

Anesthesia
Director's Notes
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ANESTHESIA

Why make this movie?

Walking in New York City we encounter extremes and everything between: wealth and poverty, gluttony and starvation, joy and pathos, brilliance and stupidity, abstinence and addiction, wisdom and ignorance, all in a weirdly connected diversity.

Lost in the devices we carry, we see this world less and less.

With ANESTHESIA I'd like us to make a film that removes the ear-buds and looks up from the tablet to examine whether our modern world, in which technology shortens distances and democratizes access to information, has actually improved our lives or anesthetized and even diminished them. Are we happier now? More fulfilled? More importantly, do we live as completely as those who lived a century ago, and is there any room left for introspection?

We'll strike at these abstractions by delving directly into an assortment of very specific and unexpectedly connected lives. Our characters are smart, often extremely articulate, in some cases profoundly wise, but each shares an inclination to numb him or herself to an unpredictable and painful world.

The film should be immersive, immediate, direct, funny, and at times uncomfortably frank. Shot mostly hand-held, on a floating head, or with a slider, and capturing the real colors and cadences of its every milieu, it should seem to breathe with the inhabitants of each scene. We'll prefer immediacy to distance, creating a picture that feels like life itself in the crowded, diverse city in which it's set.

Let's start then with what the movie is about. Usually I'd describe this with a one or two sentence synopsis that follows the journey of a single protagonist, but that really doesn't apply here. While Zarrow and what happens to him certainly centers the film, particularly as his concluding lecture on existentialism binds the stories together thematically, this is still more a story about an agglomeration of people than a single person. That said, an attempt to organize the film's plot follows.

Synopsis

One night a Columbia University Philosophy Professor named Walter Zarrow is wounded critically during a mugging on Manhattan's Upper West Side. In an effort to escape, he rings buzzers indiscriminately in a tenement vestibule, waking Sam, a middle aged father of two having an affair in the city. Sam reluctantly answers Zarrow's pleas, and Zarrow loses consciousness in his arms.

In the film that ensues, through an exploration of why these men, along with the mugger and an addict named Joe who also tries to save Zarrow, come together, we explore New York City at the beginning of the 21st Century. The experience of Zarrow, Sam, Joe, and

Zarrow's assailant ripple quickly out to include the connected lives of a housewife struggling with alcoholism in suburbia and her children, a stoner teen in Brooklyn eager to lose his virginity and his sister, a brilliant but failed African American writer succumbing to addiction, and the lawyer and doctor who try to save him, two middle class parents confronting the prospect of terminal illness, and a hyper-articulate Grad Student who chronically wounds herself to feel alive in a culture gone mad with technology.

ANESTHESIA hopes to examine where we are right now, and through the very real lives of its diverse characters, it asks also where we're headed, and whether self-reflection has a place there.

How do we make it?

That all said, what should be our approach? I've spent the last several months examining films in the sub-genre of contemporary urban ensemble dramas, and while I've had a great time doing so, I find myself bewilderingly seduced by each approach I encounter. Our options would seem limitless, and I'll go over a few.

The first questions, at least to me, center on access. Are we excluded or privileged? Is our filming larcenous or welcomed? In the former, we compress space, shooting from a distance with long lenses so the characters wouldn't seem to know we're there. In this iteration you really *feel* the lens the way you do in many Altman films, or Coppola's *The Conversation*. The value of this is to place the audience in the position in which we often find ourselves in the city, in which a face on a subway car or at a table across the restaurant captures our interest and begin to imagine where the life is headed or what brought it where it is. In a city so crowded with interesting and diverse people, we become spies just by virtue of glancing curiously around. Such a film grants us access because of the apparatus of filmmaking, rendering the viewer a kind of spy, which is not only interesting for all that implies and implicates, but also very stylish. The acting strategy that goes along with that is highly naturalistic, conversational, intimate, and almost hyper improvised, as if the microphones are as sensitive as our long lenses; that without highly specialized equipment, we'd never know what was going on.

