

Film Production Role 1: Director	2
Clip 1: Narrow My Eyes (0:00)	2
Film Production Role 2: Cinematographer	5
Clip 2: Simulacrum (3:00)	5
Film Production Role 3: Editor	8
Clip 2: Amor Fati (6:00)	8
Works Cited	11

Film Production Role 1: Director

When I was originally planning this short film all I knew was that I wanted it to be political and personal at the same time. While brainstorming I kept coming back to one idea that is a source of great frustration for me - disinterest and lack of action. I feel like many of the people my age are painfully apolitical and disengaged from the social and political issues that surround us - we are a generation of kids so privileged that we stopped caring about anyone's suffering except for our own. The generations before us were the last ones to practice politics on the streets and they wanted and had ideas for change and revolution - but we have given up.

When making "Narrow My Eyes" my main intent was to make a documentary-drama that explored the notion of apathy and apoliticism in young Polish people whilst showing the possibility for an awakening or change. I wanted it to be the personal journey of the character that might make young people reflect on their choices and I wanted the film to challenge the dominant narrative around young people and politics. In that, my main inspiration was Loach's *I, Daniel Blake*, Campillo's *120BPM* and the work of Reinaldo Marcus Green, who's short films about teens experiencing accelerated trips into adulthood are at once specific and universal. Their work, alongside my personal experiences of living as a young woman in a very religious and conservative country, became the heartbeat of *Narrow My Eyes*.

Clip 1: Narrow My Eyes (0:00)

Beyond my initial inspiration, my narrative - and specifically my script - was driven by a fragment of a text by Witold Gombrowicz, which I even originally planned to put in the film. The poem explores the concept of injustice and the irrationality of it, in the form of a challenging "What if?", which I felt like reflected the journey of the protagonist - which first had her meet with irrational injustice and hardship in order to realise that there's no other way than to fight it. The title *Narrow My Eyes* is a direct reference to the last line and the concept of retaliation. With that poem in mind I wanted to explore how a disengaged individual becomes someone capable of "narrowing their eyes" i.e retaliating or fighting back. The original poem is by a Polish writer and was written in Polish, which corresponds with the personal topic of the film and the real life experiences that inspired it.

That is how it is, ladies and gentlemen, you smile and narrow your eyes; you cherish swallows and torment frogs; you find fault with a nose. There is constantly someone that you hate, someone you find disgusting; then again you tumble into an incomprehensible state of love and adoration—and everything on account of some Mystery. But what would happen if I were to acquire my own mystery and impose it on your world with all the patriot's heroism, and devotion I was taught by love and by the army? Why will happen if I in turn smile (with a rather different smile) at narrow my eyes with the bluntness of an old warrior? I may have

Tak to, moi państwo, uśmiechacie się, mrużycie oczy; piekście jaskółki, a dręczycie żaby; czepiacie się nosa; niezawannie kogoś tam nieświadcicie, kimś tam brzydycie się, to znów wpadacie w nirapojety stan miłości i zachwytu – a wszystko gooli jakiejś Tajemnicy. Lecz co będzie, jeśli i ja zdobęde się na własną tajemnicę i narzucę ją waszemu światu z całym patriotyzmem, bohaterstwem, poświęceniem, jakiego nauczyły mię miłość i wojsko? Co będzie, gdy ja z kolei uśmiechnę się (innym cokolwiek uśmiechem) i zmruję oko z bezceremonialnością starego wojownika? Może najodwziępniej postąpiłem z ukochaną moją Jadvigą.

When writing my script I put a special emphasis on showing the disinterest and disengagement of the protagonist. I wrote several scenes that were supposed to reflect her disconnect from others

and their struggles and concerns, however after filming all of them I have realised the amount of footage I had would greatly go over 3 minutes. On top of that, the led up to the main plot point of the story was too long and, as such, I had to make the decision to cut those scenes. I had to minimize the internal space of the film and condense the story to fit

within the 3 minutes. This resulted in a very concentrated narrative, with one event developing right after another. As a result of that the film has a very intense feel to it however that also means the film doesn't have much time to breathe, making the plot seem rush at points. In retrospect, I think I was being very ambitious for a 3 minute film, largely owing to my desire to realise my personal experience.

