

# PERFORATIONS

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## **Abstract**

*Perforations* is a personal, experimental film that explores the residue and layers of memory through the emotional landscape of the artist's entrance into middle age. The project navigates the ephemeral nature of memory, loss, absence, frailty, complexity and — ultimately — renewal in life through the interconnections and legacies of three generations. The thesis examines the way in which specific absences in history (women, class and collective memory) and the recounting of family history (through home movies, reconstruction of personal memory and the cycles of life, death and the landscape) contribute to the underlying basis of the film.

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## **Introduction**

The complicated nature of memory reflects our experiences in ways that are not always straightforward and clear. Through the recollections of ourselves and others, memory gets incorporated into the messiness of life. However, it is often in the interludes and the quiet moments that a type of truth emerges: that there will always be more unknowns than knowns. It is within the poetic expressions of life - the spaces, nuances and subtleties - that a clarity can emerge which is less explicit. Memories are perforated in the way they are forgotten, lost and recovered throughout our lives. The visual and metaphoric device of *perforations* serve as the general and guiding theme of my film.

These *perforations* are the negative spaces and punctures in the film stock that take rolls of “still” negatives and allow the celluloid to be moved through the projector to make “moving pictures.” They are the “precisely punched hole[s] at the edge of film used for film transport and location for exposure.”<sup>1</sup> These holes in the film stock, by being shown aesthetically on screen in my film, not only reference its physical, analogue nature, but also metaphorically refers to memory that has been lost and “recovered” through the use of Super 8 film taken contemporaneously. The aesthetics of the “exposed” film sprocket as well as the dust and dirt on the film and the light coming through the layers also reference memory. This is also expressed in the frailty and fallibility in the image shown on the film stock, which gets worn down and potentially damaged each time it is viewed. The frames above and below the “main” image in the centre of the frame reference the past and the future (a frame that is to come; a frame that was just shown) in addition to the “current” frame in view.

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<sup>1</sup> “Perforations,” National Film and Sound Archive (Australia), accessed May 13, 2016, <http://www.nfsa.gov.au/preservation/glossary/perforations>.



Video still from *Perforations*: digitally transferred Super 8 footage of the Alberta sky during a Greyhound bus trip from Toronto, ON to Victoria, BC (frame grab: 4:45)

The film creates a non-linear narrative to reconstruct “memory” through the use of Super 8mm film with DSLR footage, abstract imagery and sound. The use of these techniques are meant to speak to the ambiguities of life and attempt to pose (and potentially answer) a number of questions: What do the conscious and the subconscious retain from preceding generations (both innate and experienced)? How do we ever know or understand what was never fully articulated in a life? The film is existential in nature, which also speaks to the unanswerable. Scenes of the everyday are shown in a stream of consciousness manner and have a dream-like quality which point to the wonder and amazement of life, but also its confusion and uncertainty. As Osthoff notes, “art, literature and poetry are perhaps better positioned to navigate the anxiety of uncertainty and timelessness. They have often revealed history’s blind spots by emphasizing the opacity of language and the complex relations between knowledge and

the somatic body.”<sup>2</sup> The project presents these themes in a poetic way by not providing answers to the inexplicable and leaving room for interpretations that occur with time and experience.

Initially, the film was focused on my paternal grandmother and the intricacies of her addiction (she was an alcoholic most of her adult life), but I realized while shooting that I preferred to reference her in a more abstract way and to incorporate my maternal grandmother, who died in her early forties, into the film as well. These matriarchal “gaps” or “losses,” one of a person I never knew; the other of a person obscured through her addiction, are experiences that are shared with my sister. Seeing her as a single parent and being an aunt myself has made me realize more profoundly the vulnerabilities and complexities involved in the relationships we have with the children in our lives as well as the interconnectedness that humans experience generationally. Our ancestors show themselves in us due to inheritance (character traits, physical characteristics), but my sister and I have been unable to identify or relate to these ties and have therefore felt removed from them. We did not experience a true or authentic interaction with our grandmothers (their stories are anecdotes that are told to us) due to either absence or addiction (another type of absence). These missing parts have not been spoken about overtly. It is within the exploration of these ideas and themes that I am pointing to *impressions* throughout the film.

The overall purpose of this project, from the initial inkling through to post-production, was to seek some sort of answer and find resolve in the current day. The process of making the film required being as present as possible through all stages and became an important link to tie back to daily life. As Jonas Mekas has stated in the narration of his film *Walden: Diaries, Notes*,

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<sup>2</sup> Simone Osthoff, *Performing the Archive: The Transformation of the Archive in Contemporary Art from Repository of Documents to Art Medium* (New York and Dresden: Atropos Press, 2009), 179.

*and Sketches* (1969), “Cinema is light, movement...light, heart beating, breathing, life, frames.”<sup>3</sup> It is in the subtlety of the light and energy coming through the film stock that is also reflected in future generations (in this instance, my nieces and nephew) and the energy and life in them that gives meaning to the present in the recounting of the past.

Although many of the themes and categories that are presented in this paper are not isolated in their construction, relationships and meaning, (they often merge in and out of each other), they are meant to dissect and investigate some of the ideas presented here.

### **Documentary Relevance**

The examination of the documentary relevance of my film primarily emerges out of the desire to categorize language, which attempts to call “order” and attach labels to art and media. The decision to use non-conventional approaches in the film seemed to lack any other term except “experimental.” But something is missing in the term. As Donigan Cumming has argued:

As “experimental” filmmakers of all stripes have observed, the term is not the best. It suggests something tentative, a seeking for solutions, rather than a finished work of art or communication. It seems a category established by the establishment for everything that doesn’t function quite the way the audience is used to or fit into the mainstream’s broadcast slots. Applied to documentary filmmaking and videography, forms in which the delivery of information is paramount, categorization of a documentary work as “experimental” might lead to its dismissal as incomplete or inapplicable to the average person – or worse, as so imaginative as to verge on fiction. Since much of this filmmaking is intended to immerse the audience in a set of circumstances that can be felt, as much as observed, a better term might be “experiential” documentary – a cinematic experience that is also a life experience, which is knowledge of a different order.<sup>4</sup>

Following Donigan Cumming, I have chosen to not use the word “experiential” in describing my film, as “experimental” is already an obscure, often alienating term for a larger audience and

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<sup>3</sup> *Walden: Diaries, Notes, and Sketches*, directed by Jonas Mekas (1969; Paris: Re:Voir Vidéo & Microcinema International, 2009), DVD.

