be more pleased with the results. "It's a really great show focusing on youth issues, things like dealing with parents," she says, noting that the kids had a hand in nearly every aspect of the production. Johnson hopes that screenings will help make the program a regular event and encourage campers to follow their dreams to the next level of life.

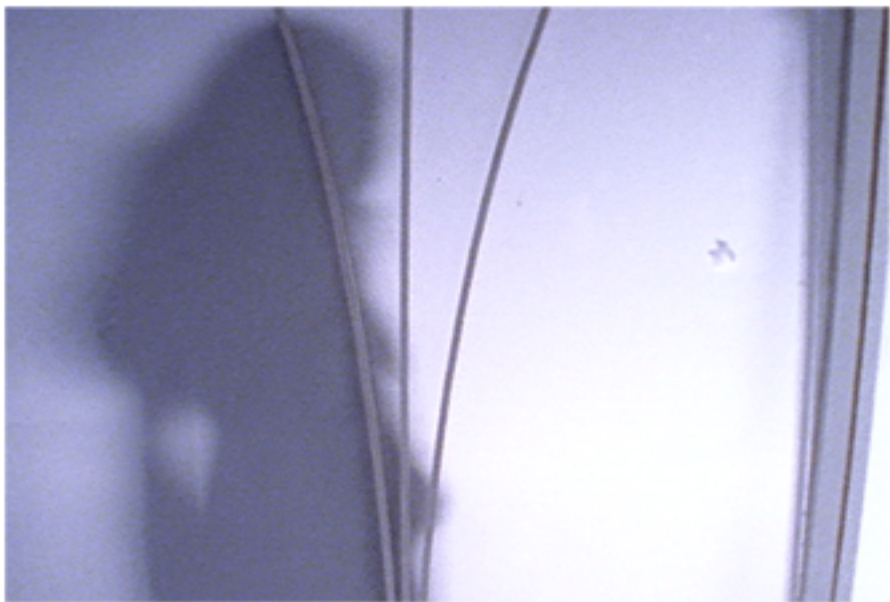
SURVIVAL OF THE ILLEST

Michael Kennedy

Michael Kennedy has already had a taste of cinematic success, and he's thirsty for more. His short student film *Survival of the Illest* has screened at half a dozen festivals, including the New York and Los Angeles International film fests and a sidebar at Sundance and will soon be included in a compilation assembled by legendary cult producers Troma Films. Kennedy describes *Illest* as "a parody of suburban and urban cultures about a kid from the mid west who goes to Brooklyn to become the ultimate break dancer." Kennedy financed the project himself for about \$1000 and filmed on location in Brooklyn and Manhattan, where he attended film school. He has since moved to the Crescent City, where he currently devotes himself to trying to sell his latest script, a comedy feature called *Sloppy*. Describing his philosophy of filmmaking, Kennedy dismisses the over-inflated concept of "indie cred." "I'm not afraid of making stuff people enjoy," he explains, "I think I can make myself happy and please an audience at the same time." Besides its festival screenings, *Survival of the Illest* can be viewed online at www.evolutionsyndicates.com, a site which also includes background information on Kennedy and his projects.







VITA

Amy Sanderson was born in Missoula, Montana in 1974. She grew up in the Northwest studying classical piano, theater and later graphic design. In 1998, she received a Bachelor of Arts in Visual Communications at the University of Idaho.

As an MFA student at the University of New Orleans she completed the short thesis film, *Her Closet*, which played in several national film festivals. Now a permanent resident of New Orleans, Amy Sanderson works as a freelance editor and script supervisor. She hopes to pursue a career in writing and directing feature film.