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Inheritance

by

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Abstract

Inheritance is a feature documentary that investigates the concept of spiritual inheritance, that which is passed from parent to child. More precisely, it examines how the experiences and struggles of an individual may be transferred and reprocessed by their children. Life experience is studied not as personal, but rather a continuous process that transcends the parent and projects onto the children. The film is a hybrid composed of experimental sequences and false starts, which all bring attention to the nuances of a not-so-straightforward story. The film begins as an essay focusing on an investigation into my parents' divorce with the intention of finding information out about them that will help me convince them to finally separate. Early on in the film, it is revealed that I am pregnant and this investigation quickly turns inward towards my fears of re-living my parents' perceived failures and passing these on to my children. The film uses intimate conversation, a feminist oral history approach, long verité sequences, and family archival material to facilitate an exchange between mother and daughter and share how they grapple with a struggle for self-expression and freedom from patriarchal forces. Along the way, the film uses Jungian concepts of individuation to explore fears, dreams, and gender paradigms as they relate to both mothers and fathers. It examines the shadows these potentially cast on their children and the journeys they must undergo to confront them.

Project Description

Inheritance focuses on my parents' marriage, which began in 1974 and ended in divorce in 2002 after my mother discovered my father was having an affair and leading a double-life. They separated for a few years, but my father soon moved back into my mother's house with her

consent, while she was living in another town. The arrangement was supposed to be temporary, but he never left. When she retired about eight years after that, she returned to her house and faced a dilemma: either move back in with him or force him leave again against his will. Even though she no longer wanted to be with him, she chose the former, and effectively returned to a situation that resembled, to the objective observer, an unhappy marriage.

From my perspective, I felt like my dad was taking advantage of my mom. It was her house, she still paid all the monthly bills, except for the cable bill, which my mom would not even have if my dad were not living there. As my dad got older and his health declined, my mom, who was a nurse for nearly forty years, became increasingly involved in his medical care. Meanwhile, my dad provided little in return aside from sometimes watering the plants when she was gone and serving as a warm body to deter intruders. As they aged, it became increasingly clear that they would continue to live together for the rest of their lives. This upset me. I felt like my mom was sucked into a situation that she didn't have the courage or strength to break free from. The film starts before I know the reason for their divorce and I am motivated to learn more convinced that it will help me intervene in their current situation. The film starts as a study of their behavior and an interrogation into the divorce and current living conditions with the hope of provoking a revelation that would lead to a change in their circumstances.

The story also explores the psychological and emotional transformations that occur in motherhood by examining the Jungian concepts of shadow and the access motherhood can possibly grant to our deepest instincts. Shortly after starting the film, I discovered that I was pregnant with twins. The pregnancy came somewhat unexpectedly and the thought of becoming a mother made me realize how much pain I felt as a child because of my parents' fraught relationship and their personal suffering. I began to understand that my mother's weak sense of

self and troubled relationship with my father had stunted her ability to self-express, preventing us from feeling the love she had for us. As a result, my brother and I grew up with a distorted sense of emotional communication, which made it difficult for us to understand boundaries, a lesson we had to learn from our adult relationships. Some of these relationships mirrored our parents' relationship, as if we were reenacting my mother's struggle to overcome it, hoping for a different result. There was evidence that their unlived lives had cast a shadow on our psyches.

Having my own children provoked a new urgency to my quest as well as new questions. I felt like I had only scratched the surface in understanding how my parents' relationship had affected me, and I worried about how it might affect my own children if I did not understand more about what I had inherited psychologically. I sensed that my parents stayed together because of events that had damaged them emotionally and the rationalizations that they came up with to reconcile these events. It left them in a bizarre living arrangement that warranted investigating. My focus shifted from separating my parents to understanding their life stories, including the experiences that brought them to where they are today, and how the consequences that resulted from their ways of rationalizing their choices had played out in my own upbringing. What kind of modeling did I experience, and how much of it did I absorb or act out already?

In the final part of the film, the pregnancy ends and I become a mother, which triggers an emotional and psychological transformation that I had not anticipated. My role has shifted from being my parent's child to being someone else's mother. I felt the weight of motherhood, the pressure to avoid making mistakes coupled with the near certainty that I would make them. This led me to examine what I viewed as my parents' "mistakes" in a new light. I considered whether these mistakes were perhaps merely an attempt to grapple with difficult situations that were beyond their capacity to handle. Victims of their own upbringing, they too lived amongst the

shadows of their parents and their parents' parents. And here I was trying to "break the cycle" not for them or even for me, but for my own children. After years of interrogation, I discover my mom's identity as a caregiver that is also made obvious by her career choice (although she says she wanted to be an artist) and, due to her Catholic up-bringing, she is incapable of separating herself from that identity. I learn that she allows my father to live with her and assumes the role of his health care surrogate, not because she lacks the strength, but because she pities him. While she knows deep down that the situation is not fair, she does not allow herself to linger there. For her, justice takes a backseat to compassion.