Let's consider the opposite approach, however, in which we're invited in, granted real proximity to the characters' lives. This puts us within scenes rather than outside of them, as if we've been not just allowed to witness these interactions, but almost urged to do so. In this aesthetic the lens should see what the eye would (meaning a range between 28-50mm), and we should seem to be hearing what the ear would hear. This allows intimacy through inclusion rather than distance, meaning camera and style would largely recede from our consciousness.

While the former of these approaches certainly calls more attention to itself, each should be considered for its subjectivity, and that line of thinking (harder to construe in the second approach in which the camera disappears) leads me to prefer access through proximity rather than distance, meaning we'll shoot this film on wider lenses from the

inside of scenes rather than outside of them. To serve this material best we need intimacy and access, and a literal closeness between crew and actors. Real immediacy inside that crucible allows for it. One could argue that the privacy afforded by actors alone at a table being spied on by a distant lens more mimics the actual situations we're exploring (especially clandestine scenes like those between Sam and Nicole), but access feels more generous, and that to me trumps all else. A great deal goes wrong in the lives of these characters, and the results are tragic and hard; to counterbalance that with an openheartedness in the way we tell those stories will accrue very much to our benefit as storytellers. The audience should feel invited in by the troupe making this film, not pushed off to its periphery.

This will advantage us in all sorts of ways, beginning with production design, since long lenses compress space, and shying away from them simply means we'll generally see more inside the frame. Our aspect ratio will be 1.85, but our angles should feel obtuse, with a great deal of color and information, and above all depth, available to the lens. In general I'd rather we see windows or deep background than walls since we're discovering these characters *within* a great city, but not limited by it (other than specifically contrary instances, such as Sophie hiding in the bathroom or Joe locked in a detox ward).

To be clear, we're not going for deep focus, so much as the feeling that we're seldom hemmed in. I'd like for the environments to feel around us and beyond us, rather than simply in front of us. New York City should feel so much a part of this film that the audience shouldn't be able to imagine it occurring anywhere else. What I've always appreciated about the city is the polyglot density of the place, meaning we're confronted in very tight spaces by a dizzying welter of cultures, languages, and social and economic strata. Though Manhattan, where much of the film takes place, has become more and more the borough of the very poor and very wealthy, there certainly remain pockets as diverse as anywhere in the country and perhaps world. Our choices should accentuate that, from extras and what they wear, to the varying details and textures of each environment the film explores.

A further hope is that this spatial openness, along with proximity of crew and camera, draws out a more intimate acting style, in which less need be done for a performance to be legible. Our film should feel intimate and generous, but never indulgent, and we'll divest our wonderful actors of any need to show us what or how they feel. Ours will be an active, foot-forward acting aesthetic, in which characters try to get what they need in transitive ways, leaving aside the burden of demonstrating emotion or mood. A shooting style that feels more immersive will have the sensitivity and agility to capture this sort of approach without actors needing to do anything other than relate to their scene partners. Put simply: need trumps emotion. Above all, I like for the set to feel like a place where actors can take risks, and a quiet intimacy among the cohort making this film, whether crew or actors, allows for that. This means no public reprimands, no shouting at one another, and above all, mutual respect. The best sets I've been on, while regimented and organized to maximize the limited time at hand, have the low key feel of an extended rehearsal, which is where formative risks get taken without the pressure of

performance that can stifle such risks. Great films capture ineffably surprising and truthful moments on screen, and our job is to make sure our actors can have such moments when the camera is pointed at them.

Different Worlds

ANESTHESIA explores the themes of alienation and disconnection through the variably connected lives of a dozen or so characters. How best do we differentiate between their disparate milieus? Since our shooting style will be for the most part consistent, the answer lies in production design and wardrobe. Generally we'll choose color palates for each set of characters that will permeate both their environments and what they wear. Some general notes follow organized by families and/or storylines that involve each of the characters.