When working on my script I also wanted to emphasise the speech I wrote for the meeting, as I wanted it to encapsulate the message of the film and be the final turning point for the protagonist. I worked closely with the actress during rehearsals in order to help her understand the motivations for the speech and the truth of it for many people our age. This process was one of the most rewarding parts of directing for me as it allowed me to connect with the cast, bringing them into my vision for the film and, on a more personal level, into my lived experience in a way that meant they felt the motivations of the film for themselves. In doing so they became active parts of the film; taking ownership of the role and its significance.. Similarly, the process of blocking was foundational within my process of directing as it allowed me to step into the films and demonstrate what I wanted my actors to express. Placing myself in the shoes of the protagonist helped me, my cinematographer and the actress to explore together how scenes would find life and rhythm. This approach demonstrated its worth as, within a fairly short period of time, I felt my actors started to embody the experience I wanted to convey; they began to live the role as I had envisioned because they had first seen me do so.

Hi, first of all, thank you all for coming out today.

One year ago I as here in this room, the day after my best friend's funeral, with memories of the hurt she went through still fresh. I came to realise this couldn't have only happened us and so we starting something. Anything that meant this kind of thing didn't happen again and again. We've come a long way since then and it is so empowering to see so many of you here today.



Fig. 1: Stills from scene 3 along with blocking map.



Fig. 2: Stills from scene 4 along with blocking map.

The value of the pre-production work with the cast is most evident within the performance of the protagonist. A young Polish woman herself, she had previously not considered in great depth the situation back home and so in many ways her journey through film resembles her journey as an actress. Rather than micro-manage every expression I worked with her to help her understand the context and emotion behind the story in order to help her make the same connections I had. Furthermore, we watch extracts from 120 BPM, I, Daniel Blake and Cold War in order to explore how the film could be full of emotion and yet not overly soft or over-stated. As I look towards my next film projects I am certain

that I want to continue to take this approach to directing, helping the cast live the role they are trying to realise on screen.

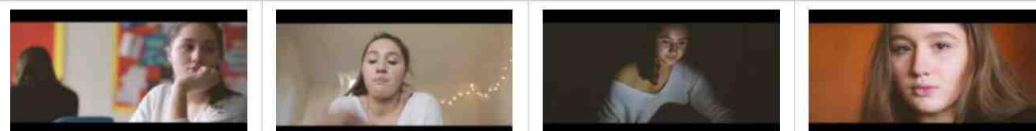


Fig. 1: Stills of the protagonist

One of the most significant shifts in the narrative is anchored by the film's most dramatic camera movement: a 360 degree rotation that depicts a group of women meeting to discuss their experiences. One of my most prominent notes to my cinematographer was that I wanted the film shot in predominantly mid to close singles that enforce her isolation. It was, therefore, vital to break that motif when the story shifts and the protagonist discovers she is not alone. I worked closely with the cinematographer to realise this shot, most notably asking for the shots to be done from within the circle to emphasise the protagonist's inclusion within the group. On reflection this was the right choice as the shots from outside the circle felt like we were looking in on the group - as if from a distance, rather than being with them - involved in their community. That being said, I regret not exploring more camera movement within the scene to continue to make the point that things have changed for our protagonist; I recognise that at this point the image system my cinematographer developed does not fully realise my intent because I had not made that clear enough in our pre-production briefings.

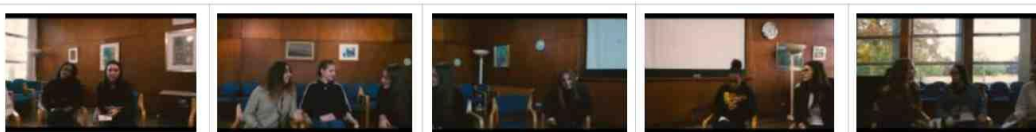


Fig. 2: Stills from the meeting scene.