This is hard for me to accept, but over the course of the film, I understand that while it is this way for her, it doesn't have to be that way for me. When I found myself in difficult situations, relationships that mirror my parents' dynamic my mom's advice gets me out of them. The revelation at the end of the film is that she has known this wisdom all along, but doesn't act on it, partly because she is a product of her time and has rationalized what women must put up with in a man's world, but also because her core value is charity. Becoming a mother stirs this knowledge (or as I see it, instinct) to the surface, and she is able to access it to protect her daughter, but not to affect her own life. In the film, I have a revelation that not sharing this value with her has caused me to look down on my mom for a long time. My definitions of strength were maybe too narrow to see her ability to look beyond her own needs for the sake of compassion.

I was drawn to this project after an exercise in self-inventory I did in Kelly Anderson's Documentary 2 class. The exercise came from Michael Rabiger's *Directing the Documentary*, in which he places a great deal of focus on finding one's creative identity:

Our lives have marked us irrevocably and these marks—whether we know it or not—largely determine what we pursue. We can struggle against this, and deny the marks we carry, but this is a waste of effort and merely evidences their power over us. People achieve only what matters to them. Looking back, we see patterns to our lives, and we see what has been driving us all along. And we see the patterns compelling those we know well even more clearly. (39)

Rabiger writes that he did not discover this himself until midway into his career when he was asked at an artist residency to re-watch all his films and conduct a self-assessment underlining the themes that connected them all to each other (*Directing Film Techniques* 26). He was astonished to discover that although he had made twenty films about vastly different subjects, there was a common thread that connected them that was incredibly personal. A son of immigrants, Rabiger's family was relocated to rural England during WWII. His experience made him acutely empathize with people living on both sides of a social barrier and any story that evoked this narrative had a visceral effect on him. It was, unbeknownst to him, the life vision that had driven him to study life and document it.

Although I had made short films before, I had noticed that my approach was highly intellectual or motivated too much by a desire to access someone else's story to achieve my own professional success. Beyond obvious ethical issues, this bothered me because I sensed deep down that I was detached from my subject matter and it felt like a block. Since I aspired to make feature-length work, I also worried that approaching my filmmaking from a more remote intellectual interest would not hold up if I wanted to do longer more nuanced projects that would require me to commit myself for extended, more intense periods. I was motivated to discover

what drove me as a person and how I could channel this for emotive filmmaking that would satisfy me creatively and more effectively touch my audience.

Using Rabiger's self-inventory, I found that the marks my life had left on me centered on my family life growing up. Over the course of producing this film, which took four years, I reflected on Rabiger's self-inventory practice and used it as a guide to analyze my observations and the revelations that were unfolding in the film. During the process I learned more about what the injustice I perceived in my mom being taken advantage of by my dad meant to me. I saw this as a projection of gender roles, which dominated the order of my family. My dad's social isolation and inability to remember or talk about his past bothered me. I felt like it was rooted in crippling, unaddressed anxiety. I did not understand his unacknowledged and unaddressed anxiety and the internal retreat that made him incapable of engaging with life in a normal way. It made me worried about my own ability to adapt to adulthood and the complexities of the second-half of life, and I feared the possibility of being overcome by them, too. Much of my life had been built around escaping my home, whose hostile environment for self-expression, either creative or emotional, I came to see as the source of unhappiness. Much later during the production of the film, I also added my fears of passing down these behaviors to my own children and began to feel a hyper sense of responsibility to model creative and emotional expression so that they would not grow up in an environment of restraint, distanced from their own desires, needs, and visions. I understood that these themes mattered greatly to me: the weight of patriarchy and repression on an individual's ability to express themselves; psychological adaptation to adult life; and the process of purging our pain for the sake of future generations.

Taking all of this in, I realized I had to take on a deeply personal subject in order to connect to the themes that matter to me the most. I suppose I could have sought out different subjects who fit the profile of the characters identified above, but I was drawn to investigate my own family for personally selfish reasons. I hoped the film would help me understand them and myself better and offer some resolution that would open emotional windows to stories I would pursue in the future. Giving birth and becoming a mother halfway through the production also made me completely consumed by these themes as they played out in my own family and in my mind. Practically speaking, considering the challenges to production that the pandemic presented, I realized later that I was lucky to have chosen my parents as subjects because I could continue and even intensify the project even during lockdown.