<sup>4</sup> Lucas Hilderbrand and Lynne Sachs, “Experimental Documentary Questionnaire,” *Millennium Film Journal*, vol. 51 (2009): 14.



this differentiation only has meaning for a very small group of people. The terminology that forms this struggle is an attempt to create a language for an experience that does not follow a tradition in documentary film. How can a filmmaker allow an audience member to *feel* something that is subtle and nuanced, familiar yet strange, and expresses something that is not immediately explicable? Michelle Citron explains the categorization of her work as “experimental” documentary as such:

What mediums, structures and styles are most appropriate for representing lived experience? How can I capture internal experience – moments that are felt, dreamt, inchoate – along with the non-physical and non-verbal textures of life...Where is the line between lived experience and pure imagination?<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps it is the places “in between” or “beside” a straight forward narrative that can also speak to human experience, even if we are not always exposed to this type of media. The term “avant-doc” (joining avant-garde film with documentary) tackles these themes as well, and perhaps is a more appropriate term to use, taking films from the late 1920s which “did not exemplify either of the two major approaches to documentary that had developed by then (the depiction of far-flung, preindustrial culture and the *City Symphony*) and were also unlike the Dadaist and surrealist works of European artists-turned-filmmakers.”<sup>6</sup> Perhaps this term will be incorporated more fully into the world of documentary as documentary practice continues to redefine itself. The evolution of the term and the types of works associated with documentary seem to change with each passing decade:

The current value of the term [avant-garde] is its inclusiveness, rather than its designation of any particular approach, though generally speaking, the films included can be understood as explicit or implicit critiques of commercial media and the audience that has developed for it. ...“Documentary” had traditionally referred to films that make a “truth claim.” Of course, any estimable commercial narrative film, like any estimable novel or poem, can be said to offer truths, or a

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<sup>5</sup> Hilderbrand and Sachs, “Experimental Documentary Questionnaire,” 12.

<sup>6</sup> Scott MacDonald, *Avant-Doc: Intersections of Documentary and Avant-Garde Cinema* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 5.

Truth about human nature and human life – though, unlike documentaries, fiction films do not claim to provide actual documents, as opposed to dramatizations, of the people and places represented.<sup>7</sup>

It is this type of inclusiveness and the emergence of varying types of documentary that can take some chances in storytelling and broaden both the experience and relatability of the viewer to the subjects and themes presented.

The work of Jonas Mekas has strongly informed *Perforations*, by being “situated within an ethnographic frame ... [and] appreciate[s] fully the way that the film medium mediates between individual and social histories, and between memory and historical time.”<sup>8</sup> When I first encountered his work, it was the personalization and seemingly haphazardness of his filmmaking that was intriguing and opened a world that was emotional, authentic, real and sensitive all at the same time. His work is not afraid to go from giddy to heavy hearted to serious within a few short scenes; these reactions are reinforced in the editing and slices of life that appear on screen. In Mekas’ films, it is the “fragmentary nature of these glimpses [that] seems destined to eradicate a present tense and to see everything as if it were already a memory.”<sup>9</sup> His working out of the past as it permeates the present often parallels the inability to arrive at conclusions about most of life’s experiences. These elements have resonated in my work both in their consideration and approach.

In a similar vein, the themes and textures of Jem Cohen’s film *Lost Book Found* (1996) incorporates the elements that are effective and compelling in a non-traditional film format but are generally not shown to mainstream audiences. It is precisely because it is not mainstream that he is able to show his subjects and themes in a poetic and profound way, while

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<sup>7</sup> MacDonald, *Avant-Doc: Intersections of Documentary and Avant-Garde Cinema*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 281.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 284.

simultaneously not providing concrete answers to the questions raised. By editing together scenes of the “discarded” (sidewalk litter that moves in circles produced by the wind and cityscape; stores that sell everyday objects as well as the useless; a key paved into the sidewalk; the fronts of businesses that have closed), he points to and deconstructs the alienation inherent in survival and consumerist culture while showing generalized imagery of the everyday:

It is often the case that there is no footage available to illustrate a verbal description of a past event, so a filmmaker must resort to generic images that offer an approximate representation. This use of a generic archive provokes a common slippage in the historical documentaries, namely that the not specific image...has imposed upon it a new, precise and, by definition, transient signification that may or may not correlate with its original meaning.<sup>10</sup>

The stream of consciousness and dream-like quality of the images that are interwoven with the sound and script of the everyday lead to a meditative quality in the work. This quality embraces the mystery of life and bears witness to the non-elevated (and often overlooked) aspects of New York (and human life in general). He tells the story of the “lost book found” by filming New York and layering the story over top of the images he has cut – essentially a recreation. I have used this method in my film as I “recreate” a past from contemporary footage with digital and film footage to create a sentiment and narrative that informs the present.

There are countless films, books, music and pieces of art that have influenced my approach in shooting and editing my film beyond the examples provided in Cohen and Mekas, such as Alice Munro, Agnès Varda, Jim Jarmusch, Louise Bourke, Mike Watt and Janice Tanaka. Some are more subtle than others, but the running threads throughout are works that seek authenticity, vulnerability, detail and an openness to being affected by the smaller moments of life – moments that I find are often the most profound.

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<sup>10</sup> Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 38.

## Absence of History

The absence of particular narratives, specifically from those who were not members of the ruling elite, have left large gaps in history. As Boulding states, “History is a problem in sampling.”<sup>11</sup> Marginalized groups are often not part of this “sampling” and as a result many identities, traditions and stories have not been told over time and therefore not incorporated as part of the Western historical canon.

Histories of women and the lower classes and their separate and combined collective memories are realities that have been left behind and not acknowledged for many centuries and as Trouillot notes, “The vernacular use of the word history thus offers us a semantic ambiguity: an irreducible distinction and yet an equally irreducible overlap between what happened and that which is said to have happened.”<sup>12</sup> Although these lives occurred in time and were an integral part of society, their stories have not been tangibly passed to later generations. These *perforations* call for a renewal in how history is perceived and recorded over time. With a newer structure, approach and philosophy, contemporary culture is discovering that history is a fluid narrative that needs to reflect all voices representing the world we inhabit:

The view of Western history as an evolutionary unfolding from the time of the first post-Roman “barbarian” kingdoms led to compelling conceptions of individualism in the nineteenth century, but they were applied to men of the middle and upper classes only. In the twentieth century these conceptions reappear as left over agenda items for populations excluded from nineteenth century developments, particularly women, the working classes, the poor, and colonized peoples.<sup>13</sup>

This perspective takes another stance on what is deemed “historical” and steps away from the patriarchal colonialism that informed the way books have been written and embedded into

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<sup>11</sup> Elise Boulding, *The Underside of History: A View of Women Through Time* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1976), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Boulding, *The Underside of History: A View of Women Through Time*, 5.

education systems and traditions. Instead, by “providing a microhistorical perspective often absent from the standard public histories ... [society is] somehow paralleling the historiographical trends that promote a history of the ordinary life or a microhistory.”<sup>14</sup>

While some traditions have been passed down through oral histories as a means of survival (information such as how to run a household with details such as recipes, seasonal preparations, childbirth and childrearing), broader, marginalized histories have not been written down. Due in part to the lack of access to education available to marginalized communities in the past, oral histories have been more recently valued and recognized as a way to pass down histories and traditions to future generations. It is the case that, “recent scholarship on historical memory in the fields of history, anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies has rarely engaged with oral history as a central practice in many societies where memory and history are inextricably entangled.”<sup>15</sup> There remains much work to be done to be able to fill the spaces in these areas.

