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Scents of memory in the film: *tender scent*

By

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Master of Fine Arts in Film and Animation

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master
of Fine Arts in School of Film and Animation College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology Rochester, NY

May 3, 2022

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Abstract

Tender scent is a film about perfumer Rita who finds that her favorite scents are all leading to the memory of her loved one whom she lost forever.

Throughout the project year, I tried to visualize the protagonist's feeling of the scents and deliver the emotions to the audience.

There were several versions of the story during scriptwriting. The revisions happened due to the fact of psychology and the build-up of the character arc. The difficulty of blending the character-study story with active and attractive plots made me decide to have a non-linear story structure.

We spent three months on pre-production to finalize the details of our blueprint to ensure the filming goes smoothly, from budget allocation to production schedule. It's a seven-day production with fifteen locations. As a result, we overcame the limitation in various aspects: schedule, physical space, the weather... and filmed the ideal visual.

There are always three scripts for each film: one for writing, one for production, and one for the post. It took four months of editing and discussion with professors to get the picture-lock.

In this paper, I want to share my journey of this one-year thesis film project, including my study of filmmaking, the whole process of making the film, and the goal for me to achieve as an RIT film student.

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1. Introduction

Is it possible to bring scent into film? This is the question I brought up with my thesis film project *tender scent*. So far, there are achievements in film on presenting and recreating different human senses by visual and sound language. Including taste, texture, mental state... However, one scent could have various feelings depending on individuals. Moreover, it's invisible and silent. After researching, I could say, it's a conundrum.

Individuals have various feelings about one certain scent because of the tricky relationship between sense of smell and memory. The question about how an individual builds a firm bond between one scent and a certain piece of memory has not been figured out yet. Does it happen when he sniffs it for the first time? Or when he has emotional fluctuation while the scent is around? The smell of wet grass could be the memory of a romantic date or the memory of a sorrowful funeral. In a word, one's preference of scent is unique and can't be delivered to the audience precisely in film.

However, what's important is the character's feeling of scent, and how I want the audience to feel about one scent. Then find a way to visualize the feeling to cause resonance among the audience. It is similar to the perfume commercial which is not selling a product, but a concept, and feeling. Using scent as a clue enhances the emotional relationship between the character and the audience. This brings me back to cinematic storytelling.

2. Review of research

2.1 Memory loss

I did research and had a meeting with psychology professor Alan Smerbeck. To sum up the notes:

1. Dissociative Amnesia is controversial, numbers of scientists like Alan doesn't think it exists;

2. Memory loss is permanent and irretrievable;

3. Patients who can't accept the truth would be "pretending" or "in denial", but they will have to be in a hospital or a rehabilitation center until they recovered.

There are several reasons for memory loss, such as a strike on the head, alcohol abuse, or drug abuse. They are all damaging the hippocampus, leading to memory loss and difficulty in generating new memory. The disability of memorizing is curable, but the lost memory is gone forever.

Denial is the self-defense mechanism protecting the patient by ignoring the crucial fact that the patient is not losing memory but refusing to admit the reality. Normally, the denial would be cured, or say, the patient would be able to accept the reality in a few hours.

2.2 Scents in live-action

Filmmakers started bringing odor into film since very long ago. The most famous one would be "smell-O-vision" created by Hans Laube in the 1960 film *Scents of Mystery*. It's a system to release odor during the film projection so the viewer could "smell" what was happening in the movie. Unfortunately, the inefficiency of technology brought an end to this idea.

Another technique from psychology is to use color, image, and sound to enhance the effect of the olfactory experience. For instance, Blackwell (1995) reported that participants misidentified orange flavor solution as lime when it was colored green. Though the connection between odor and visual image is unclear, studies like “Development of an odor identification test for Japanese people: verification of stick type and card type” (Saito et al., 2003) have proved that a certain image is strong enough to raise the audience’s sensitivity and expectation of odor.

3. Thesis parameter

3.1 Origin concept

It was a story about tea. A young girl tries to find a better job in SF and learns to deal with her anxiety with the help of the owner of a Chinese tea shop. I was planning to tell a story about the youngster’s managing her mental health and sharing Chinese tea culture. But the character arc felt flat, and the conflict wasn’t strong. I tried to make the story complex, which also made it lengthy, exceeding 20 minutes. For my thesis, I’d rather spend twice the amount of time on a shorter story to fulfill my lack of experience in filmmaking. So, I changed the story.

3.2 Story changes

I changed to suspense: a female perfumer Rita who lost her sense of smell in a car accident tries to retrieve her lost memory, but it also brings her the truth of her girlfriend’s death. Now here are my favorites: psychology and tragedy. The protagonist’s goal and conflict are much clearer than in the former story. The only two missing things are the authenticity of memory loss, and the solutions in the end.

After meeting with the psychology professor, I have two choices: either have the memory loss incurable or change the memory loss to denial. I choose to have the inevitable memory loss as the denial will cure within hours. Then the solution — how does she find out about her girlfriend's death?

I let Rita's parents, who were against her lesbian relationship, keep the secret to protect her from mental attacks. But then the story has another character arc with the parents, which doubles the story's length. This is the puzzle I can't fix even till the thesis proposal. Eventually, I decided to stop the memory loss, keep her internal conflict.

4. Pre-Production

4.1 Scriptwriting

I started working on the beat sheet in April and writing the draft in June. There are four versions of the beat sheet and seven drafts of the script. And there's another huge change with the fourth draft. I aimed to maintain the story within twelve pages which I think is the feasible length for my production. Even though there are twelve different locations, actions dominate the script.

It's painful to get to the 9-page final draft. There are days I went out for hours of walking to get inspiration and days I sat in front of my laptop without any progress. I was figuring out how to let Rita find her closure. And my answer after three months is to let Rita fail on it. Because I see the journey of a character recovered from trauma as a feature film, which is not achievable for a thesis. But failure is different; a character can try and fail multiple times before they achieve his goal. So I decided to write about Rita's one day when she fails to find closure again.

4.1.1 First version

In the first version, Rita was supposed to walk around the city the day before she moved. The more locations she visits, the more upset she is due to the familiar scents that trigger her memory. In the end, she tears up while eating Hubert's favorite pasta in the rain.

Compared to the beat sheet, I took Rita's parents out and made Rita's goal to find closure rather than recall Hubert's death. The story focuses on Rita's internal conflict, as a character study. The problem is, Rita's external conflict is weak, almost doesn't exist. It's because of the randomness of the inciting incident, so does the solution, the rain. I realized this story is not believable with the holes.

4.1.2 Second version

In the second version, I lose all other characters who are not pushing the story and concentrate on Rita's journey. Now, rather than say goodbye to their living city, Rita is already in a totally different city and finds herself being trapped in the past.

The film starts with Rita alone in her apartment, meanwhile, we hear a past conversation between Rita and Lilith, with hints of the expositions in their chit-chat. Then Rita starts another day of trying to get closure by making perfume and scouting the city. Of course, she fails and tears with Hubert's relic. I use scents of different items, such as perfume strips, books, croissants, and sea breeze, as the trigger of the flashback.

To make the audience like Hubert, one thing would be reviewing him bit by bit: only hear his voice, see part of his body, then his face, and the last sync his voice and body. Another thing is to let Hubert own a different version of Rita. By seeing the positive and happy Rita, I raised Hubert's importance and the audience's expectation of him. Moreover, I use a montage with happy moments of Rita with Hubert to nourish it. This not only fulfills the plots of Rita and Hubert's happy life but also enhances the

sympathetic resonance of the audience by going through the same journey. And, everything is to serve the ending, in which Rita hugs herself and tears alone.

4.2 Pre-Production work

I have three producers for my pre-production: Komal as the main producer, Lidmercy, and Michelle as assistant producers. During the summer break, they helped me set up crowdfunding, finalize the budget plan, find professional production designers, recruit the crew, find locations, review the scripts, and set up meetings.

The big problem is that my story was unsettled when pre-production started. We had to ensure we have available locations for the possible scripts, including bus, hospital, cafe, and bookstore. We contacted students who filmed these locations and asked for the information. For instance, there's a student who has filmed on the school bus for a whole production day, and we asked him about the process of getting permission from the transportation office with confirmation of the professor and figuring out the schedule.

Then, we focused on the budget plan and crowdfunding, so we can bring a price to the actors and production designers. I wasn't familiar with designing the budget plan, especially for the actors and production design. After the research on the possible items for art, transportation, and accommodation, we got a much cheaper and more reasonable budget plan, reduced from \$10,000 to \$8,350.

We were looking for actors from Toronto and NYC where the professionals assembled. There were over twenty applications for Rita and five applications for Hubert. Komal helped filter the applications first, then I sent the video requirement as a second filter to get the ones for the interview.

Last, we sorted out the meal plan for our six-day production, set up meetings for the whole crew, cinematography, production design, and actor rehearsal.

4.3 Visual aesthetics & Tone

This film idea is inspired a lot by the film *Her*. I want to make the image warm but alone. To make the image look warmer, I want to reduce the blue. For the loneliness, I decide to make the character small by increasing the emptiness and frames to emphasize the space limits

About the tone, I want to create an empty and warm image with sadness. I want the protagonist to look trapped, or locked in space. And I want to have a transparent, flat, and faded sense for the current, and a colorful, light, and gentle sense for the past, as a comparison.

