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To infinity and beyond Iowa

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TO INFINITY AND BEYOND IOWA

by

Timothy David Orme

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Master of Fine Arts degree in
Film and Video Production in the
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The University of Iowa

May 2016

Thesis Supervisor: Assistant Professor Michael Gibisser

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Timothy David Orme

has been approved by the Examining Committee
for the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts
degree in Film and Video Production at the May 2016 graduation.

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For Haley. Everything for Haley.

I can't go on, I'll go on.

Samuel Beckett

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To everyone I never got to know in Iowa.

And the few whom I almost did.

Thanks.

To anyone who's reading this.

Please stop.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

My thesis work explores the visual space of the screen by taking the form of the Sierpinski Sieve, providing a cinematic work that works to be the experience of itself. This written supplement to the film *Light Angle Sieve* seeks to work as a journaling of the process of making the work, a document of my mind space during a hot summer spent under lights. As an artist, I cannot claim to understand my finished work any more than a viewer might and hope in every way to speak only so far as to say: “Please do not listen to me, but to my work.”

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INTRODUCTION

My thesis film is an experimental animation. It's a work that gives depth to a fractal pattern and yet still works to keep the pattern two-dimensional.

Despite my work and in-class demeanor here at Iowa, I used to be a good student. That was over a decade ago, when I wanted to be a poet. I was always reading and often writing, and convinced Martin Corless-Smith to let me take the poetry workshop he was doing for the MFA program, even though I was an undergraduate. I just had my first poem accepted at the *Colorado Review*, and instead of feeling good about it, I felt as though a life of poetry might be less glamorous than I'd romanticized as a high school student. It was a difficult semester as a writer.

But I was introduced to the idea of the fractal form in that class, and it was something that stuck with me more than any poetry we read in the course. The idea of the fractal, of the infinite zoom, seemed so simple and yet so complicated. I've heard that's one reason the theory of relativity is so amazing: it's so simple and elegant.

A decade later, I finally began a project that might, in some way, work towards an understanding of the conversation in a poetry workshop over a decade ago. It's always a long route to it, but there's a beginning.

CHAPTER 1

WHY FRACTALS, WHY FORM

I love Structuralist cinema.

I love the ingenuity of independent animation. (The same ingenuity that Disney had when he created the camera I used for my film *Light Angle Sieve*.)

With this I began to make a film different than any film I'd made before. One that surrendered itself to its form and functioned most directly at the level of its space-in-time, its direct experience.

However, I'm very aware of what poetry and art have taught me about the formal life of a work. One, that the form must equal the work's content. And two, that once a work finds its form, it must break it. The poem must teach us by showing us its own betrayal. In that way we learn to trust its truths.

This seems to me to be the challenge (or possibly the problem) of Structuralist cinema. The works often exhaust a form but do not necessarily denounce it. The experience of a Structuralist film can therefore become only the witness of a particular pattern or structure playing out in time. (I often think of *Ray Gun Virus*, by Paul Sharits as an example of this.) While I'd be the first to admit there's a value to this form of cinema, it seems to me to leave more on the table.

For example, take the poetic form of the sonnet. Any Introduction to Poetry course will teach young poets the "rules" of the sonnet: a Shakespearean or Petrarchan rhyme scheme, a turn, fourteen lines written in iambic pentameter, etc. In contemporary poetry, any fourteen-line poem can be (and usually is) referred to as a sonnet, and people like Julie Carr frequently let other lines slip into the sonnet form.

I believe every work of art is its own epistemology.

And I believe every work of art must demonstrate that epistemology formally.

To work within a given form is to determine what subject matter, what content fits within a previously established epistemology.

So I set up my own form, based on P. Adams Sitney's general characteristics of Structuralist Cinema: fixed camera position, flicker effect, loop printing, and rephotography.

And then I found every way I could to cheat that form, to destroy its strictness and create a work that took on a life of its own. That film was *Eye Spoke Chorus*, a film I produced for Media Production Workshop in Spring 2015.

Eye Spoke Chorus is an experimental time lapse of motion blur. Except that it's not shot in time, it only appears to be. Formally, I stole the shape of the fractal and converted it to time. The formula was simple: equate each fractal integer with a shutter speed. Shoot a fan blade spinning at those various shutter speeds. Then, edit them in the sequence those integers take fractally: 1,1; 1,2; 1,1; 1,3, etc. I ran this sequence to 11 or 12 integers, then reversed it (my destruction of the fractal). The audio track followed the same pattern: I recorded my voice humming, shifted the pitch frame by frame, reversed it half way through.

