

## Evaluation 'Dor'

When I was first introduced to the task, I knew I wanted to create a film personal to my own life experience. I chose film as my medium as I wanted to have complete control over the way my story was presented. Another aspect that made me choose the short film option of coursework was the possibility to experiment with the equipment. This is something I took a lot of interest in as, film is an industry I would like to pursue. The story is based around two female teenagers. Daisy and Lola are both struggling with typical female dilemmas of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, choosing between the new found 'independence' and falling in love quickly. Throughout the film, Daisy becomes the protagonist having to deal with the unexpected death of Lola. I chose to present a climactic sequence, as I was more focused on the immediate reaction of grief rather than my character's journey to find closure.

The aim was for my audience to empathise with the story and, as a result, be encouraged to show their love and affection to their own family and friends while they still have a chance to. The film is a meditation on how fragile life is as well as trying to answer the following questions: to what extent is dwelling on our social decisions futile and how important the various types of love are in relation to our lives. At first, I wanted to use the poem 'Nothing Gold Can Stay', by Robert Frost, as not only a stimulus but also part of a voiceover. Soon I realised that I wanted the film to represent who I am. As a result, I decided to write a screenplay and produce a storyboard.

The film *The Descendants* (Alexander Payne, 2011) and its setting also inspired me. The traditional Hawaiian ocean funeral service made me want to question whether our modern attitudes to funeral services are appropriate and whether sadness and mourning is the appropriate way to 'celebrate' someone passing away. Another stimulus was *Swimmer* (Lynne Ramsay, 2012) and its use of water as not only a symbolic visual motif but also location. Because of the small budget I had, I wasn't able to film any of my actors swimming (I would've liked to have a scene where Lola falls back flat into a lake). However, I tried to use birds-eye view drone stock footage of a sea in my film and by editing its saturation (lower) and exposure (lower) I was able to maintain the visual aesthetic I had created. This became a recurring visual motif.

The film *Gunfighter* (Eric Kissack, 2014) presented a very interesting spin to genre conventions, which I found interesting. Moreover, the comedy aspect of the narrative gave it a very light-hearted entertaining feel. However, it didn't suit my original idea as well as the interesting use of the voiceover, as a character, would've made my film lose its impact.

The narrative had a clear non-linear structure, starting with Daisy and Lola being happy and content with each other's company. Their discussions are interrupted by a 'dream' sequence, accompanied by a voiceover, foreshadowing their 'break-up' in this bodily form. The ending is Daisy finding the news of Lola's death and then going through her immediate responses of grief: running from and then having to confront the memory of Lola and their friendship. This open ending effectively makes the audience conceive of their own grief and interpret the story in their own way. I really



appreciated how *About A Girl* (Brian Percival, 2001) used a striking narrative twist between comedy and drama, thus adding to the realist depiction of the film. I wanted to use that in order to mimic the spontaneity of life.

Starting with mise-en-scene, their costumes (Fig. 1) were judiciously chosen to represent

the characters' personalities. Lola is dressed in lighter colours, with a white blazer, white top and light blue jeans, to reflect her innocence as well as symbolise her transformation in an 'angel' or spirit (depending on the viewer's beliefs). This alongside the 'graveyard scene', when even her hair is black can be reminiscent of her spirit missing 'the light' of being alive. This successfully juxtaposes the black costume Daisy is wearing, to show how differences in personalities can make a friendship stronger. It can be semiotic of her mourning as well as suggest her being left in 'the purgatory' of life. This makes the piece deeper and perhaps encourages a preferred reading of the film.

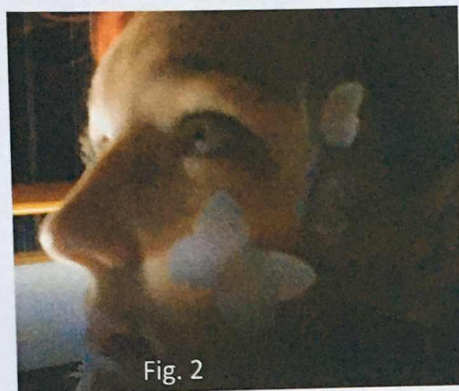


Fig. 2

Another aspect of costume and make-up was in the dream sequence when Lola has paper butterflies stuck to her skin (Fig. 2). The white butterflies reinforce the idea of innocence and purity of the character as well as foreshadow her death, as they have the ability to fly. This was inspired by *Wasp* (Andrea Arnold, 2003). That is because during the denouement, the wasp becomes a symbol of the protagonists' lives and therefore its appearance on the baby (symbol of new life) aligns the metaphorical element with the physical palpable element. By aligning Lola with a

butterfly, I was trying to replicate that message. However, this wasn't as effective because I felt it was too obvious as well as never repeated before or after in the film. If it had become a recurring visual, the audience might have been more aware of this symbol and the butterflies would've had a more successful impact.