4.4 Location scouting

The location scouting has two parts: I find the ideal locations and visit again with the DP and PD. It took me three days walking around Rochester for ideal locations. I chose to walk because I need to sense the physical space and it's impossible on google maps. Of course, I did pick some spots before visiting. But still, I want to scout nearby for more. It was fun as I never had a chance to walk in ROC until my thesis, but it was also painful due to the amount of distance for walking.

I went to different bridges for the croissant scenes, but they don't look nice and it's hard for parking. Until I found Highland Park and tried to find a street nearby, not only because it could save production time, but also it's a less crowded area.

For the pier scene and beach scene, I visited the Wind Breeze Pier which is a smaller one. It has a good view, but the available beach looks dirty and the rest of the beach is private land. So, I chose the Charlotte Pier as I went there a few times and know it better: nice and clean view, big parking lot for free, restroom nearby...

There were two options for the bookstore; one has a bigger space with a black & white floor. But I like the Green Bookstore better, as it's much tighter for visuals and it

has a nice wooden style. Then, I was going to use the street across from the bookstore for the dance flashback, but we can't set up lighting there. Eventually, I got permission from professor Skip to film at Geva theater which is much better.

The apartment and house were found on Airbnb. Not many owners are open to our filming due to covid and privacy. Considering our budget and visual preference, we looked at two places. We had limited time for scouting before the next customer, so the DP and I made good use of the time to figure out the blocking and lighting setup beforehand.

I filmed the cafe and stairs on campus, as I didn't find an ideal location in town and they have limitations. So I chose our campus as it's supportive of student work. We contacted the location manager to get permission and settle down the shooting schedule.

The ending location is a big platform above the Genesee River next to UR. I found it accidentally on my way home after a scouting day. The space is big and empty which fits our visual perfectly. Fortunately, it has a big parking lot for free across the road, which saved us a lot of time on moving equipment.

4.5 Production design

My PD, Liv Harvey, is introduced by Komal. She's a capable and talented filmmaker focused on production design, which is rare in the school. I was skeptical about her ability at first, but then she approved that I am just lucky. We had a lot of discussions and meetings to go through all the details.

First is the character buildup: their look, wardrobe, and makeup. We want to use color as a character: Rita is a warm color and Hubert is a cold color. It would be more impressive when Rita puts on Hubert's color, and enhances the idea of Rita's inability to forget him. Thus, we went through the stores looking for ideal clothes and made sure we always have a different wardrobe for each scene to separate days.

For Rita, we want her to have a different dressing style in the two timelines: she looks active and positive in the past when she dresses more protective and serious in the current. Originally, I was planning to let Rita dye her hair blue for the past, but we changed to attach the hair extensions for the sake of the filming schedule. I also suggested using glasses as a change. So we have a ponytail and round glasses for the current when loose hair with blue extension and contact lens for the past. And, Liv took good care of their makeup.

For Hubert, we want him to be a calm and quiet writer for most of the time. It will emphasize his silly goofy moment when he teases Rita. So I found some examples from Asian dressing styles which contain shirts, chino pants, and sweaters. Another thing is Hubert's beard. Our actor Nicolas looks very different with his big beard. Liv and I discussed its effects on his character and decided to have him shaved to look younger.

Then we discussed items, especially the perfume oil and tools. As we want Rita to be an experienced perfumer for several years, she needs to collect enough products. In the end, I found a local perfumer to borrow her perfume kit and books. And we bought more oil and tools such as perfume strips and glass bottles for actual use. Another idea is that I want to add depth to the space. We added props in the foreground and background to create more layers like having glass vials close to the camera, putting flower bottles and curtains with different colors in the back, and arranging items on the z-axis.

About set dressing for Rita's apartment and their house—I prefer a wooden style on items and ambiance for their house, as I feel it would bring a natural warmth of home, and it's in the spectrum of warm color temperature. For Rita's apartment, I want the place to look like she doesn't belong here, such as the items and furniture are not comfortable for her. So Liv lets Rita use a table that is much lower than her chair, puts minimalist art paintings on the wall, and uses the combination of black & white. There are other setups

for the characters, such as Rita likes drinking tea when Hubert likes coffee, Rita reads botany books and chemistry books when Hubert reads novels...

4.6 Cinematography design

My DP is Wen Tong who's my film partner for several films. I showed him clips online and the film *Her* for the tone of the film. We went over most of the locations to get a clear idea of the blocking and lighting setup. I created the shot list and storyboard as a reference on the angles we needed, and then we adjusted and improvised.

In the first scene on the balcony, I start with a dolly out Choke(?) of Rita, showing she's in a daze and throwing questions to the audience. Then we make her small in the WS and use the window as a frame to limit Rita's character visually. For lighting, we used natural light, as there's not much space for setup, the trees and house itself decrease lots of straight sunlight.

In the perfume scene, we focus on the ECU on Rita making perfume and the CU when Rita remembers the past. We opened up the aperture for the CU to add a sense of a dream. We used natural light. Though sunlight is difficult to control, the scene is well lit.

In the bookstore scene, we start with a WS, putting Rita at the end of the aisles to minimize her. Then we use the blocking of the customer walking past Rita to match the cut closer to her. And we use the advantages of the bookshelves to create frames in this scene to enhance the sense of Rita being trapped. For the light, we didn't use any practical lights and recreated all the lights in the bookstore. There are two main light sources, the daylight from the window, and softened tungsten light as the ceiling light.

In the bridge scene, we have the medium shot and MCU of Rita eating the croissant. Though we couldn't have an FS due to the space limitation, the lines of the handrail and bridges in the background create rhythm in the image, making it more interesting. The most important shot is following the bridge's direction and putting Rita

close to the vanishing point, in order to increase the sense of compression. And it's a similar image to the next scene. For lighting, the cloudy weather helped create a soft light that so we didn't get to use any light control frame at all.

In the pier scene, we start with the shot using the pillar as a vanishing point in the center and have the blocking of Rita walking to it. There are different takes: the empty bridge and passersby around. They are all static cameras as Rita walks to the end of the pier, until we handheld a CU of Rita sniffing the sea breeze to show her unstable mental state remembering again. For the lighting, we used natural light as the actress is too far from the camera.

In the beach scene, we had two OTS for Rita and Hubert. We used a long lens and had a bit more of their body in the frame to bring them closer to each other. Because it's shot at Lake Ontario, it's not the ocean that the beach is too high to have the sea horizon fill the whole frame, but we tried our best on the WS and the two-shot. For lighting, we used silk and bounce boards to diffuse the strong sunlight. It was so windy at the beach that we had our grips to hand-hold all the silks and bouncers. For the WS and two-shot, because they are too far from the camera, and we can't diffuse the sunlight on the beach, I decided to have the natural strong sunlight on the characters.

In the running scene, we shot the whole scene on a dolly on the street. We didn't have enough tracks and went on wheels, but the bumps enhance Rita's instability. We shot a sequence of Rita walking: WS of Rita wandering, Medium of Rita walking at normal speed, Medium of Rita's legs trotting, and CU of Rita's foot running. That we can emphasize her irritation by tightening the frame. For Rita's meditation beats, we have a relatively static camera as an accompaniment but putting her in the corner. Last, we use a medium shot in slow motion following Rita running from the back as she runs into the memory with the sense of her breaking the frame. It's natural light again, as we spent a lot of time waiting for the sunlight because of the cloudy weather.

In the cafe scene, we only have three shots: a CU of Rita's notebook, a single MCU of Rita staring at Hubert, and a two-shot, that I want to work as a sequence for reviewing the relationship and the environment. For the light, we blocked the window and use softened tungsten light as a room light.

In the perfume scene, we were planning to look through the glass bottle at Rita, but we can't achieve it without a super long lens. So we decided to rack focus from the bottle in Hubert's hand to Rita behind the table. Another angle is a wide two-shot to show their physical relationship and the environment. For the lighting, we created the sunlight from the frame right and used curtains to diffuse the daylight from the near windows. Also, we used floppy cutters to block the big windows behind the camera.

In the living room scene, it's a two-shot of Rita and Hubert. And DP thought it needs a slight dolly-in following their blocking to make it more interesting. So they use the rigs and apple boxes to create a small dolly for the ground-level camera angle. For lighting, we use two big bouncers to reflect the daylight coming from the big windows behind them and add another S60 in daylight as fill.

In the stairs scene, it's one static shot of them sitting on the stairs. We found a place for the camera and raised it so we could to keep the line of the handrail in the correct direction without blocking actors. For lighting, we used an S60 in sunlight as a backlight. And because we shot in the woods, the daylight has been diffused by the leaves.

In the balcony scene, we have two singles for each character and have the camera angle close to a POV to enhance their dynamic. For lighting, we created sunlight from Rita's back, and an S60 to fill the daylight in their front to strengthen their profiles.

