

THE BEST MEDICINE

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The Best Medicine is an animated documentary that explores the true stories behind the live performances of stand-up comedians. The film juxtaposes live stand-up performances with candid interview footage combined with animation and illustration. Three subjects— Michael Burd, Casey Stoddard, and Jacob Kubon— discuss alcoholism, childhood abuse, and sexual anxiety, respectively. Their candid, intimate interviews reveal personal information, creating a new context with which to understand live stand-up comedy performance. This illustrates themes of finding humor in dark or painful circumstances and the cathartic nature writing and performance.

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CHAPTER 1

PROSPECTUS

Introduction and Description

Where does comedy come from? The equation is:

$$\text{Tragedy} + \text{Time} = \text{Comedy}$$

The idea is that something terribly tragic can be joked about eventually. The irony of comedy is that tragedy can make us laugh. A stand-up comedian tells jokes in an effort to bring joy and laughter. Comedians are entertainers; they're performers. These performances can lend insight into who that person is offstage. However, one is only getting to see a rhetorical performance carefully crafted and honed by that same person; creating a gap between the reality off stage and the façade on stage.

The jokes comedians tell on stage aren't conjured. They are born from their personal experiences. For every joke on stage, there was an actuality that set the writing process in motion. Those events and experiences are used as inspiration, and then written and carefully edited until a joke is left. When that joke is performed, it becomes an insight into the workings of that character's mind. Comedy is how these performance artists translate and articulate their raw and visceral emotions into something palatable for an audience.

As the equation for comedy would insinuate, these personal experiences can be tragic, and often not funny at all. It takes the gift of a comedian to find the humor in that situation and present it to an audience. Some comedians use their own experiences to take an audience somewhere dark and allow us to laugh in that place.

This film will explore the actualities that inspire humor and juxtapose those actualities with the final product of on-stage comedic performance. The audience for this film will get to

see a side of these performers a live audience never would. They will get to see the reality as well as the performative, the dark side of comedy.

Three stand-up comedians will serve as the characters. Each will have their own vignette split into two sections: the performance segment and actuality segment. Going back and forth between these two types of segments will reveal the dichotomy of what comedians do. This is the crux of the film.

The performance section will show each respective comedian performing on stage in front of a live audience. The material they tell on stage will relate to the actuality segment that will be obtained through interview. While the performance segment is a thoughtfully written recital, the actuality segment will be much more candid and conversational. The comedians won't appear on screen in person except in their live performance. This is meant to be an illustration of how the performative character a comedian creates only exists on the stage. Without the interview segment, an audience can't perceive the reality and actuality of their situation. It is speculative and imaginary.

While they each illustrate specific experiences unique to that individual, common themes will be drawn between all three characters. The themes are:

- The ability to find humor in dark or otherwise painful circumstances
- The use of performance art and expression as a coping mechanism and for personal therapeutic purposes
- The role of traumatic events in the formation of character/personality
- The tragic irony of comedy
- Performativity and the social self

This film will not rely on traditional three-act structure. Instead of a conventional conflict and resolution, the film will act as more of a mosaic to illustrate the themes.

No sit-down interview footage will be used in the film. This section is in no way observational, and as such, it is a challenge to visually express what is being said in the interview. The solution is to use animation, re-enactments, and visual metaphors to build an image based on the interview.

My plan is to edit towards an 'audio-lock' in which I have the audio for the interviews cut for story and time. I will then have images built to accommodate them. I will work with commissioned artists to listen to the audio-lock with me, and then work together to find the best approach. Then the artists will illustrate the thoughts, emotions, and experiences expressed by the performers. The illustrations will be cartoons. This is in an effort to juxtapose the dark actuality of their experiences with the light and juvenile nature of cartoons. Each performer will be matched with an artist whose style fits their story the best.

Animation is a very labor-intensive process. In an effort to stay on schedule, alternatives to traditional animating techniques are being explored. A single image can be panned over and revealed gradually in a digital way to create a sort of illusion of motion. Also, two-dimensional stop motion animation (not terribly unlike flip-books) would create a similar effect without being as time-consuming or labor intensive. This animation will be supplemented by stylized re-enactments, appearing as disjointed thoughts and memories. Additionally, I will obtain both archival and original footage when necessary for building visual metaphors.

Treatment

The film will open with homage to Pennebaker's *Dont Look Back* (1967) where I will mimic the opening shot of Bob Dylan holding cue cards in an alley. The folk song will be replaced with a brief monologue explaining comedy as the only real effective emotional and artistic outlet allowed to certain personality types. This introduction will set the tone of the film and help to contextualize everything that follows. After this section, the first subject will be introduced.

We dip to black before a title card appears. The text on the card will be in Beavis-and-Butthead-style squiggle vision. The text reads "Casey Stoddard."

The first vignette will feature comedian Casey Stoddard from Chicago, Illinois. We will see him first on the stage performing stand-up comedy. He stands on a spot-lit stage in an otherwise dark room. He stares at the floor as he recites his jokes. His performance showcases his signature dark, non sequitur humor. His material focus on and illustrates his anti-social and introverted behaviors as well as his personal insecurities. The crowd adores Casey and expresses it with laughter and applause. Casey cracks a faint smile as we fade out.

We fade up to an illustration of a young Casey. His voice-over interview describes his dire relationship with his abusive father. It carries on with low-key lit shots of a sweaty and nearly empty glass of scotch and a man removing his belt. The sounds are booming yet faint, as if in a distant memory. As Casey describes his father, we hear a repressed anger in his voice. A hot iron appears on screen. Casey's deadpan voice describes how his dad would break his fingers sometimes as punishment or for fun. The interview is covered with cartoons of a young, fearful Casey hiding from his father. Flashes appear on screen of medical records. Other flashes appear

of X-rays of broken fingers. An image of an innocent child's hands fade to that of Casey's adult hands; healed but crooked and disfigured.

Another dip to black brings us to another squiggle-vision card that reads "Jacob Kubon." Kubon's segment begins with animation instead of on-stage performance. It's important that the audience sees things play out in both orders. Casey's segment begins with humor before we're allowed to see the poignant reality. Kubon's segment will lead with that reality, so the following performance shows us how it translates to the stage.

Kubon is a comedian based out of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Kubon's interview candidly explains his relationship with sexuality. He explains his post-coital tristesse and his deep-seated insecurities. This interview is covered with tastefully nude cartoons representing Kubon and his respective partners. The Kubon cartoon morphs into a Mr. Hyde version of himself during sex and returns to normal after climax.

A slow dip to black brings us to Kubon on stage, an easily recognizable likeness of his cartoon. His humor focuses on sexual exploits with a mocking sense of pride; no hint of the actuality we just learned about. He engages the crowd and asks a female audience member where she's from. Regardless of her answer, he replies, "Oh, I just wanted to know how far I would have to follow you home later." He makes a finger-gun gesture and clicks his mouth with a wink and smile. He continues this gesture over and over, though his smile fades to an intense stare. He lowers his finger gun and paces the stage menacingly. After a generous amount of comedic timing, he raises the finger gun again, points it at the woman and yells "BANG!"

A hard cut to our next title card. "Mike Burd." Mike's voice meanders a bit as he talks about how his father was an alcoholic and died when Mike was only four years old. On screen, a whirling double-helix of DNA dissolves into liquor being poured into a glass. Mike describes his

struggles with alcoholism and the things it has cost him. Animated bottles and cans pile up in the middle of a room. Liquor pours over Mike as the room begins to fill and he struggles to swim. He says “at least I’ve gotten some killer material out of it.” A microphone on a stand plunges into the ocean of liquor and Mike grabs it. It pulls him out and he lands on a stage.

We then cut to Mike performing. He stands on stage mimicking the animation we just cut from. He talks about his alcoholism bluntly and in a self-effacing way. The material itself isn’t terribly dark. Mike laughs his way through his humorous translations of his problems.

We fade again to a montage of the performers. There’s an over-exposure that gives it a dreamy look. Their mouths move, but we can’t hear them over soundscape. Flashes from the actualities appear on screen over each performer. We fade to illustrations of each performer with their names under their cartoon. Fade to black.

Feasibility

I’ve selected each character based on our personal friendships. They’re all willing to work with me. I also have back-up characters and stories. In case one or more falls through, I can build the same film in many different ways. My experience being their friend and also performing with them gives me the insight to be able to construct this documentary and accurately convey their characters to an audience.

My plan is to acquire all needed materials in a single two-week-long trip to Michigan and Chicago. The main interviews will each be obtained be done in two sessions: one preliminary interview and one secondary interview in which missing segments and connective tissue missed after the first interview recorded. This second interview will be conducted after reviewing material from the first. I also plan to accumulate some home movies from my subjects as well as

photographs and other personal effects, in case I can find an application for them in post-production.

On this same production trip, the subjects' live performances will be recorded. Each comedian will perform more than once over the course of my production, in case reshoots of the performances are necessary. The subjects know what material is needed for the film and are more than happy to accommodate.

Since I have many friends in Michigan from my undergraduate career and various productions, the film will have a very capable crew at its disposal. They're all more than willing to help. I plan to run sound while two cinematographers capture the performance

Securing the live performances and interviews will give me the necessary material to create my 'audio-lock.' An early preliminary post-production will construct the timeline of the film through the audio. This will give me a clear road map of the visual materials I'll need to collect and create. Front-loading the work aurally will allow me to spend more time on the visuals without falling behind schedule.

The re-enactments and visual metaphors will be incredibly easy to produce. Breaking away from vérité shooting and creating shot list will allow me to work as efficiently as possible. Since most are single shots, they will not be labor-intensive or time-consuming. That portion of the production will be easier to control and not unlike shooting in a studio.

The most challenging portion of the production will be the animated segments. Artists have already been approached to participate in the project. In an effort to maintain a professional relationship and consistently meet deadlines, the artists will be compensated for their work.

Additionally, I plan to storyboard the animated sequences myself. A guideline for the artists will help things to run more smoothly. I want to be very clear about what I want and make

the drawings simple enough that they can be completed on time. My goal is to do as much planning and work myself as I can, to make the work clearer and easier for the artists. When their work is finalized, it can be easily scanned and added to the project. Any problems with the original artwork can then be corrected digitally. While I'm not Photoshop savvy, there are people and resources to reach out to in such an event.

With the story already more or less built through audio-lock, the remainder of post-production will be adding the visuals when and where they are applicable. While scanned illustrations will be used, I've also been exploring a technique where an artist can draw on a backlit piece of tracing paper on a sheet of plate glass. With a camera placed beneath the glass, the artistic process can be captured in real time and then sped up in post-production. This is another way to have motion on screen during illustrated segments. Seeing the art created in real time could stylistically fit one of the segments. I have many solutions to the challenge of still, drawn images becoming stale on screen and continue to search for more.

In short, the front-loaded pre-production and planning that I've done has made this project incredible feasible. I've selected a topic I can competently discuss and chosen mediums in which I have connections. I do a lot of work with comedians and artists, so this project lends itself to the connections I have and the company I keep. Also, I selected this topic and approach because it will really allow me to 'write' this documentary, tapping the one skill and resource I know I have in a way that conventional non-fiction film wouldn't allow.

Goals of Production

This film has a number of goals, the first of which is to be expository in its own way. I think stand-up comedy as an art form is misunderstood. I want audiences to understand that

comedians are people, just like them. Comedians have experienced traumatic events just like anyone else. However, I don't want the audience to think that comedians get into comedy because of these traumas. Because of the characters and subject matter, I don't know how clear this will be, but that possible misinterpretation will have to be something I keep in mind throughout production and distribution

I want the film to shed light on the actualities of these performers and their writing processes. Showing the humanity of my characters is one goal, and I intend to accomplish it by sharing the non-performative aspects of a part of their life offstage. This ability of comedians to edit poignant portions of their lives into something laughable is something I want to showcase.

There is one specific misconception that my film will address. Some inaccurately code a comedian's ability to approach dark and heavy topics with humor. It's a misconception that making jokes at the expense of taboo topics like rape, death, the holocaust, etc. means the performer is callous. I want to show that stand-up comedy isn't just a form of personal expression; in a lot of ways, it's a coping mechanism (Abel, 367). I want this film to really humanize its characters and show audience members that while their ways of coping with personal tragedies may be different, that fact doesn't make them flippant.

Another goal of this production is for it to be artful. I'm employing artists for that exact reason. I want the illustrations to be impressive on their own, and for their integration into the story to only enhance the film. I want the actuality segments to be very poetic, a sort of mosaic of images that help the audience member really visualize ideas and emotions. The illustrated segments will supply visual expression to supplement the performances. While the art forms of illustration and performance, respectively, are different, they can both help to cultivate understanding.

I also want this film to be funny. This will be accomplished almost exclusively through the on-stage performances. However, I think it will be a challenge because I've specifically chosen to handle the darkest and heaviest topics. While the actuality segments will be very poignant, the live performances will certainly be funny because it's the job of the performer to make them that way. The performers put in a lot of effort to translate these tragedies into humor, and it will undoubtedly pay off. I've specifically chosen my characters because they're very gifted writers and performers. Frankly, they're hilarious. Making taboo topics palatable for an audience is what they do. Taking the film's audience to a dark place and allowing them to laugh in that place is another one of my goals.

It's my specific intention for this film to break away from the work I've been producing in this graduate program. I want to really submit challenges to myself now that I have the freedom to do things the way I want and employ my skill set. No matter what I choose to show on screen, the brief 'oral histories' the comedians supply are non-fiction. With that fact as the anchor of the film, I plan to take as many creative liberties as I can. By writing this documentary and choosing my own approaches, I can really make the project feel like my own.

Intended Audience

This film will find an audience in a way that mimics stand-up comedians. I've never been much for solicitation or pandering. I will put this film into the world and allow an audience to sort of naturally accumulate. When people are on board with the content you're generating, it finds its way around. However, I anticipate that both the style and content of this film will alienate an amount of a more general audience. While I won't compromise artistic integrity, objectivity will play a role in making the film as universally relatable as possible.

While audiences for my work have always been niche, I plan on reaching several different niche audiences with different aspects of the film. This will really flesh out my audience base and make it more diverse. As could be expected, my main audience is comedians and stand-up comedy enthusiasts. This audience will appreciate not only the on-stage performance aspect, but also the insight into the actualities that inspire the art form.

Another audience I intend to reach is through the art. I want the illustrations in the film to be able to stand on their own as impressive contributions. Audience members with an appreciation for art will not only enjoy the illustrations, but their ability to visually convey the thoughts and feelings of the film's characters.

I think this film will also be of interest to people with a basic knowledge of psychoanalysis. The way that the characters describe traumatic experiences candidly should be terribly fascinating to someone with more knowledge of psychology than I have. Additionally, I hope that this niche audience will be able to draw congruencies and original thought from seeing the live performance that was inspired by the actualities just learned. This audience will be able to understand writing and performance as a form of therapy on a level other audiences won't.

I think the personal stories of each character will also find their own audiences. Each of their stories is very unique, and in that way, able to draw in their own respective audience members. Casey's story about his dad will be relatable to an audience of people with physically abusive fathers or those with experience in any type of abusive relationship. Additionally the sort of themes being drawn from Casey's story are also relatable to anyone who has suffered physical abuse from anyone and people with strained relationships with their upbringing and their parents. Kubon's story will be relatable to men who have had sexual encounters they're not proud of, and more generally, anyone struggling with their own feelings about physical relationships. That's

the beauty of this project and these characters. Each story is an examination of the general through the specific. While their experiences are entirely personal, they are also universal in some small way.

Style and Approach

The subject matter doesn't lend itself to traditional *cinéma vérité* or observational cinema. However, the live-performance section will be filmed in a traditional concert film style. Simply, the best way to experience the performance is to see it. These segments will be filmed, like most live performances, with multiple cameras, to cut for continuity during editing. This traditional concert film style footage can then be more greatly juxtaposed with the more experimental sequences. My idea is that there's a sense of irony to it. The live performance is a calculated and practiced piece. It's an act, yet it's being captured in the most 'real' way that cinema knows how. On the other hand, the candid interviews that actually reveal the reality of the situation are shown in totally ways that are not at all congruent with observational documentary. We don't get to formally observe anything at all. The choices I'm making in production are meant to take liberties with what is real and what is not in an effort to blur the line between fiction and nonfiction cinema.

I'm using visual metaphors, stock footage, illustrations, animations, and re-enactments for a specific reason as well. Again, showing the reality of things through means that I have completely fabricated is a choice I'm making and pivotal to the point of the film. Additionally, I find these alternative means to be the most effective way to visualize the ideas and emotions of the characters. Everything they're describing can't be seen or observed. It's either a memory or an emotion. These things are internal, so they can't actually be filmed, but they can still be

expressed visually. That's where these alternative methods are pivotal. In this way, visual metaphors succeed where description fails. Trying to put something as profound as rage, fear, or depression into words always seems to fall short. I want to visually show what the inside of my characters' minds are like, and it can't be done any other way. By finding a way to visually express something internal, I'm giving my audience an intimate view of the characters. Not only will the interview portions be very personal, but also the visuals will be able to show the audience how that character feels.

I want my re-enactments to be very stylized to convey that they're my interpretations of the characters' memories and feelings. I want to really embrace that I'm in a position to make things up. Re-enactments will be low-key lit so there will be no defined background. These portions will be filmed in UNT's black box theatre. The entire room is black, so this lack of background will be easier to achieve. These segments will be dream-like in that way, like we're stuck in limbo. Also, I want the re-enactments to utilize impressionist lighting. Memories are often vague and disjointed, and I want these segments to be shot and edited to reflect that. Especially as time goes on, only parts of memories can be retrieved. Other parts become hazy or omitted all together. These segments will be my own interpretation of the imagination of my characters.

The soundscape will be a crucial part of these re-enactments, since half of our perception is based on what we experience aurally. The sound will mimic memory in a way that is consistent with the visual aspects. Any voices will be muffled and incoherent, as the interviews will be 'narrating' what we see. Since memories are warped and distorted by the passage of time, sound effects will be processed to sound dissonant. The original sounds that occurred in the

moment will be lost in a hollow echo. These will be laid over a bed of dull roar and low, droning tones.

The illustrations will operate differently than the other alternative imagery, but accomplish the same goal. Again, because so much of the actual content of the film is set in the past, it can't be captured through observational cinema. It has to be reconstructed in some other way, and that's what these techniques accomplish. The images will be built from my own interpretations of the interview with the performer. Those interpretations will then be handed off to an artist to illustrate. By the end, these images will have been filtered through the perceptions of the performer, the loss of memory, my own perception, and the interpretation of the artist. There are certain to be distortions along the way. The changes that will happen to that original event over the course of this process are intentional. It will reflect how the reality is lost and buried somewhere between the past and the moment in which we are currently living. The core of the story is that the experiences of our characters are very much nonfiction, but their way of coping with those experiences and expressing themselves is to take creative liberties with that original information. My film will follow that same model.

It's important to me that the art reflect the character to which it is attached. Since each of the characters is very different, the art should be unique in reflecting that character. After the performer gives me the aural material I need, I'll begin work on storyboarding the images. Even interview and performance segments that don't make it into the cut of the film can help me get a better understanding of the characters. Additionally, since I'm close personal friends with them all, my understanding of them is enhanced in that way. While it creates a personal bias, it is necessary that the subjects feel comfortable enough with me to participate in the film. The intimacy of our relationship will allow me insight I don't feel like I could get with anyone else.

After I know what it is that I want, I can begin collaboration with the artists to create the illustrations necessary for the film. While I'll be assertive with what needs to happen to accommodate the project, I will also let the artist take creative liberties with their own work. One of the points of the film is that the actuality has to go from the character, through myself, through an artist, through an editing process, before reaching yet another personal interpretation by an audience. While this may be too subtle for some of my audience, it's important to me that the actualities go through a highly stringent editing process and still be considered nonfiction by the end.

Once the 'audio-lock' has allowed me to create the images, I can go back and add sounds. While the timeline will be formed through this 'audio lock', that audio is in no way finalized. Interview segments can always be spaced out and sounds layered on top of this 'lock.' Since memory is not just formed through imagery but aurally, a sound bed will be necessary in creating a fuller experience. I really don't think music will be applicable for this project. I'm much more in favor of a soundscape formed through droning tones and sound effects.

Additionally one of the approaches that I'm taking with this film is collaboration. As an artist, I want to find the best people to complete any given task. I'm doing this project in part so I can collaborate with comedians, other filmmakers, and artists to create the best possible project. I will ultimately be writing, directing, and facilitating the film, but other artistic aspects belong to other people with those skill sets. While these collaborators answer to me, I want to respect the skills and wishes of the cinematographer, the performers, and the artists. When I work, it's important to me that I understand whose judgment I trust beyond my own, and this project will reflect that.

Since there is no clear story arc to this film, the project does not need to be edited in a chronological fashion. What's more important is that the editing process brings out the themes in the most effective way. Since each segment will stand on its own, the order of segments and characters will be flexible enough to accommodate the themes I've listed above. During the post-production process, I'll be working with Alec Robbins. We've worked together before, and his technical understanding of the editing process is exactly what I need and want. I'll be making the editing choices while he executes them for me. In our experience working together, he has a way of realizing my artistic visions.