Walter Zarrow

Zarrow teaches philosophy at Columbia University, and has done so for over thirty years. He is at least part Jewish, and probably first or second generation American, with Rabbis in his bloodline. I offer this to suggest that his youth at home, not just his schooling, steeped him in moral and metaphysical thought. I add metaphysical because Zarrow is the sort of thinker who grew up around the need to explore not only the rights and wrongs of human existence, but the why and how of it as well. While Judaism doesn't get addressed *per se* in this film, its tradition of perceiving its liturgy as a source of perpetual analysis and disputation does through the manner in which Zarrow teaches. He has devoted his life to furnishing young thinkers with his take on an assortment of fundamental texts from which he's then able to build his own argument regarding the increasing importance of the examined life in the changing world he sees around him. Our film depends on a love of thinkers and their words, and this emanates from Zarrow and the tradition he represents. Every character in this film has a perspicuous take on life, including the kids. While Zarrow serves as a kind of spiritual hub for this range of introspection, each actor should think about how his character perceives the world around him or her, and how that manifests itself in both needs and actions. Actors should ask themselves, as Zarrow does, what does my character make of it all?

Zarrow, when we see him lecture in the film, concerns himself with existentialism, though his initial talk actually addresses Schopenhauer, a precursor. Existentialism, a branch of philosophy developed in the twentieth century concerns itself with the absence of any *a priori* truths, meaning absolutes that universalize notions of right and wrong, good and evil, and even truth and untruth. The bloodlines reach back into the nineteenth century (Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and more importantly Nietzsche), because such thinkers were questioning the fundamental tenants of Christianity in light of scientific lines of inquiry initiated in the enlightenment and flourishing in the 19th century. Most famously, Nietzsche's assertion of the "death of God," along with Kierkegaard's exploration of the tension between Abraham's faith in God that compels him to murder his own son, and the seeming universal taboo against infanticide, not to mention murder,

left thinkers eager to explore new lines of philosophical truth. Existentialism, whose main proponents were Sartre and Camus, roundly accepted the implicit challenges of their precursors to universal truths, but pushed the notion even further in asserting a primacy in simple existence that individuates both morality and reality through each person's response to his or her world. They took Descartes's famous dictum "cogito ergo sum," ("I think therefore I am") and pushed it further, the implication being that existence itself initiates a person's reality, essentially turning on its head any notion of absolute truths preceding the reality of each person. Heidegger proposes that "I am an entity whose what is precisely to be and nothing but to be."

The impact these thinkers had on twentieth century thought cannot be underestimated, even as "existentialism" has, largely through misinterpretation, been the butt of jokes, or worse, become overused to the point of cliché. We hear people, as I did recently at a party, speak of being in "an existential fog," or having an "existential crisis," which would seem to connote a kind of paralysis of identity or action, but at this point bears little relation to what those words actually might mean. Instead, the impact of stripping universal morality of its overriding power, and paving a way through relativism to a polarity specific to each individual through the perspective of his or her unique existence allows at its best for a deeply contemplative and above all liberated approach to life. Once we recognize that no external facts about us—weight, height, ethnicity, even personal history—can be used to determine who we are, but that we rather discover our own inherent truths through the experience of existing, we become the sole determiners of who and what we are. This state is called "transcendence."

To me no other line of inquiry better suits the issues we're addressing in this film, particularly as explored by the characters of Zarrow and Sophie. Kierkegaard's statement, quoted by Zarrow that "the crowd is untruth" urges that normative and, worse, normalizing societal powers must inherently be questioned because that which purports to be universal is by virtue of the ambition fallacious. Both Zarrow and Sophie look around them and perceive only danger to the ideas they'd pursue and tease out. Plugged in, backed up, and numbed by drugs (pot, alcohol, crack, pharmacology) their fellow humans exist rather mindlessly with the herdlike mentality Nietzsche so despised, but worse, with the illusion of a kind of imperviousness that approaches the divine. In his initial scene with Adam, when he's to learn of Jill's potential cancer, Zarrow alludes (not by name) to the "singularity," and the futurist work of Ray Kurzweil who predicts our immortality through our merging with computers by 2040. Zarrow's central question then is will introspection continue to have a place? Since his very field survived the death of God and with it the debunking of moral structures that allowed for the principles of right and wrong, good and evil, truth and lie, the answer would seem to be "yes," but only if its acolytes continue to question. This urgency comprises the heart of Zarrow's beliefs.