In the morning scene, we have two OTS and place the camera on the bed to add closeness for the audience. When Rita jumps to the bed, the camera in hand-held follows

Rita. For the lighting, we use an HMI outside as the sun and have an s120 facing to the ceiling to have a gentle flat light on character

In the private scene, I break down the CUs of Rita sniffing different parts of Hubert: neck, hair, hand, and face. The main idea of this scene is to have the character fill the frame as much as possible, and bring the audience closer to them, which makes it more intimate. There's a POV of Rita looking at Hubert that breaks the fourth wall that is the same idea of bringing the audience into their interaction and relationship. For the lighting, it's the same as the morning scene, but we adjusted for angles. And for the shot of Rita sniffing Hubert's face, we used strong daylight to draw their profile.

In the night scene, we use the Steadicam to follow their blocking. We also adjusted the blocking to let them walk around the stairs to make it more active as the camera moved. We always focus on Rita in the blocking and end with an MCU on their hugs. It is hard for the camera operator and focus puller as we got twelve takes for the right one. For the light, we use silk to diffuse the practical light on the ceiling to make it flatter, and add an S60 in tungsten at the side to draw their profile.

In the surreal scene, I break the two-shot into two singles as a metaphor for a sliced photo. I did let them break the actual frame as Rita leaned on Hubert's shoulder, but ended with Hubert leaving the frame as he's a ghost. Static camera with natural light.

The ending scene is similar, I direct the extras to walk past the frame to create a rhythm, and let Rita be small in the center until we cut to a CU on her. We open up the aperture to shorten the depth of field as the background isn't pretty, which also focuses more on Rita. We continued using natural light as the silk would create a shadow on the ground and bring a huge difference from the background.

4.7 Casting and Rehearsal

Producer Komal helped on the casting for the most part, including sending cast calls on social media, setting up interviews, and rehearsal meetings. We looked for actors in NYC and Toronto via FB, Instagram, and backstage. Eventually, we received 26 applications for Rita and 5 applications for Hubert.

Komal helped me do the first-round filter on Rita's application by checking their portfolios, prices, and availability of schedule. Then I give them requirements for two reels to record: 1. Suddenly, you smell a scent, you don't know what it is but you feel familiar with it, no dialogue(15s). 2. Sad memory comes into your mind, makes you tear, no dialogue(30s). After watching the reels we received, I picked the three best ones for an interview to discuss their experience, understanding of the character, and more detailed schedule feasibility. After locking down the actress for Rita, we let her help us with interviewing the actors for Hubert, as I wanted to see the chemistry between them. We interviewed all three actors and locked the one we feel more satisfied with.

The rehearsal is a bit difficult as our actors are in different cities that we need to practice on zoom. For this film, we ended up spending time rehearsing on the production days as we didn't have too much access to the actual locations. However, Rita and Hubert took my directions and got into character quickly, which helped the production move fast.

4.8 Budget, crowdfunding, and allocation.

I set up a budget for the thesis proposal for \$11,000, and my producer revised the plan to make it more reasonable and decrease it to &7,800. Then we had several discussions and locked our budget plan at \$12,000.

4.8.1 Budget plan

First is the payment for actors. I made it at \$100/Day for Rita and Hubert, which are \$600(Rita) and \$350(Hubert). We also planned for the cafe barista, Lilith, and extras, but ended up paying Lilith \$50 for ADR. Moreover, the transportation, accommodation, and per diem for Rita and Hubert are a big part of the budget. But we have Rita and Hubert live in the Airbnb for filming to save some money. To sum up, Rita's transportation and per diem is \$420. For Hubert, we needed him to stay in Rochester rather than going around to Toronto, so we paid him extra accommodation and per diem, which equals \$1,410.

I gave the production design department \$1,000 for potential costs and promised more if needed, but our cost ended up within \$1,000.

Most of the crew from the sofa is free, but I am supposed to pay some for the graduated people at \$60/day, except Wen, Raquel, and Komal who refused my payment kindly. Adding the payment for a still photographer at \$150, the total cost is \$550.

We need to rent a U Haul to store and transport the equipment for 6 production days. And we paid the uber for the actors and crew who needed a ride. There's also a rental of an easy-rig for one day. The total of this part is \$803.

Another big cost for the budget is the meal and the Airbnb. On average we have 15 crew members for each production day. In that we need a full-day craft service, breakfast, and lunch. There's also dinner for the day filming the night scene. The total amount for food is \$1,810. And we spent two weeks selecting Airbnb based on their availability and price for filming. Eventually, we spent \$1,431 on the two houses.

Then is the pickup day, in which we only have Rita that I needed to pay for her transportation and hotel. Adding the craft service for the crew, the total amount is \$670.

The last part is post-production, with Wen and I doing editing and coloring. I paid my composer \$450 for the score, and my sound designer \$600 for mixing and foley.

In the end, the cost for this film in total is \$10,236.

4.8.2 Funding in US

We started the campaign on Indiegogo with the goal of \$11,000. Komal helped fill out the information for this project along with pics and attached my Vimeo page as a portfolio link. Then we keep re-posting it on FB and Instagram to gather people's attention. I also spent \$150 on Instagram for marketing my donation post.

We didn't get much, the four sponsors are my friends who gave me \$350.

4.8.3 Funding in CN

I used to work as a new media writer, so I wrote an article on our social media Wechat, and posted it on my public account. But I didn't market my public account well and it didn't unlock the access to donation. So I had to let readers add my personal account for transactions. Sadly, it's a weird way to donate and no new friends showed up.

Eventually, my friends and family supported my business, I received the money in total at \$11,000.

4.9 Crew recruit

I found my DP Wen, producers Komal, Lidmercy, and Michelle. My producers helped me contact PD Liv. They are my core members working with me from pre-production. Lidmercy worked as AD on Friday while Michelle worked as AD on weekends for the first production week. Then we had Selma as AD for the second production week.

The camera department, we found Brandon as 1st AC, but we need another 1st AC to cover as he has a job on Fridays. So we had Dallas work as 1st AC on Friday and 2nd AC on weekends for the first production week. For the second week, we had Ryan to

help as 1st AC on Friday and Jill as 2nd AC for the second week. Moreover, we had Rosie cover 2nd AC on the first Friday, when Max Shooster and Noah helped as 2nd AC on the second Friday. Plus, we had Malcolm as a Steadicam operator and Dorothy as still photographer for weekends.

In the production design department, we had Kim as art assistant and Vasoula as script supervisor on weekends.

The sound department only had Suzannah as location sound recordist and Andrew as boom operator, but they were present the whole production, including ADR sections.

We had several gaffers and grips for this production. Sam as the key grip was present the whole production. Malcolm worked as gaffer for the first production week, along with help from Raquel, Sam, Rosie, and Max Shooster. Simon worked as gaffer for the second production week, along with help from Sam, Malcolm, and Isaac. Plus, we had Colin as PA to support the grip department.

5. Production Analysis

5.1 Production days

There are 6 production days, not including the pickup day. On average, they are 10 hours and 3 locations for each production day.

5.1.1 Day 1

We started with the bench scene and the running scene. This is the shortest day among all production days as we only had less than one page of the script. Moreover, it's a relatively easy scene that could be a warm-up for the crew.

We pushed back for 40 minutes because I didn't double-check our equipment that missed the lens kit which Simon helped deliver. But it also gave time for Liv to buy croissants as food props. It was cloudy, so we decided to film the bench scene first. The nice thing is we will have perfect soft lighting. We had all the equipment in the truck and brought the silk and light control kit with us, but ended up without using them.

The shoot went pretty smoothly. I had enough takes to run out of all 7 croissants. Two problems were found out later in editing. The first one is I didn't let her hold her eyeline while she was thinking, which also happened in other scenes. The second one is I let her turn to the left side since there would be a sound cue of crowd noise in post, but I should have had her stay looking at her front long enough as a beat.

The street was empty, and no more cars were coming. Very lucky. However, the sunlight broke our temple of filming and we had to wait, for the sake of continuity. This scene is a sequence of montages, serving as transitions between each scene. It starts with Rita walking slowly as she's scouting the new city and speeding up as the locations bring her sad memories. We can't put the dolly on tracks as they weren't long enough for the distance. However, the more difficult problem is following Rita running. We tried to let Rita "fake run," but I feel the performance wasn't as good as the actual run, so I let the dolly and sound crew run at full speed to follow Rita. Extra thanks to my dolly grip, Malcolm, who pulled the dolly for the entire afternoon. By the way, the sound that had been recorded during the production day is a reference for the foley.

Last, this is my first time running production in a place without any electrical power, which worried our producer team. But thankfully, we planned it well ahead and shortened the day.

5.1.2 Day 2

Today, we filmed the scene of the bookstore, Rita's apartment, and the street outside her apartment. Filming in the bookstore is a challenge. Though the owner is very nice, we had to leave before its opening time. We almost couldn't finish shooting all the shots, even though we cut one of them.

The first problem is parking. Being in downtown, parking gets more difficult. So we had the truck park the closest to off-load equipment and let everybody park the car at the nearby blocks. Though we could set up a decent craft service in the store, the crew finished their breakfast and coffee on the street and devoted themselves to work.