The final product will then be a combination of many different mediums, reflecting the jumbled and complicated workings of human thought. The live performances, candid and personal interviews, illustrations, visual metaphors, re-enactments, still imagery, and stock footage will all come together as a sort of mosaic that visualizes and conveys to the audience something internal in each of my characters.

Equipment

The equipment needs of this production are straightforward and minimal. As far as constructing my 'audio lock', the live performances and interviews can be recorded with a single 702 recorder, or even my own Zoom H4N recorder. My experience recording audio at live comedy performances has taught me that a direct line from the board gives the best quality of voice from the performer. This, coupled with a cardioid or omni-directional microphone, placed at the back of the room and facing the audience, yields an ideal sound quality.

As stated before, live performances will be recorded using a two-camera system for versatility in post-production. I'm choosing Canon 5D Mark III rigs to record these

performances. My friends with DSLR's who help to record the performances will all yield cohesive footage

The interviews will be recorded with a wired lav and boom mic to allow versatility in mixing during post-production. This can be done with either the 702 recorders or Zoom H4N. An FS100 with attached shotgun mic will also be used. This will give the interviews a visual reference to aid in the editing process as well as an additional audio source. Since no sit-down interview footage will be included in the film, it won't matter that the footage isn't cohesive with the 5D.

The illustrated sequences will be achieved by scanning the illustrations with a high quality 1200dpi scanner. Additionally, I will utilize a DSLR by recording drawing processes through tracer paper and plate glass to create a time-lapse effect in post-production.

Theory Application

This film will draw heavily on inspiration from the films of Errol Morris. His thoughtful construction of imagery tactfully laid over extensive interview footage is a huge influence to the formation of this film concept and its execution. More specifically, his use of visual metaphors in *Mr. Death: The Rise and Fall of Fred A. Leuchter Jr.* (1999) and *A Brief History of Time* (1991), among other films, reflect the sort of fabrication this film hopes to achieve.

The most distinctive quality of Morris's style is his emphasis on the static monologues of his film subjects-- people sitting in chairs talking into the camera... For the most part, the "real world" social actors do the talking in Morris's films. [In *A Brief History of Time*] he himself is never seen, and his own voice is never heard. Nor does he resort to explanatory voice-over or intertitles to clarify his intentions or to guide viewer response. The words of the filmic subjects, the mise-en-scene and visual imagery, and the juxtapositions of his editing are his primary rhetorical tools. (Dorst, 270)

While other Morris films use the presence of his voice and occasionally his image, it is not the main source of his control of the content. As with Morris's films, the actuality segments of this project will deal with events that exclusively have occurred in the past. The creation of images to serve in the place of observation is a pivotal facet of this project.

This film will adhere to a lot of Morris's filmmaking ideologies. His body of work neutralizes the idea that a technique or approach is intrinsically wrong just because it is different. His use of unconventional methods is part of what makes his films work, and this film will incorporate some of them. More importantly, his refusal to shoot and edit in a traditional way serves as a heavy influence for my own production. Morris says,

Documentaries are probably harder to make than narrative features. Most people really don't understand just how hard it is to make these films. *Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control* and *The Fog of War* are full to the brim with images and sounds. It's not easy taking all this material and finding a narrative. Documentary combines script writing, directing and editing. And it also involves performance. What's more, you can reinvent the form with each film. (Morris, 107)

Like Morris's films, casting and script writing are huge facets of my production. The end result of the project relies heavily on carefully selecting characters. With casting the right people for the film, I can be sure the content they generate will align with my vision. With the film already 'scripted', I can guide the interviews to draw out the themes I want to communicate.

Furthermore, writing the visual imagery of the film will give me the creative control I need to produce the film I want. "... there is no denying the potential gain in sociopolitical as well as aesthetic understanding from cinematic art like Morris's, in which form as well as content exposes and dissolves borders that repress rather than delineate the truth" (Jaffe, 42).

The live performance segments work against the conventions of the Maysles brothers and D.A. Pennebaker. Their films, *Gimme Shelter* (1970) and *Dont Look Back* (1967), respectively, have live performance integrated into part of a larger narrative also shot in the style of cinéma

vérité. This is where my film will deviate. The styles of these filmmakers are not applicable because the use of this technique will not be consistently used throughout the film. "... there is a continuum, rather than a polarity between relatively influence-free shooting and cases where the camera's presence is a significant factor." (Mamber, 186). In the works of these seminal filmmakers, the performers are accommodating the presence of the camera, while in the recording of contemporary comedy specials; the event is organized around the idea of it being documented. While still observational, the live performance segments will be more akin to an HBO special to reflect the rhetorical nature of the performance. Theoretically, a routine performance wouldn't be affected significantly by the presence of a camera. Differentiating one kind of performativity in front of a camera from the regular performativity in front of an audience would be hard to cite in specific examples.

This film will also draw from the visualization and editing techniques of Stan Brakhage's *Window Water Baby Moving* (1962). "[Brakhage's films] have the gift of creating a debonair surface beneath with some kind of structural or associative logic that binds like iron" (Callenbach, 48). This film in particular pioneered techniques that my project will adopt. The film documents his wife giving birth, and images are edited together in such a way that mimics the formation of human memory. "Emotional arousal has the capacity to modulate memory at several stages of information processing, including stimulus perception, encoding and retrieval. Psychological studies in humans have demonstrated that arousal critically alters both attentional focus and consolidation of memories" (LaBar and Phelps, 490). Some shots are shown over and over, the way our own minds remember specific details and hold onto them. The re-enactment portions of the film will make an effort to follow this structure; to appear dreamlike and mimic internal thoughts and memories.

The audiences understanding of the characters' respective thoughts and feelings is pivotal to the film, and illustrations are the most effective way to do so. "...drawings that contained an artistic feature consistent with migraine (eg, pounding pain, nausea/vomiting, desire to lie down, periorbital pain, photophobia, visual scotoma) predicted the clinical diagnosis of migraine in 87.1% of cases" (Hove, 1). Children's drawings have, been helpful in the successful diagnosis of headaches, so there is medical evidence shows that illustrations are extremely helpful in visually conveying the internal. I plan to use this same concept to cultivate a mutual understanding of thought and emotion between my subjects and my audience by illustrating internal feelings.

Dark humor will be an overarching motif of the film. It's a byproduct of the tragic actualities being filtered through the mind of a comedian. Philosopher's Kant and Schopenhauer theorized that laughter is a reaction to inconsistency/incongruities (Roeckelein, 98). Incongruity theory plays a large role in the formation of the film. The subjects of the film will take their darkest experiences and twist them into humor. A wry and humorous presentation of heavy topics, things we perceive to be unfunny, is an incongruity in itself. The extreme levity exhibited by the subjects is inconsistent with the demeanor of non-comedians. The sense of humor necessary to generate their material is what sets comedians apart. That "gift" of incongruity is what makes the subjects funny. The films heavy topics and the way the incongruous way the subjects approach them will convey another theme of the film. The ability of comedians to find humor in painful circumstances, isn't just a coping mechanism, it allows an audience to approach those same topics. "Humor has been described as producing a cognitive-affective shift or a restructuring of the situation so that it is less threatening, with a concomitant release of emotion associated with the perceived threat" (Abel, 366). The translation of topics into something easier to ponder and discuss is what these comedians do, and the film aims to illustrate that.

This film will draw inspiration from loose departures from the documentary mode. Robert Flaherty utilized the incorporation of fabricated elements to aid in the creation of the film he set out to make. *Louisiana Story* (1948) used a script and entirely fictional characters as a means of conveying its message. *Nanook of the North* (1922) used similar elements and is still considered documentary and an iconic piece of ethnography. With the direction of the film being less speculative, fewer adjustments and compromises will need to be made throughout the production process.

The study of docudrama and docufiction is crucial to a comprehensive understanding of my own production and the successful completion thereof. These hybrids serve unique functions that more “pure” documentaries cannot.

- They appropriate documentary aesthetics to create a fictional world thereby severing the direct relationship between the image and the referent;
- They take as their object of parody both documentary as a screen form, documentary practitioners, and cultural, social, and political icons;
- They seek to develop a relationship with a knowing audience who, through being in on the joke, can appreciate both the humor and the inherent critical reflexivity of the form. (Lipkin, 14)

The re-enactment portions, reminiscent of the ones found in *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), will utilize these concepts directly. The remainder of the off-stage segments will draw from these ideas more indirectly. While docudrama generates fiction based on actual events, this film will allow the actuality to stand on its own and only take liberties with its visual manifestations. In a more general sense, this film will take every opportunity to marry concepts of fiction and nonfiction filmmaking. Aspects of these two modes will be interwoven to present challenges to both forms.

Distribution

As a partially animated short, this film will be exclusively distributed through the film festival circuit. The film will also be as a pilot for quasi-reality show. The length of the film will be close enough to use it as a sizzler reel. It will be packaged and solicited to:

- Comedy Central
- NYTFV Independent Pilot Competition
- Just For Laughs TV Comedy Search
- A&E Unscripted Development Pipeline

Additionally, some comedy festivals have short film showcases. This film will be applicable at these festivals based on the topic and the presence of live performance. I plan to further explore following festivals:

- The Journal of Short Film
- Dallas VideoFest
- BEA Conference
- Dallas International Film Festival
- Austin Film Festival
- ThinLine Film Festival
- Oak Cliff Film Festival
- Waterfront Film Festival
- Edinburgh Short Film Festival
- Tropfest
- Chicago Comedy Film Festival
- Central Michigan International Film Festival
- Ann Arbor Film Festival
- Capital City Film Festival
- Grand Rapids Film Festival
- Saugatuck Shorts Film Competition
- Made in Michigan Film Festival
- True North Film Festival
- Strutt Film Festival
- Michigan Film Festival
- LA Comedy Short Film Festival
- Iron Mule Short Comedy Film Series
- Short Cuts Film Festival
- Houston Comedy Film Festival
- American Psychological Foundation Film Festival
- Nantucket Film Festival
- Texas Independent Film Festival

- 24fps International Short Film Festival
- ATX Festival
- Dallas International Film Festival
- Fantastic Fest
- Lonestar Film Festival
- Texas Independent Film Festival
- Reykjavik Shorts and Docs Festival
- Couch Fest Films
- Hell Yes Fest
- Wet Your Pants Comedy Film Festival

Research (Continuing)

Films and Visual Media

- *Mr. Death: The Rise and Fall of Fred A. Leuchter Jr.*, Errol Morris, 2003
- *Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control*, Errol Morris, 1997
- *A Brief History of Time*, Errol Morris, 1991
- *Man On Wire*, James Marsh, 2008
- *Out of Order*, Kimberly Davis, 2012
- *The Thin Blue Line*, Errol Morris, 1988
- “Tales of Mere Existence”, Levni Yilmaz
- “Creased Comics”, Brad Neely
- *Is the Man Who Is Tall Happy?*, Michel Gondry, 2013
- *American: The Bill Hicks Story*, Matt Harlock & Paul Thomas, 2009
- *The Story of Menstruation*, 1946
- *Louisiana Story*, Robert Flaherty, 1948
- *Standard Operating Procedure*, Errol Morris, 2008
- *Drunk History*, Funny Or Die, 2007-Present
- *Drunk History*, Comedy Central, 2013-Present

Books and Journal Articles

- “Laughing at the Scary Stuff: Humor and Fear” by Gina Barreca
- “Humor, Stress, and Coping Strategies” by Millicent H. Abel
- “Arousal-Mediated Memory Consolidation: Role of the Medial Temporal Lobe in Humans” by K. S. LaBar and E. A. Phelps
- “Humor” by Aaron Smuts from the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- *Documentary Storytelling: Making Stronger and More Dramatic Nonfiction Films* by Sheila Curan
- “Why laughter makes no sense: The surprising science behind what tickles our funny bones” by Peter McGraw and Joel Warner
- “Films of Stan Brakhage” by Ernest Callenbach
- “Personality: Funny in the Head” by Gil Greengross
- “Humor Sapiens: Comedians’ Smarts, Humor and Creativity” by Gil Greengross
- “Humor Sapiens: How Healthy are Stand-Up Comedians?” by Gil Greengross

- “Humor Sapiens: Why Do Comedians Become Comedians by Gil Greengross
- “Humor Sapiens: When Do Tragedies Become Funny?” by Gil Greengross
- “Listening To Children With Communication Impairment Talking Through Their Drawings” by McLeod, Harrison, and Holliday
- “The Usefulness of Children’s Drawings in the Diagnosis of a Headache” by C.E. Stafstrom
- *Cinema Vérité in America: Studies in Uncontrolled Documentary* by Stephen Mamber
- “The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach” by Rod Martin
- “Emotion In Children’s Art: Do young children understand the emotions expressed in other children’s drawings?” by P. Misailidi
- *Errol Morris: Interviews* by Livia Bloom and Errol Morris
- *Seeing Is Believing: Observations on the Mysteries of Photography* by Errol Morris
- *Directing the Documentary* by Michael Rabiger
- *New Challenges for the Documentary* by Alan Rosenthal and John Corner
- *Stitches* by David Small
- "The Psychology Of Humor." by H.A. Murray Jr.
- “Which came first, the chicken device or the textural egg?: Documentary film and the limits of the hybrid metaphor” by J.D. Dorst
- “The Psychology of Humor” by L.W. Kline
- *Why Docudrama?: Fan Fiction on Film and TV* by Allan Rosenthal
- *Alternative Screenwriting: Beyond the Hollywood Formula* by Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush
- *Docufictions: Essays on the Intersection of Documentary and Fictional Filmmaking* by Gary Don Rhodes and John Parris Springer

Production Schedule

Date	Description of shoot	Notes/Thesis Document
July 1 st	Arrive in Kalamazoo, MI	
July 2 nd	Production meetings with cinematographers	
July 3 rd	Conduct first interview with Jacob Kubon in early afternoon. Record live performance at night	
July 6 th	Begin review of Kubon interview. Send transcriptions to artist.	
July 7 th	Record first interview with Michael Burd. Record live performance at night.	
July 8 th	Begin review of Mike’s interview. Send transcripts to artist.	

July 9 th	Record follow-up interviews (if necessary) and collect personal effects.	
July 11 th	Arrive in Chicago. Production meeting with cinematographers	
July 12 th	Conduct first interview with Casey Stoddard. Record live performance at night.	
July 13 th	Conduct follow-up interview (if necessary) and collect personal effects.	
July 14 th – 15 th	Pick-up shoots of performances (if necessary)	
July 16 th	Arrive back in Texas	
July 18 th – August 15 th	Assemble ‘audio lock’	
August 1 st – August 30 th	Create storyboards from audio lock through collaboration with artists. ‘Assign’ illustrations to artists.	
September 1 st – September 14 th	Shoot re-enactments and visual metaphor segments in studio.	
October 14 th	Rough versions of art due.	Begin chapter II: “ Approach to Production”
December 14 th	Final versions of art due.	Complete chapter II: “Initial Approach” and begin chapter III: “Evaluation of Completed work”
January 15 th		Complete chapter III: “Evaluation of Completed Work” and begin “Appendices.”
February 20 th	Complete rough cut of film	Complete “Appendices.”

Budget

Budget for Ron Lechler Production of: Tragedy + Time Length: 12 minutes Format: HD Video/Animation							
Above The Line Costs							
PRODUCTION							
Line #	Item Description	Rate	QTY	Cost	In-Kind	Total Needed	
01-00	Production Unit						
	Director/Writer/Producer	\$6,000	1	\$6,000	\$6,000		\$0
Total Above The Line Costs							
	Total Costs	\$6,000		Total In-Kind	\$6,000		Total Needed
							\$0
Below The Line Costs							
PRODUCTION							
Line #	Item Description	Rate per day	QTY	Cost	In-Kind	Total Needed	
02-00	Camera						
	Director of Photography		14	\$300	\$4,200	\$4,200	\$0
	Fluid Head Tripod		14	\$75	\$1,050	\$1,050	\$0
	Still Photographer		14	\$200	\$2,800	\$2,800	\$0
	Lights		14	\$45	\$630	\$630	\$0
03-00	Sound						
	Mixer		14	\$200	\$2,800	\$2,800	\$0
	Equipment (microphones, cables, etc)		14	\$50	\$700	\$700	\$0
04-00	Travel						
04-01	Michigan/Chicago						
	Roundtrip Flight		1	\$400	\$400		\$400
	Car Rental (2 Weeks)		14	\$20	\$280	\$280	\$0
	Gas (gallons)		43	\$4	\$151	\$0	\$151
	Lodging (nights)		14	\$80	\$1,120	\$1,120	\$0
	Other (meals, petty cash, etc.)		1	\$350	\$350	\$0	\$350
05-00	Misc. Production						
	Artist Commission		3	\$200	\$600	\$0	\$600
	Production Studio Rental (Days)		3	\$500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$0
	Props		1	\$200	\$200	\$0	\$0
Total Production Costs							
	Total Costs			Total In-Kind			Total Needed
		\$22,781		\$21,080			\$1,701

POST-PRODUCTION						
Line #	Item Description	Rate per day	QTY	Cost	In-Kind	Total Needed
04-00	Editing					
	Editor	\$200	30	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$0
	Editing System	\$500	30	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$0
	Misc. Editing properties					
05-00	Sound/Music					
	Sound Editor	\$120	5	\$600	\$600	\$0
	Score	\$1,200	1	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$0
06-00	Graphics					
	Graphic Designer	\$200	5	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$0
	Miscellaneous Expenses					
	External Hard Drive-3 TB	\$120	3	\$360	\$120	\$240
Total Post-Production Costs						
	Total Costs		Total In-Kind		Total Needed	
	\$24,160		\$23,920		\$240	
PUBLICITY AND DISTRIBUTION						
Line #	Item Description	Rate	QTY	Cost	In-Kind	Total Needed
07-00	Publicity and Distribution					
	Posters	\$250	1	\$250	\$0	\$250
	Festival Submissions	\$30	30	\$900	\$0	\$900
	DVDs and Blu-Ray Discs	\$200	1	\$200	\$0	\$200
Total Publicity and Distribution Costs						
	Total Costs		Total In-Kind		Total Needed	
	\$1,350		\$0		\$1,350	
Total Above The Line						
	Total Costs		Total In-Kind		Total Needed	
	\$6,000		\$6,000		\$0	
Total Below The Line						
	Total Costs		Total In-Kind		Total Needed	
	\$48,291		\$45,000		\$0	
Sum Total						
	Total Costs		Total In-Kind		Total Needed	
	\$54,291		\$51,000		\$3,291	
Contingency						
	10%	\$5,429.05				
Grand Total						
	Total Costs		Total In-Kind		Total Needed	
	\$59,719.55		\$56,100.00		\$3,619.55	

CHAPTER 2

PREPRODUCTION RESEARCH

Subject Matter Research

In researching the subject matter, I made an effort to explore topics specific to my subjects, as well as more general topics that would help give me helpful tools for the interview process.

While I could find no specific literature on stand-up comedy and live performance as therapy, I thought that there could be some congruency drawn between stand-up comedy and art therapy. I found this area relevant because humor is a form of personal expression, and this can often be therapeutic.

Art, psychotherapy, and humor possess one major feature in common—they can be expressions of the fluid, symbolic, and sometimes poetic primary process described by Freud... Art and humor contribute to a person's ability to master the difficulties of life. Through art and humor, a person can also express thoughts, attitudes, and feelings that are usually concealed or taboo. (Mango, 2)

While this article does not reference stand-up specifically as an art form, the themes of humor as a form of expressing concealed feelings is consistent.

Finding literature specifically on physical abuse of children also proved difficult, while sexual abuse literature is entirely pervasive. Regardless, the reading gave me an amount of insight into Casey Stoddard's story and helped contextualize some of his behavior. "Although pure emotional abuse is less commonly reported than other forms of maltreatment, all maltreatment results in emotional turmoil and may lead to lifelong mental health consequences" (Sege). Casey's descriptions of some of his own behaviors indicates the same emotional turmoil described in this article. For example, the way Casey sleeps on only his left side so he can constantly watch his bedroom door, in case of some intrusion. While Casey no longer lives with

his abusive father and any such attack is terribly unlikely, the anxiety he feels in his own bedroom still exists.

Dr. Barnett had mentioned that some of Mike Burd's behavior was congruent with what he had seen in patients of his own. He speculated that Mike taking playful jabs at his alcoholism on stage enables him to drink because he's already flagellated himself publicly for that same behavior. In that way, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. I think that, in some ways, Mike has adopted his alcoholism as part of his identity. While it's a vice, it's also formative to his character. "Depression may reduce the resolve needed to refrain from alcohol and/or drug abuse; alternatively, depression may lead to self-medication" (Sher). While I find this quote to be a bit indicting, these behaviors seem to be cyclical, and Mike demonstrates that.

Gaining a loose understanding of the psychology of trauma was helpful not just for specific subjects, but also in an overarching way for the project. While each of my subjects dealt with unique circumstances, they all deal with their problems in similar ways. Writing and live performance is a way of articulating feelings and expressing them.

