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by

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**Lost Nights**

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**Lost Nights**

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Dedication**

For Emily, our family, and our future.

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## **Abstract**

### **Lost Nights**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

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The report details the conceptual development, pre-production, production, and post-production stages of making *Lost Nights*. *Lost Nights* is a short, narrative film about two brothers who go out for one last night before the younger brother leaves for basic training. The film was produced as my graduate thesis film in the Department of Radio-Television-Film at the University of Texas at Austin.

## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CONCEIVING THE MOVIE.....	2
PRE-PRODUCTION.....	6
Finding a Producer.....	6
Developing an Aesthetic to Capture the Night.....	7
Finding a Director of Photography to Advance the Aesthetic .....	9
Finding Our Matt and Jim.....	12
Finding the World of the Story in Austin .....	13
PRODUCTION.....	14
Day 01: Backyard Party Scene.....	15
Day 02: End of the Party & Saying Goodbye to Rachel .....	16
Day 03: Interior Bar Scenes .....	16
Day 04: Exterior Bar Scenes .....	17
Day 05: The Convenience Store Scene.....	18
Day 06: The Smoke Scene .....	18
Day 07: Neighborhood & Pool Scenes .....	19
Day 08: Outside Rodney's House & The Construction Cone Scene .....	20
POST-PRODUCTION .....	22
Directing the Edit .....	22
Rediscovering the Heart of the Story.....	23
Finding the Soundtrack.....	24
Creating the Score .....	26

MOVING FORWARD.....	28
Appendix A: Script.....	29
Appendix B: Rewrites .....	46
Appendix C: Overhead Camera Diagrams .....	51
Appendix D: Visual References.....	73
Vita .....	79



## INTRODUCTION

The idea for *Lost Nights* has been with me for the past 11 years. In that time, I have thought about this story often but not until recently did I have any immediate intention to make it. The idea of this story inspired my decision to seriously pursue filmmaking and eventually travelled with me to Austin, and so it is only fitting that it will stand as the culmination of my graduate studies and my entry into life as a professional filmmaker.

Over the years, the story of *Lost Nights* had seen many different changes. In fact, one version of the story might have hardly resembled another, but the heart of the story always remained the same. It was always a story about having to say goodbye to loved ones. Perhaps it was this theme that inspired me to approach the story for my thesis, the project that would mark an end of my career as a student.

The version of *Lost Nights* I have created as my thesis is about two brothers, Matt and Jim, who go out for one last night before the younger brother, Jim, leaves for basic training. Having served in Iraq, Matt knows where Jim is going, but unable to find the right parting words, Matt must show Jim a night to express everything he wishes he could say.

## CONCEIVING THE MOVIE

*Lost Nights* was born out of late nights spent with a friend whom the main character is named after and with whom I have shared many of the experiences that play out in the movie. These nights were spent aimlessly wandering the neighborhoods of our youths, discussing the possibilities of a movie set in those places. Our conversations about this story never evolved past general scenarios, loose character sketches, and images, but these conversations were always had with the understanding that the movie should take place over one night. However, I should note that these conversations were never had with the expectation that the movie would actually be made.

It was enough for us to simply talk about it. At the time of *Lost Nights*' inception, I had just begun studying Philosophy as an undergraduate and had only a vague notion of filmmaking as a career path, and my friend was a high school dropout who drifted between jobs without any notion for the future save the night ahead. We both shared a deep love for the imagery and mood of Van Morrison's second solo album *Astral Weeks*, and for us, the movie was a recontextualization of Van Morrison's images in our own lives. The idea of the movie became a Platonic good of our time spent together and represented all that was meaningful about what we were doing with our lives. In that way, *Lost Nights* is deeply personal, which is the main reason I revisited the story for my thesis project.

I entered my thesis year in the fall of 2012, but I did not intend to complete my thesis within the academic year. My only expectation for the semester was to begin writing. I had taken my first job in film the previous spring, working full time for Terrence Malick, and my wife and I were expecting our first child in October. It was a time of transition, and I was very busy. Perhaps it was because I had little time to explore

different story ideas that the kernel of what would become *Lost Nights* called to me from the past, and I took comfort in its familiarity. However, the *Lost Nights* I presented to the thesis production class was much different from what it is today.

