



Title: Forming my Cinematic Language: A Journey

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Abstract

Before I decided to become a lens-based creator, I studied and became a commercial graphic designer. I resigned my job in Shanghai and came to The Netherlands to further my study of filmmaking. In the past two years, I have been making different type of films based on my personal interest in videography and comprehension of storytelling. In this thesis, I will unpack each of my projects by discussing the content, workflow, motivation, relationship between projects and relation to a larger context. This is a journey of forming my cinematic language.

Introduction

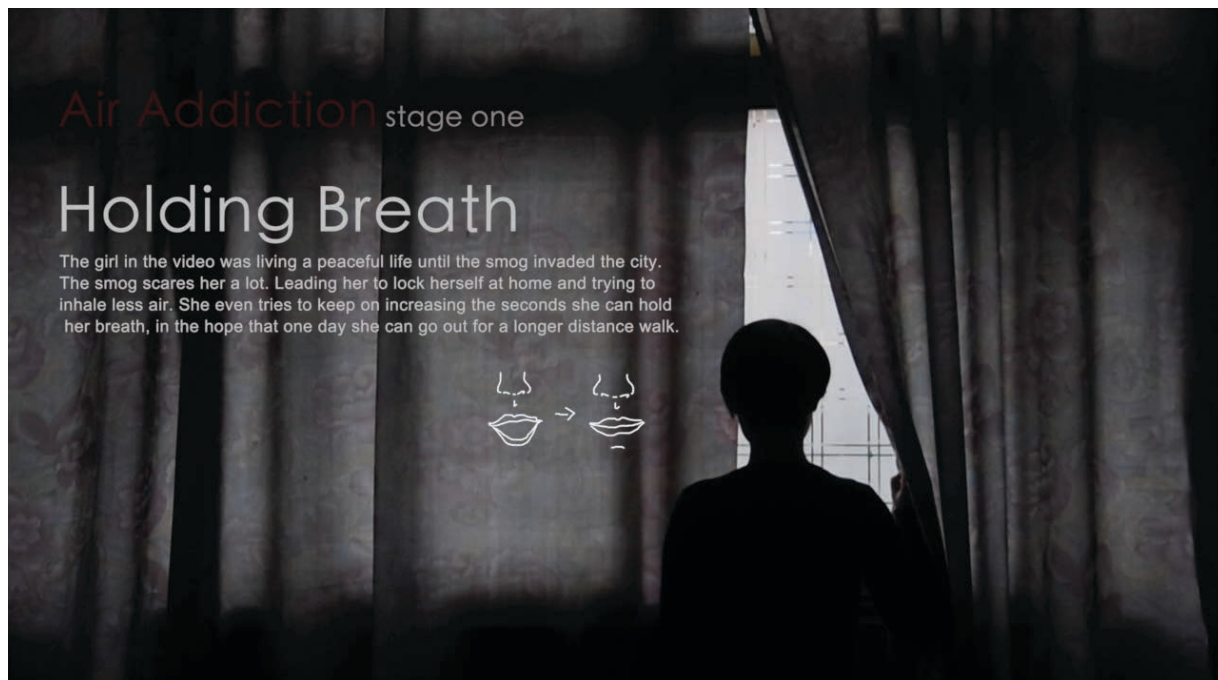
In the first year of Piet Zwart Institute, I have been making short films by learning cinematic techniques, editing methods, and adopting different narrative approaches. I tried to be critical in the film to speak for justice; I tried to maximize the aesthetics of image in the film; I tried to learn the narrative methods from the Structural Film Movement and I tried to listen to my inner voice and share my personal experience. I had a productive year of understanding the value of different skills and knowledge in film. In the second year, my plan has been to strengthen these skills and search for my own identity in filmmaking.

In this thesis, I will address one question: which steps did I take over the past two years to locate my personal identity and form the cinematic language in films? In the first part of this thesis, I analyze two critical works related to social events and motivations behind them. In the second part, I discuss at the period when camera skills and image design fascinated me and the reason why I thought script and narration are less important than skills and formal sense in filmmaking. In the third part, I unpack my graduation project *Far From Home*, I tried to share my anxious and worries while living at somewhere far away from home, this project showed the improvement of my comprehensive ability in filmmaking.

1. Part one: Authenticity and Creativity

In this part, I discuss two of my early film projects, *Air Addiction* and *Intersection*. When I started to make films, I had millions of questions about: what, how and why. To get answers to these questions I had to make priorities. Therefore I started to collect information and inspiration from my personal life and analyzed great film works in order to learn. For example, back in 2014, it was impossible to ignore the air pollution disaster in my country, people were all focusing on haze and calling for solutions to change the situation, thus I decided to create a film about this social issue and explore the meaning about it. *Air Addiction* is a story based on the reality and it speaks for my initial purpose of filmmaking. After that, I decided to pay more attention to the narrative approach, cinematic style, and aesthetics of film. *Intersection* was an experimental film that illustrates my imagination and ambition of making a Hollywood style film.