The Zarrow Family

With Marcia, Zarrow has found what would seem to be an ideal life partner. That she goes for chocolate late at night with the dog connotes an ease and confidence with

life. Zarrow buys her flowers without fail every Friday, though occasionally he surprises her on other days as well. Their apartment should be clean and somewhat current; certainly not of the cliché musty professorial rug burdened sort, because I don't feel Marcia would settle for that.

They have one son, Adam, who is married to Jill. Jill and Adam have two children: Hal and Ella. Should he wish it, Hal might become the sort of academic star who could eclipse his grandfather, and we should certainly get the impression that the mind was passed down through Adam, with a healthy measure of Jill's fighting spirit thrown in. Hal's journey leads him in a sense from the disconnected and intellectual (often both at once) to a level of emotional connection by the end of the film that he's never experienced. Two forces effect this: Amy, and the mugging of his grandfather, so that when he shares the last scene with his grandmother he's achieved a level of emotional awareness completely unfamiliar to him.

Ella takes a rather different journey, learning to temper her emotions, with the help of a pair of simple interactions, one with Werth and the other with her mother, that lead her to accept the unseemliness of her emotions without self judgment. Together Hal and Ella exhibit what's best about the Adam Zarrow family, in that they combine fierce intelligence with open discourse. While Hal and Ella might sneak pot on the roof, the parents deal with it head on, and the kids feel comfortable enough to fight back. To my mind, Jill and Adam have a healthy marriage and the kids know that.

The character of Jill is actually named for a woman I knew who died of cancer in her forties. She was a pro bono lawyer interested in children's rights, which seems like a good profession for our Jill, though I have not modeled her on my deceased friend beyond the name. Adam to me seems like a city planner, or maybe a professor himself, but regardless, neither he nor Jill works or has a background in business since they're meant to contrast with the Shaffson family apposite them in New Jersey. Their home should have a measure of chaos to it, but not because the parents don't care, rather because they're living life in all its healthy and terrific complexity. Above all, this is a close family, with the most perspicuous but not exclusive alliances being those between brother and sister and husband and wife. Jill and Adam's marriage will last, and their children will always be close. Certain interactions indicate this, starting with the level of comfort Jill has with Adam in being able to share her disappointment with him. Sure, they fight, but she wastes no time in challenging him for having spoken to his father about his illness, and he likewise chooses openness in revealing the emotional vulnerability that led him to do so. Hal, for his part, feels sufficiently comfortable with Ella to recover quickly enough from her having caught him masturbating to help her with a math problem and agree to get high within a matter of minutes.

The camera should feel patient and confident, not alarmed around, the Zarrow families, so that any upset or potential hysteria appears healthy and normal, not dangerous, inappropriate or surprising. Likewise, the clothing and design elements we choose should indicate enough structure and intentionality to project lives that while open to surprise, risk, and improvisation, are being lived fully by loving people protective of one

another as well as themselves.

Sam, Sarah and Family

We know that Sam and Sarah met in Business School, probably at Harvard or Columbia (not Wharton because Sarah takes a swipe at Penn), which I say specifically because they've got great minds, a taste for labels, and they're resolutely East Coast. Their move to New Jersey, explained pretty straightforwardly to Allie and Angie by Sarah, epitomizes a search for a kind of suburban idyll to which both attach how kids should be raised and family life lived, but this without ever considering the ramifications of that: separation from friends, urban comforts, urban challenges, and for Sarah, a career. Smart, attractive and accomplished, Sam and Sarah would have seemed, at the time of their wedding, to have had it all, even mellifluously alliterative names, a concept repeated when naming their children.