When I first seriously considered this story for my thesis project, *Lost Nights* was about two brothers, Matt and Jim, only it was a younger story. The movie was to begin similarly to how it begins now, with a party. The party was to celebrate Matt, who was a 19 year old soldier, returned home on leave from Afghanistan. In this iteration, the central conflict of the movie was Matt's insistence that he tag along with his 16 year old brother, Jim, whom Matt catches sneaking out later that evening. The story was not much developed beyond there, but it was built on the theme of searching for lost youth. I thought it would be a movie about those characters wandering the night and their neighborhood together, sharing a nostalgia for things that had not yet passed. It was a version of the story I could make sense of on an intellectual level but was lacking the emotional core I needed to understand in order to successfully make that version of the movie.

A large part of what I hope to do as a filmmaker is to articulate and engage people in emotions and meanings that cannot simply be stated or communicated in any medium other than film. Having studied philosophy, particularly Philosophy of Mind and Phenomenology, I am fascinated by the similarities between the process of understanding the experience of watching a movie and the process of understanding our experiences of everyday life. While it took me a long time to realize that simply making movies that play upon the syntax of the subjectivity of the everyday experience of life is not sufficient to make an engaging movie, I now understand that a movie must be emotionally truthful in order for it to be engaging.

Achieving emotional truth is the collective challenge of the cast and crew, particularly the director and actors. Having studied performance for the past five years, going back to my days at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, I strongly believe that directing is a type of performance. Every person living in society has been trained to have certain inhibitions. While those inhibitions help maintain order, they often suppress and sedate some of our strongest impulses and emotions. My job as the director is to develop a sense of trust between the actors and myself and create the space necessary for all parties to become uninhibited so that we might uncover those impulses and emotions and discover the emotional truth behind a given set of circumstances. In order to do so, I must fully, at a fundamental level, give myself over to the story and the moment, so that I can attempt to make sense of it from each character's perspective, and if I am to be honest in this endeavor, I cannot move forward with a project until I am able to make sense of and understand the material. That was the problem with early versions of *Lost Nights*, I simply could not relate to the circumstances of the story on an emotional level.

I took a leave of absence from school for the spring semester of 2013 in order to fully focus on the work I was doing for Malick and to have more time to spend with my family. However, in early January I was laid-off. The investors had pulled all funding, and the project was put on indefinite hiatus. I was lucky enough to have observed one of the great masters of cinema at work, but I was frustrated that the production, in which I had invested a lot of my creative capital and truly believed in, might not come to fruition. I felt helpless, and the intensity of this feeling was something I wanted to confront.

I revisited *Lost Nights* knowing that the feeling of helplessness was already a palpable part of the story's world. After all, Matt was always envisioned to be a soldier in the middle of wartime, but I did not want the melancholy of helplessness, which seems to be a part of confronting the unknown, to rule over the story. I like to instill a sense of

hope or glimpse of the sublime in whatever I make, and for *Lost Nights*, I wanted to create a movie that might glimpse the sublime in the face of helplessness, the unknown, and ultimately death.

I entertained different ways in which Matt and Jim could revolt against their own helplessness, and as I explored these options, I found that any story of a soldier lashing out against the helplessness of his situation would be too easily mistaken for a political statement. So, similarly to the way a paleontologist diligently and carefully brushes stone and sediment from a fossil, I considered the raw emotions of all that had inspired *Lost Nights*. What I found most similar to those emotions and most compelling in terms of story was the feeling one has when having to say goodbye to someone they love, and the story became about Matt having to say goodbye to Jim. Upon the realization that this was the story I wanted to tell, which did not happen until March 2013, I was ready to begin the pre-production process.

## **PRE-PRODUCTION**

### **FINDING A PRODUCER**

I knew for this project I wanted to be able to focus most of my time directing the process. Of course, I could not afford to support an entire crew financially, so I tempered my expectations accordingly. Generally speaking, I seek out collaborators who I believe fit the project. For instance, the actors must in reality be some version of the characters I cast them to play. The Director of Photography must have instincts that serve the tone of the circumstances of the movie, and the producer must understand what the movie is attempting to accomplish, so that in each instance, we share a vision.