Because I chose to focus on my own family, obviously there were concerns about how to approach the representation of the subjects given the potentially disastrous personal consequences. Although the questions of the film were first formed in the private sphere, I eventually had to distinguish the characters in the film from the people in real life. The film is not a document of reality. It is an essay told about these themes from my perspective, supported by selected observational and archival footage and interviews. During the course of production, I asked my family deeply personal questions that divulged their most intimate experiences. To my surprise, the interviews became an opportunity for them to talk about their pain in a way they had never felt the agency to do before. Feelings are not discussed very openly in my family, but for some reason the camera and the mode of questioning facilitated therapeutic conversations that although “caught on camera” have no place in the film. They were personally transformative for me and my relationship to my family, and I am grateful the production of the film made these possible. However, I learned to view my family in the film as characters, and I needed to show

their depth according to story that I was crafting. In this sense, it was necessary to disassociate from the material during the editing process. Even though the interviews were done for the film, I viewed them as private conversations and extracted what was needed to tell the story being careful not to cause intentional pain or unnecessarily expose anyone in a way that would violate the trust they had put in me. This was easier to do than I had imagined, and I am not really sure why.

In terms of medium, I consider my film a hybrid. The structure of my film is unorthodox: The story has several false starts, each time presenting itself as a different kind of film: a portrait of my mother, an exposé of my parent's divorce, investigation into their relationship to find out why they cannot separate, until it finally reveals its dominant form, an experimental essay. In some of the earlier modes, I start to use experimental techniques that are further intensified towards the end. Even in the exposé and investigative segments I create experimental interludes to visualize my imagination of the events or the closeness I wish I could attain with my father but is not possible in reality. Without announcing these false starts, I am hinting to the viewer that these forms are deceiving. This is demonstrated in the reenactments that I stage using found footage of the airport as my mother tells the dramatic story of her catching my dad in his affair.

I have never made an essay film before, but I was drawn to it after learning more about them in classes taught by my primary advisor Reiko Tahara and by Shanti Thakur. As Louis Giannetti explains in *Godard and Others: Essays on Film Form*, “an essay is neither fiction nor fact, but a personal investigation involving both the passion and intellect of the author” (26). I was an unextractable character of this story so there needed to be a space for my voice. I was interested in the essay's potential for blurring definitions and serving as a medium for personal and artistic investigation.

The essay form also allowed me to play with time, which my film approaches non-linearly. The story is told from the present reflecting on events in the past that happen out of order and ends in the future. The essay film shares a transgressive quality with its literary cousin, establishing within itself its own conditions of existence (Rascaroli 24). I take inspiration from the rebellious nature of the essay film, which Nora Alter insists is “beyond formal, conceptual, and social constraint. Like 'heresy' in the Adornean literary essay, the essay film disrespects traditional boundaries, is transgressive both structurally and conceptually, it is self-reflective and self-reflexive" (171). I wanted to control and “break” the structure in my film in order to surprise the viewer. I was interested in introducing a series of false beginnings and ends to convey the message that things are not always as they first appear and expose the rationalization and compartmentalization that occurs within the characters in my film.

Research Analysis

General research for this film began in the years running up to its production. I was always drawn to films that explored private archives and home movies to examine relationship and family themes. In particular, I watched and studied films that used archival imagery to understand people who were no longer alive or to whom they no longer had access. These included Sarah Polley’s *Stories We Tell* (2012), Donal Foreman’s *The Image You Missed* (2018), and Lynne Sachs’s *A Film About a Father Who* (2020).

Initially, I had no intention of including the footage shot in 1991 in the film at all, although it eventually played a crucial role in the film. I had it digitized with a box of old VHS and high 8 tapes hoping I would find films that I had made as an adolescent. When I re-discovered the footage that my family had filmed when we were moving away from Florida, I

was fascinated by its rawness. It was supposed to be a sentimental document of our lives in that town; instead it revealed much more about the fraught relationships between my parents, me and my brother than I had anticipated. On the tape, there is footage shot by both my parents separately and by me. Each gaze is unique. While I am narrator and ultimately have control of the storytelling, I chose to use the juxtaposition of gazes in a similar way to Michelle Citron's *Daughter Rite* (1980). I think viewers who are familiar with Cintron's film will recognize the reference to the troubling emotions the father's gaze conjures in my film as well as how my gaze on my mother, both in archival and other footage, reveals the tension between mother and daughter.

There is also footage of me performing in front of the camera, both intentionally and also when I am not aware that I am being filmed, such as the slow-motion clip of me walking a dog and dancing, which I use during the experimental sequence where my mother and I discuss why I could leave an abusive relationship, while she could not. My interest in studying performance in these home movies was all influenced by Jonathan Caouette's *Tarnation* (2003). While digitizing old VHS tapes, I did find footage of me performing alone in front of the camera and horror movies I made as a kid, which I considered including in my film, but ultimately decided not to because I could not find a place for them. Still Caouette's practice of weaving together self-made archival material from his youth deeply influenced my project. He is a little older than me, but also grew up in a time when camcorders were increasingly becoming household items and tapes were cheap enough that parents did not mind letting adolescents play around with them and create content for themselves. Watching *Tarnation*, I felt connected to Caouette's habit of using the camera to record himself and work through the complicated situations occurring around him. This was an unself-conscious era of self-recording that is barely imaginable today, but I keenly

remember it from the early 1990s. The quality of the archival materials that I use in my film reflects this lack of self-awareness. Although it was meant to be a document, it is inherently private and provided documentary evidence for me of an intimate relationship dynamic that existed since my childhood. Caouette's use of archival material contributes to his success in telling a difficult family story while revealing nuances in the relationships that clearly demonstrate warmth and love (Macdonald 207). This was a characteristic that I wanted to emulate in my film as well.