I also did research specifically on the interview process. The themes of the film being properly expressed were contingent on strong interview footage. One article titled *The Psychology of the Interview* gave some helpful insight.

It is imperative that the reason for the interview be kept in mind. The purpose of most interviews is to learn something about the person being interviewed, rather than how good an interviewer is. Obviously, if he spends the interview time talking about himself, he will learn very little. (Symonds)

While, I kept the interview format very conversational, it was important to remember that the interview was not about me and to let my subject speak and that. After some research and reflection, I decided that unstructured interviews were the best way to go about collecting material. It would allow the interview to feel more candid and less clinical. I was concerned that

the personal and very human aspects of the project may be lost in a series of pre-written questions or prompts. An article on the interview method confirmed some of the strengths of this choice.

- Unstructured interviews are more flexible as questions can be adapted and changed depending on the respondents' answers. The interview can deviate from the interview schedule.
- Unstructured interviews generate qualitative data through the use of open questions. This allows the respondent to talk in some depth, choosing his or her own words. This helps the researcher develop a real sense of a person's understanding of a situation.
- They also have increased validity because it gives the interviewer the opportunity to probe for a deeper understanding, ask for clarification, and allow the interviewee to steer the direction of the interview. (McLeod)

People, Location Research

Researching people did not operate the way I imagine it typically would in other productions. The dynamic of my research was drastically changed by my closeness and intimacy with the subjects. They were originally selected based on knowledge I had gained over the course of our friendship. In this way, I feel like the majority of my research on the subjects was done unwittingly over course of years and countless personal interactions. Additionally, I was familiar with a lot of their on-stage material, having performed with them for years. This working knowledge of my subjects as performers, not just as friends, was pivotal to completing production.

None of my subjects are prominent figures. Were they celebrities in some way, research could have been accomplished more conventionally. However, there doesn't really exist a wealth of material on any of them that could be absorbed. To supplement my knowledge of their performances, I watched what material there was on YouTube. It was important to keep up with how their material and performance had changed since I had last seen them.

After having decided the topic of my film, some preliminary interviews served as a sort of research. They helped to narrow my topic and give a sense of direction to the interviews. I knew already that Michael Burd struggled with alcoholism and that Jacob Kubon had reservations about sexual intimacy based on candid conversations we had. When I first approached Burd and Kubon about the film, they seemed immediately willing to participate. I described the idea that topics they joked about on stage actually had some serious element that applied to their life off-stage, which they confirmed.

Casey was a sort of special case because I knew that I wanted to work with him without really knowing if he had applicable material. When I asked him if he had any poignant stories that an audience wouldn't know from watching him perform, that's when he divulged to me the story about his abusive father and broken fingers. Through that one conversation, I knew that would be Casey's topic.

I kept these sort of preliminary interviews to a minimum because I wanted the recorded interviews to be revealing, instead of just a repetition. I wanted the audience to feel as moved as I did when I first discussed these topics with my friends. In some ways, I really only knew them on stage, but revealing these intimate parts of their character gave them a whole new dimension. I wanted that to be something an audience could experience as well.

Traditional location research would have been helpful if choices in location were pivotal to the completion of production. Shooting was confined to a single performance venue and the living rooms of my subjects. The venues were more or less interchangeable, so long as technical accommodations were comparable. I feel like location is pivotal in other documentary films, but that isn't the case in this production.

However, technical accommodations were a factor. Rupert's Brew House in Kalamazoo, Michigan was a space with which I was comfortable shooting the live performances. Having performed there before, I was familiar with the room. I arranged with the owner to shoot there and surveyed the space to make sure it was ideal. It was important to get a direct line from the monitor to have a clear audio recording of the performer's voice. This venue had a perfectly adequate soundboard, stage lighting, and ample space.

Deciding that the performance space was ideal, I made arrangements with the open mic host to have the performers I needed on the list for two consecutive weeks (with the exception of Casey, who was only available for a single performance). I also thought it was important to the production that the venue be full. The audience itself was a sort of character I hadn't thought about earlier. The open mic host assured me that the shows there were popular and that attendance wouldn't be an issue. I took it upon myself to do some additional advertising through social media to help supplement attendance at the live performances. My goal was to have as many people in attendance as possible. A full crowd means a more energetic room, typically makes for better performances. I have no way of knowing how helpful this advertisement through social media was. Attendance isn't counted for free shows, and I focused more on tasks within my control, specifically, the duties of production.

Distribution Possibilities/Target Audience

There were no major changes in the target audience of my film, as I adhered to the concept that I proposed in my prospectus. One addition that has been made to distribution is that in addition to the festival circuit, each vignette will be released as a free webisode on my Vimeo channel. I feel that this caters to the original concept of each character's story standing on its

own. By releasing one webisode every week, I can sustain the film's life on social media longer than I could if I released everything at once.

Additionally, releasing the webisodes for free will increase viewership. Because the film has a pretty heavy emphasis on mental health, I think that making it more readily available is the most responsible choice. I'd be much more comfortable not making money from distribution if I knew that the project was helping to normalize experiences that people struggle with.

Goals of Production

The goals of this production went widely unchanged. I think that changes in production goals are made when changes in the production itself forces them to occur. The material I needed to complete my film was stringently laid out early on. Since I was successful in capturing all the necessary material, no changes to production goals were necessary.

CHAPTER 3

RECONCEPTUALIZATION BEFORE PRODUCTION

The concept of the film did not go through any changes between the defense of the prospectus and the production process. I feel that the outline of the film was clear and specific enough that when it was approved, no changes to the concept were necessary. I stuck to my original plan that required me to not shoot a large amount of footage. My original plan was to write the film and shoot it as opposed to finding the film in footage, and I shot accordingly.

CHAPTER 4

INTEGRATION OF THEORY AND PRODUCTION

Theories and Rationale for Use

Over the course of production, different theories were researched and used. I studied topics related to both cinema and psychology in an effort to weave them together. While a deep and comprehensive knowledge of psychology on my part was not realistic for the scope of the project, my hope was that reviewing related topics would create a more informed film.

From the psychological standpoint, I looked at concepts of shame and guilt as well as the social self. I felt like these were applicable, given the nature of the project and its subjects. I felt that there was an amount of both guilt and/or shame displayed in some way by each of the subjects. "...guilt is caused by internal sanctions, whereas shame is caused by external sanctions emanating from other people or institutions... Shame sanctions what is *socially* undesired, guilt is what is perceived as flouting *private* norms" (Teroni). Having even this basic understanding of what shame and guilt mean shed an amount of light on the project and its subjects.

Dr. Barnett and I discussed this topic and the ways in which it was relevant to the subjects. He speculated that stand-up comedy live performance requires elements of public confession. In this way, topics that the subjects regard with an amount of shame or guilt (alcoholism, abuse, and sexual anxiety, respectively) can be shared to gain positive regard through the visceral reaction of laughter.

Comedy writing and performance is a sort of catharsis; a means of expressing emotions. In this way, humor can operate as a kind of defense mechanism. For example, Kubon translating his sexual anxiety into his chauvinistic on-stage character demonstrates elements of reaction formation. "The defensive component in acting out can be viewed as congruent with the dynamic

of reaction formation. In the latter defense mode, an emotion is created by the ego in reaction to disturbing affect that threatens to become conscious” (Juni).

While humor as a sort of therapy for the subjects appears ineffective in the film, I think that the subtext of the film indicates that trauma and insecurity serve as fuel for artistic expression. In this way, the behaviors of the subjects are self-perpetuating. While it may not be present in footage, the goal of comedy isn't to actually cure or heal. This was never intended to be the message of the film. Rather one of the overarching themes of the film is writing and live performance as a catharsis. For the subjects, humor serves as a way of processing and expressing emotions that might otherwise go undigested. Rather than an effort to cure, it is more like a constant and regular maintenance.

Each of the subjects takes their personal demons and translates them in some way that is tangible for an audience. The performers are fabricating a version of themselves for an audience. Carl Jung wrote seminal pieces on persona and the social self. Though we all exhibit some creation of persona, the subjects of this film do so for the purpose of stage performance. “The contents of self-presentations are influenced by numerous factors including properties of the presenter (e.g. his or her current self-concept, desired and undesired identities) and properties of the social context (e.g. role constraints [and] the beliefs and values of the audience)” (Banaji). In his book on humor, Freud said that comedy was a socially acceptable way to vent thoughts and emotions (often sexual or otherwise unconscious) in a context that was safe. After all, we're “just kidding.”

I think it's interesting that comedians who participate in this sort of shameless act of sharing harbor deeper feelings that an audience cannot see. This juxtaposition is what originally inspired the project.

The presentation of taboo topics is also a factor in the production of the film. Each subject deals with some topic that is perceived to be, in one way or another, difficult to talk about. This ties back to concepts of guilt and shame. This sort of sharing is impolite or off-limits because of its association with those two constructs.

The nature of taboo topics, an interaction topic that is perceived as ‘off-limits’ by one or both of the relationship parties has received only scant attention. This is perhaps surprising given that rules concerning topic avoidance are generally agreed by students of social interaction to play a prominent role in social exchange (Goodwin).

Again, going back to Freud, comedy is a sort of outlet for topics that can’t be confronted or discussed in other ways. It’s part of the catharsis of writing, performance, and humor. The inclusion of these topics was a conscious choice on my part. Because they’re harder to talk about, I felt like they were that much more deserving of attention. Also, I’m entirely comfortable with alienating audiences or parts of audiences. It was important to me that the film maintain my voice. The irreverent presentation of dark and heavy topics is part of what makes the project feel like my own.

Another theory that was employed in the film, almost exclusively in post-production is the concept of dialectical montage.

The alchemy of montage, for the Soviet theorists, brought life and luster to the inert base materials of the single shot. The montage-theorists were also, in a sense, structuralists *avant la lettre*, in that they saw the filmic shot as being without intrinsic meaning prior to its placement within a montage structure. The shot gained meaning, in other words, only relationally, as a part of a larger system. (Stam, 38)

The idea is that every shot is being informed by the one prior to it. For example, a shot of a man staring, followed by a shot of food would insinuate that the person from the first shot is hungry. If the shot of food were replaced with a beautiful woman, it could be implying some sort of physical attraction. Those meanings do not belong to the shot; they are forged in the minds of the audience, creating a sort of synthesis.

Traditional narratives are designed to give the audience all the necessary information to follow the story. Instead of feeding storylines to audiences who passively accept them, montage is meant to be more challenging. I wanted my film to lack a formal narrative structure and instead to rely on montage to give the audience the images with which to perform their own linkage; drawing themes and meanings from the film themselves.

My film also contains elements of postmodernism. This was another conscious choice on my part. While defining postmodernism can be quite slippery, it can be understood, in brevity, as a departure from and criticism of modernism. Moreover, “one of the most significant lessons of postmodern theory: all of our assumptions concerning what constitutes ‘culture’ and ‘critical analysis’ are now subject to intense debate” (Allen, 328). As is common in postmodern pieces, my film contains elements of irony. As was pointed out to me by committee member, each subject is taking parts of their real life and editing it for live performance. In turn, I’m creating my own art from theirs with a similar editing process. Meanings getting so distorted along the way in a medium perceived to be objective and honest has an amount of built-in irony.

There are also moments of cinematic rupture; moments specifically meant to take the audience out of the film. Cinema typically makes efforts to maintain its own illusion. Even the theater exhibition experience is designed to let the audience feel absorbed by the film; a dark room with surround sound and a giant screen made to engulf you. My film, on the other hand, tries to remind you of the fact that you’re just watching a film using self-referential moments. The allusion to the film making process and the reflexive nature of the film is almost immediate. In the first shot, Michael Burd points to the camera and addresses it. He then turns and points to the other camera and addresses that one as well. I wanted to break the fourth wall as early as possible to destroy the illusion of cinema.

Performativity is another theory I examined for the production of the film. This area of study has just as much to do with psychology as it does with cinema, though some of the terms may be different. Performativity is really an area where media theory and psychology meet and weave together.

When one's activity occurs in the presence of other persons, some aspects of the activity are expressively accentuated and other aspects, which might discredit the fostered impression, are suppressed. It is clear that the accentuated facts make their appearance in what I have called front region; it should be just as clear that there may be another region – a 'back region' or a 'backstage' – where the suppressed facts make an appearance (Goffman, 111)

The concept of performativity shares a lot in common with the idea of persona and the social self; the central core of both being that a person behaves differently in different social situations, blurring any idea of a true and real self.

A situational analysis, then, pays attention to the only reality that documentary can truly bear witness to: that of an interaction between two individuals at a particular time, each individual bringing to that situation their own expectations and understandings of what is going on, and how that will define how they ought to, and want to, behave. The reality of documentary, as Bruzzi points out, is 'performative' – 'Documentaries are a negotiation between filmmaker and reality and at heart, a performance.' (Ellis, 46)

It is important to note, I think, that performativity would not be referring exclusively to the on-stage performance of my film's subjects, but also their interview. The subject's awareness of the camera and their understanding of the eventual viewer changes the context of their interaction with me. A 'mask' is put on, unwittingly or otherwise. Before being interviewed, subjects told me that they had been thinking about the interview process and what would say. They said they wanted to deliver me what I needed for the film and also displayed a sort of obsession with being properly understood. "[Embarrassment] is something we can get used to quite quickly, but the ambivalence remains submerged, prompting a desire to perform 'better' or 'more naturally'" (Ellis, 109).

The candid interview portion is then shaped by its context. Even though candid interview is supposed to be the most realistic part of the film, it is at least partially contrived because of the nature of performativity and the social self.

Approaches

I wanted my film to only use what I referred to as the “bare-minimum reality.” I wanted the film to be constructed instead of captured and give myself as much power in that construction as possible. Part of my reasoning for this approach was that it caters to my skill set. I feel like any advantages I have as a filmmaker come from my writing background. Being able to construct a story in advance let me use the skills I have and let the project feel like my own. Later, I could build the film around ideas I had generated.

On previous projects, I had been at the mercy of traditional documentary production. Shooting hours of footage and finding the story within it feels terribly counter-productive and simply is not how I want to make films. To me, it doesn't make any sense to collect a deluge of material and then find out if your story is there. It's unlikely that I'll ever work that way again.

I feel like I've been more or less soured on the idea of non-fiction filmmaking, at least in its conventional sense. It's part of what inspired the project. I wanted to get as far away from documentary as possible, and *The Best Medicine* allowed me to do that. I felt like I had a sort of anchor in the fact that the comedians are telling true stories. This is really the only non-fiction element of the film; everything else is imagined. Even “concert” footage is an openly contrived and rehearsed performance. The true stories at the core of the film are like a glowing ember of reality, buried deep underneath an ashy mound of contrivance.

While being more or less fed up with conventional documentary production, I also wanted to see how far away I could get from non-fiction while still qualifying. In this way, the film was a sort of personal test evaluated by the stringent guidelines of the thesis process. The use of cartoons and illustrations were my attempt at blurring the lines between fiction and reality. I wanted to make the film challenging and for the non-fiction element to be hard to access. I liked the idea of using the fantastical to communicate something very real and human.

I find the concept of animation and illustration in documentary to be terribly fascinating. I think that was a huge factor in its selection and my being so consistently energized throughout post-production. Non-fiction cinema at the very least plays at the idea of objectivity. It's how the word non-fiction is applicable. I think the use of visual art is an interesting choice, as it is inherently subjective. While it may seem like a counter-intuitive combination to filmmakers who might call themselves purists, I think this marrying of concepts is a particularly ingenious one. I feel that it dissolves the illusion of objectivity in the non-fiction form.

Documentary filmmaking itself is an art form, and like other kindred visual art forms, is subjective. Though leaning toward objectivity or subjectivity may be a conscious choice, decisions must be made about what to shoot or where edit points are to be made. These choices are made based on a number of criteria set by the filmmaker. In this way, everything is filtered through their own personal lens. Even films that make an earnest effort of being objective become autobiographical in some small way.

Leaning as far away from objectivity as possible, my film maintains no illusion of being factual. It instead utilizes cartoons and illustrations, openly unrealistic interpretations of real life, to tell its story. It was important to me that the artistic interpretation present in my film be as blatant as possible. The inclusion of particularly "cartoony" representation of events was one of

my means to that end. The way Kubon appears as a caveman version is in no way a realistic of how Kubon actually appears. Rather, it serves as an artistic representation of how Kubon *feels*. Kubon described himself as feeling like a “big-forehead, drooling creature.” My artistic interpretation was a sort of Cro-Magnon version of Kubon. I verbally described this concept to an illustrator. After being processed and interpreted several times over, that feeling is visualized on the screen.

It was important to me that the film be a personal exploration and furthering of the non-fiction form. My use of the fantastical and bare-minimum reality was an effort to create that tension between what I’m exhibiting and what we perceive non-fiction to mean. This exhibits itself in a number of conscious choices I made throughout the production process. The most glaring choice was using animation and illustration to show what reality is. While some element of animation or illustration isn’t terribly uncommon in documentary, it is usually used in a way that tries to remain realistic, like artist renderings of historic battles.

As discussed, my film overtly takes artistic license with its own imagery. Some of this imagery is somber and down-to-earth, like the images on-screen while Mike describes his first DUI. However, others are more fantastical. This sort of alternative imagery is a different means to the same end of other imagery in non-fiction cinema. The imagery is there to help the audience cultivate mutual understanding with the subjects. Mike’s DUI story uses the image of the police officer and the flashlight washing over Mike’s face to really put an audience in that moment. Conversely, when Mike blows into the breathalyzer, the word “FUCKED” flashes on the device. While breathalyzers, certainly didn’t do that in real life, for Mike, it might as well have because the meaning was the same. The same way Kubon feels like a caveman and that

image appears on screen, Mike felt figuratively “fucked” by his circumstances, so that is the image that appears.

The use of alternative imagery was entirely pivotal in my approach to generating character. I’ve already discuss how the art stylistically captures each of the subjects. Animation was also key to communicating each subject’s character. Schipp reviewed footage from interview to get a feel for each subject’s mannerisms. It was important to me that the animated sit-down interviews capture each character, while giving me control of how they are expressed. As a result, Mike is depicted casually relaxing on a couch, irreverently divulging the truth about his past and his vices. A cartoon version of Casey nervously fidgets in his seat. Even though his eyes are only dots, we’re aware that he’s rarely making eye contact with us. This was also accomplished in his illustration. One sequence in particular that I feel was effective shows an adult Casey sitting at the edge of his bed staring at his bedroom door. His bedroom is a long, distorted, nightmarish version of itself, resembling his childhood bedroom. Long tentacles of darkness emanate from the door, seemingly reaching for him. This was one of the ways that alternative imagery accomplished something that more traditional documentary conventions couldn’t. It visually expressed how affected Casey is by his childhood, literally illustrating fear and insecurity.

Another one of my approaches was the integration of soviet montage theory. As discussed earlier in this chapter, I intended to forgo traditional narrative structure and instead allow images in the film to inform each other, in the tradition of soviet montage. This is present throughout the film. The main way in which I employed this theory was the juxtaposition of live performance footage with candid interview footage. The interruption of performance with interview was conscious artistic choice that creates a context with which to understand the live

performance. That was one of the original goals of the film, even in its most primal stages. Information given during interview gives the audience a lens with which to examine and understand live performance. This is a lens that live audience would not have access too. The film is meant to fill that void.

One example of the employment of montage theory occurs early in the film. When Michael jokes about having a breathalyzer installed in his car. In the context of a live comedy performance, an audience doesn't necessarily know how inaccurate or embellished this information is. The following segment is the "true story" in which Michael describes his first DUI. This portion of interview (and all the others, for the most part) is more depressing than funny. However, it serves the purpose of giving us a way to frame what we just say and what we will see of Michael throughout the film.

A simpler example of employing soviet montage theory occurs in this same segment. An image appears on screen of a police officer slowly raising a flashlight. In the next shot, light washes over Michael's face. Separately these two images are devoid of meaning, at least according to soviet montage theory. However, when put together a connection is formed between the two images. We are meant to understand that the source of the flashlight is the source of the light on Michael's face. While never in the same frame, placing these two shots sequentially communicates the adjacency of both characters, though this linkage is done in the minds of the audience.

Another approach I used to blur the lines between fiction and reality and incorporate postmodernist elements was playing at documentary tropes. After all, my film still uses the entirely traditional sit-down interview format, but in its own constructed way. I give the audience this element they may expect from a documentary, but again, only its core. Its truth is rooted in

the candid nature of the interview, but everything else is practically a farce. I keep the reality at a distance by using cartoons as a vehicle for that truth.

I even intentionally insert “errors” into these segments. When Kubon begins speaking, he is out of focus. The focus seems to rack, but goes to far, pushing Kubon into and out of focus again before finally finding focus. Of course, for animation there was no camera involved at all. The inclusion of this “mistake” is to exhibit my understanding of documentary tropes as well as my audience’s recognition of them. In a similar sequence, before Mike’s cartoon starts speaking, the “camera” is both crooked and out of focus. The noise of a camera being handled is heard and focus is found. The idea is that as a filmmaker, I made the mistake of not being prepared for Mike to start speaking. This insinuates that while my performance as a camera operator was not very accomplished, the substance of the footage warranted its inclusion in the film regardless of this technical error.

