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Storms Named After People

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STORMS NAMED AFTER PEOPLE

by

SARAH BALLARD

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Film Production
in the College of Arts and Humanities
and in the Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida
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ABSTRACT

Storms Named After People is a coming-of-age film about loneliness, Florida's disposition during holidays, freedom within abandonment, and how one translates time and space when alone.

I intend for this film to capture a unique and authentic representation of young women that I find difficult to come by in mainstream cinema. Some other things I plan to accomplish with *Storms Named After people* include subverting the audience's expectations, challenging tired stereotypes of women and various relationships among them, capturing loneliness from an optimistic point of view and embracing availability within a micro-budget filmmaking process. A final product that accomplishes all the above will be considered successful.

DEDICATION

For Lola.

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INTRODUCTION

This written thesis is a byproduct of an 18-minute micro-budget short film entitled *Storms Named After People* and will serve as not only the film's blueprint but also its epilogue.

The format of my written thesis will consist of three main sections: Aesthetic Literacy, Production Literacy, and Thematic Literacy. The creative, logistic and thematic elements needed for the completion of this film will be discussed within in each section. Consider this written thesis an in-depth look at *Storms Named After People* and its path to fruition.

The filmmaking process is commonly referred to in respect to three phases of production: pre-production, production, and post-production. Pre-production is the first phase of the process, which includes everything accomplished prior to filming, production is known as everything accomplished during shooting, and post-production being everything after. I will discuss all three phases of filmmaking in the sections to follow.

Much of what is to follow is a reflection of the process as well as the film itself as completed. It can be considered both

an afterthought just as much as it can be considered the foreword.

Over the course of my research, I have come to the conclusion that *Storms Named After People* is a film about many things, but foremost an experiment to further develop my process in a narrative setting. Most of my previous work is not recognized as narrative, and contrary to that, I wish for *Storms Named After People* to be the result of a non-traditional narrative experience.

Just before writing the screenplay, I worked on a project entitled *Living Room*—a video sculpture that began as a means to identify and fine-tune my process as a filmmaker. This project was my second attempt at a new style of shooting that I will reference later as “documentary-style”. *Living Room* is unique in that from conception to realization it was intended to be an installation in an exhibition or gallery setting.

With *Living Room*, I began meditating on a feeling, and later wrote a visual poem listing images that reflected that feeling. These vignettes involved a young woman looking out into the world. Much like the subjects in my films, the camera, too,

is always wandering, observing, and constantly in search of something unexpected.

My time in film school has resulted in four years of filmmaking experience, and amongst that time I was exposed to many different methods, some of which I found successful in my own practice.

With each film, I became closer to finding my direction as a filmmaker and voice as a visual artist. From those who saw *Living Room* (2017), and my other work made during my time in the program: *Forget Me Not* (2016) and *Prelude* (2015), I was given feedback that, due to the unique relationship between sound and image, watching was a meditative experience to them, unlike that of most plot-driven narratives.

After *Living Room*, I felt inclined to write *Storms Named After People* and did so with my newfound method in mind. With that, I had hoped to properly represent women, Florida, and myself as a filmmaker to an audience that goes beyond the educational setting. My last films have also been made for school credit and were treated as exercises. Typically, the films were made for a class that lasted one semester with the intent of screening the completed film for students, faculty and

the public at the end of the semester. With plans to submit to domestic and international film festivals, I hope to reach a larger audience with *Storms Named After People*.

This is my last film during my undergraduate career and is also my last film in Florida. I have lived in Florida since age two and grown to love-hate the Sunshine State. As a sort of goodbye letter, *Storms Named After People* explores being alone in a new place and does so in the setting of Tarpon Springs, Florida on Christmas Eve.

In unexpected circumstances, I have since then moved to New York City for work opportunities that helped me provide the budget for this project, and have been remotely directing, producing and editing the film, meanwhile making several trips to and from Florida for production. This experience has been very surreal to me, and the purpose of this film has developed into something much more personal because of my parallel experiences in an unfamiliar place.

As stated before, *Storms Named After People* exists now as an 11-page screenplay (the full script in screenplay-format can be found in the Appendix) that will serve as a blueprint for the filmmaking process and final product of a short film.

Since I am working within the confines of a short-form film, I can take risks that most mainstream feature-length films cannot. I will be working off a very low, self-funded budget. This budgetary limit will be referred to from now on as a "micro-budget" and this project can be referenced as a micro-budget short film.

I admire and have been embracing a philosophy coined by artist and filmmaker Kembra Pfahler known as "availibilism". She states in an interview with Michael Bullock that availibilism is "making the best use of what's available" (Bullock 76). Pfahler emulates this mantra in all her work, for example, her short film *Gang Girls 2000* (1999) takes place entirely in New York City, where she lived at the time. The estimated budget for this project was approximately \$2,000 and considered very low, even for a micro-budget short film. Much like that of Pfahler, many of the choices I made for *Storms Named After People* relied heavily on their availability. This method encourages the film and filmmakers themselves to be extremely adaptable to the moment.