The second film of my two part fractal series is my "thesis," *Light Angle Sieve*, a film that might work as an attempt to convert the shape of a fractal to space.

CHAPTER 2

LIGHT ANGLE SIEVE

The Sierpinski Sieve, Sierpinski Triangle, or Sierpinski Gasket

I have to be honest.

I don't know that much about math.

In fact, I don't really understand fractals, mathematically.

But still, I get it.

I've seen photos of rivers from space, microscopic patterns of electricity, tree branches, and the veins in my arm.

They all have the same pattern, the same fractal that calculates the bifurcation of each branch.

We're all made of the same math, and even if I can't explain it or do the equation for the Sierpinski Sieve myself, I can experience it, and that's more than enough.

So here's what I do know about the Sierpinski Sieve: A Sierpinski Sieve is created by following a few simple steps. First, create an equilateral triangle. From there, find the halfway point along each line of the triangle. Connect those three points to make an inverted, equilateral triangle in the center. Cut that smaller triangle out. Repeat indefinitely. Each triangle gets smaller and smaller, and the original triangle also becomes less dense.

If one runs the formula for the Sierpinski Sieve out to infinity, what one is left with is a shape with no area and only edge. Much like infinity itself, at that level the Sierpinski Sieve is only a concept. If this film reaches its fullest realization, it will reach

the same realization as the Sierpinski Sieve itself: it will become only some motion towards the concept of infinity. I cannot say whether or not the film reaches this point, I wonder if the film might enact infinity in its use of space and focus blur.

In a very literal sense, the focus blur of the film moves along a fractal pattern from infinity (which is a complete blur in this film) to each of the five planes. The six integers of the film are each of the five planes of glass and infinity. The fractal pattern (which becomes something pulse-like) is the same as in *Eye Spoke Chorus*.

Does the film itself attain infinity or simply reach toward it? Will an audience read the focal infinite as a kind of boundlessness? I think I'd be happy if the audience asked questions such as these, instead of answering them myself.

A Brief Interlude: Influences

An audience asking questions might also ask me which filmmakers influenced the film. I don't know. I'm not sure there are any, honestly. Perhaps I should simply say, none that I was aware of during the process of making the film. Perhaps some works came in more subconsciously (and likely not many filmmakers, as I don't watch many films—*gasp*). Here's a quick list of who/what I think may have slipped into my subconscious and influenced this film.

1) Structuralist cinema, such as *Ray Gun Virus* and *The Flicker*, obviously.

2) I'm a big fan of Thorsten Fleisch, but I really thought about his work a lot after making this piece, so *Energie!* and *Gestalt* may have influenced this, but not in ways I was immediately aware of.

3) Duchamp's *Anemic Cinema* and Man Ray's *La Retour a La Raison* (visually) as is probably obvious.

4) Ash Thorpe and GMUNK. Those guys aren't experimental filmmakers, but instead are motion design artist whose work you've seen (if you've ever seen a commercial, or trailer for *Ironman*, or a hundred other cool things). I follow motion design more than I follow experimental cinema (it's much easier to go online than to festivals), and I look at great stuff daily. I remember hearing an interview with GMUNK where he talked about how an ayahuasca pilgrimage influenced his work. I wish I could say ayahuasca influenced this film. Who am I kidding? I'd be too scared to try it if I had the chance.

5) Speaking of motion design, the blog Motionographer has probably influenced my work more than anything I can think of, for nearly a decade now. Sometimes I think my real dream is to have a work featured on Motionographer—though I don't anticipate I'll ever be that good, or perhaps good in those (often commercial) ways. But everyday I look at animations where shapes bounce around a screen in beautiful ways. And everyday I find it inspiring.

6) Yuri Norstein. I think of Yuri Norstein's work every day. I just can't get the beauty of those images out of my mind. And he's working with a multi-plane camera. And the most beautiful textures. And the most lyrical storytelling. I don't know how lyrical storytelling influenced this film, but it's always on my mind (and so hard to do well in short films!).