Of course, these “mistakes” were all added in post-production. I thought it was interesting that Schipp and I went to additional effort to insert errors. In non-fiction cinema, doing another take is rarely an option. I wanted to incorporate this element by making some footage look less technically accomplished. I feel like these elements are post-modern because they require an understanding of contemporary documentary on both my behalf and that of the audience. This is another way in which the film is self-referential. I took the time to allude to the filmmaking process. Again, it was important to me that the film break the fourth wall when possible and use elements of reflexivity to destroy the illusion that a film isn’t being made.

Storyboarding was another approach that required some theoretical understanding. Storyboarding is a process that occurs during pre-production of most non-fiction films. It involves drawing shot-by-shot panels of a film to help visualize what the final project will look

like. Additionally it helps, writers, cinematographers, directors, and other crewmembers to communicate their vision to each other.

This technique is terribly uncommon in documentary filmmaking, because that type of planning is impractical. Documentary filmmakers can make an earnest effort to plan shots, but that won't necessarily mean that any of that imagery will be captured. Storyboards are a tangible, visual representation that serves as a blueprint for a film. It makes sense to plan fiction films this way because the narrative is written in advance, but the narrative of a documentary film may change over the course of production.

I chose to storyboard my film because after gathering the necessary interview material, I knew what sort of imagery I wanted. I think more important than my choice to storyboard the film was that this technique was enabled and facilitated by the nature of the project. The film was so stringently planned in advance that storyboarding was an applicable avenue for further pre-production. Had I been producing a more conventional documentary film, storyboarding would not have been a viable option.

Another way that storyboarding made sense was that my production method left gaping holes in the imagery of the film. With unwatchable sit-down interview footage pervading the timeline, building something new on top of it was the only real option (and was the plan from even the earliest stages of pre-production). Storyboarding was accomplished by blocking out parts of the interview transcript and describing the sort of imagery I imagined. After a brief session with each artist, storyboards were delivered and dropped in the timeline. Keyframing the storyboards for motion gave me a sense of the film's pacing and whether or not images needed to be added or cut from the project.

Storyboarding let me work closely with the artists, who are used to thinking visually. Together, we brainstormed ideas for imagery based on the content of the transcript. Storyboarding was also a conscious choice for the project because it gave me the power to generate imagery myself. I didn't have to leave anything on screen to chance. In this way, I never had to worry about getting the content I needed in the production process because the entire film was written visually. Also, since I don't have the technical skill to storyboard myself, this was another task left to artists. On my end, this process was more about communicating my needs to the artists and working together to build the project visually.

Storyboarding was also crucial because it let the artists and me decide the final imagery for the film without a huge investment of labor. Talking with Anna Lisa, she told me that one of her art teachers told her to "never spend more than five minutes on a storyboard." A rough sketch was enough to give us an idea what was necessary. From there, final art could be generated, covering gaps in imagery.

Notes can't really be given to traditional documentary footage because changes can't necessarily be made. With alternative imagery like animation or illustration, changes can be made, and imagery re-imagined or re-constructed. I think it's important to note how important the storyboarding process was in this way. Additionally, notes couldn't be adequately given to a cut of the project until storyboards were in place. Without storyboard, the film was mostly audio and lacked a lot of visual information. A rough cut couldn't be completed until later on when storyboards had been placed. Without storyboards, too much was left to the imagination. Critiques from thesis committee members and other graduate students wouldn't have been helpful until there was a more complete film to evaluate.

Storyboarding allowed me to map out the film early on and make the necessary changes and adjustments to the film before ordering final art. This allowed for a very fruitful notes process and a production phase that was efficient for both myself and all the artists involved with the project.

Review of Additional Texts

One text was referenced that doesn't necessarily fit into the theory and rationale section. While it is not specifically addressed by any of the theories described in that section, communicating with an artist was crucial to the completion of this project. One book that I found helpful is called *Panel Two: More Comic Book Scripts by Top Writers*. This book includes scripts from comic books and corresponding storyboards or notes. The purpose of this book is to show how these materials helped writers and artists communicate with each other.

I found this book both fascinating and helpful. Writers and visual artists work in very different mediums. I've worked with illustrators before, so I have experience with the joys of that sort of collaboration as well as the pitfalls of it. While the work that writers and illustrators do is very different, there is a lot of common ground in terms of thinking visually. It's important to remember that comic books are a visual medium and, in many, ways akin to cinema. It employs lighting, tone, cinematography, character, and narrative. Reviewing the contents of this book helped me to understand that it's not so much the job of the illustrator to convey the vision of the writer, as much as it is both of their jobs to arrive at their collective vision together.

The most interesting thing I found about this text is that while it includes samples from various collaborations, not one of them looks the same. Some have carefully drawn storyboards and elaborate art, some are more or less in screenplay format with crude drawings, and some

have numbered panels with description of action. Each artist and writer collaboration required the team to work together to find the most effective way to communicate with each other. There is no right or wrong way necessarily. Each artist and writer communicates differently, so a specialized mode of communication makes sense.

I encountered similar experiences in my work during and prior to this project. I had to work with a number of different artists for this film and each of their processes were different. They also communicated differently. While I tried to find a universal way to communicate with everyone effectively, communicating my vision to Schipp was not at all like communicating it to Joe or Anna Lisa or John. As illustrated by the pieces in *Panel Two*, collaborating with an artist is a unique experience. It takes mutual understanding to accomplish work together and achieving that understanding is its own skill set as well as its own reward.

Visual Media

Many different pieces of visual media were referenced during production of this film. The nature of the project made these references not exclusive to documentary films. While documentary films are included, works of fiction and pieces that attempt to blur the line between fiction and nonfiction served as both guidelines and inspiration for methods and approaches used in this film.

Though it may seem like an odd choice as a piece of media to reference, one television program was incredible helpful in the formation of the project. *Crank Yankers* (2002) screened on Comedy Central throughout the early and mid-2000s. The show featured prank calls made by celebrity guests to unwitting civilian participants. These phone calls were represented on screen by the visual aid of stylized puppets. This show was important to for me to refer to. The celebrity

end of the phone call is both scripted and improvised, while the civilian participant reacts candidly, not understanding that they're part of the show.

Crank Yankers displays both fiction and non-fiction effectively and often for the sake of humor, so there are a number of congruencies between this program and my own film. Additionally, the presence of puppets shows a creative solution to the lack of visual information. The prank phone calls that serve as the narrative of the show don't offer anything visually. They're simply recorded in a studio. In *Crank Yankers*, the imagery was built over the story after the fact. This is another way the show inspired my own process.

I also appreciate that puppets are used to represent actual phone conversations that happened; not only juxtaposing the perceived-to-be juvenile medium of puppetry with the entirely adult content of the show, but also blurring the line between fiction and reality. My utilization of illustration and cartoon mimics this production choice. I think that using whimsical mediums to represent mature topics requires an amount of irreverence. I think this attitude is represented in both this television program and my own project.

Animation in documentary film, while uncommon, is far from new. The existence of animated documentary film gave me a frame of reference for my own film. Studying successful use of this medium and different ways it can be employed were crucial to my own film's completion.

My research took me as far back as 1918. A documentary called *The Sinking of the Lusitania* is, to my understanding, is the first animated documentary. I felt it was important to look at earlier and more primitive use of animation in the non-fiction mode. *The Sinking of the Lusitania* is a silent film, telling the story of the catastrophe through title cards. Since no footage of the actual sinking was ever shot, animation serves as a visual aid. Since footage of this event

could not be captured, a way to visually convey it to an audience had to be found. This concept was completely in line with the goals and methods of my own project. The events my comedians describe exist only in their memories, so similarly, a way to visually convey them must be conjured and construction.

“Footage” from *The Sinking of the Lusitania* shows the undulating waves of the ocean and the approach of a German U-boat. While audience members aren’t seeing the actual Lusitania, this animation helps to create an understanding of these events. This is certainly more effective than simply the description of the events on title cards. Without this animation, an audience would have to rely on the title cards to understand the events, which is only as good as reading about it. Even in the absence of the original footage, this seminal animated documentary takes full advantage of the visual medium.

One part I found particularly interesting occurs just before a German torpedo strikes the Lusitania. The shot depicts animated fish under the sea. They see the German torpedo and flash each other looks of concern. These personified fish certainly never existed, but I found it interesting that the animator took this opportunity to use an amount of create license. This moment injects an amount of levity and tongue-in-cheek humor into this otherwise serious and tragic moment. Additionally, it is juxtaposed with factual information about this historic event.

Conceptually, this is totally in line with my film. Considering the meticulous nature of the animation process, especially in its more fledgling form of this era, it took a lot of additional time and effort on the part of the animator to generate this imagery. I found it very interesting that time was taken to animate cartoon fish. In context, this moment was entirely surreal. I adopted similar moments in my own film, going through additional effort to inject jarring moments and blur the line between fiction and non-fiction. I think these moments are

unnecessary, which is why their inclusion is so important. While they don't necessarily enhance your understanding of the event (what I imagine is the objective of the film) they still are in the service of the narrative. This humor and levity makes the information more approachable and digestible because it is made to be fun. Using moments of good-natured dishonesty in the interest of better storytelling is apparent in even the first animated documentary and a tradition I carry on in my own work.

Other examples of animation in the conveyance of non-fiction were pivotal to the completion of this project. Over the course of the project, I referenced animated shorts by StoryCorps as well as a feature-length documentary called *Waltz with Bashir* (2008).

StoryCorps is an on-going oral history project that sometimes animates its subjects' interviews. This resource was invaluable. While animated sit-down interviews are not typical in StoryCorps, one feature is very much in line with my own project. The subjects interview footage becomes the outline for an animated story. For example, one "episode" of StoryCorps features the interview of an aged WWII veteran. He describes his experience being a young soldier in the 1940s and the first time he took a life. He goes on to describe how he can still see the face of the young German soldier he killed and that he often wakes up in the night crying. This moving and poignant story is visualized by stylized images of the animation as the man describes the events. The animator takes an amount of artistic license, turning the dying German soldier into a floating, angelic version of himself after death.

The idea of using interview to build a 'script' is a concept that StoryCorps and my project both have in common. Since no footage necessarily exists of the events being described, alternative imagery must be found or constructed. The descriptions of events serve as inspiration for artists, and it is then up to them to help visually express what happened and how subjects

must have felt. While the animation in StoryCorps is more involved and elaborate than the illustrations in my project, the motivations and concept are very congruent.

Waltz with Bashir (2008) was helpful in the same way. This documentary is entirely animated, with the exception of a single clip of archival news footage. This film contains both animated re-enactments of events as well as animations. For example, audio from a sit-down interview is audible, but animation is on screen to make the interview feel like it happened at a bar, with the subject and interviewer drinking and smoking while discussing events more candidly. This concept is also displayed in my film; selecting new locations and creating animated versions of subjects to be “talked to.” *Waltz with Bashir* also uses true events as its structure. While artistic license is taken with constructing imagery on top of interviews, actual events are at the film’s core.

I didn’t find out until after post-production that the way *Waltz with Bashir* was produced was very much like my own process. I found it interesting that I intuitively designed my project the same way. I think that similar circumstances make a lot of efficient and effective production choices obvious. Like I did for my own project, the director of *Waltz with Bashir* collected interview footage and assembled a sort of audio-lock. After this, he decided what portions of the interview would be best-suited for animated dramatization and what would make more sense accompanied by animated sit-down interview. I think some portions of stories are more powerful when they’re delivered in a direct-address format. It’s clear that these sorts of decisions are critical in comparable projects. Again, in similar fashion, after the audio-lock was created, storyboards were built over them. Final animations were then constructed after a notes process. Even the animation process for this film was like my own. When final animation began, no rotoscoping was used. In animation, the process of rotoscoping involves tracing over footage frame-

by-frame to create an animated version of it. In *Waltz with Bashir* as well as *The Best Medicine*, no tracing was involved. Every animated movement was generated by the animators themselves. In both the production and post-production phase, workflow choices were very logical. They were made to produce the most effective and stylized content while saving as much unnecessary labor as possible.

Again, the presence of animation in this film and other documentaries serves the purpose of including imagery where none exists. Ken Burns used similar concepts in his work, which I have also referenced. Ken Burns produced a lot of documentaries about historical events. Not surprisingly, production of these films took place after the events had happened. Not being there to capture the events left Burns with fewer options in terms of how to put the events on screen. While this may seem like a disadvantage, it is more an opportunity for creative problem solving.

Ken Burns used still images taken during the civil war in the place of footage that has never existed. These range from still photographs to paintings and artist renderings to newspaper clippings. While the story is being told through narration and voice-acting dramatization, this imagery is laid over it. Simply stringing together a series of interviews with a historian could make a film about the same subject matter. Burns' method is more informative and visually interesting than a talking head sit-down interview and certainly better than a black screen. The idea of constructing imagery around aural information is present throughout Ken Burn's filmography, and my film is reflexive of this workflow.

The most primitive way to use still imagery would be to simply put them on screen. Ken Burns instead applied motion to these still images by adding panning and/or zooming effects during post-production. This effect helps to keep images on screen from becoming stale. Audience members track that motion visually, the same way they do with footage. This

movement, subtle though it may be, effectively transforms still images into footage. The method is incredibly efficient; one of the reasons I decided to use it in my film. Instead of hundreds of frames, a single still image can be used to fill a comparable amount of screen time. In parts of Burns' works that I've studied, he'll sometimes have the same image on screen for over 30 seconds without cutting away. The panning and zooming lets the image reveal parts of itself tactfully, and in such a way that gives Burns a lot of control. A still image on screen could become stale very quickly, but this simple method alleviates that deterioration of interest by constantly refreshing what's on screen.

I've employed this same method but given myself even more control. Not only do I gain control in the editing process by being able to reveal parts of the images the way I see fit (through the use of the same panning and scanning method) but I also control what the images themselves are. While Burns found applicable images to represent this historic event, I got to design the imagery myself to suit my needs and the needs of the film. While paintings and other artworks appear in Burns' *The Civil War* (1990), they were not generated under his guidance to convey his personal vision. My own method suits my project because of the artistic license I take with the subject material, while Burns' comparable method is more befitting of an earnest representation of history.

In terms of structure, one film was very formative in the structuring my own project. Errol Morris' *Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control* (1997) shares many congruencies with it. The first and most notable thing about this film's structure is that there is no clear narrative arc. Conventional narrative structure in feature-length films (both fiction and non-fiction alike) would dictate that this film have a sort of rising action, climax, and resolution. This film doesn't operate this way at all. Instead, the subjects have their own stories that are woven together.

Again, like my own film, each character's material may stand alone, but is brought together for a more cohesive project. This film's subjects are totally unique; a lion tamer, mole rat expert, topiary gardener, and robotics engineer. In this way, they feel like non-sequitirs. However, when their material is brought together, themes can be drawn from the entirety of the film. Without knowing each other or having similar lines of work, each subject alludes to mortality in some way. Morris brings out this theme in post-production by the tactful arrangement of the material. Similarly, my subjects deal with very different topics (alcoholism, sexual anxiety, and childhood abuse, respectively) but through arranging their interview and performance, similar themes can be drawn. This could not be accomplished without placing material adjacently.

While a conventional and easily more digestible story arc does not exist in *Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control*, it is carefully constructed. The arrangement of material is carefully chosen. This leaves opportunities for audience members to glean meanings and interpretations from that material instead of having a story fed to them. This is more in line with the goals of my project.

Over the course of my research, I found many films with the subject matter of 'stand-up comedy.' However, I found very few of these films to be very helpful. Documentaries about stand-up comedy typically focus on famous performers in a reflective way or, through the use of sit-down interviews, discuss what comedy is or isn't. That simply isn't what my film is about. I think that ultimately, the stand-up comedy part of my film is almost incidental. The real story is these very human experiences and how people deal with them. That's really the crux of *The Best Medicine*.

I found only one film that dealt with stand-up comedy in a similar fashion. A film called *Comedy Warriors: Healing Through Humor* is a feature-length documentary that follows

wounded war veterans. Over the course of the film, they generate comedic material about their injuries, demonstrating the healing powers of humor. I thought it was important that this film exhibited individuals being able to laugh and joke about their own misfortunes. This sort of irreverence is a motif that is congruent with my own film. Similarly, there are laughs to be had, but a lot of it is uneasy laughter. Subjects being able to find humor in dark and painful circumstances illustrates how humor can take power away from the things that might otherwise control us. This thesis of the film is bluntly stated many times throughout the film (and in the title), which is something I tried to stay away from, but the importance of comedy as a catharsis is crucial to understanding both projects.

Ethics

There were a number of ethical questions that arose during the production process of this film. Most of these issues arose from the subject matter of the film and the nature of each subject's content.

I was very ambivalent about working with my close friends for the project. From an ethical standpoint, I think there could be concerns about talking to my subjects about their feelings and traumas without having any sort of psychological background. When I was being really honest with myself, this was not actually a concern for me personally. Talking about feelings is what close friends are for, so in that way, I think I was the most qualified person to conduct interviews with my subjects. In the event that someone broke down and cried or experienced any sort of post-traumatic stress, I think that a close friend is the ideal person to have present. I ultimately decided that a psychological professional isn't required for talking

about your feelings. In fact, since all my subjects are not comfortable seeking any sort of counseling, talking with me served as an outlet they would otherwise not have had access to.

The other side of that feeling was that they were participating in the interview for the purpose of the film, a project that stood to benefit me personally. I had mixed feelings about this as well. During a talk with Dr. Barnett, one of my thesis committee members (and a practicing psychologist) gave me an amount of reassurance. I shared with him that I had mixed feelings about interviewing people I cared for about such painful topics. He simply asked, “Well, did they agree to it?” It was such a simple question, but it really helped me to decide my own feelings on the topic. There was really nothing unethical about what I was doing and the ambivalence I was feeling was only a projection of my own concerns and perceptions. Even in the event of a worst-case scenario where one of my subjects had a breakdown, it wouldn’t have been something that I did to them. One of my concerns was that I was “making” them talk about painful things, and that was simply a fallacy. Again, there was some sort of illusion that I was in control and somehow responsible, but the reality is that all my subjects are autonomous and consenting adults.

In Larry Gross’ article “Privacy and Spectacle” from *Image Ethics in the Digital Age*, he discusses what the digital age and visual media has done to privacy. One analogy he made that resonated with me and the nature of the project was drawing similarities and differences from the Kinsey report and the OJ Simpson trial.

If the Kinsey reports opened America’s eyes in the 1950s to the realities of sexual lives – in contrast the official pieties – the Starr report may have played a similar role in the late 1990s. But, where Kinsey was scrupulously nonjudgmental in his elicitation and recounting of sexual details, Starr was sanctimonious and sniggering. (Gross, 105)

The OJ Simpson trial sort of embodies ideas of media spectacle and frenzy. I think in instances like this, more ethical problems are liable to arise. Based on concepts being teased out in this

article and book, my film feels more like the Kinsey report; a nonjudgmental account made in an earnest effort to expose realities and normalize experiences. While names were omitted in the Kinsey report to maintain privacy and my film shares names alongside personal information, this was consented to by all subjects, both verbally and in writing.

This same book also discusses the abilities of new digital technologies to tamper with and edit images. This enables what has been referred to as “moments of sin” where images are digitally altered because that technology makes it so easy and, in many ways, tempting. “The decision by a photo editor to create a more picturesque composition by engaging in a hitherto off-limits manipulation set off a firestorm of criticism within the precincts of photojournalism” (Gross, viii). My film takes a lot of creative license with imagery. I feel that my overt fabrication of imagery makes no attempts to appear like reality, the way that altered images may pretend to be authentic. I think the artistic choices I’ve made keep my film from being disingenuous.

While, after further contemplation, I was not concerned with any ethical implications of my production process, I did have one personal issue. The main ambivalence I was feeling was a result of the thesis document. I didn’t like the idea of discussing my subjects in such a clinical way, as if they weren’t my friends. In fact, I didn’t even like referring to them as subjects. The only time I actually felt unethical during the process was during the drafting of the thesis document when I had to discuss my friends clinically and from a psychological point of view. I felt entirely distant and unfriendly during this dehumanizing process. Thinking of my friends as a set of symptoms and terms was reductive and made me physically ill. It was made worse by a sense of irony that the only part of the process that was truly emotionally taxing was the document mandated by the graduate school. To accomplish this task, I feel that I had to forget

part of who I was as a friend and as a filmmaker. It's the only part of the process that I found toxic, and I'm glad to never have do it again.

One final ethical concern required my attention. As discussed earlier, Casey requested that I leave out portions of the interview that involved specific instances of his abuse. Even though I had a release form that granted me full control over the interview footage in the context of the film, I chose to leave out the content at Casey's request. It was a simple choice to make. My friendship with Casey (and all my subjects, for that matter) is more important than the project. It would have been entirely shortsighted and unethical to betray that trust.