1.1 *Air Addiction*



Still from *Air Addiction*

Air Addiction is a video-based project that shows the transformation of my life during the air pollution disaster from 2016 to 2017 in China. This project comprises three short films *Holding Breath*, *Protection* and *Illusion*. Each of them shows my attitude towards haze at different period when air pollution is particularly serious. Through this project, I wanted to send my voice to the public that haze will erode our life and no one can avoid the disaster if there is no sufficient way to govern the environment immediately.

The first video, *Holding Breath*, shows my panic and nervousness after I realized the danger of inhaling haze for the first time. I had a strong desire to survive, I locked myself at home and practiced holding my breath. The longer I could hold my breath meant there was a bigger chance of going outside to buy food. The second film, *Protection*, talks about how my life has changed while using different kinds of protective masks. I gradually become numb and speechless, because

I did not see a hopeful future in this environment. I was confused about whether the mask or the haze was the shackle in my life. The last video, *Illusion*, describes an imaginary future. When breathing easily becomes a luxury, it sort of becomes like taking drugs. With haze blanketing the whole country, the clean air may create hallucinations, people may get addicted to it. Eventually, we will fall asleep beside a pile of empty air containers. Somehow the green environment will only exist in our dreams.

These three films were shot in heavy hazy days in Hubei and Hunan provinces in China during October and November in 2016.

Before I started this project in 2014, major cities across China were mostly polluted. Luckily my hometown, a small city located deep in mountains in Hubei province, still remained clean. However, within a few months, everything has changed dramatically, haze swallowed my city with no mercy. The increasing severe lung infection made local hospital became the busiest place. Patients were mostly children and elders since they were more susceptible than adults to haze. I saw my own family members suffering from coughing and non-stop fever. It was then that I realized that there was no place to hide and I cannot simply be an outsider.



Still from *Air Addiction*

Many years ago I watched the film *Still Life* made by Jia-Zhangke, In this film, two stories were combined with the geographical transformation in Fengjie China, where a real construction of Three Gorges Dam Project was built for generating electrical power to meet the needs of the future. Engineers decided to flood the surround territories, therefore a million people had to be displaced from central China, including people from Fengjie. My hometown was not far from the dam and out of the flood area, thus many immigrants decided to move there. In my memory, people with different accents were talking about their fearsome experience, this left an impact on me, I was always worried that my home would be flooded. Unfortunately, Ten years later this nightmare became real, my hometown and almost all cities across China were flooded, not by water but by haze.



Still from *Still Life*

In *Still Life*, Jia made the film in a documentary style, the watchers witness the process of the city being destroyed. In the film, two stories were interweaved. On one hand, there is a nurse called Shen Hong. She returns to the city Fengjie and starts looking for her husband who left her two years ago. On the other hand, there is a miner from northern China who attempts to find his wife and daughter who left him sixteen years ago. It was hard to believe that scenes of the demolition site, relocation team, violence and conflicts in the film were really happening in life, they were documented aside with the stories and successfully embodied in the film. Jia defined this approach as interactive with China's reality and I found it was extraordinarily convincing. (Zheng A, 2013 Interview) In *Air Addiction*, I tried to take advantage of this narrative approach, the real polluted environment, people's life situation and the film script were designed to tell a vivid story. Plots can attract people to watch, and the reality of polluted environment can make people think.

I wrote down my experience of living in different cities, like Shanghai, Tianjin, Wuhan, and Laifeng, meanwhile, I had interviews with people from those cities. For instance, the actor from the first stage *Holding Breath*, Jie Ming, she lived in Beijing, which was one of the most polluted cities in China. Her description about the thick layer of brown haze rolling into the city and turning skyscrapers into big shadows shocked me. I collected all material from the interview combined with my own experience and wrote the script of *Air Addiction*. The storyline is based on the length of people staying in haze, thus plots were divided into three stages, meeting haze for the first time, living with haze for a year and living with haze for more than 5 years.



Still from *Air Addiction*

For example, when people described their first reaction of knowing the polluted air is poison, most of them felt being choked and automatically held their breath, therefore, at the first stage, I filmed an actor who attempts to hold her breath to her limit, in addition, I recorded animals struggled to breathe after being slaughtered by a butcher, fear and hopeless were the main tone in this period. Moreover, at the second and third stages, I planned to document the real living environment in my hometown, during heavy polluted days, I went to the observation deck of the city to have an overview and I captured people doing excises on the dancing square which they were not allowed to, I also walked into the woods to witness a totally different view of the nature. From multiple perspectives, I wanted to construct a desperation atmosphere by telling the truth that people have gradually accepted the pollution and clean air may never come back.