One area of the cinematography that was highly successful was the use of eyes as a reoccurring motif. This motif, connecting back to the title and the poem that inspired it, was central paramount for the emotional journey of the film. As such, when I reviewed the initial storyboard I asked for more time to be given to this motif and for the film to start and end in this way. Reflecting back, my collaboration with the cinematographer was vital here; it provided a creative space where ideas could be refined and enhanced. The most notable outcome of this collaboration can be seen in the opening and closing sequences that use eyes to express the emotional content of the moment: cold empty shock and stoic determination.

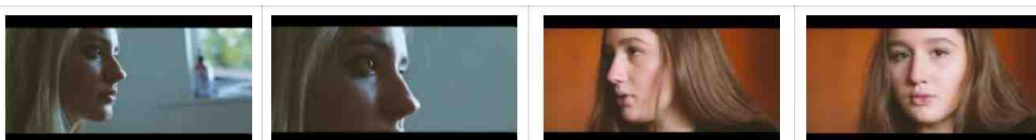


Fig. 3: Stills from the opening and ending sequences.

Film Production Role 2: Cinematographer

The original concept of the project that I worked on as cinematographer was to tell the story of a masked and isolated individual who's struggling in a world of (or so he thinks) unmasked others. Together with the director, I wanted to explore how in our society every single person wears a mask and hides their true self from others. My intent was to create an image system that demonstrated the characters isolation by showing him cut off from those around him. I, therefore, set out to use a range of shots that would depict the protagonist in the company of others but not 'with' them or part of their community. I wanted to do this compositionally, by showing the protagonist alone and isolated before showing revealing their are more people in the space, and through the use of a shallow depth of field, meaning everything around our protagonist would feel 'soft' and lack the distinction and detail of something, or someone, that is known to our protagonist. As such, one of the main motifs of the short film is realisation and so I intended to design a number of shots where other people - unknown characters - would emerging into view. The director of the film was drew inspired from the work of David Fincher and so I used this stimulus to explore his work and that his closest collaborator, cinematographer Jeff Cronenweth, who's work includes *Fight Club* (1999), *The Social Network* (2010) and *Gone Girl* (2014). Cronenweth's work with Fincher is known for its use of shallow depth of field to draw attention to specific element, in a similar way to Hitchcock's use of the close up. Equally, both Fincher and Cronenweth are recognised for their green/yellow analogous colour palette, which I wanted to channel through that style of filmmaking.





Fig. 4: Stills from *Se7en* (1995) and *Panic Room* (2002) along with the corresponding color wheel.

Clip 2: Simulacrum (3:00)

In "Simulacrum" there's a recurring image of things and people coming into view, which reflects the slow realisation of the protagonist. By either moving the camera or the objects, things and people move into the shot or are revealed in the shot. In order to achieve that effect I had to specifically use a wide lens (35mm) when shooting so that both the group in front and the protagonist moving into the frame from behind were clear and visible. I used a wide 35mm lens and composed the shot both within the doorway and with the wooden beams to the left leading the audiences eye towards the place the protagonist would emerge from.

Figure X depicts one of the most successful shot of the film as it combines one of the most central elements of the image system - emergence - with two strong compositional techniques. The effect of the framing and narrow set of leading lines is that it creates a claustrophobic space, narrowing the frame to a small square in its centre. The use of light enhances the effect by creating an entirely dark and empty foreground, with the visible part

of the frame being lit by an eery yellow light, much in the style of Fincher. Together, these elements create a somber and hopeless tone: our protagonist is truly trapped.

