

Orson Welles once said that “the death of art is the absence of limitation.” That is ultimately how I choose to reflect upon my experience shooting. A lot went wrong, more than I had expected and more than what I had accounted for. These failures on my part, on my collaborators’ parts and by chance caused my a lot of grief but forced me to properly articulate what I wanted to do and what I was capable of doing and see if I could reconcile them. I am unsure of how successful I was. The final product is not exactly Sling Blade but it could have been a lot worse. Worse yet, it could have been an anonymous work. For better or worse, it expresses something that is uniquely ‘me’.

I treated the scene as if it was a short film, and I hope that what I’ve released can function on its own as a self-contained short film, independent of the rest of the movie that has yet to be made. I have made no budget short films in the past. I intend to make more in the future. Treating it this way served multiple purposes — to make the most of this project and give myself something to show for it while also lending the project an internal coherence that would allow me and my collaborators to understand what I am trying to express.

I am mostly satisfied with being able to practice editing. In shooting all of the footage and putting it together soon after, I have a greater, more direct understanding of how parts are put together to form a whole. Having shot so much unusable footage, I have a greater understanding of how much is ultimately excised from any given film.

More specifically, I am happy to get more practice in editing sound. In the past, I have spent very little time editing sound in my own shorts. Although the sound I used was mostly diegetic sound recorded on a DSLR and my phone, I did a more precise job of removing background noise and unifying volume levels than I ever have before. Additionally I was able to sync music to the film in a way that complimented the dramatic build of the scene.

During the film-within-a-film home movie section, I needed to play with the diegetic sound in order to redact names and personal information of people that I and my actor know personally, giving me a chance to edit sound in a way that is not figurative while adding another layer of artificiality that is already inherent in film-within-a-film devices which reflected the thematic interests I had.

In editing the images, I was confronted with a problem that I was not expecting before shooting — the lights in the room gave everything a very noticeable red tint, particularly on the off-white walls and the actors’ skin, meaning that I had to color-correct and color-grade, which I had not done with video before.

Retrospectively, I wish I had shot in log so that I would have had more to work with in post. I had originally wanted to use DaVinci Resolve in order to split the footage into three different nodes in order to mimic the look of three-strip Technicolor. The footage I ended up having required enough work already just to fix it that I had so sideline that experiment.

The humanistic values (i.e. dialogue and acting) are what I see as my biggest weaknesses. With regards to dialogue, I think I am very limited, more or less incapable of anything that could be called ‘authentic’. This is for better or worse because while I would like to be able to do that, I am not particularly interested in making work within strictly realist forms. The type of tone that I tend to respond to, as well as the type of tone that I tend to aspire to is what could be called ‘dark comic’. I do not mean that in the sense that a film asks you to laugh at things that are horrific or cruel, but that it infuses humor into its serious proceedings in order to

complicate and confuse your reaction to it. The dialogue I wrote was self-consciously overwritten and the acting that my actors did was self-consciously overacted. I hope that it feels like a parody of a self-serious melodrama while simultaneously embodying all the aspects of a self-serious melodrama. I also hope that the tonal contrast between the written part and the film-within-a-film which is improvised, authentic, basically documentary footage of me and my friend heightens the ultimate tragedy of the scene.

Directing actors toward artifice is certainly easier than directing them toward realism. One could accuse me of copping out because of that. Personally I feel that it works and I ended up with something better because of that. Perhaps after more practice directing actors and writing dialogue I might be able to effectively make a realist narrative.

Shooting my scene was, above all else, an edifying experience. This is obviously what it was intended as, an opportunity to train in the craft of directing. I am glad to have done it because I have more experience doing that now.

Next time, I will need performers with more of a vested interest in what I am doing, which is to say actual actors or aspiring actors, rather than people I know. Above all, I will prepare more. I think that I can ascribe all of the scene's ultimate failures, as well as most of the on-set problems to insufficient preparation.