

# Introduction

1969. After moving onto the reservation in Oregon, a curious young girl struggles to understand her mystical destiny when tormented by the local boys and ostracized by the community.

Forgotten memories. Forgotten traditions. Forgotten stories. These are the core themes of *The Watchman's Canoe*.

I want this movie to *feel* like film; to feel like an old movie you found in your grandmother's attic. The celluloid has been poorly maintained through years of heat, cold, moisture, and dust.

The Navajo intentionally weave mistakes into their blankets to remind us man is not perfect. Our characters have flaws uniquely human. I want to embody human flaws in our visual image just like the Navajo.

I believe the medium of 16mm film is the stepping-stone to imperfection in the film's cinematography. Kodak has spent a century refining emulsion to perfectly reproduce an image, but I want do the opposite: to *imperfectly* reproduce the image. On the whole, the results will still be clear, but the slight mistakes intentionally caused by man, chemicals, and machine will remind us we are looking at something physical. The audience will feel like they're witnessing something that was almost lost.

We don't approach shot lists the way we used to. Classical Hollywood Cinema feels like an old, forgotten tradition. *Watchman's Canoe* shouldn't have modern coverage of unnecessary shots and cuts, but covered with brevity, simplicity, and efficiency.

Tony Zhou's brilliant essay on "Spielberg Oner's" shows how one to three minute single shots economically cover a lot of dialogue, blocking, and plot. Spielberg's approach is exactly Classical Hollywood. This old tradition, mastered by the legends of Hollywood, will be our guide to shooting our film.

Art is built upon itself. I am inspired by Kirby Ferguson's documentary, *Everything is a Remix*, and his explanation of art: copy, transform, and combine. I wholeheartedly believe old, forgotten lore are embedded into the stories we tell today. Films reference other movies, re-create other shots to tell the same idea. *Star Wars*, for example, uses Akira Kurosawa, Flash Gordon, and Greek mythology.

*Whale Rider*, *Stand by Me*, and *Slow West* are films that we will use most for inspiration, transformation, and combination. As inspiration, we will reference the cinematography, coverage, and story structure of these films. Stories built from stories crafted from stories. This is *The Watchman's Canoe*.

I'm excited to share my visual plan for the film. This volume will focus on the big picture, the overall decisions the director, production designer, and myself intend to make from prep to picture lock. Forgotten stories, traditions, and memories will be brought back to life. Our goal is to remember nothing has ever been forgotten.

# Forgotten Memories

Taking a photo or video is easier than ever before. 2016 is a digital world; we shoot digitally, edit digitally, color grade digitally, and release digitally. Using film in this system is counter-intuitive to how celluloid works. Film requires chemistry, physical handling, and more film to get a final image. Today, some filmmakers shoot on film with the intention of editing, coloring, and releasing on pixels, rather than chemicals. I believe film reaches full potential when manipulated physically from start to finish. Therefore, when combined with digital processing, we will unlock something beautiful for our mise-en-scene.

Scanning film makes the celluloid look digital, eliminating scratches, dust, holes, etc. Computers can easily repair defects of bad negatives, but the magic with film and digital are the results before restoration: tangible, organic, and more real than before.

The photo to the right feels real, its texture and age palpable while simultaneously transporting you between past and present.



The photo to the left is much cleaner, but the organic quality is still there. The edges of the negative purposefully left in the digital image give you the feeling of holding the positive in your hand.

These images *feel* real; they *feel* like an old memory when compared to their precise and perfect digital counterparts.

We had to shoot our concept trailer digitally, but I needed examples of what our footage would look like on film. I used a Yashica FX-3 to take photos of characters, locations, and anything else to give us a feel for the movie.



I developed the negatives in my kitchen sink, scanned them via DSLR RAW photos, and processed them on my computer. The following images show how organic impurities from the crude process came through

to the end result and worked in the story's favor.

The Watchman's Canoe Look Book



A loose gate gave this photo imperfect focus. The top left is out of focus while the subjects are sharp.



Under exposed, light leaks, and discoloration. Notice the fraying “aperture” on the left. That “aperture” is cardboard I used to hold the negative during the scanning process.



White dust spots from “mishandling” the negative.



Leftover water/chemical residue and minor light leakage made a good combo. Also, the loose-gate method snapped the negative off-kilter.



Improper loading gave this image some intense light leakage. Cardboard aperture is also present on the left edge.



Noticable grain, cardboard aperture, and loose gate all working together to produce a wonderfully impure image. My favorite example.