## **Women**

The Western historical canon has largely excluded the histories of women due to the societally-imbedded patriarchal structure. While women’s traditional roles have been fixed in the home and centered on childrearing and household management, the opportunity to become writers, storytellers and archivists has been mostly non-existent. Women have relied on their husbands, fathers and the upper classes to not only value their work, but to also include and portray them as an integral part of the backbone of culture and society. While “women have ... always participated in a secondary way in the prevailing dominance structures of society, from

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<sup>14</sup> Efrén Cuevas, “Home Movies as Personal Archives in Autobiographical Documentaries,” *Studies in Documentary Film*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2013), 25.

<sup>15</sup> Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, eds., *Oral History and Public Memories* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), vii.

the times of the earliest incipient social stratification,”<sup>16</sup> women’s historical narratives (and their rights) have not always been as oppressive, particularly for those in the working classes:

In household-based production ... women have historically probably been an equal and sometimes dominant partner in terms of productivity and decisions about resource allocation. It was the 10 percent of production carried on outside the household, increasing in proportion from A.D. 1000 to the time of the industrial revolution, that placed women at a disadvantage and in menial roles...women of the elite were much less disadvantaged beyond the household.<sup>17</sup>

Women’s rights have often been intertwined with those of the working class; class hierarchy and race continue to influence and affect the pursuit of women’s rights. Access to funding for education (and, therefore, opportunity), is directly tied to wealth and class. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, women’s increased access to education (literacy) marked a change in how they saw themselves and started to shift the tides of thought. These movements would continue into the many decades that followed:

The most important thing about the 1840s movements was that proletarian women were beginning to define their own problems and organize to solve them. Self-educated working women and middle-class teachers and journalists united in associations and in producing journals to provide a forum for their new ideas.<sup>18</sup>

In North America and Europe, women’s struggle for equality gained further momentum with the suffragette movement. White women eventually obtained the right to vote and started to emerge as being seen as their own “person” instead of the possession of her husband. With the increased numbers of women joining the workforce starting during the Industrial Revolution and becoming even more significantly employed (out of necessity) during the two World Wars, many events and factors accumulated which provided an autonomy and economy that allowed a concrete way for women to tangibly contribute an income to their households.

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<sup>16</sup> Boulding, *The Underside of History: A View of Women Through Time*, 37.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 631.

Women gained more autonomy over their own reproduction with the availability of the birth control pill in the 1960s. This new option was more reliable, safer and became prevalent and acceptable for use in mainstream society. However, the responsibility and weight of child rearing on the female body remained no less demanding physically, financially and emotionally. The role of women as mothers implicitly makes them more vulnerable within the realm of the human experience.

As contemporary society now moves into a period wherein women's histories are newly sought and valued, there continues to be a vast lack of complex women's narratives and histories told in mainstream media. This is partially due to the number of women writers, producers and directors who make work, but is also a result of the capitalist structure that continues to sexualize and provide two-dimensional characterization of female characters (fictionalized and not). There are still many institutionalized and socialized deficiencies which continue to be battled today:

They [women] may know that they are discriminated against on the basis of sex, but they do not equate this with oppression. Under capitalism, patriarchy is structured so that sexism restricts women's behavior in some realms even as freedom from limitations is allowed in other spheres. The absence of extreme restrictions leads many women to ignore the areas in which they are exploited or discriminated against; it may even lead them to imagine that no women are oppressed.<sup>19</sup>

It was with these factors in mind that I decided to make a film about particular women in my family. Women's roles in their families as mothers are related to socially ingrained expectations in North American society (expected, sacrificial; ultimately invisible) and made me consider the individual circumstances of my grandmothers and how their situations have affected the generations that followed them.

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<sup>19</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 5.

The film was also derived from the passing of my grandparents' generation and what this means for those who remain. It was also meant to question what happens when an archive is scattered and mostly non-existent. As Gaines points out, "In the case of feminist film, it has been the particular "truth" of the oppressed condition of women in patriarchal society that could not be merely "captured" or recorded on film or tape but that had to be manufactured or reconstructed."<sup>20</sup> The film explores the greater theme of speaking for the forgotten/overlooked female voice/experience that have been rarely spoken or understood. Too often, female histories (as well as their writing, art, films and creative pursuits in general) within families are not articulated. The formation and reclamation of the female voice in the film is done in a variety of ways: my own femaleness as director, cameraperson, editor and narrator as well as through the female voices and the physicality of taking up space (with my nieces, my sister and myself). It also speaks to the lack of voices that have been heard in the past and specifically those of my grandmothers. Further details will be provided with regards to the film's narration in the "Methodology" section of this paper (to follow).

### **Class**

The very nature of the capitalist and socio-political underpinnings in North American society have meant that the working classes have largely not been given a place in mainstream media culture for their histories to be told (not unlike women's histories). Contemporary culture sometimes questions the structure of the ruling elite (those in control of media outlets and the means by which to organize cultural events), but these established practices run deep. They:

belie... patriarchal virtues and in the moral discipline of the rich [that] has been present for too long in the collective memory of the industrial and commercial classes; it is a recollection that is too strongly grounded in a large mass of

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<sup>20</sup> Jane M. Gaines, "The Real Returns," in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, Vol. 6, ed. Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 10.



experiences for it not to continue to play its role in the modern consciousness of societies.<sup>21</sup>

In the visual arts world, the work of photographers such as Lewis Hine in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and later the mandate of Roy Stryker and the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in the United States during the Great Depression in the 1930s started to call attention to and deconstruct these norms, utilizing the technology of hand held cameras to tell the stories of those whose voices were largely unheard. Edward Steichen's 1955 curated photo exhibit *The Family of Man* at the MOMA in New York also started to pull apart at this idea, even though it was presented through the lens of people outside the circumstances with a degree of "othering" that, although the intention was to equalize and show the human condition as universal, did not solve the greater issue of giving people an autonomous voice.