‘I feel, the most important ingredient is the ability to sensitively capture true reality as it exists in communal memory, and then afterwards to accurately express it within the means of the medium’ (Zheng A, 2013 Interview).

Through this project, I have learned that film as a way of expression, which offered me an approach to speak of truth, while wondering what could be the most important and interesting content in a film, I tried to locate the most argued topic at the moment. Film in my mind has the same function as a great speech, an amazing performance or an educational lesson, it connected me with the public more often than commercial designs, therefore films must be truthful and meaningful. I believed what director Jia said about capture true reality as it exists in communal memory, therefore I had a responsibility to focus on the society. Moreover, during this filmmaking process, I have explored the filmmaking process by myself, from script writing to footage editing, I found it is extremely fascinating to visualize a story in text, I have noticed my special talent in observing good images and capturing the beauty of the scene, thus it guided me to focus more on the aesthetics of moving image and creativity in plots for the next film.

1.2 *Intersection*



Still from *Intersection*

Intersection is a short film made for an exhibition that united universities in the Netherlands at the EYE FILM MUSEUM, Amsterdam in February 2017. The theme of the exhibition was utopia/dystopia.

In *Intersection*, the man comes from the future, he has the power to let people enjoy sex without any bodily contact by only eating the magical fruit he has created. He meets a girl from the present who is fascinated by his appearance. The man introduced the new approach of sex to the girl and she accepts it. Afterward, we move to the future and she becomes the person to pass the new method on. The transformation on the female is the most important part of the plot, she moves from attraction, through rejection and finally acceptance of the new situation. The male protagonist is throughout very cold, he does not change, save at the end when he is happy to see the transformation in the woman.



Still from *Intersection*

Intersection is structured by a duality – a man and a woman; the past and the future; the traditional and revolutionary; the safe and the risky. There is a bridge between the present and the future that is crossed by some stylistic devices and scenes, such as the magic fruit, location, colors and the way the individuals behave and the way in which they are shot. I was inspired by *Fifteen Million Merits*, which I noticed this state of movement from one state to another also occurs in its plots: In a world where most of society has to cycle on exercise bikes to support their lives by earning a currency called “Merits”. Bing meets Abi and trying to convince her to participate in the talent show, so she can escape the slave-like world. Bing exchanges his entire stock around fifteen million merits for a ticket of the talent show, so Abi can sign in for the audition. Bing tries to help the girl to live a better life in the future and he scarifies himself. In *Intersection*, the man gives the fruit to the girl that shows his motivation of protecting her from sexual violence. The male plays as a hero or a redeemer in both films, the story is mainly about a process in which they try to help the female to change the status and break down the potentially danger in their present lives.

Both films can be seen as the science fictional film, for instance, *Fifteen Million Merits* is full of digitized and modernized scenes, actors are also designed as futuristic style. These features somehow affected *Intersection*. I also found a black young man who has an outstanding appearance and the potential to play as the man comes from the future. Meanwhile, a tunnel decorated with colorful lights was used as the symbolic location where the girl has finished her transformation from the present to the technological future world.



Still from *Fifteen Million Merits*



Still from *Intersection*

First of all, I started working on the idea of a magical item, which brings sexual pleasure to human beings. This item needs to have a resemblance to the human form and it can be easily carried. In other words, I wanted to customize a new sexual interactive approach for humans.



Pepper No. 30 by Edward Weston



Nude by Edward Weston

I came across photographer Edward Weston and attracted by his “still-lives” series from 1920, for example, his *Pepper No. 30*, depicts a green pepper in a black-and-white tone under a master lighting. (Sternberger P, 2003) The texture and shape of this beautiful pepper remind me nothing but a strong, healthy and sexy male bodybuilder. In 1936, he made another masterpiece called *Nude*, it shows a nude woman, who was his assistant, sitting on a blanket with her arms wrapped around her legs. Her gesture combined with the excellent light makes a beautiful human portrait. When I put these two photographs together I sensed the possibility of inventing the anthropomorphic food as the magic item in the film.

I decided to do the experimental shooting with some nice looking food with a concept of mimicking the human body structures. For instance, *Sexy Food No.1* shows two beautiful red peppers are wrapped by a mesh bag, the pepper on the top looks like a woman’s tongue, it kisses her man underneath. Likewise in *Sexy Food No.2*, two green peppers are having a strong body conversation. A male on the top holds a female on the ground to have some intimate interactions, from the power between them, I can clearly see the female is struggling and resisting the unwanted behavior. It is extremely interesting to connect these fruits with human body language, what they have in common inspired me to see the potential of further developing the idea of sexy food as a magical item in the film.