I like to explain my newfound process as a documentary-style of narrative production. It sounds like an oxymoron, but I mean that the process itself is guerilla while the content

captured on screen is narratively contrived and driven by performance.

SYNOPSIS

It is Christmas Eve and Jess is traveling alone to visit her estranged father. She doesn't think he will even remember that she is visiting. Along the way, she meets Lorelei—her cab driver. Lorelei has lived all over the place and chose her occupation as a driver solely to meet new people. Although Jess is out of her element, she recognizes something about herself within Lorelei and warms up to her. Lorelei drops Jess off at the bakery where she's supposed to meet her father, and just as Jess expected, he does not show up.

Jess is abandoned, but she feels some pride in being right. She knew it would happen. She leaves the bakery as it is closing, and starts walking down the streets of an unfamiliar place known as Tarpon Springs, FL. She begins living in the moment, searching for something unexpected.

Soon after wandering the festive streets of this small eclectic town, Jess finds herself in a residential area filled with empty summer houses and soon after comes across a house party where she spots Lorelei, the cab driver. Lorelei

approaches Jess and they soon go outside to meet Rocco, a guy who has overstayed his welcome to many things including the party but most of all Florida.

At this point in the film, Jess' perception of time and space changes drastically. Her cell phone rings—incoming call from Dad. She rejects the call and Lorelei notices. Time begins to move along in discontinuous vignettes as the two of them go inside the party to dance—sound and image are sewn together into a quilt of these patch-like experiences. During this time, Jess makes a remark about how everyone at the party is alone and how it is depressing, and Lorelei's response strikes a chord with Jess: "isn't it beautiful". Jess is then enlightened by this realization of perception and its significance.

Jess and Lorelei leave the party and make the remainder of Christmas Eve their own. Amid their adventure, Lorelei tries to get a better idea of Jess—meanwhile, Jess is unsure of that herself. The rest of the night feels like a dream or a lucid memory.

It's the following morning and Jess and Lorelei are asleep in the same car in which they met. They are parked in a lot facing the beach, the sun oppressively shining on both of their

faces. Jess awakens and looks to Lorelei, who is still fast asleep. Jess checks her phone—it's dead. After a moment, Jess walks away from the beach along a stretch of road surrounded by water on either side.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Traditionally, mainstream narrative cinema guides the audience to reminders of worldly truths and broad themes, but I plan to instead ask the audience questions that lead them to self-reflection.

Something I have familiarized myself within my past projects is leaving the specifics of the plot in an ambiguous territory, and later asking the audience what their projections were post-viewing. This experiment led to me learning a lot about each individual audience member—and an appreciation for unique and polarizing viewing experiences.

When referring to my thesis or research question, I ask myself "What will I ask the audience in this film? What am I trying to discover? What am I searching for?". As far as an answer goes--I'm trying to discover what happens when I present the audience a non-traditional narrative, and if they can feel, relate, empathize, or experience something similar or great to

that of a traditional narrative. What unique memories, feelings, or experiences can each audience member project onto and take from this story?

With *Storms Named After People*, I want to challenge the separation between narrative and non-narrative filmmaking--both in process and product. Can one save resources and by downsizing their environmental footprint as a digital filmmaker? Can we make a narrative film with a non-narrative approach?

AESTHETIC LITERACY

This section is a space to elaborate on the aesthetic approaches, influences and choices that make up the moving images of *Storms Named After People*.

My past work is heavily influenced by my background in visual art and is very clearly reliant on storytelling through visual language. This is evident in locations, blocking, camera, editing, and production design.

NON-NARRATIVE STYLE

One of my greatest influences is Polish cinematographer Michal Marczak who directed *All These Sleepless Nights* (2016), a feature-length documentary with narrative elements. Marczak cast the characters as themselves and attended real events with them, shooting on a low-profile camera platform documenting the festival or party, meanwhile capturing staged scenes within these real-life moments. David Ehrlich on IndieWire discusses *All These Sleepless Nights* and states "this unclassifiable wonder obscures the divide between fiction and documentary until the distinction is ultimately irrelevant, using the raw material of real life to create a richer story of drift and becoming". Much like this, I wish to challenge the difference between

documentary and fiction by shooting the film as though it's a documentary, casting some actors as themselves, shooting no more than one or two takes, with a very small and mobile crew, observing the protagonist or subject with a documentarian gaze.