About production design. The aisles between those big and heavy bookshelves are great as they created a perfect frame. So we didn't have to move them—which we can't because of their weight. We rearranged everything else, with the photos shot to revert to the origin. We put in a few piles of books to fill the gap between the bookshelves, and in front of the camera to add the depth of space. The book Rita was reading is *Sherlock Holmes*, a fascinating novel that failed to draw Rita's attention from the scent of the book, which forced her to think about Huber.

Another problem is we forgot to have Rita's glasses on during the first 6 takes, which wasted us too much time — because they can't be used in terms of continuity. That's the main reason we had been pushed, which led to us only having one take of other angles. Eventually, we wrapped at 8 minutes before the opening time and packed everything, which is very impressive, I have a brilliant crew.

Then we moved to Rita's apartment. We didn't have a lighting set-up because the light stand couldn't reach the second floor for the living room. So, we spent some time waiting for the sunlight. The only time we had to set up lighting is for the fitting room since it's too dark. But then the light stand could only reach a low angle, different from

what the the natural light direction is supposed to be. However, I and my DP Wen thought it was an aesthetic choice and that's the best we could do to light up the scene.

We started with the opening scene on the balcony, a dolly shot from ECU to FS in a slow pace. This is the slowest dolly shot I've ever done. And it's really fun and beautiful. I was inspired by the film *JOKER* in which almost every shot is dolly. But also, I feel it could help the audience get into the story and get familiar with the protagonist.

The production design is a bit heavier in this scene as we rearrange the furniture and build up the perfumer's work table. We needed to fill out the tray and bucket with vials of perfume oil. The other mistake we made is that we used water to substitute for the perfume alcohol, but is not transparent. Though real perfumers and people like perfume would notice it, I took it as a compromise to the visual.

We moved to the street outside the Airbnb for the scene of Rita deciding to take a walk in the city. We finished it pretty fast with handheld and natural lighting.

5.1.3 Day 3

Early call in the morning to protect our spot in the cafe before any customers. We rearranged the tables and chairs, put the painting on the wall, sat props on the table...we decorated the whole place. I thought about filming in the studio. But the good thing is it's a real cafe for actors to get into the story; we have painted walls and practical lights. The only problem is that we overused the space, which got her mad at us, though she's still very nice to us. I apologized to her after the shoot.

This scene is Hubert tricking Rita when they are studying in the cafe. And it's the first day for Huber's actor, so we spent some time warming up. It's a bit hard to get the right performance for the couple, but thankfully we planned enough time to get several takes, I mean ten takes for each angle.

Then we moved to the stairs that are next to the cafe, which helped save time on transportation. We contacted the location manager to get access to the outlet, in case we need lighting. But we ended up using natural light with all the floppy to create a shadow. Although the cloudy weather bothered us a lot as it kept breaking the continuity, we just accepted it and decided to fix it in the post. Overall, I think the stairs scene works pretty well.

I spent more time directing Hubert than Rita. Maybe it's because Rita has experience in films when Hubert was pretty new to filmmaking. I have directed non-actor people and it turned out well, so I kept thinking what's the obstacle preventing me from getting the ideal performance because I believe, "any less believable performance would be blamed on the director." We got about ten takes on Hubert's single to get the take that I was satisfied with, even though I decided not to use them in editing.

The last is the ending scene, filmed on a big platform above Genesee River, near UR. I spent a couple of hours looking for it. Also, we can park cars in their parking lots for free on Sunday. I was choosing between the two platforms next to each other: the small one is lower, has a bench, but the view is blocked by bushes and trees; the big one is huge, about 100 feet wide, has three stone benches, and an open view. Eventually, we picked the big one.

The platform is facing the river and back to the road. Rita and Hubert are facing the river. Wen wants trees in Rita's background when the camera moves to her front. But we can't cheat due to the limitation of physical space. And the main reason for the cheating idea is that the other side of the platform doesn't look pretty. I decided to follow the actual space as I think the performance is much more important than the location.

In the wide shot, the crew gave me ideas on fitting more extras to make it more real. So I need to direct the timing for five extras, which took me a while to find the right

rhythm for their blocking. It's really fun, I've never directed more than three actors, which I think I am supposed to practice more for my goal of being a director.

For Rita's single, we use an 8x8 silk to soften the hard sunlight. But then, the background is lit differently. Eventually, we use a big aperture for a super shallow depth of field to create the ending shot. The other challenge for me is my first time directing a crying scene, in which I can't make the actor cry several times. Also, there's a miscommunication that Rita was trying to squeeze tears but I didn't notice until editing. But, I did find a solution later.

5.1.4 Day 4

The schedule for today: the Beach scene, then the pier scene, and the dancing scene in front of the theater.

We successfully had the entire beach on Friday morning. I had a discussion with the DP about the angles and lighting. We ended up with the two-shots facing the lake, as we need to make it an ocean and avoid the ugly background. And I decided to use the hard sunlight as we are unable to have silk that covers the whole beach. I didn't want the huge difference between the soft lighting on actors and the hard light on the background. So I mimic the beach scene in the film *HER* to have the hard sunlight for the whole scene. We held silk and bounce boards for the CU on this strong windy day.

Then we moved to the pier. The wind was so strong on the pier that we needed more crews to hold the camera. Though the image is still shaky when I check in editing. The angles are WS that we don't have the space to shape the lighting, which worked fine with us. The people on the pier were also very kind to the filmmaking and helped us to clear the frame from several angles. The problem is that we lost the key to the lock of the truck, which took us two hours to find the U-Haul and cut the lock.

Then we moved to the Geva theater for the night scene. Though they had a special event tonight, we got permission from our professor Skip who works for the theater, and help from the theater manager to charge the batteries and transfer data at the counter, which helped save the lost two hours. The challenge for the shoot is the direction for the Steadicam and choreography. We didn't have a chance to make a complicated blocking but tried to add a bit more taste to the dance scene. For instance, Wen suggested I have Rita walk down the stairs and run back to Hubert's arms to increase the audience's feeling of being hugged by Hubert. We got fourteen takes to get the right one. As everybody agrees, it's hard and fun.

5.1.5 Day 5

Today we stayed in an Airbnb house. And the schedule is the balcony scene, the stair scene, the morning scene, and the intimate sequence.

The first problem is Maya, the actress for Rita, had a friend test positive for Covid. So, we had to stop and find a way to do a Covid test for her. There's no walk-in test nearby. Thanks to Selma and Michelle, we got the home test for Maya and got a negative result. So far, we lost two hours, but much better than canceling the shoot.

It didn't take us too long to light the balcony scene. We created gentle sunlight on Rita's face to make it look like afternoon. We cheated the actors' position because we wanted the right eye-line and clean singles for Rita and Hubert. We spent some time on, "how to touch Rita's hair," as it's pretty subtle, but we finished this scene quickly.

In the stairs scene, I didn't write any dialogue but gave my actors direction and context for the scene, and then let them improvise lines. And they gave very interesting lines. This scene probably is the fastest one that we achieved within four takes.

Then there is the morning scene. First, we discussed the blocking for the actor and camera, as I want the ending frame be Hubert hugging Rita from the back. It was

hard for us to rehearse. But I also want the glare from the “sunlight” to increase the feeling of the morning, and have the camera bumping on the bed to increase the audience's feeling of getting on the bed together. So, we practiced several times to get to the ending frame.

Last, is the intimate sequence. They are all CUs and simple movements. The only problem is that I didn't want my actors to feel uncomfortable for sexual and Covid reasons. So I didn't let them kiss or bite, neither did I need to. However, it got difficult as the movements' were extremely subtle and we reset too many times in each take, and I acted for them to help them understand what I wanted to achieve.

5.1.6 Day 6

Last day of shooting the principal, the schedule is: the perfume lab, the living room, pick up a closeup for the ending scene, and an ADR session.

DP and I had a slight argument on the locations for the perfume scene. To simplify, there's a better view of the background, but the perfume tools and scent oil are supposed to stay away from the sunlight. Eventually, we choose the space down the stairs, where we can have the door frame to increase the depth of the scene. Plus, our art crew rearrange everything, from the furniture to the books on the shelf. Another challenge is I want the camera to look through the vial but we didn't have the long lens to achieve that mission, which is my fault that I was supposed to test it in preproduction. We ended up having a piece of yellow blur in the foreground, which worked fine for me.

We decided to have a slight dolly shot for the living room scene. We didn't use the dolly as it's too high, so we created a small dolly with rigs and an apple box. It took a while to let the actors feel natural as being at home, and also our AC to operate the DIY dolly. Eleven takes, and we finally got the one that I was satisfied with.

Then it's a pickup. We tried to recreate the hard sunlight for the CU, in which Rita pulls her legs on the bench and hugs herself. It looked okay during the shoot but didn't work in editing.

Finally, we moved to the ADR session with our three actors: Maya, Nick, Kyla, and ADR recordists, Suzannah and Andrew, with the help of our producer Michelle. We did ADR for all the scenes that have dialogue since I planned to Foley the whole film. Directing is fun, especially manipulating the actors' tone to the right style. Though we were unable to have a rough cut to help the ADR session, they got the right tone pretty quickly. For the breathing part, we don't know which take would be used, but it's good to record a reference. It also means there would be another day for ADR. And thank our still photographer who followed us the whole day and Michelle who helped deliver the food.