Common impurities in the above photos are dust, light leaks, and uneven focus on the focal plane. These flaws remind us, just like Navajo blankets, that man is not perfect.

The following are film imperfections I will use to a varying degree:

- **Dust** – The white and black spots look great. In an effort to organically get the dust onto the negatives, I will instruct my AC to load magazines in a way to allow the chance for dust particles on the negative, all while operating within safety guidelines for the camera. Furthermore, we will rarely check the gate.
- **Scratches** – Minor emulsion scratching is encouraged, potentially caused by dust and objects within the gate. Deep scratches aren't the goal here. Statistically and financially, they are just not worth obtaining organically. For this, I'd take digital editing in all its glory.
- **Light Leaks** – Light leaks are going to be difficult to achieve on a modern 16mm camera. One idea is to use the viewfinder as a "leakfinder". The SLR can be modified to allow an eyepiece to be replaced with a custom cover to let light leak into the gate. To clarify, I want the light leak to be random in shape, but we choose when to "turn it on". This will be major focus during testing.
- **Grain Structure** – Super 16mm will be used because of its *very* apparent grain when watching a 2k scan.
- **Jumpy Image** – Super 16 should allow some jump within the gate. By applying some loose tension on the gate, only one pull-down claw, and no registration we may be able to facilitate enough bounce in the image that is comfortable for the audience.
- **Tilt Shift** – A loose gate on 16mm won't create the inconsistent focus on the film plane because of the small negative and rigidity of movement. Instead, we can use tilt shift mounting and create the inconsistent focus when and where we need.
- **Anamorphic Lenses** – The film will be 2.4:1. Rather than cropping the image, we will fully utilize the negative and get as many optical artifacts from the anamorphic technology. Oval bokeh, mumps, flares, etc. For the concept trailer, we used aspherical uncoated Zeiss Super Speeds and I loved how they flared uncontrollably. If we can secure the same type of glass, but anamorphic, we'll be in great shape. The older, the better. One concern is speed, but if we can get most lenses to at least T2.8, we can manage with lighting.
- **Scanning** – While I am happy with the results of my at-home process, I can't develop and scan motion picture stock in my apartment. My cardboard aperture effect will be lost in reality, but found in post.

Even though the techniques above can be achieved in post digitally, the mystery of what they will become on film is what I love. I have a modicum amount of control physically, but the unknown in reaching for these imperfections is exciting.

We are attempting to create flaws that are physical in nature; therefore we must shoot in a physical form.

# Forgotten Traditions

Classical Hollywood laid down the foundations of cinematic storytelling, yet modern films forgot some of the best methods. The coverage of old Hollywood, minimal cutting and one-shot scenes, feel like a lost tradition in today's limitless footage and heavy editing.

Tony Zhou's series, *Every Frame a Painting*, demonstrates Steven Spielberg as a director who's keeping the style of classical Hollywood alive. He lists six steps of one-shots that are perfect for *Watchman's Canoe*. We'll use this checklist, if you will, for our coverage, everyday blocking, and editing.

## Move the Characters

Characters need to actively move and engage with their environment. What a character *does* while talking communicates more than dialogue. We have to avoid talking heads, characters standing in one place, and ignoring reactions.



This frame from *Saving Private Ryan* shows layers of dialogue. The woman collapses on the ground, the men empathetically come to her level; no amount of dialogue can convey these layers of emotion more effectively. Furthermore, this is all one shot with no need for coverage because the

characters move and engage.

## Edit with the Camera

The camera should follow the direction of the scene. This usually revolves around the characters, but their face and body aren't the focus. We move through the scene by focusing on the details or beats like reactions, actions, props, and anything that progresses the plot of the scene. Essentially, we edit within our shots, but there is no cutting.

This angle from *Indiana Jones* is just one of many beats and moments in the entire one-shot. The characters react to the wall, we then focus on the prop, and then return to their reactions again. This could be edited with three shots, but it's more efficient with one fluid camera move.



### Simple Compositions

Focusing on beats and following characters naturally leads to multiple compositions within one shot. We won't need steadicam, just clever panning, tilting, and



dolly movement will be more than enough. However, simplicity is key to guide the audience. There's no need to create complex compositions and camera moves when a simpler composition is more effective.

A lot of compositions are in the above shot from *Close Encounters*, yet it's simple. The character moves into a wide, medium, and close up. Furthermore, leading lines and balance are used to control where we look during the scene.

