

Cinematographer

*Dollhouse*

## Rationale

Our intent for this film was to create a psychological thriller utilizing creative mise-en-scene and cinematography. *Dollhouse* depicts the story of a seemingly normal man who actually holds a dark secret. We chose to emphasize the man's psychosis by utilizing stylistic lighting, framing, and composition, as opposed to extensive dialogue and action sequences. The mood of the storyline is effectively conveyed through the cinematography and the non-diegetic music. The production of this film took place over the span of five months and editing took several days.

Word Count: 86

## Written Commentary

Dollhouse depicts the story of a seemingly normal man who actually holds a dark secret; kidnapping people and paralyzing them in an attempt to create a family for himself. But when one of his family members escapes and alerts the police of what he has done, he must make the choice: run away and abandon his family, or stay with them and face his inevitable arrest.

### Pre-Production

The initial phases of this project involved collaborating on the script as well as the storyboards. The director created a basic set of storyboards for me to use as a foundation for any stylistic elements I would add later on. The script went through several drafts. We did not want it to be dialogue-heavy, seeing as amateur acting can make extensive dialogue sequences awkward and less realistic. Instead, we wanted the meaning and mood of the film to be articulated through the cinematography and mise-en-scene. Below is an excerpt from our script.

An LS of a battered green couch fills the screen, the tick tocking of the clock continues as the shot remains. Two bodies, dressed in neat dresses sit on either side of the man. He sits between the two ladies, smiling contentedly.

MAN

(To the girl on his left)

So Heather, I like your new dress.

CUT to CU of a profile of HEATHER, her eyes flick fearfully to the CAMERA before back to their forward position.

CUT to LS of the three people sitting on the couch.

MAN

(Chuckling to himself, turns to the other woman)

Don't you like HEATHER'S new dress?  
I think it brings out the blue in her eyes.

CUT to CU of the profile of the other girl. Her eye twitches slightly, but otherwise she remains still.

CUT to CU of MAN, he leans forward into the camera, as if looking past it.

MAN

What was that, SARAH?

CUT to CU of the profile of SARAH, her eye twitches again.

MAN

(Cheerfully)

Looks like you need another shot.

CUT to the interior of a dark closet, a door off screen lights the shot and dusty shelves are revealed. A hand enters the screen and grabs a glass bottle full of medicine,

Next, I held the task of scouting locations. I needed to find a place for both interior and exterior shots. For our exterior scenes, I needed to find a place that had trees, but was open enough that follow shots would not be a hassle, so I ended up choosing a dirt road near my house. However, because all of the exterior scenes took place at night, figuring out the lighting was very important. Although I was positive I would use our two LED lights, I was not sure how intense we would want them to be. Our film draws inspiration from Expressionism, so I wanted to lighting to create a strong contrast between the man and the victim. As for the interior scenes, which were shot inside my house, it was important to create a cold, dead, atmosphere. I changed the camera's white balance to tungsten lighting. This and the addition of the LED lights helped to negate any warm yellow tones that were originally there from the natural light.

Set design was also vital to perfect before shooting. The director and I wanted everything to be symmetrical and centered. I was inspired by Wes Anderson's use of framing and composition and thus rearranged my living room and dining room to have perfect symmetry for each shot. Therefore making it more perfect and dollhouse-like, and emphasizing the eeriness of the events taking place. I wanted to utilize set design and staging as a way of jarring the

audience. But besides overall symmetry, I wanted every object seen in the frame to be significant in some way. For the dining room scenes, there are many circular objects: a clock, a plate, the table—and they all emphasize the circle of life that goes on within the house, for as victims are paralyzed for a certain period of time, they die and the man must kidnap a new family member to replace



them. It is a never ending cycle of life and death, and thus—a circle. Other objects played key



roles as well, including a bear skull in the center of the dining table. It points towards the victim, insinuating her impending death. Costumes were thought out ahead of time because they each reflected the characters wearing them. The man wears a navy and white striped button-up, symbolizing his inner conflict between right and wrong. On the other hand, I wanted all of the victims to wear white to convey their angelic innocence.