5.1.7 Pickup and ADR

We finished pickup in the studio and then the ADR. Though it's the last week of the semester, not many crew members are available. Since we had a small crew, I produced this production day myself.

We started from the balcony scene in which Rita is sleeping on the books. We hung the S120 and butterfly silk to create flat natural light. Our art crew brought a fan to manipulate the wind. It's not an easy job to create the wind as we spent three minutes getting it right for each take. It is hard without a big fan because not everything is blown by the wind in the frame. Then it's the ECU of book flipping, we opened the aperture to blur almost all the content on the page, trying to avoid the issue of copyright.

The next is the bridge scene. We tried to create a similar background with a bounce board and blue gaff tape. It worked well, it looked like the cloudy sky. And our art crew cheated Rita's hairstyle to cover her collar cause we couldn't find the same jacket and Maya's hair grew longer. Though we can see the bounce board in Rita's eyes,

I didn't have a chance to care about that, nor could we go back to the same location and shoot in the same season. So we took it as a compromise and took it as an aesthetic choice. We had the ECU of Rita's eye-line and her sniffing the croissant. We reset over ten times in each take to get the right subtle performance and detail.

We had another B-roll of sunlight getting through a perfume bottle on Rita's work table. Due to the limitation of time, Rita and I had to move to the ADR session. After finishing, Wen told me that it didn't look that good, even though we used the haze.

The ADR session moved pretty quickly since we've done it once before and we had the right cut. Only one of them has a line, which is the perfume lab scene that we forgot to cover in the last ADR session. The rest of the takes are all human sound effects: breathing, sniffing and drinking.

6. Post Production

6.1 Editing

I started editing the film in late September after I finished rendering the proxies for all raw files, which took me sixty hours. And I got my picture lock on Christmas.

I want the film to have a slow pace, but this is not linear storytelling, which would only make the film lengthy, so I choose to slow down within each scene and move quickly into the next one. The story structure has been changed quite a bit from the script. I will explain my edit decisions on each scene.

The beginning. Rita was supposed to empty herself in the chair, play with the teabag, and walk to the handrail to daze. Meanwhile, the audience could hear a past conversation between Rita and Lilith for exposition. I want to set the tone and the style of the film in the scene. But it's too long, and the protagonist is doing nothing. There's no active action that I agree the film starts with the second scene. So I shortened the first

scene, including the image and dialogue. I even put the scene of Rita touching the jacket to make it a call back of the end. Still, the first scene is weak. Eventually, I wipe out the conversation and end it with Rita standing up to add suspense. As I don't want to drop the first scene, I think this is the best I could do.

The perfume scene functions normally. Rita picked a bottle from the basket without putting it back in the medium shot, which became a continuity problem. I fixed it by repeating the action of picking the bottle from the basket as she added another drop. And the ending WS feels too long, so I dropped it and ended this scene with an MCU.

The bookstore scene doesn't have big problems except missing a shot of Rita sniffing the book in flashback. The other thing is the last two shots, one is a CU, another one is an MS with frame in frame. I chose to end with the framed MS as her performance is better. I tried to use her eyes moving to cut to the next scene. But it's too meta. So I picked up a shot matching her eye line as a transition.

The bridge scene has been changed several times. The biggest problem is missing the shot of Rita sniffing the croissant. Though I picked up the shot, it doesn't fit in the scene well as its style is kind of different from others. So I jump cut with it to cut time, which I think is the only solution to keep this ECU. The second problem is the flashback of the stairs. I don't like the lines I wrote as it doesn't feel natural. Thus, I muted the montage, which was my original plan. The lines that I gave to the actors are moving mouths, not for listening. The last is the transition to the former bookstore scene. I tried to show an empty bench for a few seconds, and jump-cut four times to let the audience merge into the scene. However, it's getting lengthy and breaking the editing style of the film. So I decided to use the pickup ECU of Rita's eyes.

The pier scene has two main changes. The first is Rita approaching the end of the pier. I use the take in which has passersby to enhance Rita's loneliness. More, I shorten the action of Rita walking to the handrail and jump cut to her CU. The other one is

Hubert's performance. Due to the limited time, I couldn't get my ideal take. Also, the line "everything" spoken by both of them is confusing some audiences. So, I cut the part of Hubert speaking to avoid bad performance and enhance the ghost-like sense of Hubert.

Originally, Rita is supposed to scout the new city, gets upset by scent, then runs back to fetch Hubert's jacket. But the scenes of Rita speeding up walking and turning into running are not working well as transitions. Nonetheless, they break the emotional arc and make the film disconnected. So, instead of having them between each scene, I make them as a sequence to build up for the climax. Then, I found out I couldn't use the first angle in which Rita is happy and relaxed, as the emotion is already upset in the pier scene. The final solution is to only use the shots of Rita trotting and running and take out the purpose of Rita going back to the apartment for the jacket. Then is the climax. I let Rita stand meditating, cutting with quick flashbacks with new shots of the former scenes three times. Not only emphasizes she's memorizing, but also creates the feeling of "ready to run" before she runs into the montage.

The montage is solid. I spent a while figuring out the order. I am sure that the coffee shop would be the first, and Rita sniffing Hubert's cheek would be the last. Meanwhile, I tried to sync their actions with certain lines, as if Rita and Hubert are related to the conversation at different times. No more changes after the third cut.

The ending has cut a lot. It was supposed to be: Rita sits in the center of the wide shot, back to the camera. Two passersby walk away, and three more passersby walk past the camera. We cut closer to Rita hugging her legs on the bench. Then we cut to her front, she tears, wipes, and buries her face into her arms. However, it's too long. And Rita is trying to squeeze tears, which I didn't notice while filming. I tried to shorten this scene by changing the order. Still, the weirdness of cutting from her back to the front and her performance stays the same. In the end, I decided to use half of the last shot and drop everything else. I thought about ending the film with the surreal scene when Rita is

learning to frame. But I think it needs to end with Rita in the current timeline, also as a comparison to the beginning of Rita's CU.

6.2 Sound Design

My sound designer is Creighton, who's been my film partner. working with me since my first film at RIT. We met a couple of times to discuss the mix and sound effects of each scene. Because we are going to wipe the sound completely and foley the whole film, we want the sound to carry the events happening off-screen to make the world more alive and real.

We did a couple of decisions on the sound design: For the first scene, we want a sound to replace the cicada in the original recording to sustain the irritation of the scene. In the perfume scene, we need to foley all the bumps and clings of the glass vials, heavy but achievable. In the bookstore scene, we need to make other customers' footsteps to enhance the quietness. In the bridge scene, we want the sound of the wind to feel sympathy for Rita. For the pier scene and beach scene, Creighton will be looking for a better version of the ambiance. I want a sound effect, like a low-frequency tone for the climax to enhance Rita's mental state. And after that, it's the score.

There are a few places that need some tests on the sound design: The transition between bookstore and bridge, Rita matches the eye line but the location isn't clear, and I want to make it a bit surreal but with the muffled ambiance of the bridge scene. The flashback in the bridge scene, as it doesn't have dialogue, might end up staying in the same ambiance. The sequence of Rita speeding up walking needs sound effects to make it smooth. The ambiance in the last shot, the way it fades out needs to be tested, either increasing the distance or muffling and decreasing volume.

6.3 Music

My composer is WanJun, who's been my film partner and worked with me since my first film at RIT. She focuses on film composition in the orchestra. We met several times and spent six hours analyzing and spotting the picture lock cut.

In general, we want to use one sad motif for this film played by Chinese instruments as I feel it's rare in US films. There are some Chinese instruments that naturally fit sad music, which is also my purpose for using them. Another idea is that I want to use vocals, no lyrics, but humming. Because most of my film doesn't have dialogue, I take it as an advantage of using vocals to enhance the loneliness.

Before the climax, the audience would only hear unmemorable melodies to accompany the image and decrease the audience's sensitivity to score until the motif and theme melody appears. And there's diegetic music for the bookstore scene working as BGM from the speaker, and it will transfer into the score when we get into Rita's memory; a transition from objective music to subjective music.

The most important part is the running scene to the montage. We want it to have one layer of fast tempo as Rita is escaping from memory and another layer of slow tempo for the warm moment in the past. So, it will speed up to follow Rita running, change to slow tempo bit by bit during the montage, decrease to only a few notes in the surreal scene, and be silent in the last shot of Rita tearing.

6.4 Color

My Colorist is Wen Tong, he has been my colorist for four films, and he's very experienced and knowledgeable about color in terms of solar science and making aesthetic choices. We spent one week in the color correction room to find the right style of this film. The main two questions are how to keep the consistent style for a short film and how to recognize memory and reality.

I want the reality to stay in a relatively cold color temperature in blue when the memory is neutral and slightly warm with red and yellow. The reason I insist on using blue and red to differentiate the timelines is because I also used these two colors to represent Hubert and Rita. I also very much like the style of the film HER which is one of my inspirations for the film. However, the colorist chose to use a very narrow dynamic range for the film may create a look too saturated outside the theater. So we keep the warm style of the color combination in full with a higher contrast ratio to have more layers of brightness.