The practice of creating a fictional scenario within real circumstances is by no means a new one. *Medium Cool* (1969), a film also directed by a cinematographer, who is known as Haskell Wexler, was among the first to film a fictional scene during a live event. In one of the final scenes of *Medium Cool*, we follow John and Eileen as they search for Eileen's son in a crowd of people. At this moment, the films' camera, characters, and audience become witnesses of the riots during the 1968 National Democratic Convention in Chicago. At this moment in the film, we have already been exposed to elements of cinema verite, a term coined in the late 1950s and early 1960s in France as a response to non-fictional filmmaking traditions and conventions. Cinema Verite was born to encourage contact between the subject and the filmmaker, and therefore permitted different and spontaneous approaches to filmmaking (Axmaker, "Cinema Verite: The Movement of Truth"). Although I did not set out to make a non-fictional film, my approach to directing *Storms Named After People* was

heavily influenced and inspired by those of *All These Sleepless Nights* and *Medium Cool*.

Like Wexler and Marczak, I am unafraid of introducing the camera as a character within the film. Although I do not directly address the camera the way that *Medium Cool* and *All These Sleepless Nights* does, I did give the camera operator direction as though they are a character as well, which later draws attention to itself. For example, during the house party scene where Jess and Lorelei dance, I told the camera operator to capture the scene as though the camera is dancing along with the characters. Most of the scenes were shot as oners (long, single-take shots), allowing for both camera and performance to observe similar to that of a documentary.

VISUAL LANGUAGE

As opposed to defining a character through plot, subtext, or dialogue, I try to assign defining characteristics with body language and actions. This concept can be compared to non-narrative because what is presented to the audience on screen is simply a representation of a character.

Instead of storyboarding with my cinematographer, we prepared the beats needed for each scene and discussed how the

camera can be used to represent the characters and their relationship to their surroundings. Much like my relationship with the actors, I build a trust with the cinematographer that consists of several conversations about tone, the characters and their relationship to the world around them.

Much like the works of filmmaker Terrence Malick, most of *Storms Named After People* was written during post-production. I have taken on this process with the past few projects I have worked on, and they usually begin with an ambiguous narrative that is later fine-tuned in the edit. This act reinforces my neglect toward plot-driven content and has created a different viewing experience.

ESCAPISM

I believe the wandering and curious nature of the camera-subject relationship results in a sense of escapism. One of my main goals with this film is achieving a sense of escapism for the audience, by camera technique and representation of time. I hope to do so with the combination of nonlinear editing and specific euphoric music, creating a sense of drifting which leads the viewer to a trance-like or meditative state when viewing.

TIME AND SPACE

Contrary to traditional filmmaking processes, I begin with a location before I begin writing. It is very important for me to first establish a world before I can create a character. The set or location is very important to me and my films, because of the significance of tone and visual communication.

Jess' external world and its relationship to her internal state of mind are constantly being compared and contrasted with the film. At some locations, like the festive and eclectic exteriors of Tarpon Springs, FL, she is completely juxtaposed--the exterior world around her is warm, welcoming, and reminiscent of family, while she is alone and empty--and others, like the sparse white-wall interior of the party, is comparable to Jess' internal state. This feeling of large empty spaces is a recurring theme in my films because of my upbringing in Florida.

Storms Named After People was entitled because it acknowledges Florida as a setting. Growing up in Florida, I am fully aware that the sunshine state is not always sunny and that weather is extremely unpredictable--much like the characters in the film Jess and Lorelei. I think the title calls attention to that by reminding us how people can be just as unpredictable as storms.

With Florida being one of the most common hurricane destinations in the U.S., I saw fit for the title to reference the more familiar side of Florida, which is to me, hurricane season.

Florida plays a huge part in my voice as a filmmaker, and *Storms Named After People* was written to be filmed in Florida for many reasons, one being because of its ironic disposition during Christmas, but another being its open spaces. Whether it be a large field or large living room with white walls, the architecture of Florida as a backdrop is important to note because of its role in mainstream cinema: the end of the road. I wanted to subvert the stereotype of Florida and present it as the beginning of a new road.

In the final scene of *Storms Named After People*, we are at a beach, which is a common stereotype of Florida. In many films, we end at a beach with the protagonist to provide a visual sense of an ending and permit the audience to question and ponder what happens after the film concludes.

I intentionally wanted the last scene to take place at the beach to call attention to Florida during winter, and to subvert the stereotype of beaches a visual metaphor for ending and

instead cut to her walking away from the beach and away from standing still.

Another important aesthetic identity in *Storms Named After People* is its unique way of displaying passage of time. In many of my influences, the passage of time is something that informs the overall pacing of a film. Some examples include *Victoria* (2015) that took place in real-time over the course of one night and was shot as one take. Another being *Certified Copy* (2010) that takes place over the course of one day and although was not shot as a one, one could argue that the pacing was similar and just as effective as though it were all in one take.

In the synopsis, I point out that during the party scene, Jess' sense of time and space change drastically, and at that moment, so does that of the film. At this point, the construction of image is like time-stitching, representing the nonlinear state of mind that Jess is in. This montage of lucid vignettes should appear to represent that of a collage or a quilt.