7) Teaching. I've been so fortunate to teach so many students who make me smarter. And we watch animations together and talk about them. Could these conversations have been my biggest influences?

8) *Planet Earth*. And planet earth. I think about *Planet Earth* and planet earth everyday too. Fractals in nature. Impending doom.

9) Can I say breathing influenced this film? I'm going to say breathing influenced this film. I think about breathing every day too. Not often in a yoga, hippy-dippy way, but sometimes like that too. While I really hope this doesn't happen, I'm fully aware this film could be reduced to a kind of breathing. Can breathing happen in the eyes? Through space? As my one of my high school buddies once told me after watching one of my films: "Dude, I can't believe you don't smoke weed." Must be a hyperoxia high.

Animatic Magic, and embracing imperfections

Long before the dreaded Kickstarter campaign or the two-month headache that was the camera build, before the animation time itself, there was the animatic: a moving storyboard of the film created digitally.

Like so much of this film, the animatic was a great starting point. However, even though I could mimic motion blur on a computer, animating depth or space didn't feel possible with computer-rendered depth (even though it is math, I suppose).

The animatic allowed me to build out the structure of the film, to watch it in time, and to give my composer something to begin composing to (more on that later). Even before shooting, I knew the animatic had to be something I surpassed in the shooting process. It took building the camera and looking through the lens to realize the finished film had to be very different from its digital starting point.

The animatic was practical. It allowed me to get a rough idea of what the movements might look like, of how blur might interact with two dimensional objects in three dimensional space.

But the film had to be hand made, had to feel as though it were more than a perfect, computer-generated rhythm. It had to interact with literal space, at least in the shoot, even if it ultimately became digital and flat on the screen.

I began disrupting the perfection of the animatic when I started making the triangles. Instead of measuring them exactly, I guessed. I also didn't use a paper cutter, but a pair of scissors.

While fractals build by a set of guidelines, they're only perfect in math. Nature is full of the imperfections and slight mutations that one might call beauty. This film isn't nature, but maybe I'd like for it to be organic. Imperfect. Full of imperfect equilateral triangles.

To roughen them up a little more, I decided to change a few things with the painting process.

One, I stippled the paint on to create a texture. It's not always as visible in the finished project, but it's there enough, and was important to me to spend that time.

Two, I altered the way triangles reflected. Working with a multi-plane camera (which I will describe in more detail later), one of the largest difficulties is making sure layers aren't reflecting into one another. The solution for this is to paint the back of every layer black, so it doesn't bounce any light. I decided to paint the back of every triangle black, except for those on the top layer. This helped create a sense of depth by allowing those triangles (which were the white triangles anyways) to reflect down into space, to create a larger illusion of depth.

I could have done this for all the triangles, but I wanted to visually emphasize actual depth more than the illusion of depth.

The animatic for this film moved very slowly, very methodically. The triangles shift just a few pixels per frame, at 24fps. This film is shot at both 12fps and 24fps.

Let me explain.

The blur moves (or is “animated”) every frame over 24fps to create a smoother sense of motion.

The triangles move at 12fps (every other frame) so that I could finish the project in one piece. The smoothness of the blur being animated at 24fps hides the staggering movement of the triangles (somewhat).

Even if I were working at a larger scale, I soon learned the animatic wasn’t going to provide the frame-by-frame direction I was hoping it would have.

As much as a help as it was, once I started shooting I immediately threw it away and worked in a more freehand method.

Kickstarter, or a month of filmmaking without filmmaking

My Mamaw (southern for grandma) sent me a check for a large amount of money for someone living on a fixed income.

Here I am in Iowa City.

No friends.

An incredibly awesome girlfriend and two black cats.

I'm thirty-three-years-old, in my ninth year of graduate school for my third graduate degree, and asking for money to make a project on a camera that would be a dream to build, but that I don't really *need*. I *could* make something on paper for practically no money at all, and given the anxiety of designing and building a camera, I start making another film on paper, a kind of backup in case the camera fails.

And then I get this check in the mail.

And then a few others from friends and family who still somehow don't trust online commerce.

And then the Kickstarter itself picks up speed and I reach a goal I thought was entirely out of my reach *three weeks early*.

I don't feel excited.

I feel guilty.

Some intense work with my therapist can't shake thirty days of this feeling.