History told in books (until Howard Zinn's 1980 book, *A People's History of the United States*) and in film meant that there had to be an interest in seeing everyday and marginalized people's lives reflected in culture. Films such as Agnès Varda's *Daguerreotypes* (1975) had working class subjects depicted in a straight forward, non-glamorous manner which revealed inner worlds and moved away from stereotypes. Technological innovations have also been tied to the ability to tell stories. For those in the lower classes, gaining access to devices of communication and therefore education and expression through the invention of the printing press, meant further access to reading and writing. The availability of Kodak's Brownie camera in 1900 started a democratization in creating a visual catalogue for families to be able to create on their own. However, these technologies were not affordable to everyone and there was a gradient in accessibility to such technologies:

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<sup>21</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Edited and Translated by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 151.

...there are no class representations that are not oriented to both the present and to the past. For a function is in the present and is a permanent condition of social life; but the persons who to our knowledge possess in the highest degree the personal qualities necessary to perform a function could manifest these qualities only in the past.<sup>22</sup>

Leisure time is a luxury that has been primarily awarded to the upper classes, and with leisure is the incorporation of cultural activities (art) and hobbies (such as photography and film/video recorders). This system reinforces itself, as the libraries of the upper classes tend to have a greater amount of recorded material with an embedded emphasis on archiving such materials and therefore their importance (being able to access this technology and the funds to support it).

My own maternal and paternal family archive lacks home movie footage until the late 1980s. The process was expensive – purchasing the camera, projector and screen, paying for cartridges and development of film. While decades prior to the 1980s are not accounted for in our home movie footage, they are found in photographs that have been saved and scattered among various disparate family members.

### **Collective Memory**

Collective memory depends upon the interconnectedness of memory, history and class. These specific elements inform each other and complicate the way memory is passed across generations. What is remembered by collective societies or specific groups of people depends upon the interplay between the experiences of the individual within the realm of and in connection to the group:

The greatest number of memories come back to us when our parents, our friends, or other persons recall them to us...It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories...there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places

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<sup>22</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 181-2.

itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection.<sup>23</sup>

A prevailing government, monarchy or dictatorship can have a direct effect on the narratives that a collective remembers, recalls and celebrates. George Orwell's *1984* (1948) dealt with implications of the rise of fascist regimes in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and how this relates to collective memory. The current climate of corporately controlled media interests seemingly has more control over society than the governments of the past. History rises out of collective memories as they change, evolve and devolve over time: "Collective frameworks are ... precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society."<sup>24</sup> The pendulum of history seems to endlessly run back and forth from the conservative to the more progressive with prevailing thoughts and ideas often regressing and taking back the more progressive work and progress made by previous generations.

Understanding the relationship between memory and history changing over time can affect memory's ability to obtain and recall these lost narratives:

Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic – responsive to each avenue or conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or project. History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism.

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<sup>23</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 38.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again.<sup>25</sup>

I am playing with my own memory and perceptions of family history as a singular (and potentially unreliable) source in all of the decisions made along the way in creating the film: these are my shots, edits and chosen scenes. This dilemma is also experienced through the remnants of aural, written and recorded (home movies, photographs) archives in all family histories. Varying versions of stories and recollections are forgotten and changed over time. As I state in the narration of the film, “It’s still knowing that certain pieces will never be put into place; traditions lost, stories never told, information never passed along.” This gap is increased with familial figures who disappear too early to pass along information to the next generations and also through the passing of intergenerational tides, which washes away details that will never be recovered.

### **Recounting Family History**

The recounting of family history often first plants its seeds in the oral stories that are told to children by their parents and grandparents. These stories do not simply function as entertainment or bedtime stories: they help to construct identity, a sense of connectedness and, most importantly, social constructs that help to assist with survival (socially and structurally):

Each family ends up with its own logic and traditions, which resemble those of the general society in that they derive from it and continue to regulate the family’s relations with general society. But this logic and these traditions are nevertheless distinct because they are little by little pervaded by the family’s particular experiences and because their role is increasingly to insure the family’s cohesion and to guarantee its continuity.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations*, no. 26 (Spring, 1989): 8-9.

<sup>26</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 83.

This experience of recollection also gets formed outside of our families and within our participation in groups outside the home and in our communities. It is the interchange of our experience between these two settings that form us:

During our entire life we are engaged at the same time both in our family and also in other groups. We extended our family memory in such a way as to encompass recollections of our worldly life, for example. Or we place our family recollections in the frameworks where our society retrieves its past. This amounts to considering our family from the point of view of other groups, or, inversely, to combining, along with recollections, modes of thinking belonging to the former and the latter.<sup>27</sup>

Filmmaking and home movies have become a vehicle for recounting family history by bringing in tangible elements that become parts of a family archive and help recall personal memory. It is the case that, “no matter how we enter a family – by birth, marriage, or some other way – we find ourselves to be part of a group where our position is determined not by personal feelings but by rules and customs independent of us that existed before us.”<sup>28</sup>



Video still from *Perforations*: Family photo album sequence and a photo of my sister and me (frame grab: 3:18)

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<sup>27</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 81.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

There is an awareness that while I am making up for the lack of film footage from my grandmothers' generation, I am also creating a partial archive for my nieces and nephews with footage of their childhood experience. The way in which the adults look at the footage is inherently different from the way the children see it. They will look back on this time in their lives through a lens that will be altered from their mom and myself, as, "one of the most basic values of home movies when revisited after a long temporal span: their power to keep the ancestors "alive" in celluloid for generations to come."<sup>29</sup> I hope that their collective memory of this time in their lives is positively associated with this home movie footage. Their connection to nature is what ties together our collective histories. Settings shown in the film are places where my sister and I had been taken as children ourselves, and the lived experiences and memories in these places (and their proximity) are renewed and carried on in the new generation's memories of childhood.

### **Home Movies**

A form of collective memory, home movies, brings together a number of variables and complications that are at play. It first takes place in the filming and the real-time dynamics that occur between the shooter and the subjects. It later takes place with the initial and subsequent viewings of the footage and the personalized perceptions that get attached by each viewer. Such subsequent viewings over time, space and distance continue to explore the complicated relationships that form and evolve in the lives of those who were captured and the generations that follow them:

In home movies we often connect directly to the person behind the lens, a relationship found in portrait photography but rarely in commercial narrative film. Home movies represent how the person behind the camera chooses to film the way the person in front of the camera presents his or her "self"...With parents

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<sup>29</sup> Cuevas, "Home Movies as Personal Archives in Autobiographical Documentaries," 21.

and children, husbands and wives, the image often reproduces the power dynamic existing outside the frame. The ubiquity of these home images, each resembling another, makes what they record seem natural. By providing the “good” memory, home movies show us an ideal image of the family with everyone in his or her proper place: parents in charge, men in control, families together.<sup>30</sup>

While a limited number of families in the past century have possessed an archive of home movies, technology now makes the ubiquitous smart phone and its camera and video recorder more accessible. Whether the footage was taken decades ago or today, the logging of this footage is related to capturing both one’s identity and particular moments in time. Such footage is open to the unrehearsed moments that become places of connection. The person filming the footage as well as the subjects being filmed (and subsequent viewers) have “this emotional relation [which]... gives home movie images their specific power. Their ability to seduce and to attract creates a magic that radically distinguishes home movies from newly-reported images and from traditional documentaries.”<sup>31</sup> When we see home movie footage in film, it is familiar in its form, subject, dynamics and intimacy and speaks its own language which does not always need to be explained.