For example, during the house party scene the editing is nontraditional and almost like that of a music video, repeating actions, and some shots being representative. Many times there

will be a shot of Jess laughing and then a cut to her distracted and uneasy. These jump-cuts are part of my way to defining time and emotions. I believe this method comments on how we externalize emotions much differently in public. The cuts are useful in displaying what internal state Jess is in. Since this film has very little dialogue, this editing process creates a visual subtext.

ROMANTICIZING THE DIGITAL AESTHETIC

In films like *Victoria* (2015) and *Good Time* (2017), texture plays a special role in the visual foreground, contributing to a “gritty” sense of reality and homage to the grainy aesthetic of celluloid film. As a celebrator of digital cinema and video, I chose to romanticize digital noise the same way that many filmmakers romanticize film grain by closing the camera’s aperture and raising the ISO, almost with similar intentions as shooting with a pinhole lens, but in-camera. This created a disproportion of the light hitting the sensor, resulting in a “noisy” image that needs very little artificial light for exposure. This gave us the freedom to shoot spontaneously and embrace natural light, while also resulting in a unique and distinct aesthetic.

PRODUCTION LITERACY

During this section, I will lay out the logistical elements behind the making of *Storms Named After People*, and the discuss the shooting process and methodology.

AVAILBALISM

As mentioned before, I took an approach to this project known as "availiblism", which is simply making the most of one's available resources. The bakery location, known as Hellas Bakery, is what began the conception of *Storms Named After People*, and therefore heavily influenced its tone, color palette, and most of all, location. I first noticed this bakery as I was visiting family in Tarpon Springs in Christmas of 2016, and immediately knew I would be back to shoot my next film there. To my surprise, a relative of mine knew the owner of the bakery and this gave us free access to film there. Because of the bakery, the entirety of *Storms Named After People* took place in Tarpon Springs which meant all our exterior scenes had to be shot there.

As mentioned earlier, Tarpon Springs has a look that I have yet to see anywhere else in Florida. I wanted to not only represent a different culture of Florida but also hopefully

expose the audience to a place they have never been before, with hopes that they, alongside Jess, will explore the town as well.

My cast, crew, and equipment are all based out of Orlando, FL and because the bakery is in Tarpon Springs, my producer and I knew it was crucial to bring our crew to there. Luckily the family I have in Tarpon Springs was kind enough to offer their home to cast and crew. There was also a crew member who had family in the area and offered their home to us as well. This saved us a lot of money as opposed to paying for hotel rooms and other travel expenses.

Nonetheless, the majority of the cast or crew had never been to Tarpon Springs, which I tend to believe helped create a unified sense of curiosity and exploration that later drove the shooting process to a successful end. By the end of our time in Tarpon Springs, the crew had collectively become protective of the film's integrity because of how close they became to it.

I mentioned earlier that we had a small crew and that is especially true for what we filmed in Tarpon Springs. Our cast and crew list for the Tarpon Shoot is as follows: (1) Director, (1) Producer, (2) Camera Operators (1) AC (1)Wardrobe/Sound Mixer and (2) Actors. Because of so few crew members, we were

all forced to take on many responsibilities, which I believe led to a stronger dedication to the film.

Taking a crew out of town for a shoot is inherently more difficult and expensive, but since we made the most of our resources, it was not much of a difference in price. Our locations were free, our housing was free, and our cast, crew, and equipment were also free.

BUDGET AS STYLE

Since this is a micro-budget film, there are many decisions made based on availability and cost--one of which is shooting style. Another example of how we implemented the Pfahler's availabilism approach is our documentary-style of shooting--by that, I mean mobile multi-camera setups and minimal takes, which ironically for us led to a performance-driven shoot.

Mentioned earlier, was cinema verite, or observational cinema, and its influence on our filmmaking approach, which helped further inform our flexibility and mobility as a crew. For example, while we were filming the scenes of Jess wandering the docks Tarpon Springs alone, it began to rain, which something many filmmakers face when shooting in Florida and rather than shut down production, we decided to embrace the rain

and integrate it into *Storms Named After People*. We secured the equipment and moved forward with the film, and fortunately, this was our second day of shooting, and therefore it did not disrupt the continuity of the rest of the film.

I believe the rain works very well as a tonal element in the film now and comments on Florida during winter. The rain also speaks for the inconsistencies of weather and compares itself to the characters in the film. Since we were operating on a micro-budget, the rain, which could have been an expensive addition, was a happy accident.

Since *Storms Named After People* was shot digitally, the high shooting ratio is not a large cost. Shooting documentary-style, without several takes of the same actions, offered a less rigid shooting schedule and brings a sense of authenticity to the screen.