There are several moments in the film where I physically handle and study the archival material and physical objects that I see as clues to my parents' identities and the story of their relationship, which I feel they never quite speak truthfully about. Early in the film, I inform the viewer that although the divorce had happened twenty years before, I had been absent during these events and we had never really spoken about them. The narration explains "there are no images of this day, but it sounded like a movie and I imagined it like this." I took inspiration from Donal Foreman's *The Image You Missed*, in which he uses his father's archive to attempt to piece together a man he had met, but never really knew. By juxtaposing letters that he wrote with photographs and films he shot at the same time, he discovers the inconsistencies in his father's story. This motivated me to look deeper into my own family archive to find contradictions between artifact and living memory.

Figuring out how to portray the different perspectives or rationalized realities of my two parents was a challenge for me in making this film. I searched for films that focused on unusual marriages for inspiration and studied two examples in particular: Amy Grappell's *Quadrangle* (2010) and Jill Daniels' *My Private Life II* (2015). Both films interestingly use split screens to demonstrate the co-existing realities of their parents. While I feel like this format works

successfully in their films, I believe it forces an almost mathematical comparison that I found too precise for my film. I aspired to show their separate lives in multi-dimensional representation. I wanted the house where my parents live to itself be a frame in which they played their individual roles, like actors in their separate lives. In my film, the objects contained in the house also serve at times as artifacts and other times as props on the two stages performed on by my mother and father. My father appears on his set on the couch in front of the tv and in front of the computer in the master bedroom (where he lives), in his car, and walking on the sidewalk outside, sometimes to the mailbox. My mother's set is in the same house but occupies different spaces, including the kitchen, her two bedrooms, the garage, and most importantly, the garden. A multi-layered contrasting sound design (tv noise, computer game audio, singing birds, cars driving by, etc.) helps to create a soundscape that divides the space also aurally. My treatment of objects as evidentiary artifacts was influenced by Cecelia Aldarondo's *Memories of a Penitent Heart* (2016) and Elan and Jonathan Bogarín's *Hollywood 306* (2018). Whereas these films use objects to understand and memorialize characters who are no longer living, my film studies these objects as artifacts of living characters, who are somewhat unreliable narrators of their own lives. The objects stand in contrast to their own accounts and provide an insight into their experiences and identities that they withhold from the filmmaker and the viewer alike. The fact that my mother discusses the plans for her own burial and the dilemma of what to do with her personal things after she dies adds to the significance of these objects as soon-to-be memorabilia, curated by the one passing them on.

Chantal Ackerman influenced this film more than any other filmmaker. I think any viewer who is familiar with her work will immediately recognize the focus on domesticity and the mundane as a direct reference to Akerman. The attention paid to eating breakfast, watching

tv, checking the mail and the soundtrack of clanking dishes, mouse clicks and television static all work to entrap us in the universe of the ordinary. My decision to focus extensively on my mother's caretaking—of the garden and other people—and cleaning, particularly the bathroom scene where she asks me if I want to volunteer to take care of her, emulate what Adina Glickstein refers to as the radical banality of affective labor in Akerman's feminist critique. This portrait of invisible labor illustrates the underlying class struggle that is playing out in the home, which I reject and am trying to liberate my own mother from (Glickstein). The visual portrayal of domestic work and the invisible hardships endured by my mother was also heavily influenced by the portraits of female experience captured in Julia Reichert and Jim Klein's 1971 film *Growing up Female*. The focus on asking my mother to tell her story in my film as well as the conversations between mother and daughter continue in the "oral history" approach of a genre of feminist political documentary from the 1970s and 80s, in which Reichert was a major figure (Aufderheide).

