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### Alone Together

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Alone Together

by

Fernanda Roth Faya

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Integrated Media Arts Hunter College  
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Thesis Sponsor

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Second Reader

“Sauver quelque chose du temps où l'on ne sera plus jamais.”

— Annie Ernaux, *Les années*

To my mother.

**Abstract**

*Alone Together* is a 40-minute documentary about immigrants living at the B'nai B'rith House for low-income seniors in Queens, New York. Focusing on three subjects, the film portrays aging as a diverse, bittersweet, and distinct experience. Juana, an 83-year-old Dominican, is dealing with a degenerative eye disease. Noemi, 87, left her five children in Ecuador to move to New York. Irina, a 67-year-old Russian, is the sole caregiver of her 91-year-old mother, who has terminal cancer. With a combined life span of more than 250 years, Juana, Irina, and Noemi's accounts express how eclectic the experience of aging can be. Their poignant stories enlighten, provoke, and offer candid insights into challenges we will all face if we live into old age.

**Project Description**

*Alone Together* is a 40-minute documentary about immigrants living at the B'nai B'rith House for low-income seniors in Queens, New York. Focusing on three subjects, the film portrays aging as a diverse, bittersweet, and distinct experience. Juana, an 83-year-old Dominican, is dealing with a degenerative eye disease. Noemi, 87, left her five children in Ecuador to move to New York. Irina, a 67-year-old Russian, is the sole caregiver of her 91-year-old mother, who has terminal cancer. Defined by a very precise sense of place, with clearly established spatial boundaries, *Alone Together* shows what results from this voluntary enclosure and seizes this limitation of space as a chance to focus on the nature of the social and

human impacts of aging. The film combines interviews with the subjects living at the senior house with observational scenes of events in the building, juxtaposing private and communal spaces. Filmed inside the apartments, the interviews with Juana, Noemi, Irina, and Irina's mother reveal their personal stories and backgrounds. The observational scenes are shot outside of the apartments, where communal life unfolds in events centered on the holidays and rituals of different cultures and religious denominations.

The subjects' stories bleed into one another, reframing the viewer's impressions and challenging preconceived ideas about what aging as an immigrant looks like. The film shows how the subjects' personal experiences impact the way they carry on socially, revealing that inhabiting a senior home doesn't necessarily mean developing a sense of belonging. Is it comforting or isolating to participate in Passover, Thanksgiving, and other rituals sometimes far removed from the cultures and communities in which these subjects grew up?

## **Background**

In 2013, my 90-year-old grandmother fell and broke her hip. At the time, I was 26 years old and living with my mother in a three-bedroom apartment. After an invasive surgery, my grandmother was transferred to our apartment, where she received around-the-clock assistance during her recovery. Over the four months that my grandmother lived with us, I became her caregiver. Initially, my mother and I shared tasks, but eventually my mother ended up divulging how she felt about it, saying "It's too heavy for me, I simply cannot change my mother's diapers. I can't do it." That statement alerted me to the possibility that one day, I

might be the one taking care of my own elderly and debilitated mother. I immediately took charge of all the functions involved in caring for my grandmother. I fed her, changed her diapers once she was unable to move, bathed her, and assisted her with her bedtime routine. Caring for my grandmother was the first time I saw an adult who was completely dependent upon someone else.

My mother's confession revealed something that would eventually become of personal interest to me: How does aging affect intergenerational relationships? How does looking at aging impact our perception of life? I was struck by the realization of what was at stake in such a role reversal. My mother was not prepared to let go of being a daughter. She was not ready to face the fact that her own mother was somewhere in between a parent and a child. In *Alone Together*, Juana summarizes what I experienced in 2014 in a philosophical and extraordinarily simple way:

When parents reach an advanced age, they become children again. A child needs help to take their first steps; when people are old, you have to help them walk because they can't walk as well as they should. They eat and spill food on their clothes because they are like children.<sup>1</sup>

There's something calming and balanced about a cycle that starts and ends in a similar place, yet there's also something unsettling about it. I wonder how it must have felt to my mother to realize she might end up in a similar situation one day, with me caring for her. As we see ourselves reflected in the other person's body, we face our own mortality.