Shift B3 G3

Jeff Cronenweth achieves this color effect not through post-production editing but through the manipulation of the white balance on his cameras. Therefore, I have shot all the scenes with the color calibration set to B3 G3, which resulted in scenes marked by a green/yellow tint. What is so effective about this approach is that it doesn't rely on heavy post-production but rather makes use of the cameras ability to filter the colour spectrum in particularly authentic manner. The outcome, especially in the case of this shot, are highly effective and loaded with meaning.

Fig. 5: Stills from scene 3, the white balance settings.

Other examples of the motif of emergence can be seen in figure X and Y. I have applied the "emerging" motif to shots that could otherwise seem mundane. As the motif reappears through the film it's not something the audience will notice straight away - mirroring the protagonist's journey as, at first, the protagonist doesn't see that everyone else is wearing a mask too - but as the film unfolds it becomes a metaphor for the slow realisation of the protagonist. On reflection I feel like I have successfully managed to incorporate my image system into the whole production and the use of those recurrent images have accomplished their intended purpose and helped fulfil mine and the director's vision.



Fig. 6: Stills from the classroom scene and the opening sequence.

When shooting the beginning sequence of "Simulacrum" I have followed Hitchcock's size rule, hence the sequence features extreme close-ups of the brushes and mask held in the protagonist's hands. This was done in order to highlight the importance of those objects in the story.



Fig. 7: Stills from the opening sequence.

Having elected to film during golden hour when the sun would be low in the sky, I positioned the camera in a way that would look directly into the light source and selected a

wide 35mm lens, which has a glass curvature that I knew would create a lens flare. The lens flare anchors this moment as both a revelation - as if we have been sent a sign from above - and as a significant moment of revelation. In part this is inspired by the work of JJ Abram, who uses a similar technique, but is largely influenced by the use of Chiaroscuro in Noir films such as Phantom Lady and renaissance art such as Rembrandt's The Holy Family by Night.



Fig. 8: Stills from the mask reveal scene. Fig. 9: Phantom Lady

One of the main challenges during the shooting was filming the bump scene (fig. x) which required me to shoot the scene multiple times using one camera: as the shots were directly facing each other I could not use multiple cameras without risking them being in each others shot. This way of shooting this particular scene made matching the action a challenge, as the actors had to walk it through each time in exactly the same fashion. Additionally, when shooting it from different angles I had to pay special attention to the rule of 180. The outcome is highly successful as the continuity and flow are maintained, as is the rule of 180. The technical aspects therefore align and allow the focus to be on the meaning of this moment rather than on the camerawork.



Fig. 10: Stills from the bump scene.

One of the last shots (fig. 10) is specifically composed in order to reflect the final realisation of the protagonist. I wanted to show how isolation has been overcome and engulfed by the realisation that he is not alone. This shot needed to have the most symbolic and significant composition of all the "emerging" shots; as it is the last scene of the short film I wanted the audience to come to the same conclusion as the protagonist by showing him surrounded by people just like him which is opposite to what he (and the audience) thought in the beginning scenes of the film.



Fig. 11: Stills from the ending scene.

Film Production Role 3: Editor

“This poetic way of editing supports and enhances the sensuality of the story. The editor sensitively leads the heroes through time, emphasising their isolation from each other in space, the fragmentation of their relationship and the impossibility of being together.”¹

When working on the editing part of my portfolio my main inspiration was the style and feel of a romantic drama “Cold War” directed by Paweł Pawlikowski and edited by Jarosław Kamiński. The film won a European Film Award for best editing and it has been described as “meaningful and emotional, almost like poetry.” The story in “Cold War” is told in chapter-like sections, with a black screen and a location and time on it between each part. The pace is slow and the music is a major influence on both the tone and transitioning. The film was shot in colour and then drained of it in post-production.

Clip 2: Amor Fati (6:00)

Once I’ve done the initial organising of files into bins in Adobe Premiere Pro, I have divided the scenes into three chapters, first being the one where the couple is shown to be in a loving relationship, then the part when the protagonist comes back home to her abusive father and finally the third part in which the couple separates. These were all divided by dips to black and from, to reflect the separation of those points in time and the incoming separation of the two characters. I wanted this to reflect how separate those three parts of the protagonists’ lives are.