I have always admired Akerman's high intensity long-take tableaux and utilized this technique in multiple moments in my film – from the one-take long shot of my father walking towards the camera as he tells me about his health issues to the slow pan of my mother's crowded room as she is sleeping. The latter shot is a direct homage to Akerman's 1972 short film, *La Chambre*, which is a continuous 360 pan of a woman lying in bed. Like Akerman, I use these long shots to invite the viewer to deepen their appreciation for the image setting them up to engage in dialogue with it. As Noah Rosenberg comments on Akerman's film "the imagery gains depth as it requires our patience...it calls on us to do some digging to navigate our own silence and re-examine what we see." He describes her work as existing between "a self-portrait and a portrait of place." That is exactly what is intended in the long shot of my dad and the one of my

mother sleeping. These scenes serve a function to move the story along, but they linger for a very long time, and in that time, the viewer gets bored and begins looking around asking themselves, “what exactly am I looking at?” In the long shot of my dad, initially we see a very small man who is extremely distant from the camera. We see his smallness and his vulnerability in this shiny, bright modern suburb around him. The sounds of lawns being mowed drone in the distance as he struggles down the sidewalk at a painfully slow pace, signaling time over-taking him. Up until this moment, I have not been able to get him to talk voluntarily about his life. My questions about his marriage and his past do not seem to interest him, but as he slowly makes his way towards the camera, he grows in size and his words begin to flow. I have finally struck a subject that he cares about and has plenty to say: his fear of illness and death. Before this moment, the film paints his character in a negative light. The viewer is set up to dislike him and not trust him, but as he grows larger in the frame, his vulnerability becomes undeniable. I demand the patience of the viewer to give him a longer look and consider that his off-putting behavior must come from some internal space rife with debilitating anxiety.

While analyzing *La Chambre*, Rosenberg suggests that “the spaces we surround ourselves with speak greatly to a collective psychology, and reflect the state of things.” In the pan of my mother sleeping, there is a similar intention to create her portrait, but placing it in her bedroom signals that it is an intimate glimpse into her internal world. At the beginning of the film, we see her cheerful and forward looking, painting an empty room that she explains will be her new bedroom. But in this scene the cluttered mess she dwells in is revealed as if it is a secret being kept tucked away. If you look closely, the room is full of half-finished sewing, art, and writing projects. She reveals in interviews how she had always dreamed of being an artist, but never understood that it was a career that she could pursue. She lives vicariously through my

dad, who started a creative career in design, but ultimately cannot overcome the external world doubting his talents and gives it up. Both have abandoned pathways for expression: my dad replaced his with isolation and self-absorption, while my mom spends so much time cleaning and taking care of others she cannot prioritize her own projects.

There are numerous parallels in my film to Chantal Akerman's last and final film *No Home Movie* (2015). Both films center on conversations between a daughter and her aging mother. I was inspired by Akerman's nuanced portrayal of a mother-daughter relationship that is clearly loving, but also distanced by drastically different experiences and personality. Emma Myers explains that "her films created a syntax with which to explore the inner lives of women, largely through meticulous attention to the spaces they inhabited; it was a minimalist aesthetic with maximum emotional impact." In this way, I hope that my film will succeed in carrying on in the feminist tradition of Akerman's work. I looked to her to find a language for describing the unique experiences of women, especially the instinctual link between mothers and daughters. I was moved by her juxtaposition of wide shots of desolate deserts with conversational scenes with her aging mother in her apartment. While Akerman's metaphor is entirely different than mine, I was inspired by the contrast between nature landscapes and intimate conversations within the home, and I knew I wanted to draw on this visual language for a key revelation in my film.

Like *No Home Movie*, film mostly takes place over conversations between mother and daughter in the home. My mom is also very often shown in the garden, where she is able to achieve a level of freedom and connection to herself and her instincts that does not seem possible in other places. The fact that this happens in nature is intentionally symbolic. My film is ultimately about the struggle for self-expression and how parents' (in this case, my mother's) attempts at achieving it plays out for their children and influences their lives. We learn over the

course of the film that my mom is trapped in a relationship that strangles her agency. She hints at being aware that the situation is unfair to her, but the film reveals that she has learned gradually over time to suppress her own needs to please or take care of others. By the end of the film, the internalization of this repression is complete and she can no longer differentiate her own desires from taking care of others. There has been a permanent overlap in her psyche, and it keeps her from doing anything about her current situation, which resolves, however unsatisfyingly, my main quest in the film: to liberate my mother. Nevertheless, the film reveals that she can gain access to the tools to self-liberate and express herself. It appears as a kind of instinctual knowledge reawakened through the act of motherhood in order to protect her daughter, when she is caught in the very same situation.

In her book, *Motherhood Facing and Finding Yourself*, Jungian analyst Lisa Marchiano explores the archetypes and metaphor of fairytales to study the shadowy world of feminine wisdom and the transformations and confrontations that can occur when becoming a mother. She retells the story of “The Handless Maiden,” a shortened version of which appeared in earlier versions of the film, but was ultimately cut out. Nevertheless the fairytale and Marchiano’s interpretation of it heavily influences the visual storytelling in the revelatory scene with my mother in the garden. A woman who has lost her hands is wandering the forest with her babies on her back. She stops by a pool of water and asks an old woman standing there to draw her a drink, but the woman refuses and tells her to do it herself. The maiden kneels down to drink and sure enough, her children fall off her back into the water. She pleads with the old woman to help her, but she doesn’t move:

‘Have no fear, [the old woman] said. They won’t drown. Reach in and pull them out.’