Sexy Pepper No.1



Sexy Pepper No.2

Due to the plots of *Intersection*, the magical item had to be introduced from the future to the present, this process should not cross the line of pornography and still be seen as a futuristic story. To do so, I got an inspiration from Stephanie Sarley, a prolific multimedia artist based in America. She is best known for her “fruit art videos” in which she strokes and prods juicy fruits in her film. She says: “I work to challenge the concept of the muse and the perception of women’s sexuality (interview, art zealous).” In one of her works, a half piece of orange saturated with milk lying on the table, Stephanie portrays it like a female vagina. she places her fingers in the middle area and lets the milk splash, it looks like the orange is enjoying the sexual interactive process, it made me look differently to fruit. Interestingly, I did not feel uncomfortable or disgusted because the nature of the fruit successfully drew a line between pornography and Human-like food sexuality.



Still from *fruit art videos* by Stephanie Sarley

However, I prefer not showing human physically interacting with fruits as a way to introduce the advanced sexual behavior from the future, this sex process can be visualized as the image that appears in people’s mind. While the girl is enjoying the magic power, fruit dances and merges in her mind, with the speed getting quicker, fruits changed to colorful and dazzling shapes. The moment she reaches the climax, all images disappear and a horn sound arouses to remind her that it is the end of the journey. I made this process in two parts; One part is about the girl performing the pleasure of sexual interaction. Another part is the imagination in her mind. With the sexy fruits photography I made before, I designed multiple effects through After Effects (Adobe software) that matches the girl’s sexual experience.

This film asked for many difficult camera skills, for instance, I wanted to shoot in a long take, actors doing non-stop performance and the camera follows all the way. The camera combined with a normal tripod are not possible to capture the image without jitter, especially in the last scene, actors were asked to run towards each other in a long tunnel, I wanted the camera to move together with the actor, the visual effect is to create a strong sense of participation for the audience. To do so, I purchased a stabilizer to let the camera remain still while even running. With this new device, I have explored many new possibilities of shooting, many different perspectives that could totally change the narration in the film has been used during this project.



Still from *Intersection*



Still from *Intersection*

The main purpose of making this film continued from *Air Addiction*, I still believed that film should serve the society, it must carry its responsibility to communicate with the public. At the

early stage of this project, news of sexual abuse in a kindergarten in Beijing and the sexual assault in the Netherlands had a huge impact on me. Therefore I wanted to construct a harmonious society where no violence is caused by sexual desire. Meanwhile, I paid more attention to shooting technology, Image composition, and cinematic tone, Intersection could be seen as an experiment of making Hollywood style film, my ambition in exploring image aesthetics has rapidly developed, the upcoming films I made in Italy proved my interest and talent in images, ever since then, image design had become an important part of my individual identity in filmmaking.

2. Part two: Technical Carnival

In this part, I talk about the period when I was fascinated by camera skills, image design, and editing approaches. Since *Intersection*, I have noticed that I have good eyes to capture beautiful moments in life, therefore I decided to take advantage of this skill and develop it as my identity in film. I went to Italy with my camera to make films without script and arrangement, I tried to simplify the working process and pay more attention to shooting and personal experience. Moreover, through my previous projects, I have noticed the shortage of narrative ability in my works, to enhance this, I have planned to start from simple and minimal narrative stories and I got interested in Structural Film Movement, the main concept of Structural films made me wonder whether the form and structure are more dominating than the well-designed script in a film, thus I created few works to look for answers.

2.1 *Slow in Florence*



Still from *Slow in Florence*

Slow in Florence is a short film documented my trip to Florence in Italy in the winter of 2017. On a rainy and snowing morning, the temperature dropped to minus 2 degrees, a long queue of visitors stood outside of the Florence Cathedral, people were all waiting to climb to the top of the church and appreciate the beauty of the city. Florence is a live museum, among majestic buildings, medieval palaces and impressive monuments, it was hard to decide where to watch first. However, the heavy fog blanketed the whole town and it reduced the visibility, red architectures gradually disappear in the white fog and eventually merged with mountains further away. The view reminded me of a Chinese poem *Ode to a Lady's Pipa Play* by Bai Juyi. The poem describes a beautiful woman: Only after our repeated calls did she appear; her face stills half hidden behind a pipa lute. Just like in the poem the rain Florence showed me her beauty in the extremely mysterious and fascinating way, it totally differed from the stereotype impression.