### Effects in Wides

We will do the majority of our visual effects and special effects in the wide shots or widest versions of one-shots. It allows the actors to actually react to what's happening which helps the audience believe the effect. An honest reaction from the actor is key, so we won't green screen effects that can be done practically.

This frame from *Jurassic Park* is believable because of the character's reaction.

Our film will use mostly practical effects. Puppets for our animals, for example, will work in our favor because they give the actor and camera plenty to play off of more than a tennis ball and tracking marks.



### Inserts and Cutaways

Not every scene should be a one-shot and not every one-shot works perfectly. Therefore, inserts of key props, actions, or reactions will help with editing. These options help the pacing of scenes, allows for portions of different takes to be combined, and helps mask mistakes within a scene (such as continuity).

### **Keep it Short**

Most importantly, we have to keep our scenes short. To do this, pacing becomes our priority. Audiences want bite-sized moments in movies, not mouthfuls of one shot nor morsels of edits. Good pacing will keep the audience engaged in the scene. Furthermore, we want to keep our audience engaged in the *story*, not the cinematography. Too long of a shot will draw attention to itself.

There will be scenes that need modern coverage, scenes that can be done classically, and scenes that will be a combination. At the core is what happens within the scene, the reactions for the characters and audience. Like in writing, we must choose the simplest option.

We must think like the directors of classic Hollywood.

Here are some technical notes to keep in mind as we enter testing, location scouting, and shot listing:

- 2.4:1 is thin, so balance can be used to guide the view for a one-shot.
- Anamorphic lenses have deep close focus distances, so we can't expect the characters to get extremely close to the lens.
- Wide-angle lenses will be preferred, hopefully the Super 35 equivalent of 28mm and 35mm lenses after the crop factor.
- There will be a lot of camera movement in the scenes, so we'll need a light camera that I can operate handheld or on a Dana-Dolly.
- When using a tripod, I want to use a fluid head. The ability for floating operating and spontaneity will help keep the audience engaged with energy.



## Forgotten Stories

Our story comes from a long line of similar themes, styles, and storytelling. There's no need to reinvent visual approaches that work perfectly for us. We must build upon what has been discovered, not just copy. Three films in particular will be a major focus for our plan.

*Whale Rider*, directed by Niki Caro, shares a lot of themes about tribe life and beliefs with *Watchman's Canoe*. Pai, from *Whale Rider*, and Jett are both girls out of place in their tribe's traditions. Both are destined to lead the tribe, both face adversity, and both simply want to be loved.



The similarities between these two characters are uncanny, yet they are both uniquely original as well. Since Jett is our main character, we will focus on her reacting to her struggle, very much in the same way *Whale Rider* did for Pai. We want to see reactions, not just actions.

Lighting in *Whale Rider* is natural and realistic. They only used lights to build up on the natural lighting. Additionally, they weren't afraid to use hard light when they did use equipment. We will do the same, building upon what our locations naturally offer.

*Whale Rider* used static establishing shots to inform us of environment and character. Keeping our coverage plan in mind, we will combine the use of establishing shots into our one-shots. To keep energy, we will mostly be handheld, but dolly shots aren't out of the question.

This film used heavy silhouettes and chiaroscuro for their most dramatic moments, a style perfect for our script. *Watchman's Canoe* will do the same, scene dependent of course.

*Whale Rider* also used shots of whales between scenes to convey their connection with Pai. The director placed the whale scenes before or after sequences of emotion for Pai. Jett has a strong connection with nature and animals; having shots like the whale scenes can help the edit convey this connection during *Watchman's Canoe's* emotionally demanding moments.

Finally, *Whale Rider* used two slow motion techniques for emotional emphasis. First, they over-cranked the camera to slow down a reaction or moment in time. Second, audio was removed from shots to essentially silence the action giving the odd effect of slow motion. We will do the same.

## The Watchman's Canoe Look Book

*Slow West*, directed by John Maclean, shares little story-wise with our film, but still serves as inspiration for our cinematography. The dated lenses, Panavision PVintage, used by the production help give an old feel to the film. They're unique looking flares, color rendition, and sharpness are classic.



The saturation is strong in the film, which is what our story needs. Even colors otherwise mute in real life have vibrancy to them.

During testing, we will find the balance between exposure and pushing/pulling the stock to squeeze out more saturation before we add any digitally.

Nighttime exteriors of buildings look like a renaissance painting. The use of heavy blacks and single source light coming from the house helps make the environment feel dark. The literal classical lighting is perfect for *Watchman's Canoe*.

