

Graduation proposal

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Description: My project will be twofold; a single screen narrative and a photograph series. The photographs will support the narrative of the film. They will entail one aspect of the film's narrative, but the photographs will go more into depth of that subject than the film does.

Together they will form a widely balanced view of the life of an adolescent neglected by his parents who tries to find substitute love and warmth in Rotterdam.

Audience: I aim for a combination of visitors of arthouse cinema, visitors of photograph galleries and visitors of art galleries. The twofold construction of my project appeals to visitors from both film and photography. This construction should also make it accessible to art lovers who do not have an interest in one particular field.

Body

Subject matter: My project theme's are: transmission to adulthood and its disillusion, the search of an adolescent to find substitute love for the lack of parental love, loneliness in a unfamiliar city and Rotterdam as a distant, ambiguous city.

The first part, which is the main part of the project, will be a short film. The story starts of with an adolescent of divorced parents, Alexander, who flees to his father in Rotterdam, because he can't stay any longer at his mothers. His father lets him stay on the couch, but has hardly any attention for him and goes out for a night on his own. Alexander decides to do the same.

The second part will be an elaboration on the subject; the cold, disharmonic, ambiguous city of Rotterdam. It shall consist of a photo series of beautiful, empty images. I mention this combination, because I see a certain aesthetic in the empty spaces inside Rotterdam and yet simultaneously a void of harmony in these aesthetic places. Each photograph will be extremely well framed with a few, one or no people in it. The persons remain unidentified, we cannot see their faces clearly, but they are an important part in their photograph.

Together these two pieces will form a response to the period of my problems with leaving the nest as an adolescent and my response as a new inhabitant in Rotterdam.

Content: The two pieces portray an image of an adolescent who still longs for the warmth and safety of his old home,

before his parents were divorced and tries to find this in an unfamiliar city that feels distant and cold to him.

The longing towards his youth in his home town is going to be visualised with pov flashbacks of a young Alexander running towards his parents in a sunny camping ground. The camping ground, the sun, the blue sky; all stand in deep contrast with the images of Rotterdam's night life.

The night life experience shows the struggle of the protagonist to connect with new people. In his conversations with Linda he tries to present himself as a secure person, who is in great control of his own life. Yet he is actually lonely and is looking for someone to comfort him. When Linda goes her own way he feels rejected by the whole city, the whole earth. Later when he bumps into Linda again he feels he finally found someone to connect with, but instead of treasuring their friendship he offends her by making an inappropriate erotic remark. The night life experience deals thus with a young adolescent looking for someone to comfort him, to listen to him, but the only one who is there for him, he pushes away.

Relationship to relevant previous practice: I think this project comes closer to my personal voice than my projects last year. With this film I hope to portray an image of the

transformation of living in the safety and comfort surrounding of your parents to the moment you have to take care of yourself. I try to exaggerate this transformation by divorcing the parents of my main character, who in the years after the divorce is neglected by his parents.

Alexander is therefore longer confronted with the feeling of the past as an utopian image. Longer than adolescents coming for a 'normal nest' he has been trying to find his own way.

The flashbacks of the sunny camping ground versus the establishing shots of Alexander in a desolated Rotterdam should express him searching again for this familiar youth feeling, but instead he wander in a distant, desolated city.

In my first two projects I observed and interpreted new spaces that interested me. Now with the addition of a narrative I come closer to my own voice.

The past year I have mainly dealt with finding my way of filmmaking. I have dealt with several subjects, but not yet with a subject as personal as this one. In this project I hope to combine my past projects styles into one. A combination of a narrative told via actors together with aesthetic shots that do serve as a contribution to the narrative.

In the first two terms I made two films that create a strong atmosphere by focusing on the space it is shot in rather than by actors. Thus the space itself is the character of my film. I would like to embed this in my project by using cinematography in such a way that it creates of Rotterdam a character of his own. In the last term I made a more episodic, surrealist, narrative driven film. In this project I want the narrative to have an episodic progression, but with a surrealistic character.

Relevant history: A catalyst for this project has been reading *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger. The book depicts the life of an adolescent in search of meaning and the disillusionments he finds in adult life, extremely well. Although Holden already lived on the campus of his high school, his stroll through the New York city streets show his longing for a new home as my film intends to do. He tries to connect with several people, but is over and over disappointed and disillusioned by them. They are not as nice or as cool as he hoped and wanted them to be. What the book captures and what I hope to capture in my film is the search for a new warm place, which is halted by the fake personality of the people he meets, but also by his presumptions of how adult life, especially in a city as New

York, would be. He finds out that even in New York a lot of people are conformist, that adult life doesn't bring all the answers, that you still feel lost and in search of, the rest of your life. The combination of disillusion and not accepting how adult life is, will be an underlying theme in my film.