‘But how can I do that? I have no hands!’

‘Then plunge your stumps into the water.’

The handless maiden plunged her stumps into the water...and at that moment, she felt her hands growing back.

‘Farewell,’ said the old woman. ‘Now you have hands and may do for yourself.’

(Marchiano 197)

At the well, the maiden has an encounter with ancient feminine wisdom. Inspired by this tale and the classic symbolism of the old woman and the pool being an access point for instinct and feminine knowing, I wanted to create similar symbolism in my film. Rather than using water, I drew on the natural surroundings, highlighting the extreme contrast between the cookie-cutter Florida suburban house my parents live in and the primitive nature encroaching all around. In the film, the scene begins with my mom on the couch watching tv. She is performing on my dad’s stage, not in her natural setting. She grabs the binoculars because she hears something calling from outside. I keep the camera on her for another long take, showing her searching for the source of the sound. I want to draw the viewer out of the noisy room and to turn their focus to what might be distracting her. She goes outside and begins tending to her garden. Suddenly, her expression shifts and we see that she hears something calling again. She points into the forest and a bird’s chirping takes over the soundscape. My mom’s theme music (“Seabird” by the Alessi Brothers) from her cheerful portrait at the beginning of the film returns, but in slow motion, signaling that we are slowing time and entering a space of agency again. My mother plays the role of the maiden and the voiceover prepares the viewer for hearing about a moment where she connects to a knowledge that is not always accessible. The visuals cut deeper into the forest until we see beautiful closeups of wild, jagged palms shimmering in bokeh light. A conversation begins in which I am thanking my mom for pushing me to leave a marriage that

eerily resembled her own, and I question her about why she couldn't do it for herself. My mother's character had given up her agency and learned to be passive, but when she saw me in danger of the same fate she was drawn to intervene. As Marchiano explains "when we have sacrificed our hands to the aspects of culture that require us to be compliant, it is too easy for our children to slip into the water...but for many of us, we know that passively accepting our wounds is no longer an option when our children are at stake...in that desperate moment we are healed. We have our own hands" (198).

I aimed to make this part of the film experimental because I wanted to put the viewer in a mystical environment where the power of instinct emerges and enables the impossible. The scene also cuts to the 1991 VHS archival footage from the beginning of the film, slowed down in reference to Citron's *Daughter Rite*. Cut into this scene and in slow motion, we see not only me breaking into spontaneous dance while I walk a dog, we also very clearly see my mom's gaze from behind the camera. At the start of the film, my narration declares that I have been watching my parents for a long time, and in this moment, it is clear that my mom has been watching me too. Right before we see the train crossing early in the film, she urges me to "watch out" for her, which I ignore then, but is recalled in this moment where she distinguishes between her life and mine. Slowing down the images in this family archival material and studying the gaze as a device (i.e. who was filming what and how) helped me, like Citron, corroborate the oral history I was collecting with what I saw in the images (Citron 94). In many ways, my film's use of archival and narration is an homage the approach used in Citron's film, which grapples with similar themes. As in *Daughter Rite*, my narration speaks of the disdain the daughter feels for the weaknesses she sees in her mother, but also acknowledges that these are her weaknesses as well and the acknowledgement of this inheritance leads to empathy and forgiveness (Feuer 13).

Finally, over the course of my research, I became keenly interested in Carl Jung's concept of individuation, which focuses on the conscious self's attempts to grapple with the unconscious self. This concept heavily influenced how I understood and formed the characters my parents portray in the film. Unlike his peers who argued individuation can occur throughout life, even in infancy, Jung believed that the process primarily happens in the second half of life when one "is concerned with coming to terms with death, finding meaning in living and the unique part each one of us plays in the world. It is in the vicissitudes of negotiating the individuation process that Jung saw the major causes of neurosis" (Schmidt).

My dad's character suffers from the neurosis of not being able to negotiate meaning in life after his perceived career failure that occurs later in life. After working as a designer for about twelve years, he was suddenly laid off and never recovered his career. Afterwards he shifted to telemarketing as a way to earn money and abandoned all creative pursuits. This caused a psychological breakdown that gradually led him to retreat from his life and isolate himself from everyone except my mother. Over time he becomes incapable of taking care of his basic needs such as "what to do about getting a new TV," as he bemoans in the film. This concept forms the backdrop for my portrayal of my dad's character and my interaction with him in a quasi-dream state, where I ask him to take me back to a moment before this process had started and we use objects—ephemera from his life as a designer—to get us there. Just as my mother's alienation from her own agency has a key influence on my character's life, so does my father's failure to individuate.