The process of Kickstarter is really boring and labor intensive. Every morning I get up at 6:30 and send personalized emails to everyone I can think of who has supported me over the last decade, anyone who I think might contribute. This takes about four hours, give or take a cup of coffee.

Then it's checking in with my social media assistant, Emma Blackman, about press releases, social media engagement, etc. Later in the evening I send another round of emails, respond to those I've already received, send shout-outs on Facebook, and try to come up with every perk I can think of to get people interested in a film I don't have a lot of visuals for.

Because I feel nobody will financially support an experimental animation based on a mathematical form, I tell a white lie and make the Kickstarter for *The Three Siblings*. The money raised goes towards the equipment I need to build the camera I'm going to use for *The Three Siblings* and *Light Angle Sieve* (and many other films, I imagine). But still.

I feel guilty for thirty days.

And then anxious for two weeks while I wait for Kickstarter to round up the funds. I'm increasingly convinced every pledge is going to fall through and I'm going to have wasted a month.

When the two weeks are over and most of the money clears, I skip the celebratory wine and spend a few of my own dollars on expedited shipping so that I can get things in the mail faster and get started on the construction.

The actual work begins.

Building a Camera, and praying a tornado doesn't wipe out my life

Building the camera was really effortless for a few weeks.

And then it was a nightmare for a few months.

There aren't exactly blueprints for these cameras out there, nor are there options to buy one off the shelf.

Here were my steps: I bought a prefabricated storage rack one might use in the garage (24x48 inches). Instead of building it with the pre-existing racks, I knocked those out and had five sheets of quarter inch platen glass built by MGSI in Iowa City. They didn't have a clue what I was doing, so explaining to them what I wanted, how I was going to mount it, etc. became a fun task.

There's always a risk of bounce, twitching, or wobbling in animation, and I made sure to prevent that as much as possible by mounting the stand to the wall and to the floor (goodbye renter's deposit).

Then I built a simple wood structure to mount the camera on. The story of how this failed is long and arduous. First I tried a TV wall mount. If I had a welder (the machine *and* the person), it would have worked. But I didn't, and it wiggled just enough to make it useless. So, I ended up mounting the cheese plate directly to the lumber.

To give me access to the camera during the shoot, I mounted a quick release to the cheese plate.

To prevent the camera from twisting, I mounted a little metal product that goes between the tripod release and the camera.

Then I mounted the Ditogear Lens Drive to the 15mm rods, a follow focus ring to the lens and cussed for two months.

The original plan was to shoot with the same lens I plan to shoot *The Three Siblings* with, a beautiful old manual Nikkor 85mm 1.4 lens. I was going to use the Lens Drive to turn the lens, and Dragon Frame to program and automate the focus shifts.

As it turned out, the Lens Drive was having some trouble turning the older lens, so I had the lens refurbished to clean out the focus ring and make it turn smoother. But that didn't work.

Fuck.

So, I bought a beautiful Sigma 85mm 1.4. With a new lens there'd be no chance the Lens Drive wouldn't work. Wrong again. So, I started a chain of emails to Ditogear wherein they proceeded to treat me as if I'd never turned on a camera or turned a focus ring before. I determined I had burned out one of the gears in the Lens Drive while trying to turn the beastly Nikkor 85mm before I'd had it refurbished.

It's a shame there is almost no literature by either Dragon Frame or Ditogear to help someone in these circumstances. But alas, I thought that was the cost of doing business (for me, making mistakes).

I ordered a new Lens Drive. They were on sale, but still I had to wait for it to ship from Poland.

Poland.

To pay for the Lens Drive I returned the Sigma 85mm and decided if the new Lens Drive didn't work with my Nikkor 85mm I was going full on manual.

When it arrived it took just a few minutes to discover it didn't work either. Slowly its focus dithered. Different gearing, same problem. I'd just cut out close to a hundred imperfect triangles and decided if anything were to be exact on this film, it was the focus.

Tack sharp goddamn it, even if I had to do it myself.

Again I contacted Ditogear. They asked for videos. I sent them. They took days to respond (and were always a day behind because of the time changes anyways).

Ultimately I learned this: *Ditogear's Lens Drive simply does not work with the precision I needed for precise focus at a 1.4 aperture.*

And: Fuck Ditogear and their horrible customer service.

And: Manual focus is just fine.