Additionally, Casey requested that during the promotion of the Kickstarter and the finished film, that I not tag him on Facebook or other social media platforms. He was concerned that his mother would see the posts and find out parts of Casey's abuse that she had not previously had knowledge of. He also wrote me a letter telling me that his involvement with the project had sparked a conversation with his mother about his own abuse. This letter is located in the appendix. He said that he conversation was brief because his mother started getting upset. I think other filmmakers could feel in some way responsible for catalyzing this tense conversation. However, I felt that Casey deciding on his own to speak with his mother was the most organic and healthy way those topics could be addressed. I think that I originally had a perception of the project as this alien and interloping force, when the reality is that it was a medium for facilitating human connection. In that way, I felt a great deal of absolution from any perceived exploitation.

CHAPTER 5
PRODUCTION
Overview

Production began when I started to coordinate shooting days. The live performance segments of the film were particularly difficult to coordinate because they can't be planned as far in advance as other parts of production. My solution was to arrive in my home state of Michigan early to perform these duties in state. I left Texas on the morning July 7th and arrived in Michigan the following morning. Via phone and email, I arranged for all the performers to perform together at one venue. This shoot was planned towards the very end of production. This date was important because it was the only opportunity to capture Casey's performance. I was not comfortable having a successful production phase contingent on a single day of shooting at the very end of my trip, but no other options were available.

Many of the struggles that came from production stemmed from the fact that it was taking place in Michigan. As a result, I had to split my time between work and seeing friends and family. In this way, my production had to double as a brief vacation. The main problem with this was that I had to employ my friends instead of visiting with them. Alec, one of my cinematographers only got to see me in a professional context, though I would have liked our visit to be more personal. Also, instead of getting to spend time with my comedian friends from the Midwest, I was forced to make them perform for me and accommodate my production. The ethical concerns of making a film about personal friends will be discussed in a later section.

I did what I could to keep everything from feeling like a chore. I got to play pool with Mike Burd after his interview and had dinner with Jacob Kubon. As crucial as production was, it

was more important to me to maintain my friendships with my subjects because they're more valuable than my film could ever hope to be.

Another large challenge over the course of production was having to do so many things by myself. I didn't have enough hands to run sound, run camera, and direct by myself. During live performance, this meant simply leaving the audio recorder running. I couldn't monitor levels because I was busy running camera. This is an entirely risky way to go about production, but because non-students couldn't touch department equipment and my resources were limited, I didn't have another choice. During interview recordings, I could wear headphones to monitor the levels on a Sound Devices 702 audio recorder, but I had to ignore the camera so I could maintain a conversational atmosphere with my subjects. This heavily affected the quality of these images, but because of the way production was planned, this was a non-issue.

Additionally, I didn't have a producer for this film. This meant that, aside from directing, I also had to coordinate every aspect of production. I had to organize the live performances myself to ensure that they would happen. It involved securing the venue, booking all the acts, and advertising the show. It's a lot of work on its own without the film production aspect even factoring in. Fortunately, I have experience in organizing live comedy performance, so this part of the experience, while a trial, was not entirely alien to me. As an aside, part of why I wanted to include live comedy performance in my thesis film was so that I could get experience shooting it. I feel like this practical skill set will be valuable throughout the trajectory of my career.

After organizing the live performances, I decided to do a practice shoot at a show at the same venue. I wanted to be sure that the audio would be recorded properly, so I did an audio-only set-up. Jacob Kubon pointed out to me that the audience reaction recording would sound better if I put the H4N audio recording device on a stool in front of the stage instead of on the

stage. This would stop the microphone from picking up the vibration of the stage caused by the monitors.

There was a pivotal error during this practice shoot. I had set the 702 to record two separate inputs, but to the same channel. This yielded an arbitrary mixdown of the line out from the board and the boom mic pointed towards the monitor. I had never encountered this problem before, but I corresponded with an equipment room employee at the university, and he explained how to set the inputs to record to different channels.

These mistakes gave me a lot of pivotal information to help the actual performance shoots go more smoothly. For live performance, I set up the cardioid mic and H4N on the stool in front of the stage. While I had a c-stand with me, I opted not to use it. Placing the mic above and pointed across the crowd would have sounded better, but I thought that the c-stand would be too obtrusive, and would distract from the performance. The show going smoothly is actually more important than the quality of this audio track, so it would not have been an even trade. Anything that serves as a distraction can negatively impact the quality of a live performance. Keeping the cardioid mic low gave me a totally adequate audio track while allowing to shoot more discretely. In addition to the cardioid mic, I placed an available shotgun mic on the stool as well. It didn't sound better than the cardioid, but for the sake of contingency, I employed the spare mic and free input.

The venue had a fireplace not far from one of the speakers. This is where I placed a shotgun mic. The directional nature of the mic offered a fairly clean track of the performers' voices, but with a roomier tone than the rather cold and dead sounding line out. To my surprise, the line out from the monitor even captures a small amount of audience reaction.

The line out and the shotgun mic both ran to the 702, which I had placed on top of the fireplace. Since I was shooting, I could not monitor these levels. This was problematic because Michael Burd is significantly louder than the other performers and Casey Stoddard is significantly quieter. I had to adjust between performances and hope that things went well. The practice shoot was helpful in this way as well.

While there were two live performances that I captured (one with Casey and one without) they operated very much the same in terms of video. It was really as simple as replacing one camera operator with another on the second performance. While footage shot by Alec Robbins was significantly better, Michael Burd and Jacob Kubon gave stronger performances the second time around. This was more important to the film and me than the quality of footage. To me, the quality of the image isn't nearly as important as the information within the frame.

Taylor's footage was shaky. Alec's footage was better than Taylor's because Alec has more formal experience in camera work and the capturing of live comedy performance. Ideally, I would have had Alec available for the second live performance so I could have had his quality camera work on the performance I ended up using.

While my second camera operator captured a medium close-up from stage left (roughly from the bust line to just above the head) with an 85mm lens, I captured a wider shot (waist up) from stage right with a 50mm lens. I wanted the shots to be different to offer me more variety in post-production.

Footage shot was stored on Compact Flash (CF) cards and later dumped onto an external hard drive. While I had enough CF cards to use a different one for each performer, my second camera operator shot all of their footage on a single card. This made organizing footage a little more difficult later on. I had been told that the type of camera my operators were using split

takes that go longer than ten minutes. To make sure that there were no spots without footage, I asked my second camera operator to begin recording a few seconds before I did. However, I found out in post-production that, while these cameras do split takes, they do so seamlessly. While they appear as different video files, no frames are dropped when this occurs. During production, Taylor, my other camera operator, opted to take still photographs while he was recording. Neither of us knew that this interrupts the recording process, not only splitting takes, but also omitting a number of frames. This created parts of footage that needed to be covered with a cut as well as throwing off the syncing process.

It was important to me for the crew to be as unobtrusive as possible, so we stationed ourselves on either side of the stage. The placement of the two cameras seemed intuitive at the time, but in post-production, the angles were a little too different. Some cuts seemed a little jarring to me, though I had few complaints from anyone who watched the footage. As stated before, the camera settings were set to match so that images were consistent. Additionally, we shot after sunset to ensure that the light from outside wouldn't change.

However, lighting was still a challenge for live performance shooting. The stage lights were partially red. The owner of the bar was running lights and sound for the evening. I asked if there was a way that the lights could be changed to just white light. He said it couldn't be done. I don't think he was lying, though I do think he didn't know how to fix the lights but didn't want to seem unknowledgeable. This was problematic because it made the performers faces appear quite red. However, I think an audience will simply think it looks like performance lighting and grant the footage an amount of license. The lighting situation became an issue because as the comedians would move on stage, they would come in and out of the light. While I think the

redness will be coded as performance lighting, having them come in and out of that light makes things a little inconsistent.

After shooting the performances, the CF cards were handed off to me and I backed up the footage on several redundant drives. Organizing the footage was little complicated because I had a folder dedicated to the first performance with a folder for camera one and a folder for camera two. Camera two had footage split among several cards. So, while camera one was organized by each comedian, camera two was organized by card. This made things a little more puzzling later on, but slowed down production minimally.

Shooting the interview portions of the film was infinitely easier and less stressful than the live performances. I started by shooting Casey's interview. By doing this interview early on, it gave me the chance to re-shoot it later if I had to. Because Casey lives further away than anyone else, I didn't want to take any chances.

I set up in his apartment. With Casey placed comfortably on the couch, I set up the FS100 on a tripod in front of him. Having the camera steady during the interview ended up cutting off the top of his head when he shifted and moved. The framing in general was in no way artful, since it would be covered by animation and illustration in post. Since this image would not actually appear in the film, I chose to focus on directing and monitoring levels. With a lav and boom mic placed, I sat on the floor with the 702 recorder. While I didn't have any formally prepared questions, some preliminary interviews with Casey told me exactly where the interview needed to go to get the material I needed for the film. I wanted to keep things casual and conversational. I thought that a list of questions would feel to formal and negatively impact the personal and intimate nature of the interview.

I turned off the air conditioning in Casey's third-story apartment. Chicago gets very hot in July, and by the end of the interview the temperature was pretty unbearable. Casey and I were both sweaty and uneasy. Fortunately, the interview only took 40 minutes. In that brief time, Casey gave me all the information I needed. His story was entirely somber and moving. Also, he speaks very efficiently. He was very concise and never went off on any unnecessary tangents. In the way that Casey talked about his own abuse, it became clear to me that he wanted to talk about it, but at the same time, he's very guarded. He didn't make a lot of eye contact with me during the interview, which is typical of him to begin with. He spends a lot of time looking at the floor. During the interview he stared, though not at anything in particular. However, I noticed that he would make eye contact with me while I was speaking. I got the feeling he would feel impolite doing otherwise. He also compulsively rubs the back of his head, especially when he's tense or nervous in some way. Even this early in production, I could tell that Casey's story was the most powerful.

Parts of Casey's interview were very tense and poignant. While he never broke down or cried, I was concerned that I was in some way doing damage by talking to Casey about his abuse without being a medical professional. This will be discussed further in my ethics section.

During the interview, Casey told me the story of how his father would break his fingers as punishment or for no particular reason at all. This story was one of the reasons I wanted to include Casey in the film. However, he told me that it was his wish for this information to not be included in the film because his mother didn't know that it had happened. He didn't want to create any unrest in his family.

In typical comedian fashion, we found a way to laugh about even the most awful things during the interview. After a long silence after talking about his deformed hands, Casey said,

“...but it makes me better at fingering chicks.” This amount of levity is really important to the tone of the film, and I think that my personal relationship with all the subjects was really pivotal in maintaining it.

After getting Casey’s interview, I worked with Kubon. Kubon expressed to me that he wanted the interview done in a hot tub. Always the performer, he thought it would be funnier this way. I explained to him that the footage wouldn’t be in the film anyway. We decided to shoot his parents’ house outside of Grand Rapids, Michigan. I covered the air conditioning vent in the room and the mic didn’t pick up any of the sound. In terms of equipment, the set-up with Kubon was really similar to Casey’s. However, I had Kubon against a sliding glass door, and as the sun started to set, the image got grainier and grainier, because I couldn’t monitor it. Again, it didn’t matter because this footage was never supposed to make it to the final edit.

Like with Casey, I maintained a conversational atmosphere during the interview. I found that doing things this way, and more importantly, sharing *back* with the comedians was pivotal to completing a successful interview. It was more effective than asking pointed questions. Being candid with Kubon helped him open up. Sharing personal my own personal stories and feelings greatly enhanced the quality of the interview.

There are a few things that negatively affected the quality of the interview. During the interview, Kubon had a cold, and it is apparent in his voice. Also, he said that because of his illness that he wasn’t as lucid as he would have liked to have been. He assured me that if he had been in perfect health, his interview would have been better and more concise. Also, he was drinking a bottle of water during the interview. At times, he would drink from it while answering questions. There were times where I could hear the timbre of his voice change because he’s speaking into a bottle.

The main challenge during Kubon's interview is simply the way that he talks. He tends to over think everything. While this is crucial to his personality and the nature of his humor, it makes getting concise answers out of him almost impossible. He rarely completes a thought and has a very meandering way of speaking. Unlike Casey, he goes off on infinite tangents, sometimes arriving back at his original point, and sometimes not. I feel that the interview process put a lot of additional stress on Kubon. He felt that he had to perform and deliver in some way. This anxiety made him even less likely to form really cogent thoughts. While Casey's interview was completed in a tight 40 minutes, Kubon's took over an hour and a half to complete. I also kept Kubon talking because even though he was talking at great length, I couldn't be sure if he had given me the necessary material.

Michael Burd's interview was the last one I shot. We arranged to conduct the interview at his apartment. He insisted on doing it at a time when his girlfriend wouldn't be home. Burd's interview seemed to fall right in between Casey's and Kubon's. It lasted an hour and most of his material was relevant in one way or another. While this made some choices in post-production difficult, it was ideal to have so many choices.

Burd's apartment is partially underground and only has one window in it, so I set up a single rifa light to bounce off the ceiling just to make him more visible.

Burd said that he had been thinking about his alcoholism a lot since originally discussing the project with me. I noticed that this was an overarching theme with my subjects. My intervention and their participation in the film made them think about their respective emotions and vices. All of them wanted to feel prepared for the interview, so they all did an amount of introspection beforehand. Again, I was ambivalent about making my subjects think about painful things that they wouldn't otherwise have explored.

Burd’s interview had a chronological order to it. He started by discussing his drinking at an early age and seamlessly transitioned into how it’s affected his adult life. Also, he was drinking during his interview. I felt a sense of tragic irony there. In fact, after the interview, we went to the bar. While Michael is an adult capable of making his own choices, I couldn’t help but feel like an enabler.

At the beginning of each interview, I would hit record on the fs100 and the 702 and just let them run. This way, all the interviews were shot in a single take of audio and a single take of video. This made organizing footage incredibly simple.

With both of the performances shot and all three interviews complete, I felt that I had all the necessary footage. I had allowed an amount of time for re-shoots, in case they were necessary, but I was confident that I had everything that I needed. Again, I planned production to only get what I needed. I didn’t want to shoot 60 hours of footage and find the film somewhere in it. I couldn’t return to Michigan to re-shoot, so by the end of the production phase, I knew I had the film in the can. In the end, I shot under five hours of footage. This was ideal because it wasn’t a lot of footage to wade through, and almost nothing was extraneous. A 16:1 shooting ratio still left me with plenty of material and options with which to enter post-production.

Schedule

Date	Description of shoot
July 1 st	Arrive in Kalamazoo, MI
July 2 nd	Production meetings with cinematographers
July 3 rd	Conduct first interview with Jacob Kubon in early afternoon. Record live performance at night
July 6 th	Begin review of Kubon interview. Send transcriptions to artist.

July 7 th	Record first interview with Michael Burd. Record live performance at night.
July 8 th	Begin review of Mike's interview. Send transcripts to artist.
July 9 th	Record follow-up interviews (if necessary) and collect personal effects.
July 11 th	Arrive in Chicago. Production meeting with cinematographers
July 12 th	Conduct first interview with Casey Stoddard. Record live performance at night.
July 13 th	Conduct follow-up interview (if necessary) and collect personal effects.
July 14 th – 15 th	Pick-up shoots of performances (if necessary)
July 16 th	Arrive back in Texas

Crew

Especially because I was out of state and did not have access to other MFA students as crewmembers, my production crew was quite small. The duration of my stay in Michigan also discouraged anyone from the MFA program to participate with me. The interview segments (roughly half of production) were completed by myself. Because I planned on running more than one camera during performance, I couldn't do everything alone. I reached out to friends of mine in the area who had their own skills and equipment to contribute.

One crewmember was my friend Alec Robbins who had gone to college with me in Kalamazoo, but had since moved to Chicago, Illinois. This was a challenge because to secure Alec's help on the project, I had to drive to Chicago to pick him up. Because of Alec's work schedule, I could only get his help on a single day of production. I arranged to have his help shooting the first live performance. Also because of Alec's work schedule, he had to be back in

Chicago for work the following morning, so he had to be driven back after the end of the production day. Alec was a camera operator for this day of production.

Another friend of mine, Austin Malone, was set to be the 2nd camera operator for the final day of production. However, he fell through at the last minute, and I was forced to find another crew member just days before the final live performance. I started searching for a crewmember, and my contingency plan was to rent a camera locally and give it to a comedian to hold. I didn't want circumstances to get that dire, but having multiple cameras at the performance was pivotal, and being out of state, I had few options.

I spoke with a friend of mine, a comedian named Andrew VanHouten. I told him that he was the comic I trusted the most to run camera for me. Though he had no formal experience, I perceived him to be the most technically competent. Sensing my desperation, he suggested that I contact a man named Taylor Reschka who lived in the area. Taylor is a comedian and amateur photographer who, at the time, had been taking high quality still photographs during live performances.

I got in contact with Taylor and explained the project to him. He enthusiastically accepted to help with no compensation. He works for a video production company, and this assured me that he could do a better job than the average comedian.

This was one of the main struggles with production. I had to rely on crewmembers to be where I needed them, and because I had virtually no budget, I had to rely on their generosity and friendship exclusively. I was never comfortable with the success of my production hinging on my ability to call in personal favors, and I don't think that will ever change.

Taylor ended up being an ideal crewmember. Because of the work that he had done previously, he was familiar with all the industry terms I was using. Being easily able to create a

mutual understanding took a lot of pressure of me as a director. I was even more impressed when he showed up an hour earlier than I had asked him to. Also, being frantic right before the final shoot began, I asked Taylor if I had forgotten anything. He said, “Have you sat down?” I appreciated this levity and his overall attitude during production. I needed someone who wasn’t as emotionally invested in the project to help keep things in perspective. In these ways, it was a blessing that Austin had dropped out of production. It led me to someone more reliable and easier to work with.

Equipment

I adhered pretty stringently to the equipment I outlined in my prospectus. Interviews were shot with a Sony FS100, a camera designed for shooting video. This gave me the visual references I needed to make the post-production process easier. Because a microphone can be mounted to the FS100, it gave me a scratch track with which to synchronize the audio from my separate recording device. By replacing the on-board mic with a higher quality Sennheiser microphone, I gave myself an additional audio track to work with in post. I didn’t bring any lights because I was relying on stage lights for live performances and the image quality for interviews was a non-issue.

I used a Sound Devices 702 audio recorder to capture audio for both live performance and interview portions. Additionally, I had a back-up audio device, though nothing malfunctioned. During interview sessions, I used a wired lavalier microphone and a shotgun microphone on a c-stand. Both of these went to separate channels on the 702 and could be synced to the camera’s audio track later. The wired lav is typically more reliable than its wireless counterpart and because this footage wouldn’t be used, it didn’t matter that wire was visible. The

wired lav gave the cleanest audio, while the boom mic gave a little more sense of the room and was typically less tinny. My plan was to mix them into an ideal audio track in post-production.

For live performance, I relied on a Canon 5D, a digital single-lens reflex camera. These cameras are designed for capture of still images, but they also have a video mode that all my cinematographers were familiar with. I had the FS100 as a backup in case the 5D malfunctioned, but it was important to have both cameras for the shoot be DSLR's because they yield comparable images.

Alec's camera was a Canon 60D, which yields an image almost imperceptibly different to that of the 5D. Taylor used a Canon 7D with an 85mm prime lens. All the images captured during live performance were comparable, especially after having all the settings set to match. Instead of white balancing, color temperature was set manually to keep images consistent. Both of my second camera operators used 85mm lenses to get a medium close-up shot during live performances, while I used a 50mm lens to get a wider shot.

My plan was to use the smaller 5D shoulder rig to get a handheld, yet steady shot of the live performance. However, this piece of equipment was checked out to a faculty member and was made unavailable to me. I was forced to operate the camera without the rig, which was a struggle for me because I have naturally shaky hands. That, coupled with my color-blindness are why I was not comfortable operating camera during production, and why I speculate to never touch one after graduation.

Taylor didn't own any type of camera rig either. He opted to use a monopod in an effort to keep things steady. He understood that I wanted a handheld look, and overcompensated by moving the camera while on the monopod. I would deal with this later in post-production. Without the shoulder rig, I was forced to switch to a monopod halfway through the first

performance as well. I simply couldn't hold the camera for the duration of a performance without shaking uncontrollably. In footage, there is a noticeable difference in the steadiness of image after switching to a monopod.

I left for Michigan the very first day that I was permitted to check out equipment. This didn't allow me time to check equipment before leaving and being in Michigan made it so I could not easily replace any equipment over the entire course of production. I had been given generic camera batteries that were not compatible with the charger I had been issued.

Additionally, these batteries cannot be read by Canon cameras. While they will still power the camera, there is no way to tell how much power they have. There was too much riding on each live-performance to depend on unreliable batteries. Fortunately, Taylor had his own Canon batteries that were compatible with my own equipment as well. In addition to the issue with batteries, one of the XLR's didn't work properly. I had the foresight to check out an extra one, but this left me a little more limited during live performance shoots.