Although I collaborated with the director on the storyboards, it was the shot list that ended up being more useful. This way, I could have more creative liberty in the composition of

the shots and try out different kinds of shots during filming. On the next page is an excerpt from our shot list.

Shot List			
Production Title: DOLLHOUSE		Date: August 3, 2014	
Shot #	Scene #	Type of Shot	One Line Description
1	1	ECU	Blue eye looking into camera. Tracks out.
2	1	CU	Hair being brushed.
3	1	CU	Applying lipstick. FP to body in BG
4	1	CU	Nails being painted
5	1	CU	Necklace being put on
6	1	MS	Shoe being put on
7	1	MS	Hairspray being applied.
8	1	CU	Tie being tied
9	1	CU	Shoe being tied
10	1	CU/ TS	Man and woman sitting/ title slide
11	2	MS	Trunk of car, with victim, being opened.
12	3	MS	Killer walking down stairs
13	3	MS	Killer walking into kitchen
14	3	MS	Cracking of eggs
15	3	ECU	Lighting of stove top
16	3	CU	Bacon being laid on pan
17	3	ECU	Coffee being poured
18	3	MS	Two plates being taken out of cabinet
19	3	CU	Toast popping out of toaster
20	3	LS	Heather being sat down at the table
21	3	LS	Heather sitting at the table
22	3	LS	Killer sitting down at the table
23	3	LS	Heather sitting at the table
24	3	LS	Killer sitting at the table eating
25	3	MS	Killer sitting at the table.
26+	3	Tracking	Heather face staring at camera

Production

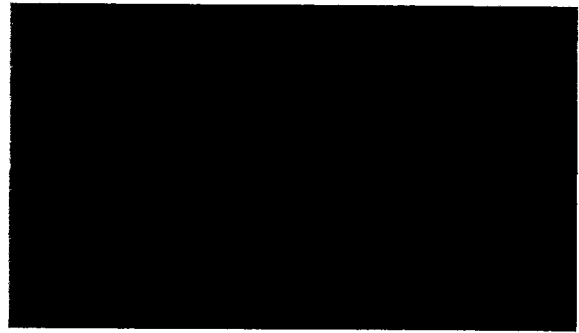
My group decided to film all of the exterior scenes first. On the first night of shooting, it began to rain. But instead of rescheduling we decided to work with it. We improvised by



covering the LEDs in trash bags and also cut a hole out of one and put it around the camera. What could have been disastrous ended up working to our benefit. The rain helped emphasize the eerie mood and added an expressionistic element to the chase scene.

One shot is a close-up of the victim's hands bound together. As the victim slowly wakes up, the camera goes in and out of focus, simulating the victim going in and out of consciousness as he struggles to wake up and get free. Another shot is a follow shot of the victim running. Initially, I tried shooting it from behind the victim, following him as he ran. However, it

soon became apparent that running in the rain while it was dark outside is really difficult, especially when I was trying to keep the victim in the center of the frame. So instead I came up with

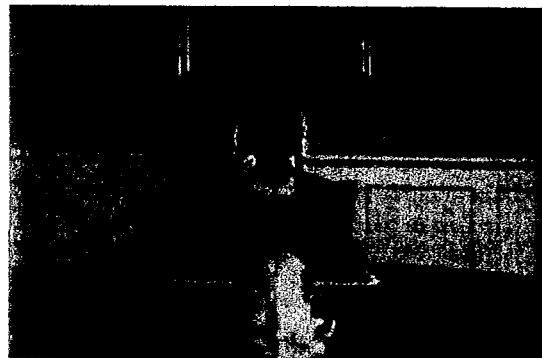


another way of depicting the chase scene. It ended up being close-ups of the victim's and the man's face and feet, cutting back and forth between them. But like I said, follow shots while

running are difficult when you do not have a dolly to keep the shot smooth. So I had the actors run in a circle around me with a grip next to me, keeping the light on the victim/man's face/feet, as I shot a long take. Then, these takes could be split up into shorter, quicker shots and you would not even know the actors weren't running straight.