Since I'd spent so much money on so much equipment that didn't work, I was in a pickle. I couldn't order another Sigma 85mm (which I could control manually but without automation from Dragon Frame). So I settled for a Canon 50mm 1.4. The blur wasn't as beautiful, but it was still pretty good.

It was disappointing to know that I built my camera for an 85mm, but that I'd have to be shooting with a 50mm. But really, the differences are only those that I might see.

Dragon Frame shoots a full sized image, so the image was something like 4,800x2800 pixels. From that it was pretty easy to cut out a 1440x1080 piece that was my film. No sweat.

Lighting was its own particular challenge for a number of reasons. I'm not really that good at lighting, and generally find it to be a time-consuming annoyance.

Stop motion is frequently lit with par cans (stage lights), so I purchased four Par20 lights from American DJ. They were cute, mounted with a little angle iron addition (see: hack sawing in a 100 degree garage), and worked well. They also made me realize I might be able to do things even cheaper. So, I picked up a few clamp lights from Menards, as well as a few different halogen bulbs (flood, spot, different wattages).

Easy as Pie Shakes.

And the lighting budget went down by 75%!

From there the problem was one of power. I live in an older rental, and if I shut the door with too much force the lights flicker. I thought I might have to get a power conditioner, but couldn't find one for 10 outlets (two lights per plane of glass), and I needed to be sure the lights weren't going to flicker uncontrollably.

Fuck.

Another issue.

I sat on this for a few weeks, debating whether or not to hire an electrician, but unwilling to let one in my house and see this massive contraption I'd built. I felt dumb, and that I was going to have to put a generator in the garage to shoot the film.

Ultimately, I remembered there's a website where you can ask experts questions (for a nominal fee). I found an electrician and asked him how I could use so many lights on one circuit without burning the house down, *and* prevent them from flickering.

The answer was simple, but very expensive: an Uninterrupted Power Supply (a UPS).

Okay, the lighting budget's about even again, maybe a little over. But can I use extension cords with it? I know you can't use extension cords with a power conditioner, for example.

Sure, you can use extension cords, they just need to be stage quality extension cords, big twelve gauge fuckers you can't buy anywhere but online. Oh, and they cost what they're worth, so add a zero to your estimated cost.

At least they work when you plug them in.

I don't have central cooling in my house, and the office that is home to my animation stand is in the hottest room in the house.

Fill up a cold water bottle (or grab an iced coffee), turn on all the lights and take off all your clothes.

Animation is hot stuff.

To round out the animation stand in the right way, I got a standup desk from Rebel Desk (they're rad), particularly one that I could crank up and down in case I needed to sit. I had to have my computer mounted very high to attach to the camera though, so sitting turned out to not be an option.

I also picked up an anti-fatigue matt, though as you'll soon see, fatigue was a big part of this animation.

Press

During the Kickstarter campaign, my press helper, Emma Blackman, sent out press releases to lots of fun places. Ultimately, *The Daily Iowan*, the *Press Citizen*, and *KCRG* all covered the camera. Only the *Press Citizen* got the story up before the Kickstarter ended, and none of them really got the story right.

To the press, the story is the camera, and I like that. I like working behind the camera for a reason: I don't want to be in front of it; I don't like eyes on me. Fortunately, they did get the story right in that respect.

Unfortunately, the story was always about Disney.

Disney-Inspired Camera!

Yes, and no.

Disney did design the multi-plane camera back when they were a much more innovative company than they are now. Their original camera is much more elaborate,

exciting, and industrial strength than mine (mine's actually built to move locations without too much difficulty).

Their camera was designed to create the illusion of depth (as is mine).

However, their camera was designed to add depth to cartoons, and while I don't dislike cartoons, they don't really inform my work as an animator.

I think an academic or an experimental filmmaker might understand that last statement, but the general public isn't interested in it.

This is the same reason I made a Kickstarter for the more narrative, more conventional film, *The Three Siblings*, and not for *Light Angle Sieve*.

Press is a weird thing.

It doesn't help the project (it helps make the project public).

It does make me a little anxious, because it puts eyes on something that isn't there, or the material that makes the thing and not the thing itself.

Look, this guy built a camera!

Who gives a fuck? What has he done with it?

Well, nothing.

Okay, let's make people think about Disney. People like Disney.