To capture audio at live performances, I brought the 702 and my personal zoom H4N. A line out from the monitor to the 702 gave the cleanest version of the performer's voice. A shotgun mic pointed at the PA gave a similarly clean, yet more 'live' sound. To capture the sound of audience reactions, I placed the H4N at the front of the stage, pointed towards the crowd. I attached a cardioid mic to the H4N because it offers a better quality sound, but capturing audience reactions with a single mic is still not ideal. For more professional productions in theaters and concert venues, many microphones hang from the ceiling to get a more comprehensive sound from the audience, though I did not have the resources to pursue this methodology.

Releases, Copyright and License Agreements

Two documents were required for this production. The comedians signed a personal appearance release that granted me full governance over their performance and interview footage. The artists signed a similar artwork release form, which signed over the rights to their artwork to me to use as I please in the context of the film. These two documents are located in Appendix A.

In addition to documents that granted me the rights to use the art in the film, I also purchased the actual art from the artists, in addition to the rights to it. To accomplish this, each artist sent me an invoice for the agreed upon amount raised through Kickstarter. This serves as a receipt of the transaction. With ownership of the art itself, I could send the final pieces to Kickstarter backers as arranged through the campaign. In John's case, where there was never a hard copy of art at all, it allowed me to print the necessary prints from his digital illustrations to send to backers.

Budget

Funding for this film was mostly out-of-pocket. I was fortunate enough to find crew members who would work for free. Additionally, I was working by myself for most of production. That, coupled with equipment supplied by the university, helped me keep production costs low.

Travel was an expense during my summer leg of production. I drove from Texas to Michigan, a round trip that costs around \$400. In addition, one of my crewmembers was located in Chicago, so I had to make a trip to pick him up and drop him off for one of my production

dates. Not a lot of money was saved by making this trip by car, but because of all the equipment I had to bring with me, flying was not a viable travel option.

The main production expense was paying artists for their illustrations. While all of the contributing artists are friends of mine and insinuated that payment was “optional”, I felt entirely obligated to reimburse them for all the hard work they did. My idea was to pay each of them \$200. While this is a shamefully low amount of money, it was a realistic amount of money to raise, and I thought it enough to express my appreciation for their contributions. The artists assured me this amount was adequate. I think their gratitude is more rooted in the thought and my appreciation than it was in any arbitrary dollar amount.

My two camera operators refused to be paid. Alec being personal friends of mine had that perk. Though I had met Taylor only days before, we became fast friends and he also declined monetary compensation for his services. They were simply excited to be part of the project. Alec and I had worked on projects together before and there had never been any money involved. I think we both find talking about money so tacky that we were both more comfortable not involving it. I discreetly paid both of my camera operators bar tabs as compensation. Again, while their services are worth much more than that, the gesture is what’s more important, especially when working with friends.

CHAPTER 6

POST-PRODUCTION

Funding

To raise money to cover production expenses, I launched a Kickstarter campaign. It was launched long after principal photography was completed, but was necessary to get the funding to pay the artists for final art. In the campaign I stressed that while I had sample animation and storyboards, that funding was necessary to acquire the final art to complete the project. The Kickstarter was in the amount of \$1,600. This would cover production expenses and accounts for the taxes that Kickstarter and Amazon take from successful campaigns (around 10%).

I produced a short video for the Kickstarter campaign in which I explain the project and show a few samples and storyboards that I had already acquired from the artists. I also composed the campaign page, which included samples of previous work from the artists as well as short biographies of the comedians with photographs of them next to the cartoon versions of themselves.

I listed the following incentives for contributions to the project:

- Mentions on social media
- A credit in the film
- Listening to backers talk about a subject of their own interest
- A three-way phone conversation with myself and my mother
- A autographed, random VHS tape
- An “I Know Ron Lechler” sticker
- A glossy 8 ½ x 11 print of art from the film
- A kiss on the mouth

- A digital download of the film
- A DVD copy of the film
- Original art from the film
- A commissioned piece of original art by one of the film's artists

It was important to me that the Kickstarter reflect my voice, so a number of the incentives were very tongue-in-cheek. Also, the diction I used made the campaign feel personal, calling backers “cheapskates” if they only contributed a dollar.

Having already previously done a Kickstarter campaign, I knew that I didn't want delivering incentives to be labor intensive. In the past, I had seen Kickstarter rewards that didn't make sense to me. Posters for the film don't seem very desirable and take a lot of money and effort to produce. I tried to select incentives that backers would be interested in but didn't take a lot of additional effort on my part. The most intuitive incentive was a digital download of the film for \$15. It's as if backers are purchasing the film in advance while simultaneously aiding in its completion. This was an easy incentive to deliver. It only requires sending a link to backers through the Kickstarter message system.

Another incentive I thought made sense was to offer original art used in the film to backers. After the completion of the film, the hard copies of the art don't serve much of a practical purpose. I thought it would be wise to put it to use by offering it to backers for a \$50 contribution to the project. Since the artists didn't have a practical application for the pieces, they were willing to donate hard copies to me to help the campaign.

Schedule

July 18 th – August 15 th	Assemble ‘audio lock’	
August 1 st – August 30 th	Create storyboards from audio lock through collaboration with artists. ‘Assign’ illustrations to artists.	
September 1 st – September 14 th	Shoot re-enactments and visual metaphor segments in studio.	
October 14 th	Rough versions of art due.	Begin chapter II: “ Approach to Production”
December 14 th	Final versions of art due.	Complete chapter II: “Initial Approach” and begin chapter III: “Evaluation of Completed work”
January 15 th		Complete chapter III: “Evaluation of Completed Work” and begin “Appendices.”
February 20 th	Complete rough cut of film	Complete “Appendices.”

Equipment

The university provided equipment for post-production. I worked exclusively in the department’s post-production lab. The edit lab’s thesis room has two iMacs with Adobe Premiere installed. I decided to edit on Adobe Premiere for a number of reasons. I had never used Adobe Premiere before and wanted to graduate with experience on all editing platforms. While it may have been risky to learn a new editing software while in post-production, it was my understanding that Adobe Premiere has the most intuitive and user-friendly interface of all major editing softwares. Additionally, I had only negative experiences working with Avid Media Composer in the past. I found the learning curve of that software to be too steep for my comfort.

After using it exclusively for two years and on separate projects, I still didn't feel confident that I had a grasp of how to use it effectively. Another perk of choosing Adobe Premiere was upperclassmen in the undergraduate program are very familiar with Premiere but not necessarily with Avid. Opting to use Premiere meant that I could ask other students for help instead of leaning on faculty and staff exclusively.

Another reason that Adobe's editing software was the ideal choice for this project was that all of Adobe's different software could communicate with each other. Because Adobe Photoshop and Adobe After Effects would be used for parts of my project, it made sense to use the software that works with them in the most synergistic way.

All scanned art was given to me in Photoshop file format. Without being exported from Photoshop as some other file type, the file maintained its full resolution. Because all of Adobe's software works together, Photoshop files can be dropped into Adobe Premiere editing timelines.

PluralEyes, software that syncs video footage to separately recorded audio, is also designed to work with Adobe Premiere. Timelines can be exported directly from PluralEyes to Premiere. While syncing with PluralEyes was a clunky and cumbersome experience while working with Avid, using this same software in conjunction with Premiere made syncing fast and easy. PluralEyes also syncs multiple video and audio tracks at once. This allowed me to sync all the footage from live performances together with all of its corresponding audio tracks at once, enabling multi-camera editing later.

Footage and project files were stored on a 4 Terabyte G-Drive external hard drive. This drive was selected as the main editing drive for its larger capacity, allowing more space for render files. Also, the G-Drive connects to a PC or Mac using either a Firewire port or USB3 port, which run faster than USB2 ports. This helps to keep footage from lagging during the post-

production process. The footage and files were additionally backed up on two redundant drives kept at different locations. In case of some catastrophe (like a flood or fire) at one location, another drive would still be safe. These drives were smaller, two terabyte drives by Western Digital. These drives run on USB2. While not ideal for use as editing drives, they are perfectly adequate for storing data.

Overview

With all the footage synced, the next step was to subclip the footage and decide what material was relevant to the project. This process involves watching footage and isolating sections as subclips (clips within clips).

I decided to subclip the interviews first. I felt that reviewing this material would give me a frame of reference with which to evaluate the live performance footage. I subclipped parts that weren't necessarily relevant to the project just in case I could find a use for them later. I marked in and out points for each subclip and titled it with a description of what the subjects were describing in interview. As speculated by one of my committee members, having a visual reference while subclipping the material was entirely helpful.

After subclipping the interviews, I subclipped the live performance. This process was more or less the same, isolating jokes in the performance and naming them. This part of the process was more intuitive because jokes seem to have a clear beginning and end, where parts of interviews seem to ramble or transition discreetly.

It was in the subclipping process that I noticed a problem with the performance footage. Taylor had been taking stills while shooting; not knowing that this splits the video into separate takes. It also adds a camera sound to the audio track, interrupting the performance. This caused

footage to be out of sync, even after being put through PluralEyes. To alleviate this problem, I had to split performances into different halves (where the tracks had split) and move the video back a number of frames to get everything back in sync. This meant that there were parts of footage that had no video from one camera. Fortunately, this never occurred over pivotal material. Additionally, I could have cut to the second camera in such moments.

All performance subclipping was done while watching footage from a single camera. I then started making multi-camera edits, cutting from one camera to another during live performance. Adobe Premiere has a multi-camera editing tool that allows you to watch footage and, with keyboard hotkeys, switch to another. The tool makes edit points wherever you switch to another camera. This made the process very quick because it was like editing live. If the camera would jiggle, I would cut to the second camera. Later, I could drag that edit point back to before the jiggle occurred. Multi-camera edits can be made at any time, so later, if I had a problem with one of the edits I had made, I could make changes without the process being labor-intensive.

Because there was only five hours of footage, reviewing footage and subclipping only took a week, where this process had taken months on the film I had worked on the previous year (with over 60 hours of footage). With sub-clipping complete, it was time to build the audio lock. At this point, I was still counting on the entire film being vignettted, so I decided to start by doing a draft of a single subject's timeline, then moving on to the next.

I began with Casey's timeline. He had been so succinct in interview; I knew his would be the easiest. I could practice on this easier sequence and with those skills, move on to a more difficult timeline. There were parts of Casey's interview that I immediately knew I wanted in the final cut of the film. While his statement about humor "taking the power away from things"

didn't strike me during his interview, I found it incredibly profound in post. I knew in that moment that it would close the film.

In reviewing Casey's material and moving clips around on a timeline, I found a sort of intuitive narrative structure to his segment. I arranged clips so that he would begin talking about his childhood. He would then move on to talking about how these experiences still effect him. He would then speak more broadly and describe the ways in which humor has helped him.

After having a rough idea of the material I wanted in Casey's segment, I decided to add jokes from his live performance and intercut them. I felt that completing a draft of a sequence of Casey would help me with assembling sequences of the other two subjects.

I found that having a rough outline of Casey's sequence built through interview informed my choices about what jokes were applicable. In one segment of interview he says, "I was more afraid of him hitting one of my sisters." This line is referencing his father, though he doesn't use the word. In a joke placed immediately after this moment, Casey says, "My dad was a bad person. He left when I was young." Putting these two segments together was a logical choice for me. The first statement leaves an amount of mystery to what Casey means, without being entirely cryptic. I also liked the idea that what Casey is saying on stage informs and contextualizes what we just heard in interview. In this way, live performance segments served as connective tissue for the interview. This was a model I tried to keep in mind for the rest of post-production.

It was important to me that each subject's personal voice was captured. While Casey makes very clear and succinct points, he stammers when he talks. While I could have made this less obvious through editing, I felt that it was the right choice to leave it because it is decidedly telling about his personality.

Conversely, Kubon rambles without ever necessarily completing a thought. This is even visible in the timeline. There are significantly more edit points in Kubon's segment than Casey's. While this made his interview incredibly difficult to effectively subclip, it was still important to maintain this voice to communicate how in his own head Kubon is. For this reason, I felt that Kubon's segment was going to be the most challenging to complete. Since Casey's had been so easy, I decided to tackle Kubon's. It would be a relief to have the most difficult sequence roughed together.

I had a rough version of Casey's sequence put together with a running time of 5:30. In terms of content, his sequence felt complete. I decided to use the 5:30 running time as a rough guideline for other sequences. It was important to me that each sequence have roughly the same running time so that no single subject outshone another.

I had selected Kubon as a subject because his false machismo on stage is so directly opposite of the actual quality of his character. This idea was confirmed when I started to place live performance footage next to his confessional interview footage. I thought that it was important that his personality on-stage be absolved by his interview. Without the context of his interview footage, I was afraid that audience members would have trouble connecting with Kubon.

Kubon's interview footage didn't lend itself to building the same narrative structure as Casey's. His footage was more impressionistic. It wasn't so much a story as it was a divulgence of his feelings. I felt that the best choice was to select footage that I could more immediately visualize. This would keep Kubon's segment in line with the original goals of the film.

Some editing choices with Kubon were very logical. His sequence begins with his opening joke, a particularly vulgar one. It then cuts to his interview where he says "I get a of

grief about my stand-up because so many of the jokes that I do have some sort of basis on sex.” I thought that it made sense that Kubon immediately addresses the problem that audience members may have with his humor.

Mike Burd’s sequence was unique because he actually discusses some of the exact same things both on and off stage. The only real difference is that he changes to a more irreverent tone while he’s telling jokes and is much more somber during candid interview. On stage, Mike jokes about his alcoholism, but in interview, he explains how it really feels. I found this particularly interesting and used it as a model for constructing his timeline.

In one interview segment, he describes getting his first DUI. It was clearly a seminal and poignant moment for him. While performing, Mike jokes about how he can only teach his nephew the alphabet backwards, the humor being that he is only familiar with the alphabet in this chronology because he has performed so many field sobriety tests. These juxtapositions were the point of Mike’s sequence. His humor is informed by these real experiences, but the reality of the situation is not actually funny. Mike and his abilities translate it.

One important choice that was made during the assembly of Mike’s sequence was his opening line. While performing, Mike immediately breaks the fourth wall. He points to the cameras and says, “This is actually my good side. I don’t like any of the pictures you’re taking.” I loved the idea of Mike demystifying the process and dissolving any illusion that there isn’t a film being made. I decided that this moment would open the film. I felt that it was important to set this tone early on.

With rough timelines put together, I sent a cut to my thesis committee members. Their response was mostly positive and their notes were minor. I ended up only switching out one or two jokes for material that was more appropriate.

With notes from my committee members and some changes, I had more or less completed an audio-lock. I knew that no other material was going to be added or subtracted from the timeline. It was time to start covering interview with imagery.

The first step was to make a transcription of each subject's interview. This process was brief because I only had to subclip the parts that would be in the final cut of the film. It ended up being less than a page of text for each subject. Some moments, I thought, would be more powerful if we could see the subject saying it. Since there was to be no traditional sit-down interview, in these moments, we would cut to a cartoon of the subject saying that line of the interview. Making these choices took an amount of intuition. I imagined what moments would be the most effective while looking into someone's eyes. Deep and intimate confessions and closing statements were early candidates for animated interview. This played at the idea of direct address, but replacing subjects with cartoon versions of themselves.

After this process, I had an idea what material would be animated interview and what material would be accompanied by illustrations. With this knowledge, I had meetings with each of the artists. We went over the transcript of their subject together and brainstormed ideas about what imagery made sense and how many images were applicable. This was refreshing because the artists were not familiar with the material. They had fresh eyes and could generate imagery I couldn't.

I was also impressed that the artists and I saw a lot of the same imagery in our minds while going over the transcripts. For example, when Casey is describing his father coming into his bedroom to abuse him, both Anna Lisa and I imagined similar long, distorted, and nightmarish views of a child's bedroom. Similarly, when Kubon describes sex as being like

“diving into a pool without checking the depth first,” there is really only one way to visualize this analogy. Joe and I both imagined Kubon diving into a pool of beautiful, naked women.

After a meeting with each of the artists and a few short weeks of waiting I had storyboards from everyone. I started dropping in storyboards into the timelines. I increased their duration to match how long I imagined each image being on screen. Before having any animation in, I used still-image cartoon versions of each performer as placeholders. To make sure that the pacing was what I wanted, I added motion keyframes to the storyboards. This made the image reveal different parts of itself, the way Ken Burns scans across or zooms into images in his documentaries. My plan was to apply motion to storyboards. That way, if everything played well on screen, I could place orders for final art and simply replace the storyboards in the timeline.

With storyboards in place, I was ready to receive more feedback from my thesis committee. At this point, the film had all the imagery to go along with interviews. My vision becoming more clear made feedback more necessary and easier to give. There was finally something to really discuss.

There were some issues with storyboards that needed addressing. A lot of the problems were things that I noticed immediately and my thesis committee confirmed. One issue was a storyboard of Kubon portrayed him having sex with a woman with a cheerful look on his face. I felt this was incongruous with the concept of his segment. This expression was later changed to one of distress. In one of Burd’s illustrations, he was pictured as a goofy, cartoon monster. I felt like this didn’t fit the tone of Burd’s segment. This image was later changed to a sympathetic, leprous monster. This was more in tune with the vision I had for Burd’s portion of the film. Examples of storyboards and notes are located in Appendix B.

After compiling notes from my thesis committee and myself, I knew what imagery I needed to complete the final film. I was confident in placing orders for final art with all my commissioned artists. I informed the artists of the small changes that needed to be made.

As dictated by my post-production schedule, the artists had several months to complete final art. I made sure to work very fast in completing the audio-lock to give the artists as much time as possible to complete their own parts as well as allow for contingency.

The final art came to me from Joe and Anna Lisa in the form of Photoshop documents, which could be placed directly into the timeline without losing any resolution. The art had been hand-drawn and scanned in at a high resolution (around 3,200 dpi). I had instructed the artists do their work on 16"x9" paper to maintain the necessary aspect ratio. Joe actually worked at half that size, but the resolution of the scanned image was high enough that it was a non-issue. The resolution of 1920x1080 cinema is about 72dpi, so the resolution of the scanned images was more than enough for zooming in and using motion keyframes. Anna Lisa's art was in full 16"x9" dimensions. She ended up scanning her art at a high enough resolution that it could have been used as a highway billboard without any visible loss of resolution.

John's art was a unique because it was all done digitally. There was no scanning involved in his process. Instead, he sent me .mov (video) files of his final art. He had worked in Adobe After Effects. In his final artwork, each image was two layers that would move, creating simple animation (like a police officer raising a flashlight or words dropping from the top of the screen). These videos were in full 1920x1080 resolution, so they could simply be dropped in over their storyboard counterparts. This also meant no motion keyframing on my end was necessary. The final art was already in motion when it got to me.

The duration of John's video exports was close to what was necessary to cover the storyboards, but not exactly. We had estimated durations together. To get the clips to the necessary length, I slowed the clips down or sped them up. This was only by fractions of a second to fill the necessary time, and this alteration was visibly imperceptible.

One part of the production process was very serendipitous. I found out that since I had already placed motion keyframes on storyboards, I only had to copy those same keyframes over to the final art to complete the motion. I had originally added motion keyframes just to get an idea how the final project would look and to get feedback from my committee. During this process, I didn't know that I was actually saving myself trouble later on.

I was mostly satisfied with my original motion keyframing, but I ended up making a few changes. Over the course of the process, I realized how displaying different parts of the image and using motion could change the emphasis of images. In Casey's sequence, one image shows his mother leaving for work and Casey standing warily with his siblings. Originally, the shot began tight on Casey's mother then slowly pulled out to reveal the entire image. I decided to put more emphasis on the children by slowly pushing in on them and framing out Casey's mother after the full image had been revealed. In another of Casey's images, he is shown having accidentally attacked a friend who snuck up on him. I started with the full image in frame, then slowly pushed in on Casey to emphasize his anxiety and embarrassment that had been conveyed in the facial expression Anna Lisa had illustrated.

At the same time the three illustrators were generating their imagery, Matthew Schipper, the animator, was generating cartoons to cover sit-down interview footage. He had sent me some tests and I was more than satisfied with his work. I sent him transcripts and video exports of the footage he would be animating. It was important to get the illustration storyboards in first to be

certain what material would be animated. Schipp's work is very labor-intensive, and I didn't want him to animate anything that wouldn't make it to the final edit. In fact, to get samples, I sent him material that I speculated would be in the final cut. That way, he would waste no effort, even in generating samples. The majority of this material is in the final film. Only a few lines were cut for the sake of brevity.

Schipp started by drawing cartoon versions of each subject. These were the still images I used as placeholders in the timeline. I instructed Schipp to draw each comedian in the clothes they were wearing during live performance. I wanted their likeness to be as clear as possible. I was fortunate that each subject happened to have a very unique look. When each cartoon speaks in their subjects' voice, it's clear that we're being addressed by whoever that subject is.