The book *Bright Lights, Big City* by J. McInerney is a good illustration of how lonely one can feel in a big city with few reference points. The main character leaves with his wife for New York, to make it big. His wife was never interested to go, but he wants to become a major writer. Instead, his wife becomes a successful model and he becomes a fact checker for other writers. After a few years his wife leaves him and he has no good friends in town, no place to go to process this blow. Thus he wanders through the city night life to find comfort in drugs and alcohol to soothe the loneliness he feels inside. What is interesting is that in the end of the story he goes back to his parental home to visit his sick mother. When visiting his mother, he has finally someone to talk to, to process the divorce with. No one in the big city, in his new life, could help him as good as his comforting mother.

The film *Control* (Anton Corbijn, 2007) serves as an example for this proposal in both its narrative and its cinematography. *Control* especially captures the life of the disillusioned, searching, never fulfilling adolescent. Corbijn with his photographers' background created a film where narrative and aesthetics go hand in hand. The framing, the lighting, the black and white, all amplify the narrative.

The cinematography of the film *Elephant* (Gus van Sant, 2003) also inspired me, it is strikingly beautiful. Again as in *Control*, the film's narrative is amplified because of the strong, leading cinematography.

Working methodology: I started this project by writing a short story in the summer. I wanted to work with the same methodology as done in the production of *The Third Man* (Carol Reed, 1949), to first write a novel than adopt it into a screenplay and than film the screenplay. Besides this project I am writing a novel and I found it starting in this medium easier than starting to write a scenario from scratch. However my story had several problems. The main issues lied in the mode of storytelling. After several critiques my head started to spin and I did not know anymore what was the right thing to do. Then I had a

tutorial with Barend, who simply asked me: What is the goal of your protagonist? Why is he in Rotterdam? Why does he not go back to his home town? All these basic questions made me realise that I had not written a story according to basic storytelling rules. Which makes the story ambiguous for the viewer to understand and comprehend. It lacked causality, the reader could not understand the choices of the main characters. Now I have been reading into storytelling and I wrote a first draft of a scenario more according to how a standard narrative works. I also stepped a bit away from the autobiographical part and made it a bit more distant so it was easier for me to write fiction. This also makes it easier to write in actions instead of in feelings.

While in my last project I worked with a cinematographer, I am not sure if I want to shoot it myself this time or if I want to work with a cinematographer again. I have spoken with two people who are interested in helping me with the production and have made contact with an old friend to become my first A.D. My first step will be to ensure that the two production people stick to my project and in consultation with them arrange the rest of the cast & crew and other necessities.

For the photograph series I need to take several additional classes from Liz, to enhance my skills. During the year I have to find out if I want a few, one or no people at all in the photo's. My preference now goes to making photographs without actors. However, if this remains unsatisfactory, I might need to adjust this approach.

Potential problems: The biggest problem at the moment is that I have to understand how narrative works. I have been digging in to this subject, but still find it hard to write with a clear goal perspective. Yet I think I already learned a lot on how to write a story which I hope is present in my first draft of a new scenario.

I have almost no money of my own, therefore I hope to work with an unpaid cast & crew. I worked on several sets where this was the case, although it will be hard to arrange cast & crew and equipment.

I have to take into account potential weather problems, if there is snow for two weeks in a row, when I planned shooting days, I will have to assess how this will affect the production process. I might make Rotterdam more romantic than I plan on showing.

The photograph series is a whole new area to explore, it is exciting, yet it can also create unforeseen problems. I

know I am not well trained technically; therefore I must make sure I will pay enough attention to this part of the project, instead of spending all my time on the film production.

Summary/Conclusion: In this project I hope to create a deeper insight in the transformation from teenager to adulthood. This transformation is particularly present when an adolescent leaves his old home. I wish to capture the attempts of a child from divorced parents who longs back for his old family situation to find a substitute feeling for his lack in love. Rotterdam is therefore an important character in itself in the film, because it portrays a distant, ambiguous place where the protagonist fails to find the comfort he is seeking. Moreover, I hope to construct a personal view on my period of leaving the nest and my view on the city Rotterdam. The way I experience the city as disharmonic, visualised in the film, and aesthetic and empty at the same time, visualised in the photographs.