Sound Design, or Fuck, we have a film

In May, I contacted Jonathan Wilson about working together on this project.

Actually, it was a weird, fortuitous meeting that had nothing at all to do with the film. I arranged a meeting to look at the department's multi-plane camera in Studio B. Jonathan is a graduate student in the music department, and his office is in that Studio, so he was happy to let me in to take a look. It was (and still is) a beautiful camera, but I

immediately knew it wouldn't work for the focus shifting I'm doing in this film. The cross-departmental politics alone was enough to make me not want to shoot the film in Studio B, so I never tested the setup. Truthfully, it would have taken at least four assistant animators and myself to animate on a camera that big, and that seemed to defeat the purpose of animating by myself.

A few weeks after meeting to look at the camera, I arranged a meeting to see if Jonathan (an experimental composer) might be interested in making some sounds inspired or driven by math.

We met in my dark, sauna of an office (the one in AJB) for about an hour.

I showed him digital tests of the film.

The creative fireworks began.

I write fireworks because the conversation went really well, and I imagine the fireworks in our head somehow morphed into the crackly sounds that later fizzled throughout the film's soundtrack.

From that point, the collaboration was really effortless. I gave Jonathan the animatic of the film and asked him to compose something that could breathe, which could easily be remixed and/or blended to fit a slightly different edit. A few weeks later (in late July), Jonathan emailed me that he had a rough edit.

My first experience of *Light Angle Sieve* as an actual project was when Jonathan and I met again in Studio B. The Studio (which was torn apart from the HVAC rebuild) had just been put back together, calibrated, and was shiny clean. Jonathan put the animatic on a monitor about ten feet in the air, and turned the volume up very loud. The experience was overwhelming, painful, pleasurable, fantastic.

This, I thought, is a film. I made a few small requests for minor details, and we met again to go over that, but it's all really low-level level and boring stuff. With a few exceptions for matching the sound to the final picture (which was two months away), the sound was all finished. Hell, I even thought the film might be done just digitally if the camera fell through. So, minus this written document, the film was kind of done in July. What a great feeling to have while building the camera was at its worst.

Shooting, Accupuncture, Gua Sha, 3,000 Calories

A week or two before the semester began, I finally started shooting.

In full manual mode.

To do so, I had to spend some time calculating focal intervals. It was fairly simple, and after making shooting charts (for the depth of field only, not the triangles), I began shooting in earnest.

I had no idea how long any of the shooting was going to take.

I was very anxious.

It didn't take long to realize that I'd be able to average 600-800 frames on full days and maybe 200 or 300 on days I was able to animate between classes. At 24fps I knew it'd still be a month of shooting, but a month of shooting for a six-minute animation at 24fps is very fast.

As soon as I built the animation stand, I could tell animating was going to be very physically grueling. For every two frames I shot, I would have to bend or squat down to the floor, reach just over my head, and at three intervals in between. That's over 4,000 squat/good morning/lunge combinations over the course of a month, on top of my normal physical activity and workout routine.

After the first week I was nearly sick I was so tired.

Pure exhaustion.

So I tried something new, an appointment with an awesome practitioner of Chinese medicine. He treated my back with acupuncture needles and Gua Sha abrasions. I felt better immediately (despite a bruised back that looked like I'd just been in a severe car wreck), and was finally aware enough to realize it was going to take a significant boost in calories to fuel the life of my new movements. After a few massive "refeed" days (as the fitness world calls it), I was back in shape and ready to tackle the next two sections of the film with both more food and more rest.

New schedule:

6:30: Meditate and mobility drills.

7-9: Animate with cold coffee nearby.

9-9:30: Mobility Drills and Inversion Table.

9:30-11: Animate.

11-11:15: Scapula Stretches.

11:15-12:00: Lift Weights, jump rope, sprint, whatever the plan is.

12:00-1:00: Eat 1200 calories while watching mindless TV and relaxing spine.

1:00-3:00: Animate.

3:00-3:15: Therapy ball massage lower back, lie on acupressure mat. Breathe.

3:15-4:00: Animate if office isn't too hot. Maybe just lay on the floor more.

4:00-5:30: Clean dishes, make dinner, brew coffee for fridge.

5:30-6:30: Eat 1800-2800 calories depending on number of frames and gym work.

6:30-9:30: Rest.