In Englewood they chose wisely: thirty minutes from Manhattan, wealthy, safe, chockablock with educated couples such as themselves eager to raise kids well. Our Gracie Chanoff School is based on the Elizabeth Morrow School, founded in 1930, and sitting on fourteen gorgeous acres off Lydecker Street in Englewood. Kids from dozens of towns, as well as Manhattan, attend. It's highly traditional with a dress code and an extensive curriculum that includes Mandarin Chinese, Latin, and even calculus all before eighth grade, when it ends (k-8). But perhaps the biggest draw is its strings program-on-steroids, run by the extraordinary instructor Emilia Gold. Kids do indeed spend months simply learning how to hold the bow, and the results are nationally renowned. Above all, this is a school for the privileged, of which the egregiously entitled are a healthy subset against which Sarah inveighs. What she learns of course is that much of what she fled in the city exists in the suburbs but more "artfully concealed." Yet what probably does Sarah in is the loss of her career. The question then is how do we approach telling the story of her disappointment?

A rule of acting, which I think can be healthily applied in any department, from the writing of characters to how they are clothed, photographed and lit, is to make positive, as opposed to negative choices when it comes to the challenge of playing and depicting scenes. Nicole avers in the film (and Sam agrees) that Sarah drinks because he's never home, which certainly obtains, but the emptiness of no longer having a career for which she trained carries equal force. I'd like to think Sarah once had a fast track, high status sort of job before opting to scrap it and stay home to raise children in the manner she deems appropriate. That Sam then seems always to be away only exacerbates the disappointment and loneliness. Drinking thus becomes her primary means of anesthetizing herself to a sense of betrayal, not only by her husband, but by herself and by life. Considered in these terms, even though Sarah drinks, she's not a woman who has given up; that to me is uninteresting, and veers toward self-pity. She is, rather, a person struggling to stay vital by any means possible, whether healthy or not.

For his part Sam stays away because the opportunities he's afforded in the city (particularly when he conceals his wedding ring) become irresistible juxtaposed with the

poignancy of life in the suburbs with a wife who's increasingly unfulfilled. While at the end of the film I'd like to hope that Sam and Sarah will find their way to a healthy marriage, this is far from certain, if only because they were perhaps too susceptible to marriage in the first place before they came to terms with the lives they wanted to live. In this regard, Sam, like Sarah, does what he can not only to stay vital, but to distract himself from the corrosive impact of a deteriorating marriage. What's most important however, is that our approach to both these characters should adduce how they're trying to make their lives work, even when these attempts are ultimately destructive. Actors advocate for their characters and so should we.

In terms of design and shooting style for the film's New Jersey section, this involves camera movement that, even when hand held, is sensitive, patient and elegant, rather than swift, invasive or impulsive. Likewise, Sarah shouldn't seem, either in dress, the state of her home and car, or even the sort of meal she cooks, to be in any sort of depressed retreat. Her discomfort with life should rather manifest itself in how earnestly she tries to live the life she imagined when moving to New Jersey. This means she wears nice clothes when Meredith is over, has good vodka and good wine, and cooks decent food in a clean, modern kitchen. Her car is in good nick, and when she drops the kids off at school it might be good to have her in gym clothes as if she's headed to a spin or yoga class after dropping them off, meaning she's taking care of her body.

Sam too cares about how he looks, and perhaps even more than Sarah hopes to restore the freedom of his youth; that time when he didn't know what came next. It'll be up to our actors to determine how they met, but my suggestion would be that Nicole, who clearly works freelance, was either hanging paintings or installing planters in Sam's office when he first noticed her and pocketed his wedding ring. What I do know is that she works in some occupation that involves design, and that both her clothing and apartment should reflect that. However illicit their affair, I'd rather also that we empathize with Sam and Nicole rather than judge them. These comprise two characters eager to find solace, comfort and hope at a time in their lives when each is somewhat lost. It's important to remember that over the course of the film they end the affair.

Sophie

When I first conceived of Sophie, I had no idea where she was headed, though her antecedents are the philosophy concentrators and grad students I met in college, whose approaches to their specific fields of study permeated every aspect of their lives from the sartorial to the emotional. While others would construe such thoroughness as self-conscious, I, having studied a good deal of philosophy myself, took the opposite point of view, finding it painfully honest. After all, if a person's focus is nothing short of what they make of life, why shouldn't that connect in very tangible ways to everything about them, from how they speak, what they do, to what they wear. This is all to say that little should divide how Sophie appears, speaks and interacts from her belief system as articulated to Zarrow and Elaine in their respective offices.