As for the interior shots, many of them were also creatively designed. In the opening scene, there is a tracking shot of one of the victim's eyes. It starts as an extreme close-up then tracks out to a medium shot of her face. To create the look of a dolly shot, we had to figure out a way for the camera to smoothly move back. First we tried the camera mounted on a tripod on top of a skateboard, but that was too wobbly. I ended up finding my grandpa's old wheelchair and sat in it as the director slowly pulled me back, in the same way Godard used wheelchairs for makeshift dollies.

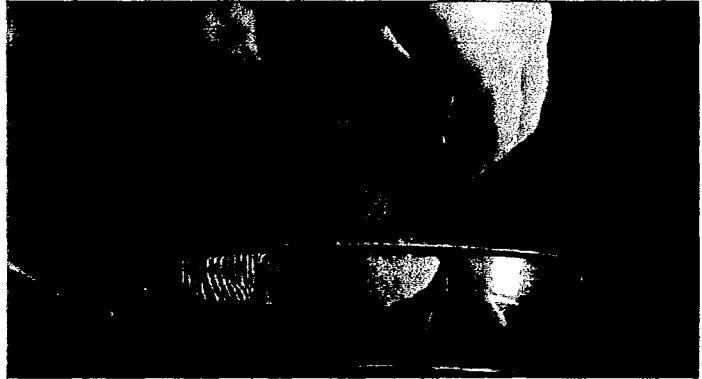
For the breakfast scene, I wanted to make Mary seem very angelic, so I placed a small LED behind her. This created a halo of light around her head. I also wanted to have shots from her perspective so I would sit in the chair she was in, and with a tripod I panned up from the plate of food and focus-pulled onto the man's face.



Meanwhile, there is a window behind the man with the blinds open. It emulates a sort of cage, symbolizing the trapped predicament he has put them in. We also utilized a bounce to add more light to one side of his face. This conveyed the duality in his character, with one side of his face in shadow and the other side in light.

## Post Production

For the most part, I did not have that big of a role in the post production. I worked alongside the editor at times to make sure continuity and the film's meaning stayed intact. There are several montages throughout the film. For one, there is a sequence of cooking an egg and toasting a slice of bread. I collaborated with the editor to ensure the montage was quick and fast paced. I also worked with both the editor and director to ensure the overall design and pace of the film was accurate to the director's, and my, vision.



Overall, there were not any problems with any of the footage, lighting-wise or composition-wise. However, we did run into problems with continuity when we found that some of our shots cut to another shot without any sort of transition, so we would have to film again later on to get that transition shot. Aside from this, the filming and editing process went smoothly and I am quite proud of our finished product.

Word Count: 1200

## Bibliography

Hardy, Robert. "Cinematography Tutorial: Why Manipulating Character Size Is an Incredibly Powerful Tool." *No Film School*. Web. 7 Dec. 2014.

Hayek, Daniel. "Behind the Glass." *Vimeo*. Web. 25 Oct. 2014.

Renee, V. "5 Techniques That Create Depth & Make Your Cinematography More Dynamic." *No Film School*. Web. 2 Jan. 2015.



School name:

For completion by the teacher

A (0-10)	B (0-10)	C (0-10)	D (0-10)	E (0-10)	Total (0-50)
9	9	9	9	9	45

**Comments**

As a cinematographer, this candidate has provided a number of screenshots of her work + explained the reasoning behind her artistic choices. The only element I wished she would have provided is a shot diagram depicting how shots were set up. One can tell that this candidate is quite competent with a camera. Her shot composition, use of light, and other related mise-en-scene elements are noteworthy as is her creativity.

**Teacher declaration:** To the best of my knowledge, the material submitted is the authentic work of the candidate.

Teacher's name

Date:

For completion by the moderator

A (0-10)	B (0-10)	C (0-10)	D (0-10)	E (0-10)	Total (0-50)
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For completion by the senior moderator

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