Still from *Slow in Florence*

As we all know, Florence is considered as the birthplace of the Renaissance, Revealing Rome in its art galleries and libraries, (THE CITY OF FLORENCE, ITALY. 1877) It is a place where people can easily capture the moment of beauty, especially for filmmakers, it seems like a random corner can be constructed as astonishing scenery in a film. There are many great films that framed in Florence, for example, the romantic film *Light in the Piazza* made by Guy Green in 1962, Florence left a sweet impression where a love story began, Clara, who is a mentally ill American lady, met an Italian man n Fabrizio on a sunny afternoon at a square in Florence. They fell in love at first sight and finally got married in Italy.



Still from *Light in the Piazza*

Out of blue, Florence in *Intersection* is shown as a city full of sadness and coldness. Raindrops dropped from the ceiling, strong wind blown them on people who were trying to hide underneath the shelter, and it made them frustrated. The road was iced in the evening and became extremely slippery, local people walked slowly and carefully with their heads down, the sound of their footsteps was particularly clear in the stillness of the morning. Some people that have watched this film said that it reminded them of Italy during World War Two as if everything was dying and everyone was full of fear. However, I did not construct such a negative emotion on purpose, I felt the city was surprisingly outstanding and eye-catching in the foggy and dusky day.



Still from *Slow in Florence*

Major things I did during this trip were to observe the city with my camera and to write down my feelings. For the first time I had realized that I could borrow the material from the city and combine it with my memory to narrate in the film. The image was rendered to a cinematic style, which has a high contrast effect on objects and a gloomy atmosphere. The sequence of the film was arranged by the travel schedule. Even though it looks abstract, but the image itself is already good enough, it contains a lot of information.



Still from *Slow in Florence*

The background music of *Slow in Florence* is Gregorian Chant, which is the central tradition of Western plainchant, a form of a monophonic, unaccompanied sacred song of the Roman Catholic Church. The reason why I chose this music in my film was because I felt that Chant made the images of Florence more vivid, the simplicity of the rhyme served as a foil for the silence of this religious city. Like Pope Pius X once said about this music: “Its proper aim is to add greater efficacy to the text”. (Stevens G, 1944) What the Pope means is that the Chant can add a stronger feeling to words. In my opinion that is also what the Chant did for my images. Along with the music, I emphasized the sound from the surroundings, like raindrops, human footsteps and spitfire. Meanwhile, I designed some dramatic transition sound on the connecting frame between two scenes. These highlighted sounds revealed the energy and emotion I had in Florence, through them I wanted to guide people into a nervous atmosphere and an uncertain situation which perfectly pictured my memory of Florence.

My advantage in discovering beauty through the lens helped me to locate my personal identity in films. In addition, I sensed the importance of sound in a combination of moving images. *Slow in Florence* was the most satisfying work I have made. I had substantial experience of learning to particularly combine shooting, sound production, effect design, and sequences into a strong narration. The well-designed details in the film were made for personal reasons, they contained my comprehension for this trip. You can see this back in the film as a sudden transition or an enhanced sound were designed to enrich the atmosphere. However, the lack of good narrative approach pushed me to go further. From previous projects and feedbacks, I have noticed that the priority of forming the cinematic language is to formulate a clear narrative strategy. To do so, I started to focus on Structural Film movement.

2.2 Structural Film Experiment

Back in the 1960s in America, there was a new trend from avant-garde filmmaking, identified by film historian P. Adams Sitney in his book *Visionary Film* as the Structural film. (P. Adams Sitney, 2002) Sitney outlines four distinct characteristics of Structural film: Fixed camera frame, flicker effect, loop printing, and re-photography. However not all of these feathers occurs in one structural film, nor indeed do any of them. The most common characteristic is a preoccupation with form, structure, and material over content, this made them differ from mainstream cinema. (P. Adams Sitney, 2002) Structural film movement attempted to challenge the popular cinema by creating the illusion of traditional narrative films and guiding viewers to pay more attention to surface and structure instead of content.



Still from *Wavelength* by Michael Snow 1967

For example, Michael Snow's *Wavelength* from 1967, a 45 minutes long film shows a gradually zoom in a photography depicts waves hanging on the wall, it is hard to finish watching the film without getting board. Well, Andy Warhol have made this temporal duration even longer, in his film *Sleep*, six hours long film just shows a man sleeping in a space. For these films, they are considered to be the most significant films of the Structural movement, somehow they "challenged the viewer's ability to endure emptiness or sameness" (P. Adams Sitney, 2002), which was seen as the revolutionary step in contrast to traditional narrative film.

I have noticed that what promoted in the structural movement is advisable for my cinematic language, I think some structural film artist's filmmaking approach and theory can make up the defect of my narration ability. Particularly like Hollis Frampton and John Smith, in their works, minimal narrative content and minimal camera work can build up strong effect; they can capture people's heart like doing magic. I was strongly interested in their works, so I made a short film called *4 Rooms* to experiment with the possibility of add this skill in my filmic inventory.