For their parts both Zarrow and Elaine gain access to Sophie because their openness

allows it. We should get the feeling that Sophie's been desperate to reveal what's going on with her, but hasn't found a single person she can trust until she arrives at Zarrow, and even with him she wasn't planning to do so until the moment she does. It's her sense of relief perhaps that allows for the subsequent outburst with Elaine. These interchanges should exude patience and warmth in carefully still environments that seem almost to invite the sort of catharsis that occurs. Conversely, the scene in which we meet Sophie and she encounters Roger (espresso bar) is one of ruthless and caffeinated impatience, inhibiting and stifling her as much as the others welcome her. This dichotomy in itself could easily represent the poles in Sophie's belief system; one in which our appetite for the immediate, as manifested in all that technology has to offer, inhibits the pure and patient interaction of the type that allows for introspection and independent thought. Though we encounter her reading Heidegger, Sophie is far more a Romantic thinker, along the lines of a displaced John Locke. She looks around her at 21st Century New York City and sees the enlightenment's demise, as humans lose all power of thought and action to the devices they carry.

Jeffrey and Joe

Without naming names, this storyline is based on a similar intervention I did, with the help of an over-sized ex-cop, on a person struggling with addiction about ten years ago. The trajectory of a very long day inspires our storyline, complete with the visit to the doctor's office, the shooting up on the street, and the forced lock-up in a detox ward. I had to leave town, and in spite of a few regrettably hapless phone calls on my part, the person checked himself out and was using again that day (48 hours after lock-up that is). Thankfully however, he is now clean and very much alive.

More importantly though, Joe represents a depth of genius and passion desperate for the respite of answers he cannot find. Unfortunately he discovers drugs, with years of alcohol as a gateway, before he can focus his creative desperation as a writer. For any of us who've matriculated into adulthood, the ranks of our friends are populated by a smattering of such tragic figures; those who seemed destined for spectacular renown with the sort of creative output that could alter lives, but instead ended up never learning either to harness the power, or control the passions that fueled it. When offered the euphoria of drugs, along with the weird convenience of their destructive power, they're lost, while the residue of what they could have been tragically and quite legibly remains.

Such a figure is Joe: he still writes, albeit probably with far less structure and discipline, and his argot, intentionally and a bit ironically of the street, is peppered with an outrageous vocabulary. At the point we meet him however, life centers around the next fix, and he's gripped by the double addiction of heroin and crack, a manifestly devastating combination. Within minutes under these drugs, one plunges from the suddenly manic to the blissfully subdued, and all of it with a remarkably lucid consciousness that leads only to fevered devising of how to make it happen again. The being I encountered in this state possessed all faculties, not excluding reason and even self-reflection, and the ride had been taken enough times as to furnish no surprises. In other words, he understood completely the position he was in, and could discuss its

ramifications lucidly and without the passion or uncertainty that derives from novelty.

The predicament in which Joe and Cedar find themselves then is not one of managing a drug-addled lunatic, but rather a drug addled genius very much in possession of his rhetorical powers. The most daunting initial surprise would actually be the physical being of an addict as juxtaposed with any recollection of the person before the drugs. Our Joe will be emaciated to a degree that certainly won't be lost on Jeffrey, and his apartment should be stripped of any belongings of monetary value. It's also filthy. Though ultimately up to the actor, I'd suggest that Jeffrey, who grew up upper middle class, went to top schools through law school, and now makes seven figures a year, has never encountered a place like the one in which he finds Joe. Wachtel, Lipton (which we probably won't be able to name) is the top corporate litigation firm in the city, and perhaps the country, having made its name defending against hostile takeovers with the famous "suicide pill" language that would render a targeted company so toxic that inimical suitors would shy away, hires only the best; and only the best of those, ambitious enough to log the 60+ hours a week, actually make partner the way Jeffrey has. He is an absolute star who, unlike Joe, was able to focus his brilliance gorgeously. He rides to and from work in black sedans with drivers that wait outside his every door, and he bills in excess of \$850 an hour. That said, he and Joe were once equals, and perhaps folks would have predicted Joe had more promise.