We were worrying that having two or more color styles would not be accepted by the audience easily as the film length is too short. Most of the shorts are kept in one style, which makes sense as the color also serves as an icon for the short film. After several tests, we believe that two colors help a lot on recognizing different timelines and avoid creating confusion for the audience.

7. Evaluation

7.1 Deficiency review and experience

There are several deficiencies in my production. Some I was aware of before filming and prepared to accept the consequence, others I found out on set. After all, I take them as experience to be a better filmmaker.

7.1.1 Financial constraint

There will be a need for more budget on all productions, which I understand. The budget for this production is \$11,400, excluding the crew and equipment. This is the first time I had this much money for a set. I wasn't fully understanding how to spend money on production until I discussed it with my producers.

We tried our best to make good use of every dime: give up hiring a paid PD, minimize the actors who need to be paid, negotiate with the owner to get a free location, find the lowest price of the item we need...even though we almost ran out of all the budget. Thus, we didn't plan to reshoot any scene.

7.1.2 Technical issue

The biggest problem is lighting. We didn't have a high enough light stand to recreate the natural lighting, which makes it look a bit weird. Also controlling the natural light, we weren't able to have giant silk or HMI to maintain the same brightness.

The next is the dolly. In the scene of running, we didn't have enough tracks to cover the distance. And in the scene of Rita and Hubert's living room, we need a small dolly that allows us to have a lower angle closer to ground level. Though we found a way to figure it out, it's not perfect.

7.1.3 Lack of testing

The first is the series of scenes of Rita speeding up walking on the street. They break the rhythm of the film when being transitions, and lack continuity when being a montage sequence. I end up using them in jump-cut. I should've done a test filming and editing before the production.

The second one is similar, the POV of Hubert looking at Rita through the glass vial. Without a super long focal lens, we weren't able to achieve the shot. We ended up a rack focus, which I didn't use.

The last one is perfume. Though none of my audience noticed, the perfume made by Rita doesn't look real. Because it's water, rather than coconut oil or perfume alcohol.

7.1.4 Location limitation

They have the same problem: too small. Including Rita's apartment, the bridge, and the bookstore. That we can't have more choices of camera angles and lighting set-ups. For instance, the bridge is not wide enough for us to have a full shot of Rita, but an MS.

7.2 Meeting with the committee and other professors

7.2.1 Jack Beck

I met with Jack almost every week. In the spring of 2021, we had a few discussions about the stories for the proposal. Jack liked my story of tea and gave me some ideas such as a long static two-shot of a conversation during the tea ceremony. But I couldn't make the story interesting enough with the conflicts, so I switched to the story of memory loss. Then Jack pointed out the mistake in the story that I couldn't find the right character to keep the truth a secret. For instance, I let the parents know everything but without telling Rita to prevent her from a mental breakdown. But then I need to give a solution to the internal conflicts of Rita's parents to tell her the truth, which would weaken the character of Rita because then Rita doesn't need to struggle, but just wait for her parents to tell her. More, I consider the elements of LGBTQ, psychology, etc. The story is getting more and more complicated. So I had to change the story.

In the summer of 2021, I met Jack twice to report the progress of my pre-production. Also, I explained my latest version of the story for permission on production. Jack felt it was better, the hole of logic had been fixed. And he's satisfied with my pre-production since I had the best crew and planned the schedule well.

In the first week of the fall semester in 2021, I sent him all my pre-production works, including the shot list, storyboard, production day schedule, crew list...

I made the rushes for both production weekends before my weekly meeting with Jack, to have a clearer purpose for discussion. We didn't go through the whole rushes videos as its total length is 3 hours and 40 minutes. However, we watched the best take and talked about the possible approach to edit the film, and what's missing for pickup.

I started editing the film as soon as I finished filming the principal of my film so that I can discuss with Jack on a new cut every weekly meeting. In general, the note for the first to the fifth cuts:

1. The first scene is too long and the joke at the end of the conversation feels confusing.
2. The sequence of Rita scouting the new city between each scene isn't working.
3. Missing Rita smelling the croissant.
4. Missing Rita smelling the book.
5. The build-up to the climax needed to be fixed.
6. The ending scene needs to tighten.

For me, it means that I need to rewrite the story by editing. The missing shot would be included for my pickup days. But the real puzzle is the build-up for the climax. I tried to mix all the voices to create a chaotic psychoacoustic effect to describe Rita's mental state. However, Jack felt I went too hard on it and it's stronger than it should be. Besides, I didn't deliver similar sound techniques in the former part of the film.

Jack was kind of surprised with my eighth cut as I shortened it by 2 minutes. But on the other hand, Jack thought the editing went smoother. And he likes the new reference music for the montage—light piano instead of vocal, and that the music sounds more empathetic with the protagonist and avoids bothering the audience to focus on the voice-over conversation.

After the eighth cut, our meeting focus went on the missing shots that were needed for the pickup. Meanwhile, I was giving new cuts every week, trying to see if my editing could solve the problem. I did solve some of them, but sadly, the shot of Rita smelling book and croissant are necessary.

At the end of the fall semester, Jack got my report of pickup shooting and the contents of the thesis support paper. I was going to talk more about smell-o-vision and the techniques of bringing scents to film. Jack suggested I focus more on explaining my project, as the purpose of the paper is to support the film, rather than being another academic paper that I won't be able to accomplish.

In the spring, we discussed the latest cut. Jack thought most of the cut works except the pickup shots in the bridge scene. Though I did more test editing, none of them is better than the current version. I also showed it to different people to see if they have the same uncomfortableness while watching, but the answer is no. So, Jack and I think we can picture lock, but work on the sound effect to smooth the transition.

7.2.2 Munjal Yagnik

I met with Munjal several times. The first few times are for my script during the summer break. It was when I changed Rita into a perfumer and removed the memory loss, but Munjal dressed out a few problems that made me rethink and rewrite the whole story.

1. Rita's goal throughout the 10 minute film is to wait for the rain. Which doesn't require her effort—she just waits. And, what's the specialty of the rain today? Compared to the rain a week ago? Rita's goal is to, "say goodbye" or, "find closure". So, I try to emphasize her internal conflicts by, "finding inner peace for perfumer Rita".

2. I gave Rita an hour as a time limitation. This is just to make "today" in the film special. Same as the last one: if they are moving next week, and today is going to rain—is it gonna make a difference? As long as she's finding closure, I think, no.

So I remove the time limitation, to offer Rita enough time for finding closure.

3. Rita ends up in a location that is not the key to her goal. There's a big scene in the restaurant, but it's not about it. It's something else, the rain. So, why not the bridge, bookstore, or flower garden? Because Rita traveled so many locations that the place she ends up with, needs to mean something. I admit, yeah, it could be somewhere else. Then I realize the restaurant doesn't mean anything.

4. Too much extra dialogue. Mainly are Ben and Diana not pushing the story. And I should treat my lines as bullets, quick and accurate.

The biggest problem is, "what does Rita want to achieve throughout the film?". So, I make Rita's goal clearer—looking for closure, but her sense of smell prevents her from getting new experiences without Hubert. I let Rita fail at the end, cause I don't know how to find her closure. And the reason, I later realized, is because I haven't found one yet.

The other meetings happened after my fifth cut. Though one of Munjal's comments about how my film doesn't have interesting shots upset me a bit, the true critique that worries me is that the first scene is not working for the story. Mainly because I want to set the tone of the film and let the audience get familiar with Rita, I had Rita "doing nothing" in the first scene. Even though I had a voice-over conversation between Rita and Lilith, it's still not interesting enough. Munjal also saw my anxiety about his comments that he cheered me up again and again, "what's important is what kind of story you want to tell".

7.2.3 Frank Deese

I met Frank twice, once for my script idea, and another one for my fifth cut.

I had a hard time sorting out Hubert's death and Rita's pain, which affects Rita's character arc directly. Frank shared with me his own experience and his feelings on

people passing away. Nine out of ten people's deaths could happen in a very simple and silly way, which explains partially why it upsets us. Frank showed me a few videos as a reference which are about a police officer and nurse giving a speech of death. The speeches are strongly peaceful and sad. But that's exactly what I need as I want to tell a sad story. From then, I start thinking about delivering the emotion resonating to the audience.

Frank liked my fifth cut, but several things needed to be fixed. The scenting part is a problem, especially the library scene and bridge scene. I might need a closeup of Rita smelling the objects. The other thing is the dialogue. Frank thought my exposition was too implicit. For instance, the conversation in the first scene when Lilith and Rita were chit-chatting but worrying about Rita's situation might lose the audience. I need to rethink the way of putting the subtext. Frank also suggested I think about designing the conversation between Rita and Hubert and layout the whole film to have a closed story structure.

7.3.4 Dan Latourette

I met with Dan around my fifth cut when I had a severe problem with the story of my film, in editing. I think Dan is a very good professor of storytelling, and I had discussed films with him many times.

So, Dan thought my film would work. He also thought about the sniffing problem which had been addressed by my committee. The film needs more close up on Rita sniffing the subject to emphasize the idea of, "the scent brings Rita a flashback". I agree, and I did plan to pick up a few more shots, basically for Rita sniffing the croissant and the book.