Still from *4 Rooms*

4 Rooms is an experimental short film shot from the window of my room. There is a big building in front of my house and it blocks all my view. I can watch nothing else but these four rooms. Each of these rooms have big windows, which generously shows me what happens inside. I observed inhabitants from those rooms and with time I got familiar with their living habits. In this film, the scene slowly zooms in on each room; meanwhile, the soundtrack of my descriptions of what was happening inside the room is playing in succession before the related image appears.



Still from *Nostalgia*

4 Rooms was inspired by *Nostalgia* made by Hollis Frampton in 1971, *Nostalgia* shows black-and-white photographs taken by Frampton slowly burning on a hot plate, while the soundtrack offers comments on those images, each comment is heard slower than the related image shows on the screen. Technically, I used a similar approach in *4 Rooms*, I tried to bring viewers into my story and arouse their curiosity. Moreover, I wanted to figure out what was Frampton's motivation from a filmmaker's perspective.

In *Nostalgia*, the commentary caused the sense of anticipation by referring to the future and it also recalls the past about the time and conditions behind each photograph. Viewers are pulled between anticipation and memory, the confusion in different time sense has aroused great interest for viewers. Through *4 Rooms*, I have learned that the nature of the film is actually dealing with the relationship between creator and viewers, it all depends on what the creator wants to share and what kind of interaction they pursue. Furthermore, good and enough information in the film can be consisted by a brilliant story or the creativity structure, Structural films are not simply protesting the content of the film and promoting the structure of the film, I believed that Structural film artists were looking for the most suitable approach to express their ideas. Film is a tool, as long as an excellent conversation can be organized between the creator and audiences, it can be considered as a good film. At that moment, I have suddenly felt relieved, because I can make films for myself, despite all the concerns for the audience, social impact or responsibility for the public, I could just listen to my own voice and share with people.

3. Be myself

In this part, I talk about three films: *Walk slowly*; *After Living in Holland for One Year*; and *Far from Home*. They were made during the period when my attitude towards filmmaking changed from passive to active, I turned myself into the protagonist, I started to care about my feeling, my honest opinion and tried to speak for myself. I went through my first project *Air Addiction* and based on the same footage, I made a new version to point out the air pollution from a more personal perspective. After that, I started to record my daily life as video-blogs (vlog), due to my strong emotion of missing home I have shown in vlogs, I made another short film *After living in Holland for one year* to discuss my life situation in the Netherlands and my attitude towards the culture difference. In the end, I share the graduation project *Far from Home*, on one side, I tried to be updated about life in my hometown by conversations with my family. On another side, I was looking for the sense of belongings in Rotterdam.

3.1 From a personal perspective



Still from *Walk Slowly*

Walk Slowly is a short film that shows the mountain view in a heavy hazy day in China. With low visibility, everything looks extremely mysterious and beautiful. My family and I were walking in the mountain. However, the truth behind this peaceful scene was the terribly polluted air and a worried normal family. I asked my mother to walk slowly to avoid too much polluted oxygen to be inhaled. Somehow it reminded me of her concerned words of walking carefully when I needed to go to school alone. A sweet reminder changed into a strict order because the reason behind it transformed dramatically. This was an experimental film of using the metaphoric narrative approach from a personal angle to point out a bigger phenomenon. The script was developed from conversations from my mother and me in two different periods. I read the script out loud in the native language and used the sound as the voice-over. The image of this