When on set, I prefer to leave the smallest footprint possible on location, meaning everything is mobile and handheld, using the location as-is. Because of our approach to filmmaking, I believe we created a sustainable method that saves time, money and makes room for spontaneity and creativity.

IMPROVISATIONAL FILMMAKING

Similar to the methods of Terrence Malick and Emmanuel Lubezki (on the many films they have worked together as a Director and Director of Photography duo), my cinematographer and I also work with a 360-degree set--meaning minimal and hidden equipment and crew. With this freedom, we are able to shoot scenes like a documentary, not abiding by the 180-degree line and other compositional conventions. We tend to let the actors lead us and the camera--which is a result of improvisation in rehearsal. With this method, it is very important that I spend a lot of time talking about the characters and tone with the actors and cinematographer leading up to shoot days.

During rehearsal, I did many improvisation exercises with the cast after they were familiar with their character. During these improvisations, I would take notes or record them, and later develop the dialogue scenes around these exercises. To be clear, on set we had a shooting script to serve as an outline and by this point, the dialogue was set with very little room for change. With that being said, we did indeed do some improvisational exercises while shooting to serve as transitions into and out of scenes.

Much like that of Cassavetes, I prefer to give the actors much more control and liberty than most traditional directors have had in the past. For example, Cassavetes would write a tight script and let his actors build from there, giving them freedom with blocking and therefore promoting the performances to feel unplanned (Brokaw "John Cassavetes Talks Comedy, Life, and Reputation in Rare 1989 Interview"). In *Victoria* (2016), Director Sebastian Schipper followed a similar path. Due to Schipper's limit of shooting the entire film in one take, the performances appeared to be much more spontaneous and realistic. I followed similar approaches to directing, with hopes that the performances are organic and truthful (Lattanzio "No One Believed Sebastian Schipper Could make 'Victoria' in One Take").

LIMITATIONS AND TOOLS

Like that of the past films I made, the limitations for *Storms Named After People* lie mostly within the budget, runtime, shoot days, and scheduling. Fortunately, none of these limitations inhibited the integrity of the film, in fact, most of these limitations allowed for creativity. I work very well with limitations and problem-solving, and although most of these limits were assigned to me, I plan to continue assigning limits to future projects upon graduation.

When it comes to the necessary resources for the completion of this project, I am basing my needs off a micro-budget model which includes an experienced and versatile crew of 5-15 people, trained actors, a sufficient camera package (camera body, lenses, rigging materials), media (data cards and storage), sound package (microphones, recorder, transmitter and receiver), lighting equipment (although using natural/available light most of the time) and a budget of approximately \$3,000 in total.

Something I learned during my time in undergrad is to make your budget your aesthetic, and that inspired the methods discussed earlier: availabilism, documentary-style shooting, and improvisational directing. The filmmaking process for *Storms Named After People* began in March of 2017, once a working draft of the script was complete. Pre-production for this film consists of orchestrating all of the elements needed for shooting the film, and since I was working remotely, the importance of a strong producer grew substantially.

I was fortunate of enough to have a great producer that was able to completely take over the crew and equipment logistics which left me available to focus on story, performance, and visuals.

Following months of preparation, we began production in early December 2017 and finished in mid-February of 2018. With a total of seven shooting days, we completed production on *Storms Named After People* and went directly into post-production.

Post-production is usually a job that can be done by an editor separate from the director, but since documentary-style shooting leads to much of the story being written during that phase, it was pertinent that I edited the film myself.

Storms Named After People was written during Spring of 2017 and production began in December of 2017, ended the following February and immediately, post-production began.

THEMATIC LITERACY

In this section I will discuss the research I have been conducting on themes such as loneliness, independence, feminism, etc. and its influence on *Storms Named After People*. Below I will state a few examples of some of the research I have done thus far:

CHILD INDEPENDENCE

Storms Named After People is a coming-of-age film about Jess and I wanted to emphasize Jess' independence and her growth once her father doesn't show up. In "The Lonely City", Olivia Laing discusses child independence, and specifically brings up the result of a series of experiments that took place in the 1960s by Mary Ainsworth:

"An ambivalently attached child is distressed by maternal absence and shows its feelings via a mixture of anger, desire for contact and passivity, while an avoidantly attached child withholds their reactions on the mother's return, masking the intensity of their grief and fear (Laing 150).

Much like that of an "avoidantly attached child", Jess internalizes her emotions of her father abandoning her--and therefore her actions are much more telling than anything she says. I addressed this in *Storms Named After People* by playing with the relationship between Jess' external surroundings and

internal world--her loneliness will be evident by both her performance, but also by the form of the film. For example, the film will both begin and end with a wide shot of Jess walking alone in a vast open frame. There are also many moments when the festive setting of Christmas Eve juxtaposes her loneliness.