The reflection of the complicated matter of our relationships with each other in the dynamics of a family get reinforced and confused in the footage with each subsequent viewing. Many things are happening at once and over time. Home movie footage of one’s own childhood becomes an altogether different experience when one moves into adulthood and parenthood (the person *behind* the camera):

The meaning of home images is in constant flux. This is due, in part, to the fact that we provide a second track, either stories or memories, at the moment of viewing. By doing so we fuse the present tense of viewing to the past tense of

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<sup>30</sup> Michelle Citron, *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions*, from *Visible Evidence*, Vol. 4 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 13-15.

<sup>31</sup> Roger Odin, “The Family Home Movie as Document: A Semio-Pragmatic Approach,” in *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories*, edited by Karen L. Ishizuka and Patricia Rodden Zimmermann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 264.

recording. Time folds back on itself. Two places on the time line of our life meet. In this moment of superimposition, a space is created from which insight can arise. This is the latent hope in all home movies.<sup>32</sup>

My own Super 8 footage in the film parallels the reliability of memory. The seemingly old footage is not old at all, but an attempt to recreate and reference the past. This is an interaction between the present day, the past and the role of memory over time which includes voluntary and involuntary memory. I also wanted to incorporate the idea of life's layering of memory: that memory is never static and always changing through various interpretations and lenses and becoming something else over time. Also at play here is the element of simultaneous memory occurring at once through individual and collective recollections, through objects (as reminder/remembrance) as well as the result of the revision of history and memory through time (always in flux):

In the home movie, those addressed by the film have lived the events depicted. Reading a home movie does not summon the documentarist mode of reading but the *private one*. If I construct a real enunciator (the Family), I do not ask the truth question nor expect information. Home movie images function less as representations than as *index* inviting the family to *return to a past already lived*. The home movie does not communicate. Instead, it invites us to use a double process of *remembering*.<sup>33</sup>

My Super 8 footage is also used in the film to create a sense of nostalgia and recreate a past that was not recorded on film. I also reference archive imagery from my parents' family photo album from the late 1970s and early 1980s. These photos get embedded in the present through the "filter" of the past (not unlike the Super 8 footage) when I record myself looking through these albums.

The way in which I saw the digitally converted Super 8 footage while editing made me consider the analogue footage differently. As Sassoon points out, "the processes at work in the

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<sup>32</sup> Michelle Citron, *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions*, 23-25.

<sup>33</sup> Roger Odin, "The Family Home Movie as Document: A Semio-Pragmatic Approach," 259.



translation from the material to the digital image serve[s] to change the nature and the very experience of seeing photographs in contradictory ways.”<sup>34</sup> The horizontal nature of the DSLR footage (the way in which it is edited in the software on the timeline) and the verticality of the Super 8 footage (the frames moving from top to bottom through the projector) ultimately had me thinking differently about the way in which I viewed the footage and how to cut it together. These vertical and horizontal axes indirectly reference a family tree and lineage. The non-linear is resonated throughout the film and is referenced with the use of the vertical and horizontal at the same time. These axes end up “negating” each other, ultimately becoming the present and making time and space “hover” as it were. This can be explained by Osthoff in the following way:

Increasingly inadequate is the way we usually represent time and space in our common experience: we place ourselves in the present with the past behind and the future ahead—a linear sequence, that can hardly address the temporal and spatial displacement produced by telecommunications technology, which is closer to the way our memory works, with gaps, faint records, repetitions, blind spots, flashbacks, imaginative jumps, associations, and daydreaming.<sup>35</sup>

The self-reflexivity involved in the medium of home movies and the process of filmmaking (and making a personal film) in the “paused” or “held” images is meant to not only pause the imagery to make the point that this is a digital transfer of analogue film. It is also a way to take “pause” in temporarily suspending the deluge of imagery coming through the screen. The paused images are also meant to reflect on what the film is physically doing as it builds images for the viewer.

### **Reconstruction and Representation of Personal Memory**

The recollection of personal memory is both fluid and entirely subjective while at the same time embedded in nearly all of our present activities and decisions. Its fragmentary nature

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<sup>34</sup> Joanna Sassoon, “Photographic Materiality in the Age of Digital Reproduction,” in *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (New York: Routledge, 2004), 189.

<sup>35</sup> Simone Osthoff, *Performing the Archive*, 178.

is often reflective of one's current life experience and cannot always be relied upon as a true, direct experience. Personal memory relies on what is both retained and forgotten. The ability to process a situation through memory can be based on life experience and perspective. We aim to know ourselves in the narratives we tell ourselves and others about our pasts, but, as Bernstein and Loftus state:

In essence, all memory is false to some degree. Memory is inherently a reconstructive process, whereby we piece together the past to form a coherent narrative that becomes our autobiography. In the process of reconstructing the past, we color and shape our life's experiences based on what we know about the world.<sup>36</sup>

These narratives we tell ourselves will change over time. Memory's fragmentary nature can leave spaces in our understanding of the past and also how we perceive ourselves both in the present and the future.<sup>37</sup>

Reconstruction of personal memory is done throughout our daily lives but is also reflected in our interactions with others and in the art that we create. If all of us are changing our pasts (as they are perceived) through our accumulated lived experience, the knowns and the unknowns become incorporated at the very same time:

Decades of evidence demonstrates that we change our memories as we lay them down, we alter them again if new information comes to light, and then, if it helps us to make sense of events, we can change them again when we recall them. Memory is reconstructive. None of this is done dishonestly or even consciously. But while the flexible nature of memories presents a problem for the reliability of eyewitness testimony, this same flexibility could be the key to imagining the future at all.<sup>38</sup>

The ability to be able to see "truth" and "non-truth" as part of the same construction of memory helps to understand its ephemeral nature and perhaps lends a philosophical slant that

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<sup>36</sup> Daniel M. Bernstein and Elizabeth Loftus, "How to Tell If a Particular Memory Is True or False," *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 4, no. 4 (July 2009): 373.

<sup>37</sup> Claudia Hammond, *Time Warped: Unlocking the Mysteries of Time Perception* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2012), 229.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

can be applied to life – that we are both awake and unconscious, darkness and light, death and life – and that these binaries are, by their very nature, the definition of life, which is reinforced in meaning with the experiences, people and spaces that surround us.