I was fortunate that Schipp works very fast. Animation is a very labor-intensive and monotonous process, but Schipp generated a 30-second fully animated sequence in two hours. The visual reference from interview footage came in handy again. With video clips of the interview footage, Schipp could get a sense of each subject's personality and try to replicate it through animation. He captured Mike's relaxed interview style by placing the cartoon version of him on a couch. Schipp also mimicked how Mike would gesticulate and pat the couch at the end of a thought. This sound was picked up on audio, so the cartoon doing the same thing makes these diegetic sounds make sense. Similarly, Schipp captured Casey's personality through subtle movements. The cartoon's eyes are almost constantly moving, though never making eye contact with us. This is exactly how Casey behaves in interview. I feel that this inclusion is pivotal to understanding the content of his character, and I'm fortunate that this aspect was not lost in the animation process.

Though I let Schipp use his artistry and best judgment in how best to animate each subject, we collaborated when selecting backgrounds. Because of the way this imagery was being generated, I could put the cartoons in front of any background I chose.

Using a process called bitmap scanning, Schipp can remove resolution from a photograph, making it appear blotchy and cartoony. This allows me to zoom in almost indefinitely in post-production without any visible loss of resolution. Additionally, because resolution was a non-issue, background photos could be taken with an iPhone camera. The animated character is then dropped in front of the background and the cartoon is complete.

All of the background photos were taken at Paschall's, a bar in Denton, Texas. It offered backgrounds that each looked like entirely different locations. Paschall's was the ideal choice because the décor looks like a living room or parlor, the perfect intimate setting. A sophisticated red leather couch was perfect for Burd's relaxed demeanor. A different couch in the same bar was similarly intimate for Casey's interview. I chose a dartboard as Kubon's background. I wanted his background to have some depth, and I wanted his interview to feel more public and candid, in an effort to feel different than the others. I also found it interesting that Kubon would be talking about such intimate (and often crass) things in a seemingly public space, though this was not the reality of the interview.

Schipp and I went to Paschall's to take background pictures together, deciding as a team which backgrounds would suit each subject best. I took the pictures with my phone's camera and cropped them to a 16x9 aspect ratio. I took both a wide and a tight shot of each background. This way, I could punch in later in post, giving the allusion of having had a two-camera set up while "shooting." After some simple in-phone color correction, I sent the photos to Schipp.

In Schipp's animating process, he can create artificial light that displays itself on the animation. In Mike and Casey's animated sequences, there are lamps in their background photos. Schipp generated artificial light that was made to look like it's being generated by the lamp in the photograph, making the background feel more alive. Additionally, it transforms parts of a still image into practical light sources.

In the original design of the project, there was to be no music, but instead, droning tones. My idea was for the sound bed to feel very ethereal in an effort to really draw the audience into minds of the subjects. I reached out to a friend of mine named John Paul who is a musician, but has no formal experience with composing a score.

I sent him a rough cut of the film and a brief explanation of what I was looking for. He was immediately interested and sent me back a six-minute sample of sounds and tones. I ended up chopping that sample into small parts and laying it down in Casey's sequence and was immediately satisfied with the result. After adding crossfades to that audio, Casey's score was complete.

John Paul and I quickly worked out an effective way of working with each other. He would absorb the material for each subject and generate a number of ambient tones based on his impressions. He would then get that material to me. I would edit and place segments where I pleased. This was ideal because it wasn't labor-intensive for John Paul and it gave me a huge amount of control over the sound bed.

This is not the way scores are typically generated. More commonly, a picture lock is achieved and a score is generated to match the imagery on screen. Since I wasn't going to achieve picture lock until much later, this option was not applicable for the timeline of the project.

Extracting segments from a longer sample of sound allowed me to layer sounds on top of each other for the sound bed to suit my needs. This was perfect, again because it put control of the music in my hands without requiring any experience in scoring a film. This was only possible because of my choice to use ambient tones. Because the sound was just ambient, being “in key” or in the right time signature was not a factor. This would have been a problem had actual instrumentation been involved.

One part of the film where this approach was the most effective was in a scene in which Casey describes his abuse. The image transitions from an image of Casey’s mother leaving for a night shift at the hospital to an image of the looming silhouette of Casey’s father entering Casey’s bedroom. In this segment, I laid down a calm, ringing tone that, with the use of a long crossfade, transitioned to a frightening and chaotic sound. Both of these sounds came from different parts of the sample John Paul had sent me. My process allowed me to gradually change from one sound to another to accurately express the tone in a given moment. Additionally, in an image where Casey’s father reaches for him, I added a disturbing static sound John had sent me. Layering sounds allowed me to enhance these moments.

One of my committee members indicated to me that sound effects might be applicable. I had decided that a slide projector noise would enhance one of Kubon’s illustrations. My committee member decided, and I agreed, that having a sound effect at this one moment (and so late in the film) didn’t make a lot of sense. The best option was to explore sound effects and place them throughout everyone’s sequence to make the sound bed more consistent.

I went back and printed out each of the storyboards and made notes as to what kind of sounds I imagined accompanying them. After tracking down copyright free sound effects on Soundminer (a sound effects database to which all UNT students have access) and third-party

websites, I laid down all my sound effects choices in the timeline. I was concerned that sound effects combined with the ambient tones would become obnoxious and distracting. I found some sound effects to be unnecessary, so I stripped some away, leaving only the sounds that really served the film.

After a long vetting process with sound effects and ambient tones, I was entirely satisfied. While I had been concerned about sounds being distracting, I decided that the presence of sound effects and ambient tones would only draw the audience in further.

There is one segment that I found the most successful in this regard. In a segment where Mike is describing how he got his first DUI, I added the sound of a police siren, a car door closing, footsteps on asphalt, police radio garble, and handcuffs. These sounds are subtle in the mix, but I feel that they really put an audience in the moment. Additionally, I added reverb to all these sounds. I feel that it makes everything feel like one of Mike's distant memories. While this is a lot of sound effects in a short period of time, I felt that it was the right choice. Conversely, in the segment where Casey describes his abuse, I added only one sound; the ominous creak of a door slowly opening. I felt in this instance that less was more.

Creating the title sequence was a subtle, yet entirely crucial, part of completing the finished project. My concept was to have a microphone on a stool that transformed into a cartoon version of itself. I thought that the microphone and stool were iconic images that communicated the idea of stand-up comedy. The transformation of these items into cartoons, I thought, could communicate some of the ideas of the film and do so in a non-verbal way. My hope was for the title sequence to be expository in this way so that when cartoons and illustrations appeared on screen, it wouldn't be quite so jarring. This imagery combined with the reveal of the title "The Best Medicine" would efficiently reveal a lot about the film and its messages.

Achieving the title sequence I wanted was a simple process. About 30 seconds of static footage was shot of a stool with a microphone on it. This duration was more than enough to build the sequence I wanted. Joe Duncan then traced a screenshot of the stool and microphone and created an illustrated version. He scanned that image, removed the background, and gave me a Photoshop file with that image.

I imported the footage and Photoshop file into Adobe After effects to complete the title sequence. Since the stool and microphone had been traced, Joe's image was to scale, so I only had to resize it slightly to fit the illustration of the original items. An animation preset in After Effects applied to the illustration made it appear in sections over the original footage. I applied a scribble sound effect as this animation occurred to make it seem like the illustration was being drawn in real-time over the footage. I also decreased the opacity on the illustration to make it blend more seamlessly with its background.

The final step was to add the title. The hand drawn font I had selected for the film spelled out the title of the film. Another After Effects preset made it fade in from left to right. Another preset I had sought out called "squiggle-vision" made the text appear constantly in motion, like some stylized animation of the '90s (Beavis and Butthead or Dr. Katz). Traditionally, squiggle-vision is achieved by drawing an image and then tracing over it twice more. When animated, the imperfections produced from tracing give a subtle, yet entirely distinct sort of motion to the imagery. The Adobe After Effects animation preset I found took all the labor out of this process while still yielding the same visual concept. I felt that squiggle-vision fit the whimsical tone of the film. I ended up using it in conjunction with my chosen font on all the title cards throughout the film to keep things consistent.

CHAPTER 7

RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF FILM DURING POST-PRODUCTION

There were a number of changes made to the film during the post-production process. The first change was the title of the film. The original title was “Tragedy + Time = Comedy.” I found this title kind of cryptic. From a marketing point of view, it would be nearly impossible to find in an online search. I came up with the final title “The Best Medicine.” The reference to the adage “laughter is the best medicine” tied together the concepts of comedy and its therapeutic nature. I felt that this title was more intuitive and succinctly explained the concept of the project. I think that this title is more expository, which is helpful for a project that utilizes so many different elements.

A more major change was the number of images used in illustration. Originally, the concept had been to use animatics, a sort fast-paced storyboarding that teeters on animation. For the length of the project, it would have required between 75 and 100 images per subject. The artists and I agreed that this was not realistic for the scope of the project. We instead decided to shoot for between six and ten images. Using fewer images allowed artists to make them more detailed. This produced higher quality art. Additionally, fewer images meant that they would be on screen longer, making them more meditative and allowing the audience more time to absorb the visuals. By using motion keyframes in Premiere to scan across images, the images don’t become boring or stale. The imagery remains dynamic without being unnecessarily labor-intensive for the artists.

Another change that came about in postproduction was the omission of re-enactments. In earlier conceptualization of the film, dramatizations would be laid over interview footage in the place of art (when applicable). I ultimately decided that only using illustrations would make the

film more appropriately stylized and cohesive. Relying solely on illustrations to tell the stories visually helps to keep imagery consistent. The addition of another medium would have felt wedged in and made the film feel more scattered. In addition, the production of dramatizations would have been an additional amount of work that, in my speculation, wouldn't have served the film as well as the illustrations from contributing artists.

There was one bittersweet reconceptualization that occurred during post-production. A part of the treatment that I had certainly imagined ending up in the final film had to be omitted. Even in the earliest and most primal versions of the treatment, Casey describes how his father would break his fingers for punishment (or for no particular reason at all). He then describes a story in which he was in 2nd grade and had to trace his hands to make a turkey. He said that all the other children made fun of his turkey because it was deformed, having been based on Casey's crooked hands and fingers. I found this story incredibly poignant and compelling. In fact, this particular anecdote was what inspired me to think more seriously about the film's concept and solely responsible for Casey's inclusion in the film. Casey divulged to me later that his mother did not know about this aspect of his abuse and that he didn't want her to know. As a result, he requested that this story not appear in the final version of the film. While I was disappointed, I accepted Casey's terms, understanding that it was in the best interest of him and his mother. I ended up finding another avenue to complete Casey's segment. Both fortunately and unfortunately, there was enough description of Casey's abuse to complete his vignette several times over.

The final reconceptualization to the film in post-production was the notion of integrating each subject's story and forgoing the original vignettted approach to editing. A committee member brought up this idea during the post-production process. By this time, the interviews had

been subclipped and the bulk of the material for the final film had already been selected. It was a struggle to build the film in this integrated way after designing the entire project and beginning editing under the original plan to create a vignetted version.

Each subject's sequence has a flow that was achieved through the selection of material while subclipping and assembling the timeline. While interweaving characters' stories made new connections, just as many connections were lost. For example, one segment features Casey talking about his father during his interview. However, he never uses the word father until the following live performance segment. Interweaving the stories interrupts this moment, which is not my preference. In another segment, Mike talks in interview about how much his alcoholism has cost him. Immediately after, he is on stage drinking and says "I love the sweet nectar, baby." I found this juxtaposition fascinating, but again, interweaving sequences wedges them apart.

There are a few benefits that I see to integrating each character's story this way. Kubon's segment is particularly offensive. I can imagine him totally turning off audiences, so breaking his segment up into smaller doses is tactful. Additionally, I like having all of the subject's closing statements close together. It gives the film a real sense of closure that isn't achieved when each subject has his own section. While integrating the sections certainly has its benefits, I feel that those of the original model for the film outweigh those benefits.

I feel that the film becomes scattered and that each character's story loses connectivity when edited this way. While it may feel more cinematic for all the sequences to be woven together, it is not in line with the original plan for the film, and I think each segment loses more than it gains from this choice. Had this interwoven style been the plan from the beginning, the film would have turned out much differently, but the project wasn't designed nor produced to work that way.

The solution that I've found is to create two versions of the film. An integrated version will be used for film festival submissions because it feels like a more cinematic and cohesive project. This version will also be used for the thesis screening for the same reasons. Each vignette will be released separately as a webisode. I feel that audience members are more likely to watch a six-minute episode than a 20-minute film. This will also allow me to keep all the connectivity that I feel is lost by integrating the sequences. All the original themes can still be drawn from viewing the "series."

CHAPTER 8

EVALUATION OF COMPLETED WORK

Pre-Production

The film was stringently planned from the beginning. In a lot of ways, the film was “written” early on. Through knowing all of my subjects personally, I had a grasp of the sort of material I would be getting from them during the interview process. Additionally, from working with them for years as a comedian, I knew their on-stage personas and material very well.

Going back and looking at the original treatment for the project reveals the many ways the film has grown. While specific imagery in the treatment didn’t necessarily make it to the screen, all the characters manifest themselves in the same ways. Casey’s “deadpan voice” and “signature dark, non-sequitur humor” are entirely present on screen, just as described in the treatment.

I was fastidious in assembling my equipment list, but in retrospect, I was hasty in leaving for my production trip. If I could go back, I would test all the batteries and cables before leaving the state. Being that far away made it impossible to exchange defective pieces of equipment at the department.

“Casting” was also a part of the pre-production process. Selecting the right characters for the film was one of the most pivotal aspects of the film’s completion and of successfully communicating its themes. It’s important to note that while I have access to a lot of comedians, not all of them were appropriate for this project. I think that the three characters I selected work well on their own but also do a lot to enhance each other’s stories and the overall film. Casey’s story is very dark and personal. He talks about his past and how that past has influenced his character. Conversely, Kubon’s segment does not have that kind of narrative arc. His segment is

more a personal exploration of his own feelings. Burd seems to fall between the two, reflecting on his past and how his stigma affects how he feels about himself. I chose these individuals because their vices and insecurities are different; abuse, alcoholism, and sexual anxiety respectively. I think it was important for their stories and styles to be diverse in this way. It helps the film to be more broad and inclusive in scope. Additionally, it helps to show that the theme of finding humor in dark circumstances is more universal. Finding three alcoholic comics or three comics that were abused as children would not have been hard, but I feel that it would have pigeonholed the project and its goals. I'm confident that I selected the right subjects for the film and that casting was one of the most successful parts of the pre-production process.

Selecting artists was another pivotal part of pre-production. In a way, this was casting as well. I had to select the right artists to represent each of the subjects of the film. This part of the process, while entirely important, came very easily. I knew I wanted Anna Lisa to contribute art for Casey's segment. She had collaborated with me before by illustrating a piece I wrote about my own father. Her style was whimsical and cartoonish, but still entirely dark and foreboding. I knew that it fit perfectly with Casey's story, so I secured her involvement early on. It was important to me that each artist's style be different so that each character felt very different. I wanted Joe Duncan to contribute art for Kubon's segment. I felt that the two were a good match. I had described the inside of Kubon's brain being like Pee-wee's Playhouse. Joe's background in illustrating for children's books made him the perfect choice. I wanted to juxtapose the entirely adult content of Kubon's segment with the goofy and juvenile art that Joe would be producing. The bright colors Joe used immediately set his work apart from Anna Lisa's monochrome pieces she would be producing. Getting John Martin on board came later on. I was not entirely familiar with his work, but he expressed interest in the project. I didn't know an artist personally that I

felt had a style cohesive with Michael's story. I selected John not only based on the quality of his portfolio, but because he wanted to work digitally. My other two characters were represented with hand-drawn art and I wanted Michael's segment to stand apart from the other work of the other two artists. Each comedian's personality was so unique, I felt it important that different artists represent it on screen. Again, I feel that the right choices were made in terms of selecting artists. While I'm fortunate to have a network of talented illustrators, it took an amount of intuition to match the artist with the right comedian.

The entire concept of using animation and illustration was designed in the pre-production phase. Representing things on screen that are so internal (memories and emotions) was a challenge. I decided to think outside the proverbial box and use art to put imagery on screen that otherwise could not exist. In this way, it was a creative solution. Again, I feel that this was the right choice for the film and a huge factor in what makes the film so different and worthwhile. One of the best and most important decisions made during pre-production was to have cartoons take the place of traditional sit-down interview footage. I feel that sit-down interviews in documentaries are a real cop-out. They're easy to shoot and a safe and easy choice to put on screen, all without being at all visually interesting. By choosing in pre-production to have cartoons take the place of sit-down interviews, I effectively made the easiest part of production the most labor-intensive process and also made interview footage visually interesting.

In terms of making choices that serve the nature of the project, I feel that the pre-production phase was entirely successful. The plan for the film was stringently laid out early on and was followed closely. I think that having a clear vision and knowing what I wanted the film to accomplish early on was the main factor in having a successful pre-production phase.

Production

I feel that writing is my greatest strength as a filmmaker. This skill set translates very well to the pre-production phase; the writing and planning and conjuring of a story makes a lot of sense to me. This skill set, unfortunately, does not factor in as significantly to the production phase. Production requires a lot of technical skill. This is an area in which I feel I am lacking. If the film suffered in any area, I feel that it was in this phase. I had to rely on myself for producing quality camera work, a field in which I am not at all comfortable. I think that the footage I shot was adequate at best, but very little more than that. Part of my decision to use cartoons for interviews stemmed from my lack of confidence in producing visually pleasing footage.

Another struggle during the production phase was being out of state for its entire duration. I have very little experience coordinating shoots and production days, but the success of the film was riding on my ability to do so. It was foolhardy to leave for production without checking the equipment. Perhaps blinded by hubris, I could have avoided a lot of problems during production by checking equipment.

I didn't feel comfortable asking any graduate students to accompany me on a three-week trek to Michigan, so I was more or less on my own during this phase. I was fortunate to have friends willing to operate cameras for me during production, but I was uncomfortable with the success of my production riding on my ability to call in favors. I think production would have gone much smoother if I had more sets of hands on set that were qualified and legally permitted to touch department equipment.

The audio quality for both interview and performance footage was adequate. I feel that I have more experience in this area of production than any other. While some adjustments were certainly necessary in post, there were no catastrophic errors in the capturing of audio. I attribute

an amount of this to luck. I had to leave audio equipment alone during performances because I was busy running camera. Had any of the performers peaked or had there been a problem with the equipment, I wouldn't have known until it was too late. While I didn't feel that I had other options, it was not wise to leave any part of production to chance.

Any major problems that I have with the finished film stem from issues during this phase. I was disappointed that one of the cinematographers I had been counting on to shoot for me bailed at the last minute. As a result, I had to rely on a perfect stranger to capture live performance footage. While I am entirely grateful for Taylor's contributions, I made a serious error in directing him. I said that I wanted footage to look handheld. He said that he would have the camera on a monopod and move it to maintain a handheld look and I agreed. Later on in post-production, I realized that this was a poor choice. The footage turned out shaky and there was a lot of jarring movement across the x-axis. I think that Taylor overcompensated and moved the camera too much during production, and this could have been avoided had I been more knowledgeable and assertive as director.

While there were many opportunities for error while shooting live performance footage, shooting interview footage went pretty smoothly. Again, it would have been ideal to have an extra set of hands. However, with the quality of video footage not being a factor and being able to focus on audio, this type of shoot was manageable by myself. I'm also satisfied with my performance as a director during interviews. My choice to keep the interviews unstructured served the purpose of the film very well. By the end of each interview, I was confident that I had the necessary material to complete each subject's segment.

The production process took three weeks, although there was only a total of about five hours of footage shot. Considering the target duration of the film, this still left me with a 15:1

shooting ratio, which I found more than sufficient. More importantly, I knew that my subjects had given me the material I needed (in both performance and interview) to complete the film that I had set out to make. With two live performances shot and sufficient interview footage from each subject, I completed my production phase.

Post-Production

The unique nature of my project allowed me to design the entire post-production process in advance, during the pre-production phase. On the last documentary I worked on, I waded through 60 hours of footage in an effort to “find the film” within it. This process is not my preferred way to work. Instead, each character’s story, message, and arc were plotted out in pre-production to streamline post-production. The idea was to only capture material I knew I needed so that post-production would be about putting information in the right order. I think this was the right choice for this project, especially because it is tailored to my skill set. It allowed me to follow an outline that I had written for the project.

Also in pre-production, I developed the idea of an audio-lock, in which I laid out all the necessary material for completing each character’s story aurally, then building the imagery on top of it. This process was entirely effective during the post-production phase. After sub-clipping the interview footage, selecting the most relevant material was a fairly intuitive process. It was then a matter of whittling the material from each segment down to only the most necessary and narrative-driving material (roughly three minutes for each subject). Because of the way I planned the post-production process, I had a completed timeline of the film within a few short weeks. It was like building scaffolding for the finished film and fabricating the rest of the project around it. In my experience, films may go under serious structural changes during post-

production. New, relevant material may be omitted or added; parts of the film may be shifted around in chronology; themes and messages may be gained and lost in the arrangement of the material. My post-production phase was not like that at all. During this phase, I didn't feel so much like an editor or filmmaker as much as I felt like an architect. The structure was solidified early on. The film never changed so much as it evolved, constantly transforming into a better and more complete version of itself.