FEMINISM

As a filmmaker and feminist, I believe it is my responsibility to authentically represent women on screen. I hope to successfully influence a new world where we see accurately portrayed female characters in mainstream media, and *Storms Named After People* is an example of my efforts.

In Ross C. Murfin's essay "Feminist Criticism and The Awakening", he opens with discussing French Feminism and its attention to language. Murfin mentions that French feminists believe language serves a male-dominated society and was conceived by and for a patriarchy. With this in mind, I intentionally wrote the script with sparse and meaningless dialogue. I tend to stray away from dialogue because, in reality, we spend so much time without speaking, and when we do, it's often insignificant.

In *Storms Named After People*, Jess becomes more and more distant from her past youthful self and experiences her first glimpse at adulthood. As the film goes on and she rejects contact with her father and speaks more frequently to those around her and (if going off of the French feminist theory that language separates one from their mother) she grows more distant from her childhood. Murfin states:

"In the view of French feminists, language is associated with separation from the mother. Its distinctions separate the world from a male point of view, and it systematically forces women to choose: either they can imagine and represent themselves as men imagine and represent them (in which case they may speak, but will speak as men) or they can choose "silence," becoming in the process "the invisible unheard sex" (Jones 83 as cited in Murfin 159).

I hope to think that the women in *Storms Named After People* are recognizably strong and complex characters. Their ability to communicate without words is meant to be noticed as something intellectual as opposed to the tired stereotype of women speaking to each other about superficial topics, including men.

In the backyard scene at the party, Jess' silence is juxtaposed by Rocco's character, who doesn't stop talking even when Jess is clearly distracted. This is my attempt at escaping common gender roles in film.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I believe after this year of research, that my style of filmmaking has evolved into something worth pursuing and I hope to use *Storms Named After People* to grow as a filmmaker and start my career as a director. Since my style is heavily influenced by Nordic films, I hope to travel to Northern Europe to study to live and make a feature-length film influenced by my research with *Storms Named After People*. This will hopefully lead to my long-term goal of making a living in Europe's film Industry.

With the completion of *Storms Named After People* in April of this year, I will be submitting to film festivals with hopes of it being accepted to internationally.

APPENDIX

Storms Named After People

By

Sarah Ballard

24 September 2017

1 EXT. FLORIDA AIRPORT - DUSK 1

An airplane takes off into the beginnings of a night sky.

2 INT. FLORIDA AIRPORT - NIGHT 2

A young girl, JESS, exits the terminal and walks towards baggage claim. Shouldering a backpack and wearing corduroy overalls, Jess examines the desolate atmosphere. We hear faint sounds of Christmas music.

With her phone in hand, Jess stands still on the escalator as it reaches ground level. She walks outside.

3 EXT. FLORIDA AIRPORT - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS 3

Jess stands outside waiting for a cab. Her glance alternates between her phone and oncoming traffic.

4 INT. CAR - NIGHT 4

The car is older and more casual than most Lyft cabs--beads hanging from the rear view and a woven beach blanket draped over the vacant passenger seat. A phone with a GPS is mounted to the dash.

Jess is dosing off in the backseat. Next to her is her backpack. We hear the radio playing softly in the background and sounds of waves crashing--windows are down as they drive along the coast.

From a fragmented view we see LORELEI, ambiguously 25, and driving. We see her disembodied expression in the rear view mirror. She has frizzy hair and gold hoop earrings.

After a few moments we see brake lights on Jess' face and she awakens to look out the window.

LORELEI
(over the radio)
We're almost there.

Jess doesn't hear her and takes a moment to realize that.

JESS
I'm sorry, what was that?

Lorelei turns down the radio, gestures to her GPS.

LORELEI
We should be there soon.

Jess nods and looks at her phone.

(CONTINUED)

LORELEI
785 Dodecanese right?

JESS
Yeah, uh, it should be a bakery or something.

Lorelei messes with her phone to double check. Jess is concerned.

LORELEI
Yeah yeah we're good. Just checking.

Lorelei looks at Jess through the rear view.

LORELEI
Hey it says it closes soon. You want me to take you somewhere else?

Jess looks up from her phone and then look back down.

JESS
Oh, no its okay. I'm just meeting someone there.

LORELEI
Oh okay cool. Are you from Tarpon Springs?

JESS
No, just visiting my dad.

LORELEI
Do you have time to try a few things while you're there?

JESS
I don't think I'll be there long enough. But thanks.

LORELEI
You have to try the baklava.

Jess nods. Lorelei takes the hint.

They drive in mostly silence for a while aside from the occasional car passing by, and the dim music playing in the background.

Lorelei checks on Jess via rear view mirror.

LORELEI
You like Christmas music?

JESS
Not really. But you can go ahead if
you want-

LORELEI
No no no, its Christmas Eve, so I
had to ask. But if I can be honest,
I think it fucking blows.

Jess laughs.