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from an interview with Juana, September, 2017.

From that time onward, I developed an interest in aging, and in how reflections on death, home, and family evolve as one approaches the end of one's life. I became intrigued by the perspectives of those who had to make life-altering decisions, separate from loved ones, assimilate into a different culture, and live their last years far from their homelands. How does the sense of home and belonging shift throughout a lifelong experience of living in a host country, instead of a homeland? How does the relationship to language and to community change? I was curious to know whether being at the end of life transforms the way one sees and narrates their own life. *Alone Together* investigates some of these themes.

My grandmother passed away one month after I moved from Brazil to New York. Influenced by sentiments of longing (*saudade*) and isolation, I made a short film called *One for the Road*. The film, a foreign yet intimate look at New York City and its inhabitants, unfolds into a visual letter as I collect images of my new surroundings and read first person voice-over letters to my grandmother. As I reflect on my grandma's migration, I find traces of my own identity. Although some themes from *One for the Road*—intergenerational relationships, death, migration, memory—persist in *Alone Together*. This film differs from the short in that the captured images do not connect overtly with my personal experiences. I was motivated by the feeling that the stories of the elders at B'nai B'rith would die with them and that making this film was an opportunity for me to capture these narratives so they could live on for future generations.

With the increase in life expectancy, the elderly are the fastest growing population in the US.<sup>2</sup> This creates conflict in a society that revolves around youth and immediate

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<sup>2</sup> According to the United States Census Bureau, 2018.

gratification. We live in denial of aging, to the point that elders become almost invisible. When those elders happen to be immigrants, that reality becomes even more complex. What happens to immigrants when they grow older in this country? Are we hearing their stories?

I wanted to avoid the stereotypes of aging that we usually see in films, where many portrayals of the elderly reflect negative cultural attitudes toward aging. In comedies, the elderly are often associated with grumpiness, ineptitude, or hostility. Rarely do the roles of the elderly convey the fullness of their life experiences—as parents, employees, or the myriad roles they have had in real life. *Alone Together* shows that people are complex and experience aging differently, depending upon their personalities and their life trajectories.

Spending time with the subjects, and being able to break with stereotypes and capture the authenticity of those life stories, became a method and a foundation for the development of my own filmmaking ethics. It was important that the people I approached to participate in the film knew that my interest in being with them was independent of the film. If I wanted elders to be seen and heard in the film, I had to express that in my actions towards them. My relationship with the subjects precedes the film and has extended far beyond production.

Another motivation for making *Alone Together* was the microcosmic aspect of the senior house. The B'nai B'rith House is a Jewish establishment, but it receives federal funding and is open to all qualified individuals as defined by HUD (the Department of Housing and Urban Development), irrespective of race, color, religion, sex, disability, or national origin. The rich environment I found at B'nai B'rith of Queens in Flushing reflects the borough's diverse population, which is 28% Hispanic and 24% Asian. Almost half (48%) of the residents are

foreign-born, and 56% speak a language other than English at home.<sup>3</sup> I saw an opportunity to create a portrait that would reflect a broader reality, incorporating the residents' various languages and ethnicities. B'nai B'rith Queens is not just a senior house, but a residence where immigrants from different parts of the world are growing old together.

### **Thesis Production Process**

I moved to Sunnyside, Queens, in 2016. I was looking for a tailor to hem a pair of pants when I met Rosa, a seamstress in my neighborhood. Something about her immediately captivated me. Perhaps it was her resemblance to a great-aunt of mine, or the fact that my grandmother had recently died and I missed being around an older person. In the subsequent weeks, I would go back to Rosa with clothes to fix that didn't need to be adjusted. We became friends. For some time we would talk, and then I would stick around and observe her at work, at her extremely slow pace, as though time was suspended whenever she was working. Back then, I had a feeling that Rosa would be a good subject for a portrait film. I sensed that there was something intriguing about her life story. I tried filming her many times, but Rosa was always reluctant and closed off. Later that year, she moved to B'nai B'rith in Flushing, and called me one day to say that there was finally something interesting worth filming. She wanted me to come over and film the residents' art show. I went with my camera, mostly to please Rosa.