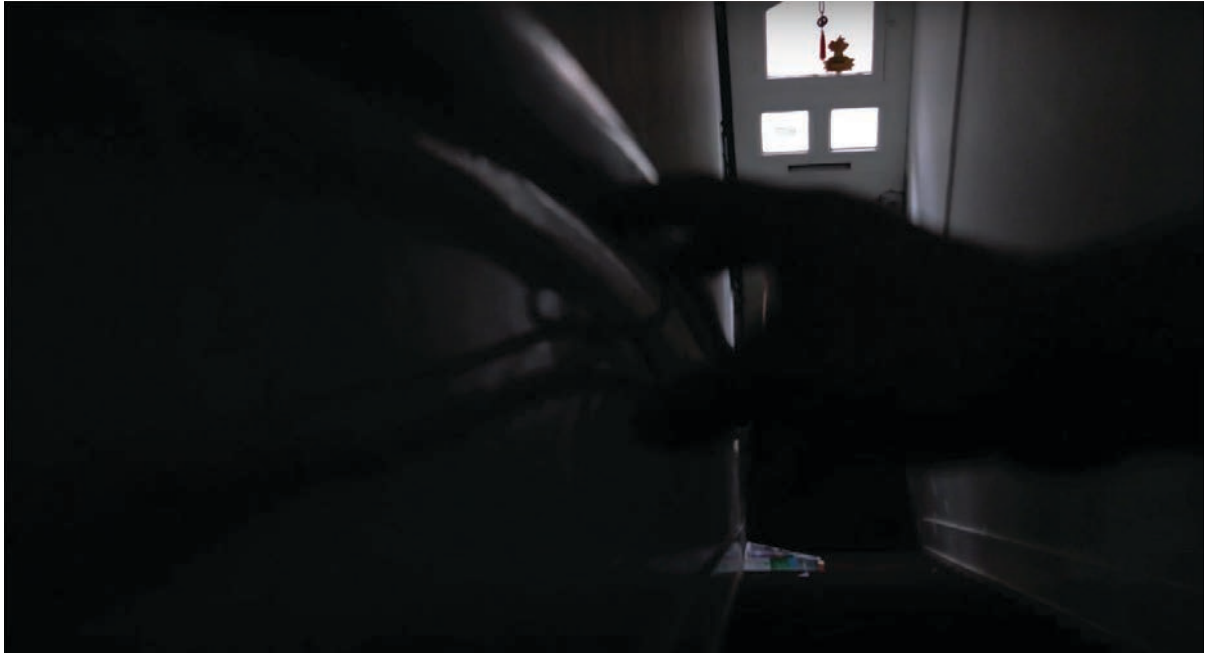
film came from the previous project, *Air Addiction*, I picked up a few scenes and edited them in slow motion.



Still from *News from Home* by Chantal Akerman, 1977

I noticed that the power of the true story is more persuasive than some well-designed plots in some conditions. For example, like *Air Addiction*, I put a lot of efforts to construct an atmosphere of fear and worries due to air pollution and tired to highlight that haze is dangerous. However, the same concept is more effectively discussed in *Walk Slowly* by sharing a simple story from my real life during haze days. Somehow it reminded me the style of *News from Home* made by Chantal Akerman in 1977, in her film, images of New York City in the late 1970s accompanied by a voice-over of Akerman herself reading letters from her mother. While watching views of New York City, we hear words of Akerman's mother, she is always worried, concerned and tired, in letters, she mentions her health issue, difficult in financial situation and how much she supports Akerman to be a filmmaker in the USA. This film has a very simple concept but very effective, it speaks for complexity in simplicity.

I got involved in the life of Akerman's mother through her written words, I was sharing her anxious and worries. I also tried to imagine Akerman's complex emotion from her perspective. It offered me the free space to combine my own life and it reminded me the consideration of my position in another society.



Still from *After Living in Holland for One Year*

After that, I continued the exploration of making films based on my personal life experience, I made another short film, *After Living in Holland for One Year*, which you can get an impression of my first year living in the Netherlands. As the protagonist in the film, I set the camera on the first person perspective. I sat on the stairs and looked at the view from the small windows on the door while holding a long cable in my hand, which was connected to the locker of the door. I pulled the cable carefully, felt nervous but also excited to open the door. After a few tries, the door opened. I walked to the door and hid behind it, observed the view on the street. Later on, I closed the door and went back to where I was sitting, held the cable in my hand again and made one more pull in the end. The image is accompanied by my voice-over, reading a simple self-introduction in Dutch, the fluence of speed and pronunciation of reading was getting better after a few times practiced the sentences. This film shows my anxious and curiosity while studying and living in the Netherlands for a year. I still felt strange and struggled about my position in this society; I was trying to get more involved in this culture while I found it was difficult to do so. Through these two short films, I have tried to use my mother language to describe the situation; I have transferred my role as a cameraman to a storyteller and I have gained a huge interest in the self-oriented narration. However, these two films were not good enough to represent my cinematic language. At that moment, My plan was to combine my talent of capturing beauty with the story which speaks for myself, thus in the graduation project, I will try to make a work that can be particularly identified as my personal feature in filmmaking.

3.2 *Far from Home*



Still from *Far From Home*

Far from Home is my graduation project which is still working in process and I edited a short version which has been showed during the united exhibition at EYE Film Museum on March 2019. In the short version, I documented the view in Rotterdam, including the harbor, bridges, city center and train station, etc. I have carefully framed these views and the city looked extremely beautiful on screen. They preciously showed my impression of Rotterdam, which was modern, fantastic, beautiful but no sense of belonging. Along with images, I recorded daily conversations between my family and me on the phone, we talked about the living conditions from both side, they were curious about my life in Rotterdam and I asked them about changes in my hometown.