LORELEI
I mean seriously, think about a
person you know that genuinely
enjoys Christmas music, and tell me
to my face that they are normal.

Jess laughs and thinks for a moment.

JESS
You're so right. It's all sexist
and religious.

LORELEI
So gross!

They laugh in agreement. Lorelei turns up the music.

Lorelei sings along. We see her lips moving from Jess'
fragmented view.

Jess enjoys the song. She sticks her hand out the window to
feel the warm Florida air.

Lorelei sees her through the rear view mirror and turns up
the music.

Jess and Lorelei's hair blows in wind, as a combination of
Christmas lights and street lights paint Jess' skin as the
song continues.

5 EXT. HELLAS BAKERY - NIGHT - HOURS LATER

5

With neon lights and embellished with christmas decor,
Hellas Bakery is closed. Everything nearby is abandoned--not
another person in sight.

We can hear faint Christmas music playing in the town's
outdoor speakers. Other than that, there is silence. So much
so, that you can hear the sounds of water passing from the
docks in the distance.

(CONTINUED)

Jess is seated alone outside of the bakery and stairs at her half-eaten pastry. Across from her, a fresh piece of baklava. She has been waiting for over an hour.

She checks her phone and looks around one last time before she wraps up her pastry and and puts both in her bag. She takes a cigarette out of her bag.

After many failed attempts, she lights the cigarette and leaves the table to start walking down the street.

6

EXT. SPONGE DOCKS - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

6

Jess passes a couple walking their dog. Their conversation seems to be much louder than it should. From what we can hear, they are arguing.

Jess takes a drag from her cigarette.

Headlights approach around the corner and she quickly puts out the cigarette on the bottom of her shoe as though she will be caught.

The car doesn't slow down. As it passes by her we hear music blaring from inside. Jess watches as it continues into the distance without hesitation.

Jess passes by a marina. Boats are inhabited by eclectic locals and decorated as such. Christmas lights reflect in the water.

Her phone rings. She takes it out of her pocket and looks at it for a long time. She doesn't answer.

She relights her cigarette.

7

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

7

Jess ends up on a nearby residential street. Houses are decorated for christmas, some are vacant, some have families in them. Most are dimly lit by the Christmas trees inside.

A dog aggressively barks at her through the screen door of what appears to be a vacant home.

A car drives past her full of people and blasting music. It stops at a house in the distance and they get out to enter.

The house stands out from the rest of its neighbors' both visually and sonically. Young people litter the front yard and its light from within is anything but festive. Music is coming from inside.

Jess walks toward the house.

Jess walks through the house aimlessly. Its not just a party, but also an art exhibition. Although crowded, the house feels empty because of the white walls and open spaces.

However, people are everywhere--so much so that you have your own privacy. Some people notice Jess, but to most she is invisible. Many are dancing alone. Despite the amount of people, there is an emptiness to this party.

Jess finds herself at a wall covered in various mirrors. She stares at her disfigured reflection and puts a barrette in her hair, pulling one side back. As she's doing this, she notices in the reflection that Lorelei is entering the party.

She quickly takes the barrette out and gets on her phone.

Lorelei walks to the refrigerator to pull out a drink for herself. She heads towards Jess with a smirk on her face.

LORELEI

How did I know you'd be here?

JESS

You did?

LORELEI

I don't know, just had a strange feeling I'd see you again.

JESS

I was just walking down this street and ended up here.

LORELEI

Here.

Lorelei takes off Jess' back pack.

LORELEI

Let's find a place for you to put your bag down.

And Jess follows her towards a room.

They open the door to a room full of people.

9

INT. HOUSE PARTY - BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

9

Some people gather around the room passing a joint. Dimly lit by an abundance of Christmas lights and very foggy, beads hanging from the ceiling, and a large fish tank. This room feels much more crowded than anywhere else

LORELEI

(to everyone)

Looks like we found the party.

Everyone greets them. Some laughing. Lorelei continues small talk with them while Jess becomes very intrigued by the fish tank. Jess half-heartedly participates in the conversation.

ROCCO, a young guy with long dark hair and tattoos, offers Lorelei the joint.

She accepts and passes it to Jess who also takes a hit.

ROCCO

You guys from here?

LORELEI

I've lived here for a few months and she's visiting but she-

JESS

I'm from North Carolina.

ROCCO

What part? Don't tell me you're from--

JESS

Winchester.

ROCCO

Oh never mind, I have family in Raleigh.

JESS

Oh cool. I've never been.

ROCCO

Well, welcome to what we like to call the armpit of the US.

Everyone laughs.

LORELEI

Okay okay its not that bad.

(CONTINUED)

Everyone chimes in on their thoughts about Florida. Jess plays with one of the fish in the tank. The sounds of everyone talking start to build onto of each other and their words become incomprehensible.

Jess' phone rings again. She looks at it and rejects it. Lorelei notices.