The art show was my first contact with the diverse group of residents living at B'nai B'rith. The show had a large attendance, with Russian, Chinese and Hispanic residents

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<sup>3</sup> According to the U.S. Census Bureau reports, 2019

constantly ebbing and flowing. Over the hours I spent there, I met people who would eventually become subjects in my film. Unlike Rosa, they seemed interested in sharing their life stories, and conversation was easy with them. This is the main reason some of them are in the film and Rosa is not. After that day, I kept frequenting the building with my camera to shoot yoga and painting classes, bingo sessions, and the different spaces inside the building. I nurtured relationships with the staff and residents there, which rendered me and my camera inconspicuous after a while, and I was able to capture candid moments of the daily routine inside the building.

Even though I'm not in this film, it does completely rely on a personal approach and the personal relationships I established with the subjects. Before choosing my subjects, I spent a lot of time simply being in the space and sharing experiences with the people there, attempting to build a genuine bond with them. After a couple of months, I called everyone by their first names and knew their personal backgrounds. In an interview, filmmaker Alan Berliner says:

It often takes me several years to finish my films, so they better be about subjects I enjoy spending lots of time reading, researching, and learning about. Making a documentary film is often a long process where it is necessary to follow the subject matter over a period of time (Berliner 3).

Berliner is famous for working on one film for more than five or six years. The description of his approach profoundly resonated with me at the time. I had to surrender to and embrace the process, as I knew it would be a long journey. Working with elders was challenging in that their health and mood can be erratic, causing me to reschedule many of my shoots on very short notice. Sometimes I would show up with the equipment on the day we

had agreed to film, and the subject wouldn't be feeling very well or would have completely forgotten about it. I had to respect that and reschedule even if it was very frustrating for me, which extended the film's process. The production phase has spanned more than three years and is still ongoing.

Brazilian filmmaker Eduardo Coutinho was another important influence on *Alone Together*. Because of the single location, where residents share their personal stories, I was especially drawn to *Master, a Building in Copacabana*. In Coutinho's film, there's an interest in observing a diverse group of people with heterogeneous backgrounds living in one specific physical space, a large apartment block near Copacabana beach. This film became a reference for me in the early stages of production. I initially even thought about *Alone Together* as "*Master* with elders."

In a compilation of interviews organized by Milton Ohata, Coutinho says, "I try to make films in which I have questions to ask, and I will try to learn what the answers are as I make the film" (Ohata 25). Coutinho's practice has been aptly described as a cinema of conversation, where interviewees are allowed and encouraged to keep talking after the initial question has been answered. My upbringing was also a constant exercise in listening, as both of my parents are psychologists. All my family relationships were rooted in long and deep conversations, and I tried to translate this practice into my work on this film. I used attentive listening as a method and style, seeing it as the primary way to generate empathy and allow personal stories to come to life. My approach when interviewing the subjects would be much like Coutinho's conversational mode, an exercise in seeing and hearing what emerges from a filmed, unstaged conversation.

In *Master*, Coutinho had researchers conduct preliminary interviews with all residents who were willing to talk. From reports and conversations with the research team, he selected the interviewees. He would meet with the subjects only at the actual moment of filming, with the full crew. He was interested in the performative version of the subjects, and therefore maintaining the formality and even intimidation of the filmmaking apparatus was key. In the few interviews I conducted using this specific strategy, I didn't break through surface level conversation, and the resulting footage and subjects ended up not making it into the film. It also felt somewhat invasive to ask intimate questions of people I had only just met. I understood that I needed to employ a strategy that better fit my personality, one that could incorporate some of Coutinho's approach but tailor it to my personal style.

From the very beginning of this film's process, it was my intention to preserve the residents' native tongues as a way to allow them to more freely access their emotions and to incorporate the cultural diversity of B'nai B'rith Queens' environment into the film. I could conduct interviews in English and Spanish and use the conversational method, which is contingent upon hearing the interviewees and working spontaneously with what emerges from that, instead of trying to extract specific content during the interviews. But when it came to languages I did not speak, the approach had to be reformulated.