9:30: Bedtime.

Note: No email or Facebook during shoot days.

Note: No more than two, maybe three shooting days in a row without a break for mental and physical health.

As I've already noted, the shooting was fairly simple and I was able to work through things quickly, largely because of my "embrace imperfections" mentality.

As I've mentioned, the animatic was helpful, but entirely too slow for me to animate with either any kind of smoothness or any kind of consistency. So, I traced its movements in my mind and threw it away. I helped make the time more meditative, more focused.

Fingerprints, dust, and—in my house—cat hair are really hard to keep off the animation stand.

I quickly realized how long these shots are.

Two to four weeks long, in animation time.

I quickly realized I was unwilling to reset and clean the animation stand every day. Not because I'm lazy, but because it's impractical and would have created a level of imperfection beyond that of the project.

(At some point one crosses the line from calculated imperfections to amateur mistakes, and this was that line.)

Then I remembered some ridiculous line in some version of an artist statement I was once asked to write where I said something about how a film should always be a work of the filmmaker's hands, should always contain the artist's fingerprints.

And there were my fingerprints.

Literally.

Not literally as in figuratively.

Literally as in literally.

The viewer of the film may never see that they take the shape of a triangle, but they will see them smudging the surface, altering the texture of the light.

I left them in.

Staying Digital

Somewhere between the guilt of raising thousands of dollars in cash and the realization that I will be on the job market sometime soon, I realized I had to change my life.

Maybe it was a bigger realization than that.

Maybe it was smaller.

Either way, I realized filmmaking is expensive. Honestly, it's too expensive.

It's a stupid art for one to pursue.

I don't mean that facetiously.

I won't get into how much money I have put into unfinished films that may or may not see the darkness of a theater. Or the thousands of dollars I've sent in exchange for rejection letters. Or the film print for *Eye Spoke Chorus*, a film that isn't finding theaters. Suffice it to say it's a lot, and it's not financially responsible.

I've spent my entire life worrying about what's artistically responsible, and it occurs to me that's why I'm so broke and stressed about money.

I'm done with film. No more shooting or finishing on film for me.

(I may do some direct animation, but that's free.)

There has to be a middle ground, and for me it requires giving up fetishizing film in order to make more films. For the cost of finishing *Light Angle Sieve* on film I could make one or two other films.

Obviously the biggest concern I have is that finishing on digital risks pushing the work into a realm outside of its goals, its aims as a work. Ultimately I'm not convinced finishing on digital does that. And even if it does, I think I'm okay with that as a sacrifice (particularly one that will keep food on the table).

The Finished Piece

Ultimately the piece is a finished piece.

I don't know what I think of it.

I love the process of it (and writing it about here has brought me great joy).

I hate the finished product.

It's simple.

It's overwhelming.

It's elegant.

It's messy.

It's "representative of my work."

It's not "representative of work."

I think people could really give a shit.

I think people might find it worthwhile.

I think maybe it is what it is because Jonathan's a badass.

I think I'm okay with just being the manager who puts the right people in the right place.

Jonathan's the right people.

I could likely sum up the project succinctly with one paragraph.

I really enjoyed working on this film. The backbreaking, acupuncturist seeking, back bruising work was really enjoyable. It works like a meditation for me, and both expands and contracts the world into the moment of creation, of creating movement and illusion. That's the cinema. And that's more important to me than a lot of things. Maybe it's the pulse of the film itself.

CHAPTER 3

LIFE AFTER IOWA

There are fewer things I'm looking forward to than life after Iowa. I'd like to be somewhere with a community I feel a part of.

Somewhere with art museums.

Somewhere with some things to do other than watch TV and football.

Somewhere where I don't have to avoid going outside for eight months a year.

Somewhere I can be the person that makes art without having to prove something to someone else.

I want to teach, but who's to say in what capacity I will do that.

Of course I want to make films.

I really want to make films more than anything.

Iowa's helped me think differently about having a practice as excessive as making films, but it hasn't really been the best place for me to explore those new opportunities.

That's the next film, and the life's work after that.

I've learned a lot in Iowa, though I'm not sure how much about filmmaking.

I've learned everything about patience.

Maybe this film shows my patience.

Maybe it shows my OCD qualities.

My thesis film is available to experience digitally.

CODA

Into the wind and blur.