Dan also got confused by my “Yes, Mom” joke, though Dan didn’t think it mattered that much. I think I am supposed to cut the part. Then Dan suggested I rewrite the script, mainly the dialogue.

So, Dan thinks the advantage of my film is that lots of exposition is coming from the voice-over, which I can fix as many times as I want in the post. He suggested I consider rewriting the conversation in the first scene to clarify Rita’s situation. Dan likes my style of using dialogue, but he told me to bring some information on the note, as right now it’s too much implied. However, Dan didn’t have a problem with the voice-over conversation for the ending montage, as he thought the style of my film is poetic as it should be.

For the rest of the meeting, I was asking Dan about story structure. Like, I had my film in non-linear storytelling, which I also felt was kind of cheating as I could change the meaning of the story in the post. More, does it mean I lack the ability in story writing that I chose an easier way to put my story together? Well, the conclusion is that there’s no real “cheating” in terms of scriptwriting. But also, the skill of writing takes a long time in decades, requiring hundreds of days for practicing. I just need to have a habit of writing every day.

7.3.4 Don Casper

I had a meeting with professor Don Casper the week after the screening. Mainly, I was aiming to discuss the editing of my film. Since Don is the professor for editing in the school, and I plan to be an editor after graduation, this gave me more reason for this meeting.

I showed Don two versions of my cuts: the one for screening and the one I re-edited the first scene by taking out the voice-over conversation. Don liked my newer cut, as it added more mystery for the audience to explore. Additionally, he wanted me to have

a few more lines, maybe Lilith's voicemail, to indicate that Rita's leaving for something and increase the audience's interest.

Don reads the second scene a bit differently. Don thought Rita was trying to make a perfume of Hubert's scent, which he also wanted a call back in the end to fulfill the story structure. Originally, I used this scene as an exposition to show Rita's occupation as a home perfumer and she has difficulty continuing this job as she can't help thinking about Hubert during the process. Don suggested I add a few more shots of the scene in the end as a callback. I do have several angles that weren't being used, but I also need to consider if I want this circular story structure.

Don thought my editing works well, though there are a few places that could be edited tighter as a general suggestion. The only part that throws him off is the three jump cuts in the bridge scene, which breaks the unity style of the whole editing. My purpose of the jump cut is to show Rita's anxiety, and the scent of croissant calms Rita down, so as is the editing. After hearing this, Don suggested I have one or two more lines in the voice-over to decrease the sense of inconsistency. And Don was expecting Rita's voice for the extra lines, which I thought was Hubert's. But it makes sense, as it's Rita's story. Even though I did worry about the unity style as Rita never spoke in narration in the former scene, Don told me the narration doesn't need to be in every scene but where it needs to be. Then I came up to have Rita respond to Lilith's voicemail and also indicate that Rita is looking for Hubert's scent.

Don suggested I push back the date of the picture lock which was the middle of December, to keep editing more. I was hesitating when Don said he hoped to discuss with me again in January on a new cut. I think I will postpone the date of the picture lock, but I do need to lock it and go for other things. Not just because I had spent almost the whole semester editing, but also I can't have more reshoots in the next semester due to my budget and crew. He disagrees with some critiques in screening when some people don't

want to see Hubert's CU. Don thinks the story needs Hubert's face and his interaction with Rita, which I deeply agree with.

The last meeting with Don is about my picture lock cut, as a final check. Generally, Don thinks the film works better with my pickup shots. Especially the bridge scene which is my concern, but Don didn't have any discomfort or weirdness while watching. We also discussed adding shots of Rita making perfume to have a closed circle of Rita trying to recreate Hubert's scent. The conclusion is, I need more dialogue to fulfill the information, which is not on the table. The only problem for him is the CU of a croissant in the climax scene that needs a visually stronger one to substitute.

7.3.4 Amy Adrion

I gave Amy the newer cut after meeting with Don.

Amy did agree that the beginning feels stronger after I took out the dialogue. Though the emptiness was now on the surface that music needs to fulfill. Amy highly suggested I have interesting music for the first scene to draw the audience's attention.

And she thought I could tighten the scene of the bookstore as we spent too much time waiting before Rita sniffed the book. Which I didn't change as I want the audience to settle in the bookstore after the former scene.

Again, Amy still thought Hubert's performance was less believable so she suggested I cut his part as much as possible. The last note was similar to Jack: the text on the door of the running street kind of bothered her while watching. Maybe blur them in post. I was worried if the pickup shots would throw her out while watching, but fortunately, she didn't notice the weirdness while watching. And she comforted me to not be too concerned about them.

8. Screening & Feedback

8.1 In-progress screening in fall

The audience likes the cut. I will lay out the comments well and need to approve.

The good. They like the way I use CU on Rita that it helps them to build a relationship with her. And they are bonded to the cinematography. The performance of Rita is believable. They like the lines in the film, which is an encouragement for my writing. And they think I did a good job of building the female protagonist.

I need to approve. Several mistakes in the caption and credits have been pointed out. There's no critique on the cinematography, I take it as a pass. The performance of Hubert is less believable and they hope I can cut some of it. Generally, everyone is getting into the film in the third scene, which is a bit late. Some techniques on the sound need to adjust better like the "(s)lip-sync" which is somewhat confusing.

8.2 Final screening in spring

I've received lots of compliments about the final film. There were students who could "smell" the odors during the film; and students who were inspired by the romance story and wanted to give it a try for their next films.

The part I worried the most was the pacing of the film because I used hard cut for each scene, but no one was bothered by it, instead, there were people kind of liking the way I edited the film, and thought the emotional delivery benefited from it.

The only problem pointed out was the volume of the dialogue, even though the sound was balanced by following theater screening rules. After screening, I also reached out to our sound professor Dave, and he thought it wasn't really a problem.

Overall, the audience liked the film better, and the emotion is delivered effectively.

9. Conclusion

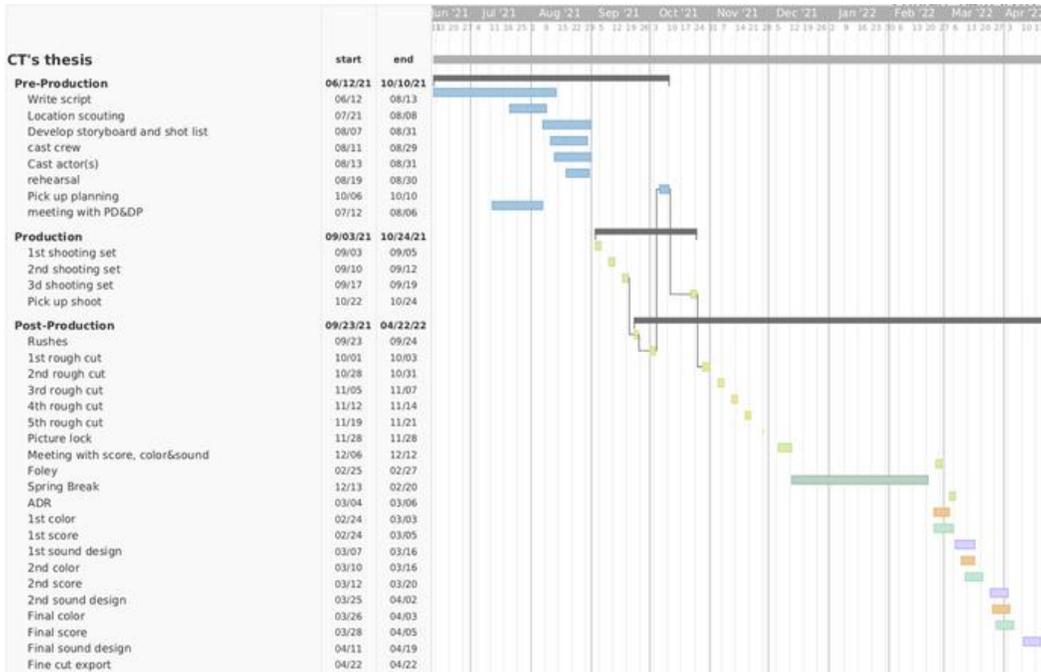
Overall, I think I did my best based on my current knowledge and experience. The screenwriting and directing are much better than in my previous films. I know it could be better, after a year studying since the production. But I am glad I made good use of my strengths for this project. Moreover, the connection between memory and the sense of smell is the concept I had as a child, and I am satisfied with making it come to life.

And I think I achieve the goal of my MFA program to become an independent filmmaker as director and editor. I command the film languages and visual-audio techniques I learned and practiced well in my projects, which is strong proof of my growth in RIT.

As a filmmaker, I wasn't confident due to my lack of experience and knowledge. What cheers me up after my three years of learning is that I find a way to succeed with it. I will continue having a lack of confidence and unsure as to whether there's a better way to achieve and satisfy the audience. But I also learned more of my strengths and I know what will be good in my film. I am able to admit my mistakes and be proud of myself at the same time.