The biggest question I had was whether it was possible to preserve a conversational method with the mediation of an interpreter. I did two interviews with Russians where I would introduce general themes and questions, and the interpreter would then conduct the interview based on my guidance. In these instances, my connection with the subject was completely broken, or, more precisely, it didn't take root to begin with. Once I couldn't make eye contact,

the interviews became more formal and removed from the kind of relationship I was trying to create. The question of how to maintain the interviewees' native languages without risking the intimacy of the interviews was the biggest challenge I faced in the process of making this film.

I eventually realized that having an interpreter could work as long as I had a pre-established relationship with the interviewee. So I went to the building several times to shoot observational moments, and after a while I would put the camera aside and just talk to the residents, participate in the painting class, or simply hang around. The interviews grew out of a series of previous encounters and conversations I had with the people without the mediation of the camera.

The first interview with someone who ended up becoming a subject in the film, Noemi, developed into a very candid and philosophical conversation that lasted around two hours. Noemi's interview served as a guide for the ones that followed as I identified some of the potential themes I was interested in exploring. The same questions I started formulating in 2014, when I took care of my grandmother, and then in 2015 when she passed away, would reappear in the first interview with Noemi. How does it feel to be your age? Do you think about dying? What was your childhood like? In the particular case of *Alone Together* and its subjects, the fact that I was not only dealing with elders, but foreign-born elders, prompted me to expand the initial questions.

With all three characters, I conducted the interview first and asked to follow them around during a specific occasion after the interview was complete. The informal and intimate nature of the observational scenes required a trust that would be established during our conversations in the interviews. Once I allowed myself to become emotional and talk about my

personal experiences in front of the subjects, I was able to balance the power dynamic and establish a more casual and intimate relationship. From this shared vulnerability and exposure arose a sense of complicity and proximity. The real exchange that happened during the interviews gave me the freedom to ask for more opportunities to film, and gave the interviewees the confidence to allow it.

In Noemi's case, we shot an observational scene that followed her getting ready for Thanksgiving dinner in her apartment, walking the hallways, taking the elevator, interacting with other residents, and finally attending the party. With Irina, I shot multiple observational scenes of her taking care of her mother. With Juana, I was able to film the seemingly never-ending process of two delivery men trying to move a dresser into her bedroom. On each of these occasions, I was able to capture deeper glimpses into their personalities, spontaneously expressed in how they interacted with other people.

During interviews, subjects are generally able to curate what stories they share and how they want to share them; they are fully aware of the camera's presence. In observational scenes, there is less control, as the subjects eventually forget that there is someone recording. I wanted to combine these two strategies to portray the subjects' multidimensional personalities. It was very important to me to capture their contradictions and mixed feelings as well as those of the space itself, and this was achieved by filming in both controlled and uncontrolled situations.

The collective moments were incorporated to reveal how the subjects' personal experiences impact the way they engage socially. The same event can foment feelings of belonging, or of isolation. A shared birthday party can spark joy in some and trigger loneliness

in others. In *Alone Together*, the interviews sometimes create a set of expectations that the observational scenes contradict, showing that our actions do not always align with our thoughts. In the interview, for example, Juana talks about not feeling lonely in the building. She seems very comfortable with her age and her life. Further on in the film, we see Juana at the Thanksgiving party. While some people dance and mingle, she watches everyone from a certain distance, isolated from the group. Even if she does feel happy, she has trouble feeling like she is part of a community. As we see the juxtaposition of these two moments, it becomes clear that her experience is more complicated than initially meets the eye.