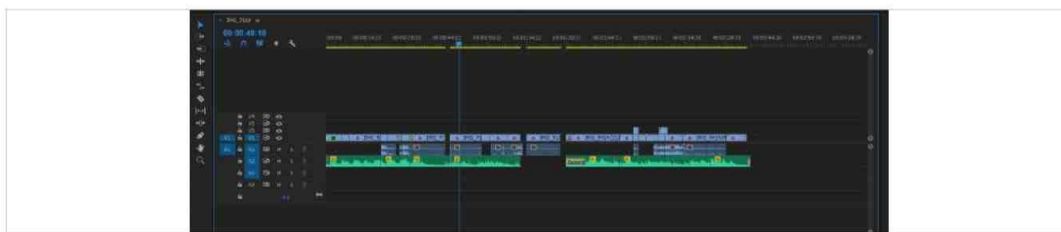
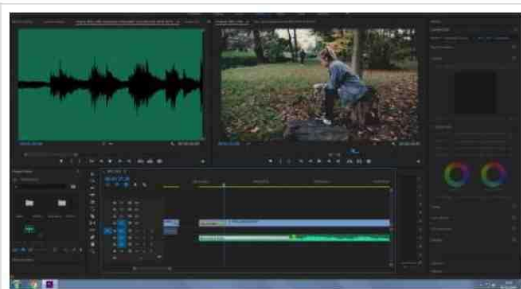


Fig. 12: Timeline of the film.

Since the film was a romantic drama I wanted the pace of it to be slow - for it to take its time and to give the audience plenty of time to feel the emotions of the two characters. For the film to work it was essential that the audience make a human connection with the characters so that they fully experience the tragedy of their relationship come the end of the film. This is what makes Cold War such a powerful film and is what I hoped to achieve through the pacing of cuts and transitions. Therefore, I used the shots that had the most internal space; knowing that the director had taken great inspiration from the filmmaking and philosophy of Tarkovsky I expected the shots to be open and spacious which would work well with my intent. One of the very important parts of the film was the accompanying sound, both diegetic and non diegetic one. In my editing, I paid special attention to the instrumental soundtrack given to me by the director and the diegetic sound in chapter 2.

¹ *Cold War* wins European Film Award for best editing. Retrieved from Radio Poland.



In this scene from chapter 3 I made the instrumental music slowly increase as the figure of one of the protagonists enters the scene and slowly comes into frame. It is critical that audience feel the tension here, which is anchored by the score, so I chose to use the whole shot, lasting X seconds, to elongate the shot.

Fig. 13: Screenshot from the sound editing process in Adobe Premiere Pro.



Here, I removed the music all together to bring attention to the diegetic sound of the crying. Based on the directions given to me by the director, the emotional content of the shot was very important so I enhanced volume up to 6dB, so we could hear the shaken breaths and sniffing of the actress. This, along with the rare break in the music, proved highly effective.

Fig. 14: Screenshot from the sound editing process in Adobe Premiere Pro.

Color was an important part of the film as the director and I wanted the first chapter to have a nostalgic feeling to it, and the other chapters to look sadder with darker undertones to reflect the doomed relationship. To create the nostalgic effect I used a colour grading preset that mimics the look of a Fuji F125 camera with Kodak 2393 film. The use of the film effect is that it instantly evokes the period of time from which it originates, creating a sense of looking back to the past; of nostalgia.



Fig. 15: Chris Niedenthal's photographs of 70-90's Poland.