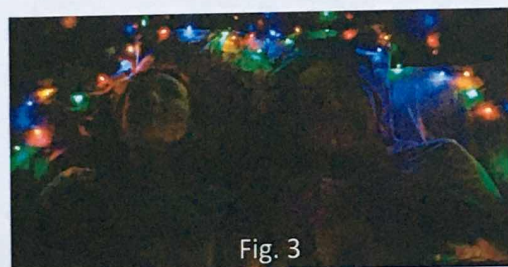


Fig. 3

A successful aspect of the mise-en-scene was the use of practical lighting. In figure 3, I used fairy lights as the only lighting source as well as a symbol for the youth. The ISO of 6400 alongside the mostly blue tinted lights gave this scene an atmospheric, intimate and comforting aesthetic that showed the familiarity between the characters. In post-production, I increased the brightness overall in order to make this sequence as

veridical as possible, this way juxtaposing the dream and end sequence. Moreover, the location, a bed is a very vulnerable place to be as it is the place people sleep in. This shows the trust built over years of friendship. The fairy lights are also a visual motif (repeated at the end of the dream sequence through the out of focus shot of street lights) that successfully hints to the hope and light the youth has. The blue lighting also hints to the leitmotif of water, which I will discuss further when analysing sound. I chose to have the lights included in the shot in order to make it clear to the audience that they reflect a symbolic meaning. As a non-realistic setting, the audience is effectively reminded that there is a deeper layer to the characters' story.

One successful aspect of my film was my use of sound. At the very beginning the song 'Put Your Head On My Shoulder', by Paul Anka fits well with the actions; the girls laughing and 'mocking about'. Moreover, the theme of love present in this song fits well with their dialogue about love and relationships. The lack of sound in the 'bed scene' is also powerful as it, again, reinforced the intimacy of the scene and juxtaposed the rest of the film.

One part of sound that I would like to focus more on is the dream sequence. When shooting it I knew I wanted it to have a voiceover about grief. The idea of using sound effects of waves came later as I felt like the silence wasn't effective enough. The idea of water or mass of water became a recurring motif as it was reinforced by the colour scheme of the fairy lights and stock footage I have

discussed earlier. This effectively hinted to the religious use of water. In some cultures water is used for baptising as well as cleansing, but the preferred reading of this symbol would be a reminder to the Hawaiian funeral ritual, when family members throw the ashes of the deceased into the sea. Another successful part of this use of sound was that it hinted to life being as stable and eternal as waves crashing on the shore. The idea of the deceased being washed away successfully encourages the viewer to think of life as fragile. This accompanied by 'Claire de Lune' by Debussy become the key ingredients of the dream sequence. This use of non-diegetic sound was inspired by *La Jetee* (Chris Marker, 1962) and its atmospheric use of non-diegetic classical music. The sound bridge of an iPhone ringtone then interrupted this. This reinforces the voiceover's question: 'Was it all just a dream?' as the audience is impactfully feeling like they are woken up from the serene atmosphere of the dream sequence.

The dream sequence in itself was very much inspired by *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren, 1943) as the short film mixes dream and reality giving it a surreal look. I didn't want to go as far as duplicating that aesthetic, however, watching it in class, I was able to take away the amalgamation of 'real' and 'imagined' to suit the theme of death and what is after life.

My use of cross fades at the very end of the film accentuates the confusion of that scene in order to successfully suggest the panic and emotional shiver of grief. This alongside the discontinuity editing makes the audience uncomfortable only to be consoled by Lola's 'reappearance' at the end. Another stimulant for this reaction would also be my use of focus and blur. Those were done by manually adjusting the lens during moments of high emotional intensity such as when Daisy gets 'the call' or during the dream sequence (as seen in Fig.2). In the call scene the shift between focus and defocus is also reinforced by using a post-production filter designed specifically for the desired effect.

To conclude, my film had to determine an emotional response in order to make the message easier to understand and relate to. As a result, I had to create an endearing atmosphere, meaning that mise-en-scene and sound were the most important emotional triggers in my piece. I consider I successfully achieved my target.

Word count: 1688