Of all the collective moments I shot in the building, including birthday parties, bingo sessions, classes, and holiday parties, the latter offered the most interesting context for the subjects. The events that ended up in the film are the Passover and Thanksgiving dinners, rituals that are tied to Jewish and American traditions respectively. Generally, celebrations connected to a specific culture or religion initially only have a meaning to people who belong to and follow those traditions, in contrast to bingo or birthday parties, which are inclusive and familiar to people of different backgrounds. Those events are opportunities for residents to be in a group, to celebrate something together; there's a greater promise of collectivism. Concurrently, it became clear as I shot those situations that the premise of belonging to a community, which is implied in celebrations of that sort, was not necessarily fulfilled; simultaneously, there was an isolation imposed by it once the greater majority of attendees were not Jewish nor had grown up celebrating Thanksgiving. What does it mean, for example, for Chinese elders to participate in these rituals?

I tried to have subjects that could reflect the ethnicities of the people in the house, which is basically comprised of Hispanics, Russians, and Chinese. The great majority of the Chinese residents spoke no English at all, however, making it impossible to even approach them without an interpreter. One of the most difficult decisions I had to make was to let go of having a Chinese subject in the film. As I had a deadline to present the film and had no budget to hire a Chinese interpreter, I had to accept this production limitation. Nonetheless, there is a strong presence of the Chinese residents in the film as a determinant group in the composition of the space's heterogeneous social fabric.

### **Artistic Approach**

As a cinematographer, I have spent years meticulously framing shots. I developed a personal aesthetic that transferred to my documentary work when I started directing and shooting my own films. Years of using the camera frame as a way to see the world allowed me to compose at the speed that documentary filmmaking demands. I tried to implement an intimate and non-judgmental approach in *Alone Together*, from the first moment I talked to the subjects through to production and postproduction. In the process of making this film, I found a non-invasive and respectful strategy and visual approach that seemed right for me.

This film combines a variety of situations that asked for different kinds of camera work. For some shoots, such as the interviews and the shots of hallways and elevators, I would have a lot of time to compose. At other times, when I was following characters around, I had to adopt a handheld camera which required some improvisation. In both situations, it was important to

convey closeness and achieve a naturalistic look. To achieve that, the film was almost entirely shot with fixed 35 and 50 mm normal lenses that have optical characteristics similar to the human eye, providing a visual experience that places the viewers in the space, making them feel like they are there. In opposition to long lenses, the normal lenses also create a proximity effect, but do so without affecting the depth of field and offer more stability for the handheld camera.

When using the 35 and 50 mm lens, the camera is forced to get physically closer to the subjects in order to capture medium shots and closeups, facilitating a cinema vérité approach where subjects can interact with the camera and the filmmaker. This was my intention from the beginning. As a result of the kind of relationship I developed with the subjects, they felt comfortable having me near, with the camera, and I felt at ease because I wasn't pushing or forcing to get shots that were tighter than medium/close.

In the film *Care*, by Deidre Fishel, I was struck by the intimacy she captured in the observational scenes. The film takes a close look at the world of home elder care and the powerful relationships that occur between care workers and elders. Fishel was able to show private moments of bathing and dressing with closeness but without being intrusive. Watching those scenes made me see their dramatic and visual potency and encouraged me to pursue such extremely intimate moments, like the scenes where Irina takes care of her mother.

In the process of making *Alone Together*, I did not want to pretend that the camera, the crew, and I (the filmmaker) were not there. Historically in observational or "fly on the wall" films, the subjects don't acknowledge the small crew of one or two, and some of the candidness feels so unguarded that it's as if those on screen weren't even aware they were

being filmed (Nichols 137). This kind of film allows the viewer to be a witness, a passive detached observer who doesn't necessarily feel implicated or responsible for the events and people they are seeing on screen. In *Alone Together*, all the choices were made to intentionally achieve the opposite effect, including the decision to incorporate reflexive moments into the film. In many scenes, the subjects look at the camera, or even talk to me behind the camera. In the final scene, Irina's mother stares straight at the lens for minutes, in one of the film's most poignant moments. With this constant breaking of the fourth wall, the viewer feels "seen" by the subjects, which changes the power dynamic and moves the viewer away from the comfort of obliviousness. The film's reflexiveness demands an active watching, and as a result the audience feels in touch with and sympathetic towards the subjects.

Eduardo Coutinho talks about the documentary film medium as not the capturing of the truth, but rather the capturing of "filmic truth," which means the truth of what happens within the shot, while the camera runs.