These scenes should be shot with the two actors in frame together as much as possible so we're reminded constantly of their shared background and the absurd contrast that's grown out of it. This comprises one of the film's most complex and tragic relationships, fraught with shame, guilt, love and hope, in which neither character is actually living the sort of life they might together once have considered ideal. Camera movement should be easy and patient, though far less so for the scenes with Joe when he leaves the hospital and his actions reach a desperation with which the lens should feel it's constantly trying to catch up.

And Finally, Everyone

One of my favorite paintings is Courbet's A BURIAL AT ORNANS, lampooned in its time as "A BURIAL OF PAINTING," but considered now a seminal work of the 19th century, and a harbinger of modernism. In it a group of mourners (of Courbet's uncle actually) rings a grave, the head of which opens out at us from the bottom of frame. What the painting accomplishes is the inclusion of the viewer at the scene, and the effect, confrontational at the time, sticks with you. In the vein of Courbet, a master of realism with a small "r," I'd like us to put the audience not only inside of our narratives, but inside each scene as well.



What Courbet manages compositionally is a formalism that feels accidental. While the s-shaped arrangement of the mourners, none of whose heads breaches the horizon, pushes our eye to the edge of the grave and the grave digger who kneels beside it, we don't end up feeling the painting is staged. The gathering seems random, and more to the point, generously unaware. As an audience, we seem so unnoticed, even taken for granted, as though we belong with the mourners. Both compositionally and psychologically we're included in the event. Even the crucifix, providing Christ as a witness in a manner that positions him either atop a staff, or on a distant mountain, has the illusion of feeling simultaneously formal and un-staged. With its seemingly monochromatic earth tones gently interrupted by reds and whites, and a lattice of eye lines and distracted glances, the painting is rigorously haphazard, somehow exerting utter control of where you're meant to look and when. Remove one constituent element, and the composition collapses. Because this is so manifestly true, even our positioning as the viewer seems elemental.

In how we design, shoot, act and edit, I want us to have similar aims, and with as little cutting as possible. In this film about connections between people and the spaces between them, the camera will achieve these aims in single takes when possible. Even close-ups will be shared, with the lens often roving from one face to another. In other words, this is not a shot-reverse shot kind of movie. That said, we'll often shoot scenes both ways in the event they could end up playing more effectively inside the film with traditional editing.

Finally, the frames themselves should be organized to feel more accidental than staged, as if these scenes, in which the characters encourage our presence, were happened upon rather than arranged. While this might seem the aim of any film really, variety occurs, as Courbet proves above, and I'd like us to strive for a balance that tilts toward an aesthetic that feels utterly real. Another Courbet painting, *THE STONEBREAKERS*, illustrates the point.



Leaving aside the emblematic and revolutionary concept of canonizing two anonymous workers in a seminal realist work, compositionally the painting almost aggressively refuses to follow the putative rule that at least one face must be seen for a painting's existence to be justified (excluding landscapes and still lifes of course). Strangely however, with aesthetic principles that anticipate twentieth century photo realism, particularly the works of Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, more emotion derives from the staging of this painting than if the subjects had been facing us.

We don't need to see the faces of each actor when he or she speaks, and we'll maintain enough distance in most shots to allow for body language and posture to evoke just as much emotion as an actor's expression in a close-up. Finally, if you consider both these paintings, the coherence and unity of color are astounding. He does this not only by muting his colors (even the reds and whites of *BURIAL AT ORNANS* don't possess the vibrancy of his contemporaries Ingres and Delacroix) but the relationships within the palette as well. Ours won't be a muted palette by any means, but we'll work assiduously to direct the eye in frame through use of color and light, as well as to orient with organized palettes within the overall film to define each storyline.

Conclusion

I want to thank you all for coming together to make this film. Such budgets as ours, sadly now the norm, render us all major contributors to the process, and for that I am grateful to each of you. Let's make an extraordinary movie.