Although the post-production process was designed to omit any guesswork, it was still the most labor-intensive part of the project. It took hours and hours of time in the lab to assemble the audio-lock and countless more hours for the rest of the imagery to be inserted and arranged. I think it's clear that the project is very thoughtfully and artfully constructed. I think one of the reasons the project is so successful in this way is that it had so many hands in it. By delegating parts of the process to illustrators and an animator, I ended up putting together a whole post-production team. There was a lot of effort from a lot of different sources and I think that huge amount of labor is visible on screen.

I think another reason post-production was such a success also stems from the collaborative nature of the project. The majority of the film is imagery I couldn't have generated myself. Animation and illustration are simply not in my wheelhouse. I maintained control of my vision in working with artists, but allowed those other people to help me accomplish it. Even if I had all the skills necessary to complete the project on my own, it would have taken much longer than a year to complete because I would have had to do everything on my own. Working with other artists allowed the workload to be split up manageably for the size and scope of the project. I also think it was in the best interest of the project to trust the artists to complete the necessary work and not to micromanage them. It's important to remember that artists aren't good at what

they do just because they know how to draw. They know how to think visually. That's something that we both have in common, and it was key to the project's success to maintain that mutual reverence during post-production. As an added bonus, the work was spread out among four five different people; an animator, and three illustrators, and myself. This kept the workload manageable for everyone. For each subject, half the material was on-stage performance, which made for no additional work for the illustrators. Out of the remaining material, only half was being illustrated because animation was picking up the slack. The work each illustrator did only accounted about a minute and a half of screen time, so they were only responsible for generating that manageable amount of material. Schipp ended up animating only about four minutes of screen time. While he worked very hard, this was a totally reasonable amount of content to generate, given his experience. Each person's involvement made less work for everyone else. The inclusion of many different collaborators was crucial to the success of post-production.

One choice I made in post that I was particularly proud of was how to end the film. I think that in a lot of ways, the end of any film is the most important part, because it will likely be the part that sticks with audience members the most. The film ends on Casey's statement:

Humor is kind of how I take the power away from things. I feel that if you can laugh at it, you're proving that you're bigger than it because you can find happiness in even the darkest things. You view it as something you can chisel away at, and take it down a peg or two.

I felt like this was a powerful moment because Casey sums up the thesis of the film. I struggled with this choice briefly because I wanted the film to end on a high note. I ultimately decided that the comedian's feelings and philosophies were the point of the film, so it made more sense to end here. However, Casey's story is arguably the most poignant, and I wanted to relieve some of the tension in the audience. I chose a song for the credits called "The Good in Everything" by Uncle Neptune. The song is incredibly upbeat and the lyrical content of the song

juxtaposed with the solemn content at the end makes the song irreverent in context. I think this is attitude is ideal, not only because it is a relief after hearing so many sad stories in a row, but because that same attitude is totally in line with the message of the film.

The production phase is really where I found out that the project was what I had been trying to achieve the whole time. While I knew I had gotten the necessary materials in production, the final project couldn't emerge until this later phase. In many ways, the project is better than I imagined. After seeing a rough cut of the film, a committee member explained to me that he couldn't fully understand or visualize the project until seeing it. He assured me he meant this in a good way. I took it as a tremendous compliment. It meant that I effectively communicated my vision. I was also proud that explaining the concept wasn't enough. It meant so much more when the completed film was effective. The visual medium was clearly the best choice for communicating the themes and messages of the film. It will be important in the future to know that if I have a very abstract idea that can't be expressed in words, that it is still worth pursuing. It's profound to me that I could see the completed film in my head early on and that an amount of work could put that same understanding in the minds of my audience. Ultimately, that's the goal of all creative endeavors; to put your feelings in someone else and allow them to feel something visceral that you've felt yourself, cultivating mutual understanding.

Success in Integrating Proposed Theories

Some theories employed are more visible in the footage than others. Post-modern elements of the film are very noticeable on screen, I think. My use and re-appropriation of documentary tropes is clear in the footage. I originally wanted to make many allusions to the filmmaking process in an effort employ theories of reflexivity and self-referential filmmaking. I

certainly accomplished that. There are many moments of cinematic rupture that dissolve the illusion cinema. Mike's references to the camera, the out-of-focus cartoons and camera handling noise, and asking cartoons to sit down for an interview all serve the film's post-modern approach.

Psychological theories, to me, are not so much integrated into the final project, but more a valuable tool for me in the production process. Understanding the interview process and how shame and guilt operate was pivotal to the successful completion of the project. While that knowledge is not necessarily visible on the screen, it informed a lot of my choices. Theories like performativity and the social self also serve as valuable tools for evaluating the final project. Gaining this knowledge has helped me to see the film with a more informed lens. I've learned things about my subjects that I couldn't have without this entirely valuable research.

I was also successful in integrating elements of dialectical montage. Especially after integrating sequences, parts of the film become informed by other parts. In the tradition of Soviet montage, my film lacks conventional narrative structure. It instead leaves linkage up to its audience. I wanted the film to be intellectually challenging in this way, and that was achieved. Deciding early on how the film was structured enabled this theory to be effectively integrated.

It was important to me to stay as far away from conventional documentary filmmaking as possible, and I was entirely successful in that regard too. My production process was terribly unlike any other filmmaking experience I've ever had, and isn't at all like the conventional filmmaking process. Building an audio-lock and storyboarding is really uncommon in documentary, so by using these methods, I was sure to create something unique. Also, employing cartoons and illustrations to tell my story kept me pretty divorced from non-fiction cinema. Having an anchor in the true stories of the subjects allowed the film to qualify under this mode,

but the theories and methods I employed kept it as far away from this medium as possible. In this way, I feel like I have really explored and furthered this form, if only in my own small way. I think, more importantly, I pushed myself to find out what new things I could accomplish as a filmmaker. Almost everything I did in this film was something I had never done before, so I had to do a great deal of learning over the course of the production process. The integration of proposed theories turned my thesis film into an entirely valuable learning experience.

APPENDIX A
RELEASE FORMS

Appendix A contains two documents. The first is a copy of the personal appearance release form each comedian signed. This document granted me the rights to use all footage (both performance and interview) as I please within the context of the film. The second document is a copy of the art release forms each artist signed. Similarly, the signing of this document granted me rights to use each artist's imagery as I please within the context of the film.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE RELEASE

Person Appearing: _____

Film: _____ (the "Film")

Producer: _____ ("Producer")

For good and valuable consideration, receipt and sufficiency of which I hereby acknowledge, I hereby irrevocably grant to Producer the right to photograph, film, videotape, or otherwise record me in connection with the Film including the right to use my name, likeness, performance and appearance, and related biographical materials (collectively, "Image") in the Film, and to own the copyright therein, to use the Image, or any part thereof, throughout the world in perpetuity including, but not limited to, the right to exhibit, record, edit and otherwise alter at the sole discretion of the Producer the Image or any portion thereof, in any form of media whatsoever, without limitation or restriction, including for the purposes of advertising, publicity, promotion and trade in any medium whatsoever without restriction as to manner, frequency or duration of use without any future payments to me.

I agree that all right, title and interest including all copyrights, to any Image of me in the Film are owned by Producer. No material needs to be submitted to me for any approval and the Producer shall have no liability to me for any distortion or illusionary effect involving my Image.

I represent and warrant that I have reached the age of majority and therefore can grant the rights hereunder or my parent or legal guardian will sign on my behalf and that the rights granted hereunder will not conflict with or violate any commitment, agreement, or understanding I have with other person or entity.

Nothing herein will constitute any obligation on the Producer to use any of the above rights.

By: _____

(Signature)

(Address)

(City, State, Zip)

Date: _____

If a MINOR parent or legal guardian must also sign below:
I, BEING THE PARENT OR GUARDIAN OF _____, HEREBY CONSENT TO BE BOUND BY THE PROVISIONS OF THIS APPEARANCE RELEASE ON BEHALF OF SAID MINOR.

PRINT FULL NAME SIGNATURE DATE

Release Form – Artwork

For good and valuable consideration the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, I, the Artist (defined below), do hereby irrevocably grant the right and license to the unlimited use of my Artwork (defined below) by Filmmaker (defined below) and their affiliated companies, successors, assigns and licensees for use and display in the Video (defined below), which Video may be displayed and/or broadcast for any purpose in any and all media now known or hereafter developed throughout the world, without limitation as to duration or frequency of use.

I represent that I am the author of and owner of all rights in and to the Artwork and that I have the sole and exclusive right to make the within grant of rights, including but not limited to moral rights, that neither I nor anyone else has any contractual or other arrangements which will interfere with rights herein granted and warrant that the rights herein granted will not infringe on the rights of any third party and that the consent or permission of no other party is required by Filmmaker, its successors, assigns or licensees in connection with the use of the Artwork. I agree to indemnify and hold Filmmaker and its divisions, subsidiaries, affiliates, officers, directors, agents, employees, successors, assigns and licensees harmless from and against any and all liabilities, damages, suits and expenses (including reasonable attorney's fees and disbursements) arising out of or in connection with the breach or alleged breach of any representation and/or warranty made hereunder.

The Filmmaker, its successors, assigns and licensees shall have the right to alter, edit, modify, adapt, reproduce and illustrate (as appropriate) the Artwork for any use. All right, title and interest in and to the Video incorporating the Artwork shall be vested in Filmmaker and any of its subsidiary and affiliated companies, successors, assigns and licensees.

I waive any inspection or approval of the finished material and I release Filmmaker and any of its subsidiary and affiliated companies, successors, assigns and licensees from any liability for any claim of alteration, optical illusion or faulty mechanical reproduction.

This agreement constitutes the entire understanding between the undersigned and Filmmaker with respect to the subject matter herein. Any waiver, modification or addition to this agreement shall not be valid unless in writing and signed by both parties.

Date: _____

Signature of Artist _____

Print Name of Artist _____

Artist's Email & Physical Address _____

Title of Artwork _____

Signature of Filmmaker _____

Print Name of Filmmaker _____

Title of Video _____

Important: Attach a scan/photo of Artist's driver's license or passport for age & identity verification. This Release Form template must not be modified or edited in any way. [Read this FAQ for steps to upload.](#)

APPENDIX B
STORYBOARDS AND NOTES

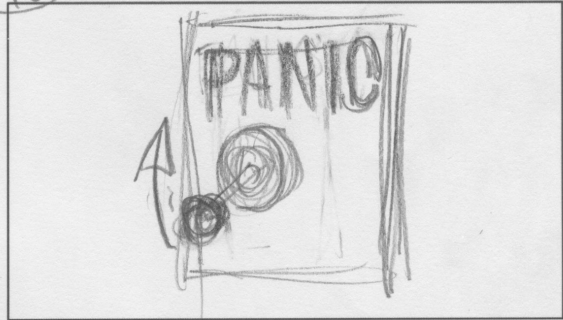
Appendix B contains samples of storyboards from two sequences; Casey's and Mike's, respectively. Additionally, this appendix contains correspondence those two artists and myself. Within the correspondence are notes for changes to be made before the storyboards became final artwork.



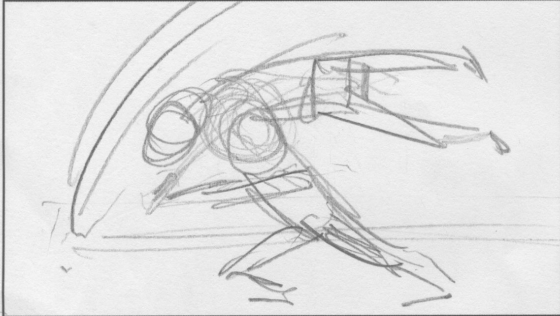
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10



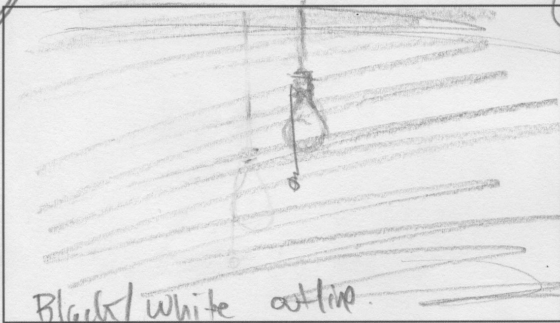
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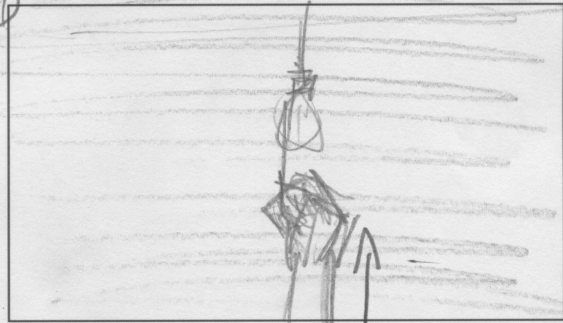
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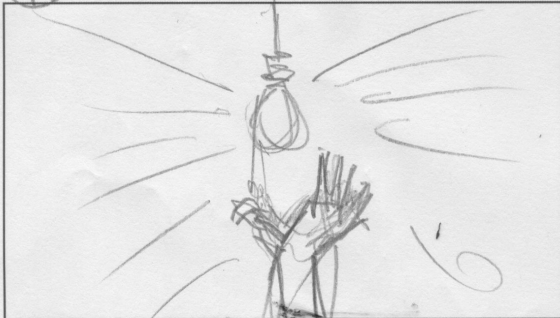
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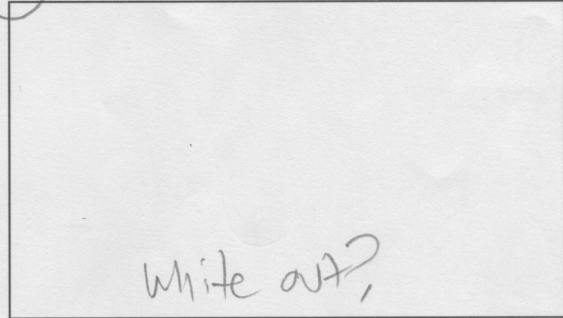
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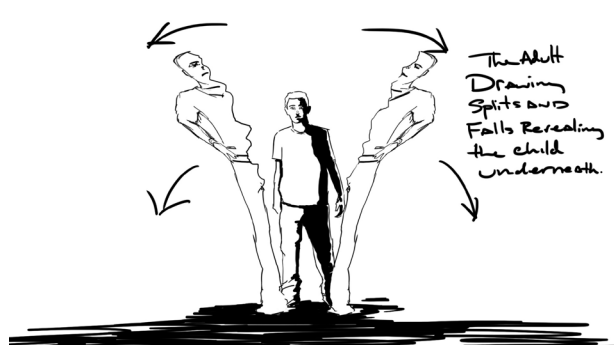


15



16





GIRLFRIEND CHEATING DU THEARPY



WORDS DROP DOWN adding weight to character trying to hold it all up.



Ron Lechler [redacted]

storyboards

Ron Lechler <[redacted]> Wed, Oct 22, 2014 at 10:19 AM
To: Anna Lisa Schneider <[redacted]>

Hey Anna Lisa,

I dropped the storyboards in and things look great. The scale is perfect. I still need time with motion effects to really nail things down but I think we're close. Here are some of my impressions:

I love the first storyboard (The whole family as mom's leaving) but I think it might be more effective if dad's not in it. Maybe just the mom in the nurse outfit leaving and the group of kids watching warily.

The long hallway shot is amazing. It's exactly what I want.

The one where Casey's dad grabs him is also perfect. I really see now what you mean about part of the image moving and how rad it would be to see the hands move over Casey, but I don't think it's in the cards. I think his hands casting shadows on Casey and a slow zoom in will give the same effect. Thanks for drawing the arrows to give me some idea. They won't need to be in the finished drawings (though I kinda like having one on the panic switch).

Casey trying to fall asleep again is also perfect. I might end up sticking with Casey's sit-down interview for when he says "... and wait for it the next night, I guess" but I like having this image to experiment with.

Adult Casey sitting on his bed is cool too. I like having the shot of his face and then showing the reverse shot of what he's looking at; an eerily similar doorway. I think the shot of Casey's face in this sequence should be more straight-on and centered with a distant, pensive look. I dig.

I love how you've done more drawings for the 'sneak-up' sequence. It makes sense that this would be a little faster paced. I like juxtaposition we're building between this part and the more slow, meditative sequences.

I like the lightbulb sequence a lot. I ended up putting them in out of order because I prefer Casey turning the light off instead of on. I think it calls back to the 'sleeping with the light on' bit and I appreciate the sort of closure it gives through visual metaphor.

You don't have to redraw anything. Let me just get with the committee and we can move forward. It might take a hot minute, so breathe easy. You're amazing.

Best,

Ron
[Quoted text hidden]



Ron Lechler [redacted]

Thesis art stuff

Ron Lechler [redacted]
To: Johnathan Paul [redacted]

Mon, Nov 3, 2014 at 9:25 AM

Hey John,

I dropped in the storyboards. Everything's working really well for me. Here are some of my initial impressions and notes:

- - Can the cop hold the flashlight from beneath it (kind of like how you would throw a football)? I think it would be more intuitive with the upward motion of the light.
- - If I wanted to add keyframes to slowly push in on your .mov's (like the flashlight on Burd's face) would that be cool?
- - I love the breathalyzer image. I like the idea of the text in the background to sort of establish tone and get in Burd's head in terms of his self-perception. However, I don't know if it's wise to have readable text on screen while an audience is listening. It might distract. We'll see what Melinda says.
- - I'm thinking the gal screaming should be more disgusted than afraid.
- - I added the storyboard of leprous-Burd after the screaming woman as well. I think if you reverse the motion and have his hand lower in defeat and rejection, that could play well on screen.
- - The storyboard of Burd splitting in two and the one with the words falling on him are perfect. They're going to play really well visually. The text in the final one won't be distracting because it's matching his voice, almost like subtitles, ya know?

Those are my notes for now. I'll wait to hear from the committee. It could be a hot minute because Melinda's in Cuba and otherwise busy anyway. Again, these images are fucking dope. I'm really excited for this project.

Best,

Ron

On Mon, Nov 3, 2014 at 9:11 AM, Ron Lechler [redacted] wrote:
Hey John,

I was shooting all weekend and didn't have time to drop in the storyboards until this morning. They are fucking dope. I'm working with them now and I'll have a full sequence of the storyboarded version of my film exported today that I'm going to shoot to you with some preliminary notes. Then I'll be getting feedback from my committee. In the meantime, can you take a snapshot of the marked up transcript I gave you?

These really look awesome man. You rule.

Best,

Ron

On Sat, Nov 1, 2014 at 4:46 PM, Johnathan Paul [redacted] wrote:
Hey Ron,

Here are the quick Storyboards. I'll play around with separating these out into layers and doing some parallax effects, which makes it look like the layers are in a 3D space. Look over these and let me know if these work for you. If you need anything in the interim just let me know.

John

APPENDIX C

LETTER FROM CASEY STODDARD

Dear Ron,

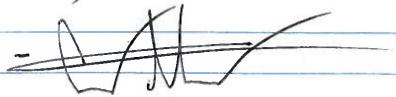
i used to watch the prison profiles MS/MSC
and on the weekends. the best profiles were when
they interviewed inmates on death row, because the
inmates had nothing to lose or gain, so they often
went into detail about their crimes. one dude said
he ate another man's brain because he was bored
with just killing people. my ^{favorite} inmate was this guy,
who every month, wrote a twenty-plus page letter
to the female governor of the state, to tell her
how much he hated her and the things he would
do to her if he ever got out. the best part
was, he would cover each page until it crinkled,
in his semen. he used butter as lube and the
governor said she never read his letters. he never
said if he wrote the letters first and then
covered them in semen or vice versa. your guess is
as good as mine.

although this letter is semen free, it does not
mean it's not filled with love. i have signed
the release, making me your property. i know this
short is going to be amazing because it's made
by someone who knows what his doing and
more importantly: gives a fuck about the three
said mistits it profiles. i hope it turns out
the way you want it to. ~~and~~ all that i
ask, and i hope i'm not over-stepping my boundaries
since i agreed to be ~~in~~ in it, but it would
honestly ^{spine} ~~spine~~ me and man a lot of turmoil
if she didn't watch it. all i'm asking is that
you consider not digging me in posts on ~~the~~

turn page over

facebook, twitter, vimeo, youtube, etc. recently, i tried to discuss some of the things we talked about with my mom, things she mostly doesn't know about, and she ~~was~~ became very upset, so i imagine if i can't even tell her one on one what happened, i don't think ~~she'd be~~ her finding out ~~from~~ from a short film is the best way to start a conversation that is still probably years away. i don't mean to offend you or question your intentions, i wouldn't have agreed to be in it if i didn't want to, i just need to be ~~careful~~ ^{cautious} with who sees this film, for the time being.

other than that, i hope all is well. it was great seeing you as always. hopefully next time you're around, i'll be in better spirits and we can perform on the same stage. my goal is to move to LA before i'm 30 and live with Kuban and Ortiga and possibly the jews too. i know we would all love to have you, i think the group of us could make some very special things and then die. stay black my friend.



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