The shot to the right uses two sources, one from the house and an edge from the opposite side to retain shape. It looks and feels natural.



Night interiors use single source lighting, such as this frame to the left. The single source light conveys realism to the location that we will use for our film.

Additionally, night scenes with any light resembling a man-made source are intensely orange while natural sources are slightly blue. The main idea is to make the light at night feel motivated and the source identifiable,



such as man-made or natural.

*Stand by Me*, like *Whale Rider*, shares a lot of similarities with our film as a coming of age story. Additionally, *Stand by Me* takes place in Oregon ten years before our story. Visually, this film gives a clear idea of what to expect with the naturalistic lighting, cinematic movement, and compositions of the Oregon forest.

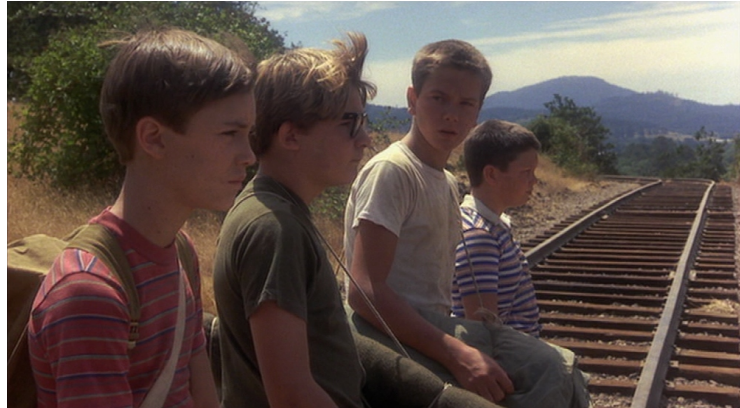


Soft light is frequently used in this film, mostly because the film takes place in exterior shade. We intend to have most of our scenes within shade, like *Stand by Me*, however not all scenes will work that way.

*Stand by Me* has an equal amount of scenes in broad daylight, but they keep the key light soft by using the sun as an edge.

This angle has the sun as an edge light. For *Watchman's Canoe*, we will need to plan our shots around the position of the sun. Wide shots will be done at the beginning and ending of days while close ups will be done in the middle.

Underexposed faces are acceptable in this film when using the sun as an edge because the dark figures stand out from the bright backgrounds.



The camera moves a lot in *Stand by Me*. Some shots are tracking back with them as they walk and talk, others interact. The energy injected with the smooth camera movement keeps the audience engaged.

For *Watchman's Canoe*, I want to keep the energy of children in mind. The dolly movement in *Stand by Me* is a great guide for how we can cover our one-shot sequences, but I want to replace the smooth dolly work with handheld operating. The extra energy will keep up with the children in our story.

## Final Thoughts

The plan we've laid out in this book will guide us through testing, production, and post. Inevitably, we will deviate from this first volume as better choices are discovered. However, moving forward with these current decisions gives the story a stronger foundation.

The team and I have barely started climbing this mountain. Traditions, stories, and memories are here to guide us through our journey. By looking back and using where we came from artistically, the film moves forward into new story.

A new look. A new tale. A new member to the family of stories.

## The Watchman's Canoe Look Book

The following films are reference for this story:

- *Whale Rider* – Dir: Niki Caro, DP: Leon Narbey, PD: Grant Major
- *Stand By Me* – Dir: Rob Reiner, DP: Thomas Del Ruth, PD: J. Dennis Washington
- *Lord of the Flies* – Dir: Peter Brook, DP: Tom Hollyman, PD: N/A
- *Beasts of the Southern Wild* – Dir: Benh Zeitlin, DP: Ben Richardson, PD: Alex DiGerlando
- *Slow West* – Dir: John Maclean, DP: Robbie Ryan, PD: Kim Sinclair

The following are more visual references:

- Breathing Forest phenomenon:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njTmKCPEXwY>
- #FindTheGirlInTheNegatives:  
<http://petapixel.com/2015/07/30/photographer-finds-beautiful-medium-format-beach-photos-in-thrift-store/>
- Every Frame a Painting; Spielberg Oner's  
<https://vimeo.com/channels/everyframeapainting/94628727>
- Every Frame a Painting; Lynn Ramsey
- Every Frame a Painting; Robin Williams

The following are thematic references:

- Beauty in imperfection:  
[https://www.theasc.com/ac\\_magazine/September2015/PresidentsDesk/page1.php](https://www.theasc.com/ac_magazine/September2015/PresidentsDesk/page1.php)