The colour grading is, in my opinion, the most successful part of the editing of this film. Not only has the nostalgic tone been established in the opening scene but throughout the film the colour grading enhances the emotional content by anchoring each moment; the warm scene help us understand the love and warm between the two characters; the colder bleaker scenes help us feel the hopelessness of the girl with her bruised face and the guy as he watches her walk away. The whites are well balanced throughout and the colours are stylistic whilst remaining realistic enough as to not break the connection with the audience. As the film goes on the colour grading becomes less and less a feature and more simply an expression of the emotion. This moving to the background of the editing is

what allows the narrative to be felt by the audience; they can be concerned with the characters rather than with my editing choices.

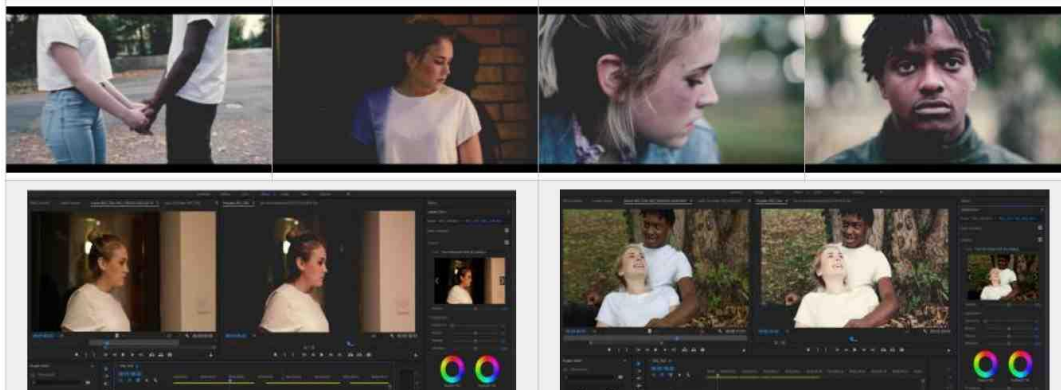


Fig. 16: Color graded stills from the film and screenshots of the color grading process in Adobe PP.

In my opinion, this is particularly impressive as, from the images above, we can clearly see the difference between the original footage and the edited ones and the effect of the preset on certain colours and textures.

The below sequence features one line of dialogue said by the protagonist, which I overlaid over two different shots from different angles to show both the expression of the female protagonist and the male one. When doing this I had to match these two shots in terms of her facial movements, in order to have a smooth transition and maintain continuity between the two shots. The time of this was key as the shot transition happens during her taking a breath before the next line. I think this transition has worked really effectively - creating an almost seamlessly transition and allowing the audience to see the mans reaction in the second shot without feeling as if they made a dramatic move away from the action.

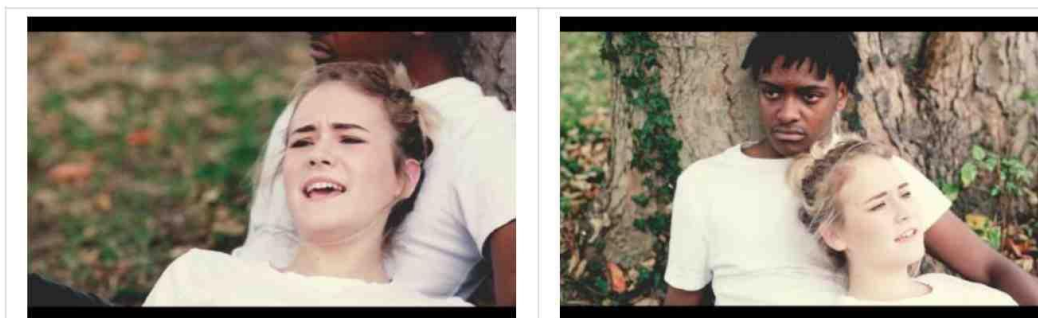


Fig. 17: Stills from the conversation scene.

On reflection I felt like I successfully managed to tell the story of the couple through time and in a way that emphasised the impending separation of the two. I feel confident in that my use of sound, pacing and colour, which I paid special attention to, achieved the intended effect and created a coherent and smooth story.

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