Title

REBECCA: A SHORT FILM

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9425w1h7

Author

Fay, Connor M

Publication Date

2024-07-24

REBECCA: A SHORT FILM

By

Connor Michael Fay

A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

May 08, 2024

University Honors
University of California, Riverside

APPROVED

Professor Keunpyo Root Park
Theater, Film, and Digital Production

Dr. Richard Cardullo, Howard H Hays Jr. Chair
University Honors

ABSTRACT

Rebecca is a psychological drama that explores the breakdown of a young woman's identity over the course of a night. Through precision editing and camerawork, along with a sparse and surreal soundscape, the film aims to convey the tension and emotional turmoil of its central character. The film will be no longer than 15 minutes in length and will feature UCR students as the cast and crew.

The narrative of the film follows Rebecca as she experiences a series of conversations that lead to a profound sense of dislocation and confusion. As the night progresses, she becomes increasingly detached from her sense of self, leading to a climactic confrontation that forces her to confront the fundamental questions of her identity.

The film's director will oversee all aspects of production, including casting, production design, and location scouting. Through these efforts, the film seeks to create an immersive and authentic atmosphere that fully captures the emotional journey of its protagonist.
In summary, Rebecca is a character study that explores the psychological toll of losing one's identity. Through a combination of precision filmmaking and the participation of UCR students, the film aims to create a compelling and immersive cinematic experience that speaks to the challenges of navigating personal identity in the modern world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Rebecca is a creative project in the format of a short film. The film is a psychological

drama and character study of a college student coming to terms with her mother's passing and

how her identity has shifted to compensate for the missing void of her mother's unconditional

love.

Identity and the sense of self have never been more important in the modern world. The

internet age has brought an unprecedented understanding of personality and introspection,

making humanity turn inward and examine what it truly means to be human. With the

accessibility of millions of different people at the swipe of a finger, the brain is constantly

reframing who we are in the scope of those we know or have seen. What drives us? What are we

in comparison to that person we are not? These questions have been asked for thousands of

years, but never before at the scale of the present, where we're constantly being compared

through social media.

Rebecca is a short story about a young woman struggling with these questions on a more

extreme scale. She is forced to examine herself from all angles after the traumatic experience of

losing her mother. The film aims to combine realist techniques with a procedural and surrealist

script to achieve a unique and profound study of self-discovery. The aim is to contrast the film's

realist visual and sonic structures with a script that employs surrealistic elements. If synthesized

correctly, the form will heighten Rebecca's inner paranoia while engaging the audience in

Rebecca's self-realization.

In this paper, I will discuss the narrative of the film and the multiple approaches I

employed to actualize this fragmented identity that Rebecca struggles with. I'll also elaborate

more on the different stages of production that my team and I went through to create the film, as well as the failures and lessons that I experienced throughout the filmmaking process.

NARRATIVE

Over a few days, Rebecca has conversations with her boyfriend, Bobby, her best friend, Janet, and her mentor, Professor Flores. Her conversations with each character represent a different part of her personality. When communicating with Bobby, she goes by Lily. When communicating with Janet, she goes by Amber. When addressed by her mentor, she is the closest to her identity before her mother's passing and goes by Rebecca. Rebecca feels most comfortable around her mentor, looking at her as a maternal figure, almost a substitute for her dead mother.

Throughout the story, Rebecca unravels a secret relationship between Bobby and Janet. Ultimately, she is confronted with the disingenuous nature of the parts she plays in front of them.

At the end of the story, Rebecca remembers feeling the most confident in herself when working on her art. She turns on the camera and records one final visual diary for her mother, working alongside her mentor to complete her final goodbye.

METHOD

Through a combination of realist technique and a focused and stylized procedural script, Rebecca aims to slowly build tension as each clue is revealed until the cathartic climactic reveal. This leads to a melancholic decline in Rebecca's acceptance of her reality and a gradual processing of her grief. Contrary to most Western filmmaking, most shots are wider to show how Rebecca is a piece of her environment, not the other way around.

The film's structure unravels like a short novel, with three acts structured like three different chapters. Each chapter highlights each individual personality.

STAGES OF PRODUCTION

Before there was a script, there was an idea. I had met a girl over the internet who introduced herself to me as Suzi, who projected herself to me as an intellectual interested in philosophy and psychology. I knew this girl for a couple of months before one of my friends told me he also knew her, but she had a different name and persona. This idea of codeswitching over the internet sparked the idea of creating Rebecca and inspired me to explore this concept further.

Pre-production started once I had gathered a group of friends and started brainstorming how to create a script. After two weeks, we had an initial script. I knew that moving forward, I had to be the sole contributor to the script, as the story was too personal to me. During this time, I was also in the process of looking for a mentor for my honors capstone project. I had reached out to Professor Park because I was deeply moved by his short films "Wake" and "Starry Night" and wanted to learn from his filmmaking perspective. I reached out, pitched the idea of Rebecca, and began working alongside him as I continued to adapt the script. After 19 adaptations to the script, the script was ready to be developed into the film. Through Professor Park's TFDP 156B course, I connected with a couple of classmates interested in helping produce and shoot the movie. Through those classmates, we assembled a small crew, put out marketing for casting, held auditions, found and secured locations, developed what the sets might look like, shot list each scene, and rehearsed with the cast.