Reconstruction is shown with my nieces, nephew and sister as the main characters (and voices) in the film. They represent the present day, the passage of time, renewal with a new generation, and the complex dynamics within a family. The nuance of their personalities is captured in the “little moments” and interactions of the everyday. The way in which all of them are represented in the film was of primary importance. I have shown the children and my sister (their mother) the scenes as they were assembled as well as the final version to ensure that all were in agreement with the context and content of their appearances. The assembly was done from my own perspective and experience, but I wanted to ensure that there was no misunderstanding or disagreement with my choices, “Clearly, the problem of speaking for has at its center a concern with accountability and responsibility. Acknowledging the problem of speaking for others cannot result in eliminating a speaker’s accountability.”<sup>39</sup> My perspective as an adult in a position of power who interprets the way in which scenes become edits is informed from my own life experience and related to my experience as a child as I remember my childhood:

...information outside the frame is a constant reminder that home movies are highly selective in what they show...In presenting the image of an ideal selective past, home movies announce what is absent. They stand in for what is there *and* what is not there. In their ambivalence they both confess and hide. The home movies are simultaneously acts of self-revelation, self-deception, and self-conception.<sup>40</sup>

I have selected scenes that while ordinary (mostly at play), reveal the children’s complex relationships with each other, their mother and their aunt. Some scenes reveal other subtexts

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<sup>39</sup> Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique*, no. 20 (1991): 16.

<sup>40</sup> Michelle Citron, *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions*, 19.

that they are not aware of themselves (yet), such as gender roles, the need for each child to be heard and to express themselves, the overall need for fairness, and how each child is learning about themselves and life through play. Most of the footage is taken during leisure time (a four day camping trip and a mid-summer day at the beach), so their excitement is somewhat heightened. The obligations and responsibilities of school and weekly swimming lessons are temporarily suspended. Although they are somewhat idealized in their depictions, they still act as themselves, but are aware of the camera and its function nonetheless.

The reliability on memory and the truth of the material presented is shown in various forms. The most overt footage that relates to memory are photographs from family albums that are thirty-plus years old. Incorporating these albums creates a sense of nostalgia from the physicality of the photos themselves (their rounded edges, dated fashion and aesthetics of the print/filter), but they are also embedded in the present (and all that remains in relation to memory). This element of memory is also tied to the unconscious, dreams, imagination as well as disembodied memory. These types of archival photographs are familiar to my sister and myself as an experience of our childhood - we can name from direct experience (or have been told) the names and relations of the figures in the photos. However, the circumstances surrounding the time and place they were taken are not known, and some of the adults in the photos are no longer with us. This type of knowledge falls away over time, until the people in the images become altogether unfamiliar with each passing generation. It also points to the way in which information that my sister and I have (in our limited capacity) relayed to her children and whether this is important to convey in the first place.

The simultaneous layering of the Super 8 footage in the film is meant to stand in for “past” footage – footage which does not actually exist. This is “revealed” in one of the final



Video still from *Perforations*: the “reveal”- my nieces and nephew in Super 8 footage, showing the contemporary day in analogue medium (frame grab: 12:44)

scenes. Up to this point, the “vintage” footage only showed scenes of nature and landscape and lacked human figures (which would have, by the fashions and styles, placed it in a present time and space). When the children that you see throughout the film in contemporary DSLR footage suddenly appear in the Super 8 footage, it reveals that the Super 8 footage was contemporary all along and unveils the deception that I create while deconstructing (and reconstructing) the making of a “home movie.” This deception calls attention to the reconstructive nature of our memory as well as the lack of vintage home movie footage we have had in our family prior to the late 1980s: “There is incongruity in many respects between the constraints of yesterday and those of today, from which it follows that we can only imagine those of the past incompletely and imperfectly.”<sup>41</sup> It is also through the use of experimental documentary film that such types of experiences can be properly transmitted.

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<sup>41</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 50.

## **Cycles of Life and Death and Landscape: Nature and Family History and the Lower Class**

The cycles of the natural world - life, growth, decay and death - are regularly occurring and accepted within nature. Death is the final acceptance of life. It ensures continuity in its renewed cycle and the ultimate experience of vulnerability: making room for others to carry on with the humility of accepting that one's role in life is complete (even if one's life did not align with expectations from the past). Within nature, all of these processes seem to occur without protest even though survival and procreation are central to existence and acceptance of these cycles appears to be more innate. In contemporary (and urban) society, humanity is further removed from the cycles of nature, and this lack of connection removes us from nature's ability to remind us of greater truths. Humans in the past (and places not located in the first world) were/are more aware of nature and are more in tune with it. In cases when humans more fully accept nature and the natural elements (and are at the mercy of it), they embrace their vulnerability (and their mortality) within this realm.

Those who remain in connection with the landscape are reliving an initial set of familial traditions as, "landscapes are often forums for social interaction... Thus, experience is neither exclusively internal nor external, but a space between landscape and people."<sup>42</sup> Nature and the landscape are often introduced in childhood, and when this is the case, one's relationship with nature remains for life. It becomes the backdrop of formation - "landscape *circulates* as a medium of exchange, a site of visual appropriation, a focus for the formation of identity."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Susan Herrington, *On Landscapes*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 125.

<sup>43</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 2.

The mystery, longevity, resilience, recovery, rebirth and wisdom of the natural world, as well as its visual and aural language, offer time and space for contemplation. The use of water as a metaphor for life as moving and ever changing is carried throughout the film. The use of coastal imagery – those from the west, where I grew up and where my immediate family



Video still from *Perforations*: Gordon Bay Provincial Park, Vancouver Island, British Columbia (frame grab: 3:20)

currently live, and east, where my paternal lineage originates - references the interconnection of generations living by the sea and the backdrop that it creates in our lives as a physical presence, resource and symbol.