In "Assessing Our Psychic Inheritance," psychoanalyst Joseph R. Lee explains that the un-lived life of the parent sets a question for the child that they have to grapple with for their own lives. The long shot of my dad at the end of the film with no accompanying narration is a

nod to this question. Lee refers to Hamlet and the visit he gets from his father's ghost as a literary allusion to this phenomenon. The ghost says "I am thy father's spirit doomed for a certain term to walk the night. And for the day confined to fast in fires. Til [sic] the foul crimes done in my days of nature are burned and purged away" (Lee 22:30). The parent's unlived life is both a burden and an offering that can be finally expelled or released through the child. While there is no clear resolution with my dad's character, this last shot invites the viewer to ponder what is it exactly that must be purged. My dad's mysterious character makes this difficult to answer precisely, but it is clear that it relates somehow to his alienation from his authentic self. Jung writes in *Aspects of the Feminine*, "all the life which the parents could have lived, but of which they thwarted themselves for artificial motives is passed onto the children in substitute form. That is to say the children are driven unconsciously in a direction that is intended to compensate for everything that was left unfulfilled in the lives of their parents" (43). The conclusion of the film is open-ended on this point: I may not be doomed to repeat the "mistakes" of my parents, but what will I do with this unconscious drive to face up to and live what my parents could not? The shot of my father, where he looks at the camera after playing with my daughter, and the final shot of my mother flooded in light as the garage door opens, alludes to this purging. Through me, something in them has hope for redemption too.

Thesis Production Process

The production process was full of unexpected surprises and direction changes, but as the film evolved, I made important discoveries that were crucial to making the film a success. The film was made over a four-year period. In that time, a lot was happening that affected the film: I unexpectedly learned I was pregnant, gave birth to twins, and moved across the ocean to another country, not to mention the phenomenon of the global pandemic.

When I first started this project, I thought it would be a study of my parents. I did not envision that I would become one of the main characters. The first scenes that I filmed, many of which ended up in the beginning of the film, have a different aesthetic than the material I shot later on in the production. This is partially due to my attitude toward the subjects (my parents) then. The shots are all wide and distant. I remember having fixed ideas of behaviors I thought were characteristic of them that I wanted to show in the film, and I did not have time on a short production visit to wait for it to happen, so I engaged them in a number of staged scenes that give off a sterile, distant aesthetic, which I did not know at the time would work well for the start of the film.

Initially distance was a challenge. I understood that I would need to travel from New York to Florida every time I needed to get footage, so I had to budget my time and money with that in mind. When I discovered I was pregnant with twins, these concerns intensified as I was unsure how much, if at all, I would be able to travel towards the end of the pregnancy or after the birth. I was able to shoot some scenes of my mom with the babies right after their birth in New York, which were very important for the film, but at that point I had only shot about 40% of the footage and I was not sure how I would complete the rest of the film.

In March, 2020, my partner and I decided to visit my parents in Florida. It was our first time traveling with the kids, who were just 6 months old at the time, and it would be the first time most of my family would see them, so I was skeptical I would have any time for shooting during the trip. Nevertheless, I decided to bring my camera and sound equipment on the off chance that there might be an opportunity to film my parents with the babies. The day before we were supposed to fly home, New York went into lockdown, and we decided to stay in Florida indefinitely. Although this period was extremely stressful, trying to manage childcare, our full-

time jobs, and our mental health, it was a blessing in disguise for the film. Suddenly I had plenty of time to spend with my parents (perhaps even too much). I was also going through a huge transformation as a new mother and it was a special time to spend such intimate time with my family. About 50% of the film was shot during this period, and I wrote daily in a journal about my observations and thoughts as they were emerging for the film. Much of this writing determined what is in the film today. Living with my partner and kids in my parents' house also changed the aesthetic of the film, making it more chaotic and spontaneous. With two babies to take care of, I no longer had time for staging and I lost interest in it. There were many times where the most I could manage was to place the camera on the tripod and keep it rolling while I continued my childcare/work duties. Occasionally, if I noticed something interesting, I would grab the camera and focus in on it. This yielded a lot of unused footage, which took ages to review, but in these reels were also absolute gems. The shots of my mom and dad changing places on the couch, the long shot of my dad playing with my daughter, the dream sequence where my dad sleeps, and the scene where my mom is cleaning the bathroom were all captured in moments like these.

In the editing process, I noticed many mistakes which I would absolutely aim to not repeat on future projects. I learned that I have a habit of fiddling with the camera while shooting, constantly adjusting the f-stop and focus sometimes unnecessarily. It created an unreasonable amount of camera noise that was annoying and distracting while editing. In the future, I will try not to touch the camera if something important is being said or if I am closing in on a shot. I mostly shot on the Canon C100. Perhaps a different camera will be more forgiving in terms of noise.