Supporting material

Research background: My research will focus on literature/academic papers about family structures, adolescence, leaving the nest etcetera and on academic

papers about *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Control*, *Elephant* etcetera.

There are several articles that will be interesting to read about the transition to adulthood, that I will use as research material for my project. One of them: 'Transition to adulthood' by J.R. Walters delves into the new skills that need to be acquired when transforming to adulthood. I think this article will be a good comparison for my own work and for *The Catcher in the Rye*, because what I and Holden have problems with is that after acquiring these skills, life will not be more fulfilling, it becomes faker and less open. This causes a disillusion to the adolescent which develops into disappointment and depressed feelings, because you feel your environment has no problems at all with this new fakery.

'Learning to Stand Alone: The Contemporary American Transition to Adulthood in Cultural and Historical Context' by J.J. Arnett focuses on the American youth; how they deal with the transition towards accepting responsibility, dealing alone financially and how they obtain or not obtain individualistic character qualities.

An interesting sociological article, which will be useful to read as well is: 'Family structure and leaving the nest:

A social resource perspective' by B.A. Mitchell. It focuses on the role the family plays in the home leaving behaviour among youths. Mitchell uses data from the Canadian Youth Foundation to compare different family situations and how these determines home leaving behaviour. Although this is a sociological perspective; the findings do discuss the long term consequences for the adolescents. Learning more about the social part of the leaving the nest issue will be good to obtain a broader understanding of the theme.

Many articles have been written about *The Catcher in the Rye*. The article 'A Retrospective Look at The Catcher in the Rye' presents a broad perspective on the book, on its impacts, on what has been written earlier and how to view the book in their present (1977). Because of this broad perspective it cites several other articles, thus I can extract the relevant ones that connect with my subject.

The article 'Familial influence and social expectations in Jay McInerney's *Story of My Life and Bright Lights, Big City*' by A. Magnusson examines how familial estrangement and social expectations influences the life of the main characters in the books mentioned in the title of the article. It constructs that: 'To be able to resurrect their lives the protagonist needs to relinquish the illusion of

control and this implies a confrontation with superficial ideals as well as it involves the end of repression, as the main characters can no longer escape their unforgettable past.' This conclusion in the abstract of the article delves deeper into the subject than I have done so far, thus it will be necessary to read. *The Story of My Life* will be essential to read then as well.

'The (re)marketing of disability in pop: Ian Curtis and Joy Division' is an article written by M. Waltz and M. James. In the article they examine the disability of the main characters (also abilities, but I am more interested in the disabilities) as a marketing device in pop culture. The article delves further into the way these disabilities are presented to the public. It will be good to read this article to understand what the public interests in characters as Ian Curtis and how this character is presented.

As the title informs: 'Control, Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten, This is England' is an article about these three films and the writer, M. Sinker, compares how each of them depict youth subcultures. The other two films will be interesting to watch as well.

The article 'Following in the steps: Gus Van Sant's *Gerry* and *Elephant* in the American independent field of cultural production', by G. King, considers both films mentioned in the title as manifestations of contemporary American independent cinema. It will be useful to read, because he explains how and why these films reach their niche audiences. King argues that the cinematography style of the two films make the films differ from mainstream cinema. Besides, it also explores the very long take, which I used in my second project. *Gerry* will be interesting to watch then as well.

Workplan:

Sep - Oct:

I finished writing the story in novel form. Start with further research for project. Practise photography skills.

Nov - Dec:

The first story serves as a background story. Now I wrote a first draft of a new scenario and I am waiting for critique. I hope to finish the final scenario in December. Finish research project. Start with production product.

Jan - Feb:

Production. Start photograph series. Research the end production of the photograph series.

Mar - Apr:

Start en finish shooting film. Finish photograph series.

Start editing film. Finish research end production photograph series.

May - Jun:

Edit and finish film. Choose and produce photographs. Write dissertation.

Jul:

Solve any problems or unfulfilled tasks from above.

Budget:

Production photographs: 1000,- (School budget).

Travel expenses cast & crew: 200,- (Self funding).

Renting extra equipment: 250,- (Self funding).

Canon 5d + 24-70 + extra equipment: 3200,- (Self
funding).

Research costs (books, films): 50,- (Self funding).

Total: 4700,-

Bibliography:

Literature:

- McInerney, J. *Bright Lights, Big City*, 1984.
- Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye*, 1951.

Films:

- *Control* (Anton Corbijn, 2007).
- *Elephant* (Gus van Sant, 2003).