Lorelei gestures her head at Jess to leave.

LORELEI

I think we're gonna go dance.

ROCCO

Alright well it was nice meeting you two. I'll see you out there.

Lorelei grabs Jess and they leave the room.

10

INT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

10

Jess and Lorelei dance. The room is now more crowded and it seems as though everyone is dancing.

Lorelei brings Jess a drink and "cheers".

Jess watches the other dancing around her. Everyone is dancing solo.

Jess looks around the room as they dance. The following conversation is cut between imagery of the artwork, lights, other people dancing. Time starts to disconnect itself from reality.

JESS

Have you noticed that everyone is here by themselves?

LORELEI

Yes, isn't it beautiful.

JESS

I find it kind of depressing.

LORELEI

Why?

JESS

I don't know. I just do.

LORELEI

Did you take a look at the installations?

(CONTINUED)

JESS
Yeah a little when I first got
here.

LORELEI
Guess which one is mine.

JESS
You made one?

LORELEI
No, I just wanted to see what you'd
say.

They laugh.

JESS
I really like the one over there
with the butterflies.

Rocco approaches them and grabs Jess' hand like a princess.

ROCCO
Who says theres not snow in
Florida?

He sprinkles cocaine from a small vial on the lower part of
her thumb. Does the same for Lorelei.

ROCCO
Happy holidays if you're into that
sort of thing.

Rocco walks off dancing.

LORELEI
You don't have to do it if-

Jess snorts the cocaine.

JESS
Don't have to do what?

Lorelei laughs and does the same thing.

LORELEI
You're funny. You know that?

The music gets louder and time starts to drift into
discontinuity.

They dance.

They laugh.

Others around them dance.

Someone puts glitter on their faces.

They drink.

Lights.

Jess is sweating badly. She walks off to the bathroom.

11 INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

11

The bathroom is lit with peach-red lighting. Someone decorated the bathroom with Christmas lights. Jess looks at herself in the mirror for a while and takes off her shirt. Under it she has a tank top.

She puts her hair up and as she's doing so her phone rings. She doesn't stop what she's doing. She checks her nose in the mirror.

After she's done, Jess takes out her phone and sees (3) missed calls from "dad". She puts her phone away and leaves.

12 INT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

12

Jess walks out of the bathroom and now someone is singing a cover of "Santa Baby" on karaoke. She heads over to Lorelei.

LORELEI
Everything ok?

JESS
Yeah. It's just so hot right now.

LORELEI
Wanna get some air?

JESS
I'll do anything to not have have
to listen to this ever again.

Lorelei laughs.

LORELEI
Me too, lets go.

Lorelei grabs Jess and they leave the party.

13

EXT. TARPON SPRINGS STREET - MINUTES LATER
 LUCID SEQUENCE

13

Jess and Lorelei walk along the street by a yellow house.

Jess notices a bike decorated with flowers and Jess suggest they steal it.

They ride on the bike together through residential Tarpon Springs.

There's close to no one out at this hour on Christmas Eve. Just empty roads.

This cuts along with:

1. Christmas light imagery
2. Jess and Lorelei running through a speedometer laughing
3. Writing "you are here" in chalk on a wall

More vignettes TBD

14

EXT. SPRING BAYOU - LATER

14

Jess and Lorelei sit in front of the bayou, each smoking a cigarette. Their new bike is next to them. Some time has passed.

LORELEI

How'd you convince your family to let you out?

JESS

I didn't.

LORELEI

Oh so you're a badass.

Lorelei laughs. Jess fakes a smile. Not much is said for a while.

LORELEI

Why do you do that?

JESS

Do what?

LORELEI

Internalize everything.

(CONTINUED)

JESS

I'm sorry-

LORELEI

No. Don't be sorry. I just want to know whats going on in there.

They laugh. Jess stares into the dark abyss. This moment feels like eternity.

After a while, Jess checks her phone.

JESS

Oh shit.

Lorelei watches with concern.

LORELEI

What?

JESS

Merry Christmas.

LORELEI

Merry Christmas.

15 INT. CAR - HOWARD PARK BEACH - EARLY NEXT MORNING 15

They sit in the car as the sun is well over the horizon. We can see the beach through the windshield.

Jess and Lorelei are both asleep where we left them last.

After a few moments, Jess wakes up and looks at her phone. It's dead.

She stares at Lorelei for a while. Lorelei is passed out.

Jess carefully goes through her backpack and pulls out a fresh pastry from Hellas Bakery.

She slowly and quietly gets out of the car, covering Lorelei with the woven beach blanket and leaving the untouched pastry in her seat.

16 EXT. HOWARD PARK BEACH - MORNING 16

Jess walks down a long road that is surrounded by water on both sides. She is heading away from the beach.

She takes a bite of her half eaten pastry and continues.

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