Once we finished the final stages of pre-production, we started getting prepared for production. Production would take longer than expected, beginning around November 2023 and

completing February 2024. We had initially planned for a six-day shoot, which ended up being a thirteen-day shoot with all the reshoots we had to do. During production, there were a lot of elements of filmmaking that I had previously overlooked in smaller productions. Hair, makeup, and costume are essential in creating a believable character and subject for each scene, which I emphasized more as the production developed. Camera and gear rentals were also imperative, as it was much more gear than I was used to working with. My Director of Photography and I worked extensively on our lighting setups, blocking, and camera setups for each shot, as well as how we wanted the sound design for each scene to play out. Each scene would take much more work than initially expected because of the set design, lighting issues, or random technical difficulties like sound equipment dying on the shoot. Eventually, we would complete the initial shooting and the following reshoots, then moved forward with post-production.

Like each step of production, post-production would also take much longer than expected. Post-production started before production was even wrapped so that a rough cut could be submitted for the final in Professor Park's TFDP 156B course. The initial cut completed for Professor Park was around 25 minutes long, completely ungraded, and with an unmixed sound design. The final version is about 14 minutes, graded, with a complete sound mix and a finished title sequence. It took an incredible amount of work to recut the film and cut down over 10 minutes of footage. Through editing techniques like intercutting, I combined multiple scenes into one scene, significantly reducing the film's overall length. I also thought about the end color grade, a darker yet realistic grade with a subtle stylization that aligns with the directing approach. Working with my sound designer, we created a layered and thorough mix that played with silence and tension that worked to emphasize the inner turmoil Rebecca was experiencing. Once the sound mix was finished, the last touch was to create a title sequence that would match the

fragmentation of Rebecca's persona, which we did through an offsetting effect in the typography. After the typography was finished, we locked the project and rendered the final version of Rebecca.

FAILURES AND LESSONS

The amount of filmic lessons I learned while creating the project cannot be summarized in just one single paper alone. However, one of the main lessons I found necessary is to be thorough in casting and location scouting. A cinematic image is composed of a subject interacting with their environment. If the subject or environment is out of place or character, the scene cannot exist and will fail. If a scene requires to be shot at night, there needs to be ample amounts of light sources to make the scene look believable, as well as visually attractive. The location's context must also make sense so the characters have reasons to be there. For example, the opening scene occurs outside a construction site at night. Hence, we needed to find a construction site with a practical light source to light the characters, and was also visually interesting enough to maintain the viewer's attention throughout the scene.

Another important lesson I learned was the importance of the rehearsal process with the actors. It's paramount that the actors are completely bought into their characters so that it's possible to capture images with emotional resonance once shooting starts. At some point, I felt that I stumbled through my direction because we weren't thorough enough in the rehearsal process to connect the characters I wrote with the lived experience of my actors.

CONCLUSION

Rebecca was one of the most challenging projects I've ever undertaken. The process took over two years of consistent work, from pre-production to the end of post-production. Each day, I learned more about what it takes to bring an ambitious project to life, often taking an absurd amount of work, failure, and luck.

I hope my experience working on Rebecca can contribute to UCR's film program as an example of an ambitious project executed on a limited budget and resources. I also hope those who see it affiliated with the school are motivated to create more ambitious projects and push the film program's expectations. I appreciate the honors committee for allowing me to experiment as an artist and a filmmaking student. The process was unforgettable and something I'll cherish for the rest of my life.

REFERENCES

Whitford, Steve. *"The 'Truth of Sound': Exploring the Effects of an Immersive Location Sound Recording Methodology within Realist Filmmaking." Soundtrack, vol. 13, no. 1, Oct. 2022, pp. 61–71. EBSCOhost, https://doi.org/10.1386/ts_00016_1.*

MacDougall, David. *"Observational Filmmaking: A Unique Practice." Visual Anthropology, vol. 33, no. 5, Oct. 2020, pp. 452–58. EBSCOhost, https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2020.182497*

Angelone, Samer. *"Storyboardgraphy." Visual Studies, vol. 36, no. 4/5, Sept. 2021, pp. 421–25. EBSCOhost, https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2021.1889401.*

Ran, Ma. *"Independent Filmmaking across Borders in Contemporary Asia." International Migration, vol. 60, no. 3, June 2022, pp. 275–77. EBSCOhost, https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12968.*

Berg, Charles Ramírez. *"Robert Rodriguez: Teaching Creativity." Texas Studies in Literature & Language, vol. 63, no. 2, Summer 2021, pp. 1–27. EBSCOhost, https://doi.org/10.7560/tsll63204.*

WELLES, ORSON. *"Orson Welles the Third Audience." Sight & Sound, vol. 32, no. 8, Oct. 2022, pp. 104–09. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=158874647&site=ehost-live.*

Edgerton, Gary R., and Michael T. Marsden. *"Chronicler of the 'American Problem': An Interview with Kevin Willmott." Journal of Popular Film & Television, vol. 49, no. 1, Jan. 2021, pp. 2–15. EBSCOhost, https://doi.org/10.1080/01956051.2021.1868935.*

Murphy, Denis. *"Ardmore Studios, Film Workers and the Irish State, 1962–1964." Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television, vol. 42, no. 2, June 2022, pp. 244–60. EBSCOhost, https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2021.1922037.*

Wiedemann, Thomas. *"Struggling for Legitimate Meaning: Agent–structure Dynamics in German Filmmaking." International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics, vol. 16, no. 3, Sept. 2020, pp. 291–308. EBSCOhost, https://doi.org/10.1386/macp_00030_1.*

Jones, Jennifer. "Art, Architecture and Film: The Encounter between the Post-War Psyche and the Frame in Hitchcock's Notorious." Interdisciplinary Humanities, vol. 32, no. 1, Spring 2015, pp. 53–65. EBSCOhost,
search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=108356920&site=ehost-live.