I met Mark Blumberg when he started in the MFA program in 2011, and we immediately hit it off over a conversation about the sincerity of reality television. I ran into him only occasionally after that, but I saw his KB film and was interested in his style and understanding of the way in which movies and art can function. When I learned that Mark was interested in producing, I approached him about coming on board in late March 2013. He was interested, so we scheduled a meeting to go over the script and discuss the project at greater length before making any commitments. To my delight, Mark not only understood the project but was ready to commit. We had only to define his role.

My first true collaboration developing a story was with Mark. Mark became a creative partner as well as a producer. After our initial meeting in early April, we met once or twice a week to go over script revisions and development with an eye toward production and how this would all come together to become the movie. When it came time to schedule and coordinate the shoot, I had every confidence in his ability to cover all of our bases because we shared a vision.

Mark worked beyond my expectations, and I owe him a great debt. He handled the practical side of production in such a way that all arrangements were made to serve the story's aesthetic, an aesthetic he helped to develop. He invested his own creative self in the project and challenged me to dig deeper to uncover the heart of the project.

#### **DEVELOPING AN AESTHETIC TO CAPTURE THE NIGHT**

At the core of *Lost Nights* is a very specific emotion from which the story sprouted and which the movie hopes to convey. In order to be able to truly understand any movie and thus be able to properly communicate its vision to others, I believe that a film's aesthetic should be fundamentally tied to the subject and tone of the piece so as to have maximum emotional impact. Developing the aesthetic is a long process that is not limited to pre-production and is not completed until the film is completed. However, most of what happens in pre-production is aesthetic development. For several months leading up to production, I plumbed the possibilities of the story of Matt and Jim's last night together in order to hone in on and continue to refine and articulate the emotion at the heart of the piece.

Insofar as film is a visual, time-based medium, a script can only ever be a blueprint of a movie, communicating the movie's actions and approximating the movie's tone. Likewise, reference materials from different mediums can certainly help to answer questions left by the script and give a greater sense of what the movie can be, but reference materials have their own meanings and contexts which can confuse or distract from the emotional seed of the project. In defining an aesthetic, I am able to see not only what separates the movie from its influences and inspirations, but I am able to better see how the movie should work toward achieving its emotional climax.

For my pre-thesis film, *Little Lions*, I developed an aesthetic intended to feel like a memory. *Little Lions* is about a young boy who finds an injured bird in his backyard and instead of helping it or nurturing it back to health he decides to make his younger siblings kill it. A large part of the directorial process of *Little Lions* was cultivating a level of naturalism in the performances rarely seen on film. To do this I spent months of rehearsal simply developing strong relationships between the children. Also, I worked without a script and instead engaged my actors in games, such as Keep Away, that I manipulated in order to tease out conflicts that would have an organic immediacy. The result of this process was a hyper-realism in the performances that had a documentary-like feel to it on screen. I wanted to revisit the idea of creating a movie-watching experience that felt as though one was revisiting a memory, and so I built upon the directorial process of *Little Lions*.

In order to make *Lost Nights* seem like a memory, I had to make the movie so that both the audience and characters would truly lose themselves in the moment, so that it would become an unthinking experience for all parties involved. I developed a story arc that would evolve from scripted to unscripted scenes wherein the actors would be completely free to play and exist. Furthermore, Mark and I scheduled the shoot chronologically so that my actors, with whom I knew I would have little time to rehearse and build a personal relationship between, would have time to build their relationship, a relationship that would free them to fully lose themselves in the moment. I hoped that by following this arc and shooting schedule from scripted to unscripted moments that we could tell a complete story while freeing ourselves to exist in the moment entirely.

Because I knew the unscripted parts of the film would be wildly inconsistent in terms of action, I had to plan accordingly. When I worked for Malick, I got to see how he conducted his shoots. I learned many valuable lessons from him, one of which was to rely



upon a shooting dogma or, in my case, establish rules of cinematography that would help to guide my camera operator in the moment. I knew these rules would play an influential role upon the tone of the movie, so I sought out a Director of Photography I knew I could trust to understand the story and its characters.