There are many ways to show that, from the presence of the camera, of the director, of the sound recordist, to the audible thing of the exchange of words, including the incidents that might happen like the dog barking, the phone ringing, a person that protests cause she doesn't want to be filmed anymore and she argues with you in front of the camera. This is extremely important because it reveals the contingency of the truth you are dealing with (Ohata 23).

It was important for me to incorporate the contingency that Coutinho talks about, represented by the moments where the subjects behave differently than what was expected of them, breaking the equilibrium that has been established during filming. As Irina's mother stares at the camera, she creates an identification that makes us think about our own mothers,

grandmothers, and elder relatives. She makes it impossible for the viewer not to become involved. In those moments, the viewer is shaken out of the illusion of being an observer of an unchanging reality and is forced to reflect on his/her place in the world.

In my films, I have been deeply influenced by Chantal Akerman's approach to duration and her realistic style. Films like *News From Home* (1977) and *No Home Movie* (2016) were especially important during the process of making my short *One for the Road*. In *Alone Together*, Akerman's influence remains. After making the film, I watched *From the East* (1993) and *Hotel Monterey* (1972) for the first time. I found many similarities between Akerman's camera and my cinematic approach. In *Hotel Monterey*, the camera moves through the hotel building, lingering in the elevators and halls once the residents clear out. In my film, those empty spaces also have an important connotation, as they convey a literal and metaphoric emptiness. The spaces in the building are generic and lifeless; they seem like the perfect neutral scenario for the myriad bodies of different sizes and shapes that will compose the group of people in the collective scenes. The empty space reminds us of those who were once there but could and will disappear. The generic aspect of the rooms, that look just like any other aseptic space we might know, serve as a counterpoint to the uniqueness and diversity of the stories shared by the subjects.

The spaces can be observed by viewers through the long takes that allow them to sink into the details of the environment and feel the atmosphere and rhythm. In one of the scenes of *Alone Together*, a janitor enters the space by the 12th floor elevator. He moves a little couch over to clean the moulding of the wall behind it. He sprays cleaning product on his mop, he cleans, he leaves the frame. The routines at the B'nai B'rith are what tie the stories and scenes

together; the building shelters an insular and microcosmic reality, just like in *Hotel Monterrey* and *Master*.

Scholar Ivone Margulies, referring to the experience of watching Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman*, said: ". . . The film inscribes itself inside your body, in your memory" (Avram 239). I believe this is a consequence of the viewer's experience of a time that is not manipulated by the editing process, but simply allowed to pass. Cinematic time coincides with the literal duration of time experienced by the viewer when watching the film. In *Jeanne Dielman*, the actions—making the bed, washing the dishes, eating dinner—play out in real time, taking the literal time required to be performed. In *Alone Together*, I attempted to allow the space's own temporality to emerge. The bodies of the viewers become as important as the bodies of the subjects as they share a physical experience of time with the subjects—both are implicated in and affected by the passage of time. I wanted to incorporate cinema's ability to explore the relationship of subject to world as a dynamic one that shapes both those who are filmed and the spectators who are watching.

One of the motivations in making this film was to visually show the elderly, once they are not being seen by society, or are segregated in senior houses. The use of long-duration shots allows the subjects to move at their own pace inside the frame; the passage of time in the shot respects the actual amount of time it takes for an older person to move through the world. In opposition to the interview scenes, where subjectivity is expressed through words/speech, the observational scenes are centered around the bodies as expressions of the subjects' experiences. The shots reveal the gestures, the rhythm, how they walk, how they enter the elevator, how they eat, in a succession of movements that become a statement of their

existence. The frontality of the camera in some scenes, filming at a neutral angle in relation to the frame's subject, pairing the eyeline of the subject with that of the camera/viewer, were other formal decisions made to strengthen the connection between viewer and subject.