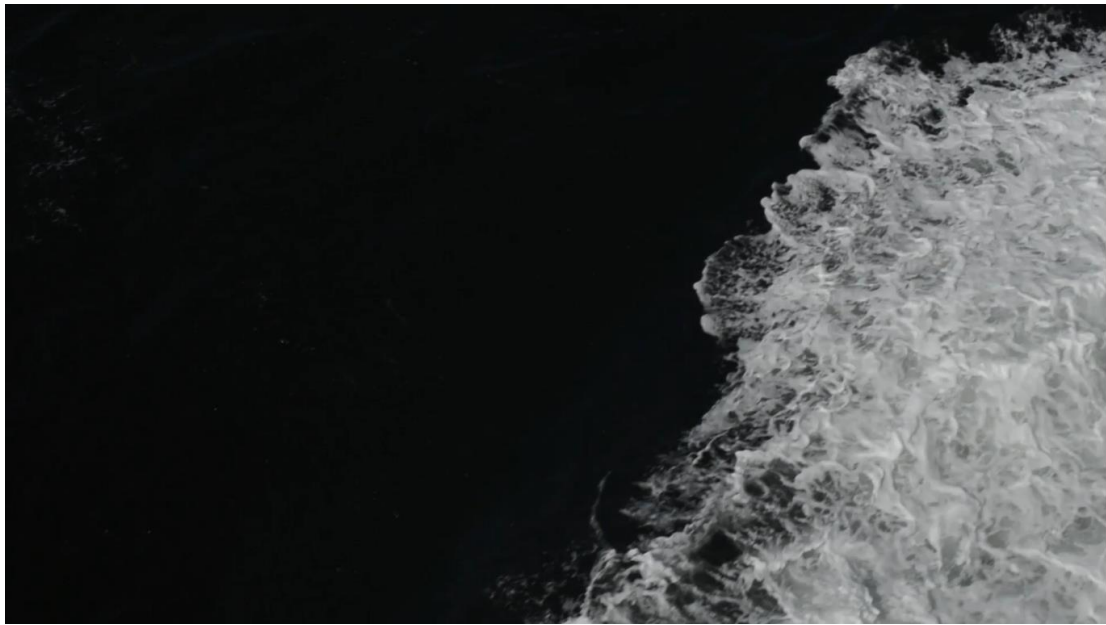
The ocean functions as a metaphor in the film and is the springboard for the soundtrack/score. This ever-present sensory experience – sound, sight, smell, and its prevalence in everyday occurrences (travel by ferry, recreation, means by which to obtain goods for daily living) also becomes a background in the everyday – the sound of the air and space, moisture retained in the air, sounds from fog horns in the seasons of transition. As Serres describes:

We never hear what we call background noise so well as we do at the seaside. That placid or vehement uproar seems established there for all eternity. In the strict horizontal of it all, stable, unstable cascades are endlessly trading. Space is



assailed, as a whole, by the murmur; we are utterly taken over by this same murmuring. Proteus—the god of the sea, a minor and marginal god, nonetheless a god of the first water, a god whose name stands at the beginning – is the shepherd who tends the oceanic flocks in the prairie of Poseidon. He swells in the waters round the isle of Pharos near the mouth of the Nile, Pharos, bearer of the first Beacon, Pharos, the fire that sheds light, standing out against the misty background, yet whose name means canvas, sail, veil: revealing, re-veiling.<sup>44</sup>

The ocean's ever-changing sounds, smells, tides and vastness are elements that I need to return to in order to experience a re-connection to my youth and to recalibrate my existence in



Video still from *Perforations*: The ferry's wake: crossing the Strait of Georgia to Vancouver Island (frame grab: 9:44)

the world. By being able to see nature as something to return to in the many phases of life (nature was introduced and experienced regularly as a child), I have continued to find a place in which to find refuge from the challenges and routines of life. It is also a place for reflection, renewal and inspiration.

The experience of viewing (and hearing) the natural world in the film is not only representative as a metaphor (seen in edits and where scenes are placed), but I hoped that nature

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<sup>44</sup> Michel Serres, extract from *Genèse* (Paris: Grasset, 1982); trans. Geneviève James and James Nielson, *Genesis* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995), from the book *Sound* by Caleb Kelly, 93-94.



was also a familiar experience/interaction for the viewers (perhaps some more often than others) – and that it was a “return” for those who have been away from it. The film shows nature through footage from oceans, forests, landscapes through travel, and through the soundtrack. It is also used as an unheard, invisible or subtle voice to draw attention to how nature (if we allow it) can teach us through the various stages of our lives.

### **Methodology**

The project emerged out of an original intention to explore the concepts of loss, memory and patterns of the past as shown in the present through the figures of my maternal and paternal grandmothers. This was done via travel and road footage on a Greyhound bus trip from Toronto to Victoria, British Columbia (and back again) as well as a three week visit to coastal Vancouver Island to visit my family. Later, I drove from Toronto to coastal New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. My paternal grandmother was born and raised in a small fishing village in New Brunswick and later moved to coastal BC; my maternal grandmother had spent some time on Vancouver Island in her earlier years and the later part of her life raising her seven children in a small prairie community in Alberta. Filming in these locations were meant to tie the footage (and myself) to these histories.

Capturing non-tangible elements such as memory and loss was a challenge. Inspired by Mekas, I took the approach of filming my nieces, nephew and sister during their summer vacation to explore both the present moment and how life continues to carry on in the younger generations. This was done partially via taking long shots in *cinema-verité* style (using both a tripod and shoulder-harnessed hand-held camera) and simply letting scenes unfold as they occurred with the hope that the themes I was exploring would show up on camera. I initially tried to be “invisible” in the footage of the children, but it became impossible during certain moments to

not interact with them as they asked questions and treated me as they would have if a camera had not been present. But it ended up that these interactive scenes between us created an entry point for the viewer to begin to understand our relationships with each other. In the interludes between the verité scenes, I shot natural elements in the landscapes which would eventually be built up over a vocal narrative that also incorporated the sounds of the natural landscape.

Many of the spaces captured on film and video had been frequented by my sister and myself as our younger selves – ones that held particular emotional memories that I have carried with me over time and distance. These places have also shown up subconsciously as backdrops in dreams over the years. Although I was unclear of the eventual form of the piece and how it would come together, I had to be open in the moment and to trust my instincts and intuition. Exploration was a component which was important to experience as a process first hand as well as to show in the footage. This was as much a journey of my own mind and memory as it was a journey of recording and logging these places through film.

Shooting with the Super 8 camera required a greater awareness and attention to the running time as well as an awareness of the quality of the visual (what was coming into the scene, when to keep rolling and when to stop recording). The scanning of the Super 8 footage was done frame by frame (each frame was scanned separately), which was utilized in editing during the “freeze frame” and “slowed down” sequences. These techniques called attention to the analogue nature of the medium of the film itself as it moved through a projector. It was also meant to catch the viewer off guard and away from their given expectations as well as to allude to the greater themes of life, death and loss:

Stillness and emptiness are perhaps magnified when the motion-picture screen remains blank after a film ends. More important, stillness may stand out *during* a

motion picture, in the form of freeze frames, for example, or frame of sheer light or darkness, such as signal[ing] death and dying.<sup>45</sup>

The sound recordings were derived primarily from landscapes, including bodies of water in varying forms and intensities. Incorporating the sounds of the ocean into the film added to its dreamlike quality, which also alluded to the themes and references of memory, undying energy and the forces of nature: mystery, recovery, rebirth, cycles and longevity. Sync sound was used in the cinema verité scenes of the children at play as they interacted with the natural elements. The interior sounds of the bus (*en route* to the west coast) and inside the car (to the east coast) were recorded for their ambient sounds. These recordings had a certain type of frequency and meditative quality that helped to layer the sound and construct the soundscape. It was important to have the sound of water be a continuous reference throughout the film visually and acoustically as:

Without water, life as we know it wouldn't exist. Giving off the most ancient of sounds, it is extremely hard to capture acoustically and replicate. Its burbling, hissing, lapping, roaring, crashing, multi-rhythmic periodically has served as a setting for human themes since the first music was sung and the first words spoken.<sup>46</sup>

The work of Gordon Hempton and his idea that “silence [the sounds of nature] is not the absence of something...but the presence of everything”<sup>47</sup> was also a crucial component of the work. Sounds of nature and “silence” also work as a metaphor for the silence of the unheard: “With the introduction of *noise* – the sounds of life – into a compositional framework tending towards the ephemeral and avoiding the referential I, artists and composers have created works

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<sup>45</sup> Ira Jaffe, *Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2014), 130.

<sup>46</sup> Bernie Krause, *The Great Animal Orchestra: Finding the Origins of Music in the World's Wild Places* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2012), 17.

<sup>47</sup> Gordon Hempton and John Grossman, *One Square Inch of Silence: One Man's Quest to Preserve Quiet* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 2.

based on the assumption that all sounds uttered are music.”<sup>48</sup> I have found that being exposed to elements in nature can often answer deeper philosophical questions and I therefore wanted the exposure of these elements to be a steady backdrop in the film.

The process of constructing the narration came much later in the editing process and started with a full construction of the soundtrack on its own (a conversation that I have with myself and my grandmothers) combined with the dialogue of the verité scenes and the ambient sounds of elements. This process helped to construct the visuals of the film and was a jumping board for bringing the elements of sound and visuals together as a more cohesive piece.

The narration was also constructed and woven together from the dialogue of the children in their various interactions with each other, their mom and myself; the conversations and observations that occurred in those scenes were carefully chosen for their content and reference the greater themes of the film. The primary voice is my own, recalling what it means to be a descendant of two grandmothers who were not fully known to their grandchildren and great grandchildren. My voice is relational (as a granddaughter) as I speak to ideas of inheritance, meaning, time, truth, mothering and the unknown. The narration is a type of conversation/confessional/inquiry with these two matriarchal figures which I have never experienced. I also see (hear) the natural sounds and the voices as “speaking” to each other, and even though the natural elements are more abstract in their language, they hold meaning in their force, mystery, rhythms and universality.

Editing strategies evolved over time and was a slow and methodical process, punctured with occasional insights. I was very hesitant to tell a story that was direct and precise. Narration came last and reluctantly as I struggled to find and trust my own voice. The overall strategy with

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<sup>48</sup> Dan Lander, extract from “Introduction,” *Sound by Artists*, ed. Dan Lander and Micah Lexier (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1990), 10-14, in *Sound*, edited by Caleb Kelly, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2011), 63.

editing was to drop clues throughout the film about these mysterious, missing figures, alluding to them abstractly throughout and eventually revealing who they were in the last minutes of the film. I felt that this approach paralleled my own process of discovery and their importance in my life - they were two figures that I had missed throughout my life and only realized this well into adulthood. While "...withhold[ing] information and actions that might amplify the spectator's understanding of what is happening,"<sup>49</sup> this process of revelation was meant to parallel the way in which life often reveals scatterings of understandings about complicated matters in families throughout one's life and not just at the onset of adulthood.

The slowness in the reveal, and the general lack of "action" in the film was intended as a point of reflection for the audience and to create a space of contemplation for the inexplicable elements in life as well as the interconnection we have with each other in experiencing these situations:

As a strategy of the contemporary, aesthetic slowness not only reminds us of the fact that everything could be different from how it is and has been. It also allows us to explore and rub against the very limits of what transcends our sense of control and strategic individualism, be it political, psychological, or perceptual in nature. Slowness approaches the present as a realm of unfulfilled pasts and unclaimed futures; it stresses the extent to which the virtual is deeply embedded in what we call and perceive as the real.<sup>50</sup>

This approach to slowness, as well as the incorporation of juxtaposition, is materialized in many forms. It occurs in the materiality of the image and the use of Super 8 footage that is juxtaposed with video to represent the past, present and memory. They present a collage of images that refer to each other and at the same time call attention to themselves as singular forms. Filming and editing involve "three "voices" – speaker, seer, and seen... avant-garde filmmaker as collagist and editor. This is perhaps the surrealist heritage of the form, the role of juxtaposition,

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<sup>49</sup> Jaffe, *Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action*, 12.

<sup>50</sup> Lutz Koepnick, *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 14.

irony and *rétrouvé*, through which the film- or videomaker “writes” an identity of temporal structures.”<sup>51</sup> These temporal structures are also shown in the juxtaposition (but also relationship between) the natural world scenes and the “live action” scenes of the children. The “reality” of the *verité* scenes combined with the more abstracted ones in nature (with narration) gives an element of contrast and allows the viewer to question the reality and subjectivity of the film.

### **Conclusion**

The overall process of making the film involved a set of personal confrontations involving the themes that arose, particularly the feelings that I had not completely faced in the past about my family and my (lack of) relationship with my grandmothers. It was this experience of vulnerability that I hope comes through and allows viewers to be able to see parts of their own lives reflected in the film.

Self-reflection was meant to parallel the process of filmmaking and was experienced through creativity, emotional risk-taking and being open. The dust and lint on the lens and in the camera are shown in most frames of the film (sometimes obviously, sometimes more embedded) and highlight the medium’s (and life’s) imperfections, unexpectedness, tangibility and being ever-present. This ephemera circles back to my grandmothers and is a reminder that nothing is ever “lost” or “gone,” and that much can be gleaned just below the surface. It is also a reminder to contemplate and slow down: “Life is faster today than it has ever been before, it is concluded, but in accumulating ever more impressions, events, and stimulations we end up with ever less—less substance, less depth, less meaning, less freedom, less spontaneity.”<sup>52</sup> It was the time spent with the footage and the concurrent contemplation which created a level of depth to

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<sup>51</sup> Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, 277-8.

<sup>52</sup> Koepnick, *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary*, 1.

the experience which was helpful in reflecting on the cycles of life. Multiple viewings should uncover further details in the film that may have gone previously unnoticed and speak to the nuance, subtlety and complexity of life.

In the end, the mere ability to spend time thinking about the meaning of life is an experience that comes from a place of privilege. It is only through the rise of the leisure class in contemporary culture that such reflections have been able to occur, and I hope that my self-reflectiveness in the film speaks to this idea and acknowledges that privilege.

**(word count: 10,347)**

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