10. Appendix

10.1 Pre-production

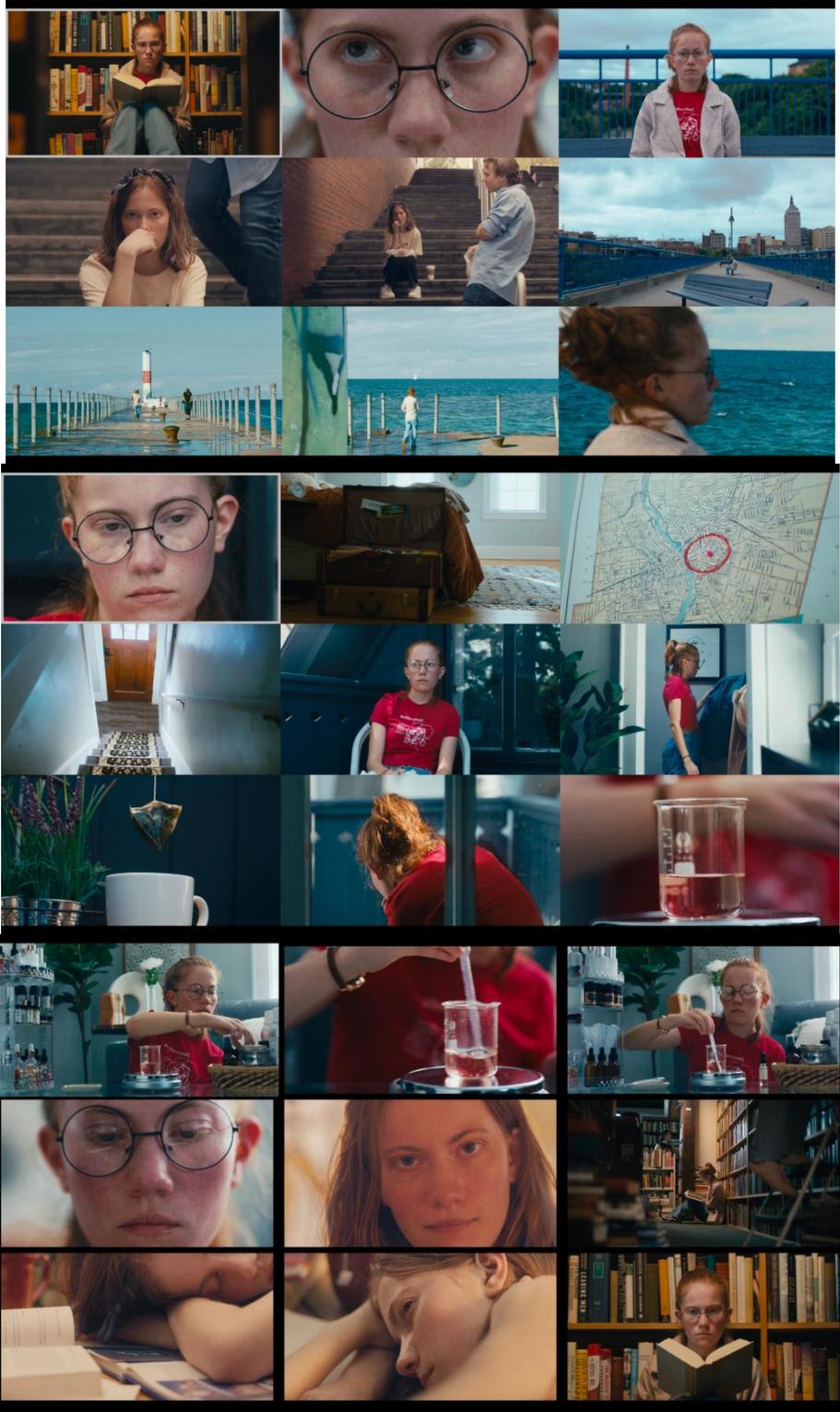


10.1.1 Schedule

	Amount	Units	QTY	Rate	Total	Plan	Actual use
01-00 Script				In kind			
01-01 Final Draft				Own			
01-02 Clearance				In kind			
01-03 Script Copying				In kind			
				Total for 01-00		\$0	\$0
02-00 Producers Unit				In kind			
				Total for 02-00		\$0	
03-00 Direction							
03-01 Director				In kind			
				Total for 03-00		\$0	
04-00 Cast							
Lead Actors							
Rita	6	Days	1		\$450		\$600
Hubert	3	Days	1	\$150/day	\$300		\$355
Extra- barista	1	Days	1	\$50/day	\$50		\$0
Extras	3	Days	1	\$50/day	\$0		\$0
Lilith	1	Days	1	\$50/day	\$50		\$50
				Total for 04-00		\$850	\$1,005
Crew/actor transport & Per Diem							
Rita	2	Bus and flight		\$136/flight, \$50/bus	\$402		\$316.41
		Per diem		\$120			\$120.00
Hubert	1	Roundtrip		\$273/RT	\$273		\$852.95
		Per diem		\$120			\$120.00
PD	2	Bus and flight		\$136/flight, \$50/bus	\$402		\$0
						\$1,077	\$1,409.36
05-00 Production Design							
05-01 Prop	x	allow	x	\$570			
05-02 Costum	x	allow	x	\$400			
05-03 Make-up	8	Days	1	\$200			
05-03 Hair	1	allow	1	\$100			
				Total for 05-00		\$1,270	\$1,000
08-00 Crew							
Prep:	5	weeks	1	In Kind			
Shoot:	10	days	13	In Kind	In Kind		
Brandon	4	days				\$160	
Suzannah	6	days				\$240	
Dorothy	4	days				\$150	
				Total for 08-00		\$550	\$550
10-00 Transportation							
10-01 Equipment Rental							
Gear							
Easy rig(expressway)					\$189		\$189
Loss coverage					\$47		\$47
Production Van	8	days	1	\$80	\$640		\$0
Week 1 Van				\$320			\$207.08
Week 2 Van				\$320			\$223.29
10-02 Gas		allow	5	\$30	\$150		\$0.00
10-03 Uber		allow	5	\$30	\$150		\$137.00
				Total for 10-00		\$940	\$803
11-00 Location Expenses				In kind			
11-01 Catering Service							
Crew Meals	6	days	17	\$10	\$1,020		\$1,000
Snacks&Coffee	6	days	17	\$7	\$755		\$810
Airbnb rental week 1					\$1,900		\$609.00
Airbnb rental week 2					\$1,000		\$822.81
Nick's airbnb					\$500		\$506.45
Restaurant rental	1				\$200		\$0
Cafe rental	1	days			\$200		\$0
				Total for 11-00		\$5,575	\$3,748
12-00 Footage Storage							
12-01 Hard Drive	2		2	Own	\$300		
12-01 DIT	10	days	1	In kind			
				Total for 12-00		\$0	
20-00 Pick Up							
20-01 Actor	1	days	1	\$100	\$270		
20-01-1 hotel	2	nights			\$300		
20-02 Food	6	Person	1	\$100	\$100		
				Total for 20-00		\$670	\$670
33-00 Music							
33-01 Composer	10	minutes	1		\$450		
				Total for 33-00		\$450	
34-00 Post Production Sound							
Production designer							
34-04 ADR & Foley	7	hours	1	In Kind	0		
34-04 Foley Artist	7	hours	2	In Kind	0		
34-15 Dialogue/Efx Edit and Pre-Lay	0	hours	1	In Kind	0		
34-16 Sound Design	20	hours	1		\$600		
				Total for 34-00			\$600
Total Below and Above the Line	\$11,932						
Contingency@10%	\$113						
Grand Total				\$12,045			
Actual Total				\$10,236			
CT's current donations				\$11,100			

10. Budget plan

10.2 Film stills





10.3 BTS





11. Bibliography

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12. Special Thanks

Now, this is the ending of this thesis paper and my three-year MFA student life in RIT. I met great professors and good friends. The knowledge, and qualities I learned from them, such as kindness, consideration, and hard-work, will support me in the future. Compared to myself in 2019, here's a better version of me and a better filmmaker, which contains so many stories I want to tell and many people I want to appreciate.

First, I want to thank my parents. They are a great support for me to study abroad and major in film. I am very lucky to have my family encourage me to achieve my wishlist, see the world, reduce the possible pity, and live a hopeful life. We had facetime phone calls to show care for each other, and I always started missing them after the call. I've been away from home for years since I graduated from undergrad, working, studying abroad. I want to go home after RIT, have breakfast with them, and then take a walk by the sea.

I want to thank Jack as my chair. Jack is a respected and wise professor, teaching class in detail, and talking like a friend privately. He has been supporting my thesis project from the very beginning, along through its finish. A lot of great ideas and thoughtful modifications that I can't come up with due to my inefficient knowledge and

experience, but with Jack's help. As my mentor, he taught me a lot, such as handling anxiety as a filmmaker, dealing with relationships with people. And I will keep them in mind after leaving.

I also want to thank Munjal and Frank who've been supportive the whole time for my thesis and helped me to be on the right track. They are also friends of mine, sharing knowledge and life experience selflessly.

And I want to thank Wen who's my DP and my best friend here. We were friends long ago before RIT, but we worked together throughout multiple projects. As a friend, he's strict, kind, and considerate. As a film partner, he's a talented and responsible worker who's always got my back. I hope he can achieve his dream without too many difficulties.

Last, I want to thank Bella, who helped me know myself and inspired my story.