All of the subjects in the film are facing some kind of limitation, either physical or emotional. The theme of restriction is a big part of the aging experience. The body starts failing, compromising daily activities and basic actions like walking, talking, or performing manual tasks. The film had to reflect these aspects and allow the aging bodies to fully exist, with their limitations, inside the frame. It was important to me that the style of framing reflect and embrace the subjects' physicality. Moreover, the centrality of the body often shows how the relation of the subject to others and to his/her environment is one of profound disjunction.

As this film explores the theme of mobility/immobility as a particular issue that emerges with aging, I incorporated moments where people block the shot, sometimes partially and sometimes completely. The visual blockage serves not only as a metaphor for the condition of being limited, but also concretely obstructs the viewer's access to the scene. It highlights the immobility of the viewer at the theatre, who can only see what's being shown in the frame from the fixed perspective of his/her seated position. In many of the shots, people move in front of the camera, they cross the frame, they take the space they need inside the frame. As a result, the image's punctum (Barthes) constantly changes, leading the viewer's gaze inside the frame. The obstruction limits vision, but also reframes the shot showing that limitation necessarily comes with a change of perspective.

One of the things I greatly reflected upon with this project was how to approach the structure. Early on, I intended to juxtapose the individual setups with the collective ones, using

the events at the building as a thread in the film, and respecting their chronology. The individual stories would be woven into this basic chronological structure. As I was editing, though, I realized that the events I wanted to incorporate in the film were not sufficient to give the film an effective chronological structure. I realized I was attempting to communicate the idea of a place not necessarily bound by time. Where time begins and ends is less important than the actual experience of time in each one of the scenes. It was important to convey the temporality of that space in opposition to organizing that temporality in a linear way. The final structure I created for the film is non-linear, where scenes are connected thematically. In one of the interviews, Juana questions how it must feel to depend upon someone else to simply go to the bathroom, or make small movements. In the next scene we see Irina's mother, who is in the exact predicament Juana has just described. Irina slowly moves her mother's body in bed. In another moment, Noemi talks about feeling lonely and fearing that she will die alone in her apartment. In a wide static shot, the following scene shows a large group of people moving towards the community room. These connections can be direct or subtle, creating varied meanings for different viewers.

### **Audience and Exhibition**

In finalizing and distributing this film, I will have to seek funding in order to professionally color correct the images and edit sound. I will submit the project to grants like the University Film and Video Association's Carole Fielding Grant and the Women in Film Finishing Fund. I plan to implement a hybrid distribution strategy for *Alone Together* that will

have the following path: screenings in film festivals, screenings at community centers, airing on television, and finally streaming on demand and via DVD. I will seek out partner organizations and sponsors such as Women Make Movies to maximize distribution. I will first submit the film to general international documentary film festivals like FidMarseille, IDFA, It's All True, Visions du Reel, and will then submit it to niche festivals that specifically curate around the themes of aging, immigration, and diversity, like the International Film Festival on Aging in Uruguay.

The primary audience for this film is the community of the B'nai B'rith Queens, in Flushing, those appearing in the film and their relatives. I will promote a screening at the house to display the fruit of years of visits, in hopes that the residents will appreciate seeing themselves on screen. This screening will not affect the distribution strategy and can happen independently. The final phase of distribution will focus on educational and community engagement. Screenings will be organized at senior centers in New York City, as well as at institutions and organizations, such as the New York Foundation for Senior Citizens, that serve the needs and interests of elders and are dedicated to issues around aging.

I believe that this is a film that has the capacity to resonate with people on a personal level. Even if viewers are not experiencing the same exact situations depicted in the film, the issues it addresses—growing older and its challenges, questions around aging parents and how to care for them, building community at a late stage in life—are universal and will be faced by all of us, directly or indirectly. I want to encourage people to be more compassionate and understanding of the aging process before they reach old age themselves. If people are sensitized to the themes raised in the film, they may reflect on their own relationships with the elders in their families, and on how society treats and deals with seniors. As the film resonates

with viewers, generating empathy through its candid and intimate approach, I believe it has a potential for social impact. I hope that the themes and feelings expressed by the seniors in *Alone Together* will also resonate with immigrants from other countries, and that the universal sentiments associated with aging can be shared with a wider audience.

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