When I started the project I did not record my questions with high quality audio because I was convinced that they would never make it into the film. It turned out that my voice behind the camera was really important, and unfortunately, I had to pump up the volume levels and deal with a lot of loud background and ambient noise in order to make these audible. Next time, I think I will seriously consider recording my audio if there is even the slightest chance that it may be needed for the film.

Working on this film, helped me understand my own aesthetic. I am drawn to the domestic and the mundane. I enjoy long takes and I think I am becoming pretty good at feeling out what is a good frame and staying on it. Rather than thinking about the “content” that I need to shoot, I like to think about visuals metaphorically, often filming objects or landscapes that may not immediately relate to anything in the story, but that could be useful for drawing out symbolic meaning that is difficult to demonstrate later on. I get especially excited if I can catch a frame with reflections or with multiple things happening in different parts of the frame. This project also taught me the power of tuning into facial expressions and embracing their capacity for commentary beyond words.

I usually edit without music, but several of the scenes in this film, especially the experimental ones were edited with music and it became an important element for setting the tone and atmosphere. I usually work with royalty free music from the Creative Commons, but I discovered during this project that this music was not exact enough for me and I was able to imagine compositions more precisely in my head. When I slowed down, the Alessi Brother’s “Seabird” during my mom’s garden revelation, the Wurlitzer piano that is used in the original recording started to sound a bit like horns. I began to imagine how I would like to rearrange and re-record some of the music with an orchestra. I never felt like I had an aptitude for this before,

but this became very clear to me working with and manipulating music for this project. I found myself overlaying audio tracks, “mixing” songs and sound effects, and playing with speed to get the desired sound, but I wanted to do much more and I hope to work with composers for my future films.

Audience and Exhibition

My intended audience is women, particularly those who came from troubled families and who sought to overcome the challenges their own mothers struggled with. This does not mean that men are excluded as an audience, but I intentionally made this film for women. I grew up in a world where I was highly conscious that most things were not made for me. This film comes from a deeply emotional place; it is a reflection on feminine wisdom and power. It speaks to celebrating and guarding this for our daughters. In this way, I intended my film to be a feminist work for individuals who can understand that kind of syntax. I think my film will also appeal to new parents, especially mothers, whose new status in life causes them to have urgent questions about what they may pass on to their own children.

In terms of distribution, I have three pathways I intend to explore:

1. Experimental and women’s film festivals;
2. Community screenings organized with local women’s organizations and film and feminist studies students in Florida; and
3. Podcast communities focused on psychic inheritance, adult development during parenthood, and Jungian concepts related to individuation and grappling with motherhood.

To reach these targets, I am preparing the film for submission and hopefully screening at documentary, experimental, and feminist focused film festivals including: CPH DOX, New York Film Festival, Berlin Feminist Film Week, and others. I look forward to the film festival circuit so that I can hear how people react to the film and learn more about the themes that I investigate in it. In addition to these international festivals, I also plan to show the film in Florida, where it was produced. In particular, I hope to screen the film at the Through Women's Eyes festival in Sarasota, Florida, which focuses on women filmmakers and underrepresented issues of interest to women and is sponsored by UN Women.

I plan to partner with women's organizations in Florida to organize community screenings and gather together feminist thinkers and artists to discuss the influence of psychic inheritance on the experience of motherhood and childrearing. These include but are not limited to: The Women's Caucus for Art, Florida Women's Art Association, and Women in the Arts. I will also reach out to Lisa Kritzer from University of Central Florida's film and media department, who specializes in feminist film theory and criticism. I want to organize screenings for students and discussions on how *Inheritance* fits in and continues the traditions of feminist filmmaking that started with Michelle Citron and Chantal Akerman. I hope these discussions will expand the debate on the importance of continuing and expanding these traditions.

I also plan to reach out to communities of listeners that are concerned with the experience of parenthood and its psychological implications. One of my IMA classmates, Kim Buikema, works for a podcast company that produces a show called *Childproof*, which focuses on the growth and development that people experience as parents. Kim recommended that I reach out to the producers of *Childproof* to potentially talk about my film and engage with listeners about the themes presented in the film. I will also reach out to Lisa Marchiano and the hosts of *This*

Jungian Life to see if there may be an opportunity to discuss the Jungian concepts explored in my film and discuss how listeners respond to the way in which they are treated in my interpretation of them.

The majority of the archival material was created by and is owned by my family. There are a few short archival clips that are used in the film, which were sourced from public archives. All of the music used in the film was sourced from the Free Music Archive and adheres to the rules of its royalty free use, except for my mom's theme music, "Seabird," by the Alessi Brothers. The rights are owned by A&M Records Limited and I am in the process of purchasing a master license of the song so that I can use it in original form in the film, but also rearrange and re-record it for some of the experimental scenes. I have researched who owns the rights for this song and in the process of getting a quote for purchasing a master license.

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