During the exhibition at EYE Film Museum, some people recognized that the content, the cinematic style and the narrative approach of *Far from Home* are similar to *News from Home* made by Chantal Akerman in 1977. It is undeniable that I was affected by Akerman and I admired her works. What she built up in *News from Home* was a friendly space where everyone can find their own belongingness. Viewers may think it as a film about New York at 1970s, a film about her mother or a film about herself. However, I think she made a film about us, she let us to decided what is important to see in the film and let us connect with our individual lives. For the final version of *Far from Home*, my motivation is to construct the story that starts from the personal experience and reaches the life of everyone else. I believed that during this process, my cinematic language will be formed.

Conclusion:

Filmmaking is long-term learning and exploring process, during the last two years, there were many reasons that pushed me to be productive and constantly create films, for instance, the social responsibility, cinematic techniques exploration and content and form innovation.

At the beginning of the study year in PZI, I considered that film is a tool, which serves the public. It must relate to people's life and phenomenon in our society, the implication of film is to share social responsibility. That was why I started to focus on the haze pollution in my hometown and the sexual violence in a kindergarten in Beijing. After that I paid more attention to cinematic techniques and narrative approach, due to the advantage of having talented eyes to capture glorious scenes, I made few experimental films to develop the strongest feature in my cinematic language. Meanwhile, depended on the disadvantage of narration, I tried to look for the most suitable narrative method by looking into Structure Film. Until then, filmmaking was considered as a mission to fulfill the desire of others or a formula that can be split to learn, it was difficult to identify my cinematic feature through these films because I was not clear about what the real motivation was.

After that I noticed that film is a platform, which I can also use it to communicate with myself and listen to my own voice, then I made two short films which the content was based on my personal life, and through experiments I considered that the more honest I narrate in the story the more effective my film can be. Filmmaking is actually the process of knowing a person itself more, despite the concept of constructing the brilliant story or gorgeous pictures, the filmmaker should respect their inner voice and speak for the true feeling, then the film will be equipped with power, communicating ability and effective energy automatically.

For my graduation project, I will present a film that speaks for myself, my feeling of missing home. I believed that at this moment, I have moved into another level in filmmaking, it guides me to not only form my cinematic language but also understand what the value of filmmaking is.

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3. *Slow in Florence*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fl3-VgHdF4c>
4. *4 Rooms* : <https://youtu.be/-b4VZ5-mx6I>
5. *Walk Slowly* : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJWsis5wfsU&t=35s>
6. *After living in Holland for a year* : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAwE96SmT94&t=66s>
7. *Far from Home* : <https://youtu.be/Y1ptdVfPIBQ>

Others:

8. *Still Life*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Q0M8EvUkTU>
9. *Fifteen Million Merits* : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ebCXAh2UV8>
10. *Fruit art videos*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFD0xRtfEN0>
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12. *Sleep*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaiEM2lUoZg>
13. *Nostalgia*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voMDL1TgTh4&list=PL313CFE2D67C39FEB>
14. *News from Home*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xna5T9QkQ04>

Notes:

1. Jia Zhangke, one of the foremost contemporary film directors from China, his works are known as preserving the diver and the complex figure of private and communal memories before they blur or are summarized by official narratives. The important feature in his films is that he cares about the voice that barely heard and the reality was covered.

2. *Still Life* (Chinese: 三峡好人; Sānxiá hǎorén; literally: 'Good people of the Three Gorges') is a 2006 Chinese film directed by Jia Zhangke. Shot in the old village of Fengjie, a small town on the Yangtze River which is slowly being destroyed by the building of the Three Gorges Dam. *Still Life* tells the story of two people in search of their spouses. *Still Life* is a co-production between the Shanghai Film Studio and Xstream Pictures.

The film premiered at the 2006 Venice Film Festival and was a winner of the Golden Lion Award for Best Film. The film premiered at a handful of other film festivals, and received a limited commercial release in the United States on January 18, 2008 in New York City.

3. The Three Gorges Dam is a hydroelectric gravity dam that spans the Yangtze River by the town of Sandouping, in Yiling District, Yichang, Hubei province, China. The Three Gorges Dam has been the world's largest power station in terms of installed capacity (22,500 MW) since 2012. In 2014, the dam generated 98.8 terawatt-hours (TWh) and had the world record, but was surpassed by the Itaipú Dam which set the new world record in 2016, producing 103.1 TWh

4. *Fifteen Million Merits* is the second and penultimate episode of the first series of British science fiction anthology series *Black Mirror*. It was written by series creator and showrunner Charlie Brooker and his wife Konnie Huq (credited as Kanak Huq) and directed by Euros Lyn, and first aired on Channel 4 on 11 December 2011.