#### **FINDING A DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY TO ADVANCE THE AESTHETIC**

I did not meet Caleb Kuntz until after Mark suggested that I consider him for Director of Photography. In one of our early meetings, I suggested to Mark that the movie should be shot with an entirely handheld camera and that the camera should be in constant motion. Mark immediately touted Caleb's smooth handheld camerawork and his background in photography and music as reasons Caleb would be a good candidate. I did not know Caleb, so I was not convinced. However, upon seeing Caleb's pre-thesis, which was a short documentary titled *Uncertain, Tx*, and hearing Caleb speak about his unconventional shooting style, I knew he was right for the project. I sent him the script. He committed to the project the following night.

In mid-May, Caleb and I began to search for reference materials that would help to inform and possibly inspire our development of a set of rules to guide the cinematography. We not only looked for films directly related to the plot of *Lost Nights*, but we sought out materials that shared our themes and/or emotional thrust. We looked through photographs of soldiers, read accounts of their experiences, and spoke with childhood friends who had since become veterans. We let the process of sifting through the different materials affect the way we thought about the movie, ultimately landing on a couple of key pieces that helped to inform our rules.

As we began the process of searching for visual references, I came across the 2011 Norwegian film *Oslo, August 31st*, directed by Joachim Trier. The movie is about a

recovering addict who returns home for a night on leave from rehab. The story follows him as he revisits old haunts and friends, and it had a very similar feeling to what we wanted to cultivate in *Lost Nights*. Perhaps our greatest takeaway from this reference was the subtlety with which it treated its impressionistic moments. Rather than cover scenes entirely in traditional shot-reverse shot sequences, at times Trier's camera simply followed its characters as though it were an old friend. This was an element we wanted to use to our advantage, especially in some of the more intimate moments of *Lost Nights*.

The other reference that greatly influenced our cinematographic rules was photographer Lalage Snow's *We Are The Not Dead*. This project consists of a series of triptychs of British soldiers before, during, and after their deployments to Afghanistan. The images are a very powerful portrayal of the trauma of war. The transformations of Snow's subjects helped to unlock what ultimately was at stake for our characters: Matt, who had experienced the trauma of war and this transformation first-hand, was saying goodbye to the Jim he knew and loved but would likely be changed forever.

After vetting the various references, we formed our rules. First, the camera would always be handheld so that even in moments of calm, the camera would always make its presence felt. We believed that this would free the actors from having to hit marks, so they would not have to think about their performances. We also liked that this would allow Caleb to react to movements instinctually and however he felt compelled to do so in the moment. Our second rule was that the camera always be at or slightly lower than eye-level. We believed that a handheld camera kept at eye-level would best capture the intimacy of moments and help audiences to feel as though they are there with the characters. Our third rule was to never trap characters against flat surfaces, that the frame always has a three-dimensional depth. Not only do I simply prefer such images, we wanted to allow the locations to play an important role. Providing depth invites audiences

to explore the frame. Our fourth rule was to favor framing characters in either profile, three-quarters, or from behind over framing them straight on. Not allowing people to gaze directly on a character's face provides for intrigue and focuses attention on the action or the tension between characters. We believed it would also allow us to call attention to particular emotions when we did train the camera directly on a character's face. Our last rule was to never simply pan or tilt the camera, that any such move should also include some z-axis movement. Movements along the z-axis are much more dynamic and are ripe for injecting emotions into moments.

Another element we developed through this process was our intention to use mixed media formats. By bookending the film with common video formats we thought that we might be able to help audiences identify with the world of the characters in the movie's opening while leaving them with a purely impressionistic ending. So we planned to shoot moments from the backyard family party scene with a digital camcorder, and we intended to use a Harinezumi camera for the underwater images of the brothers swimming.

All in all, our rules were directed but simple. As I have stated several times already, I believe the moviemaking process, the process of finding the story and refining the emotional thrust of a movie, is not finished until the movie is sent out into the world. At no point in the process does the movie's conceptualization go into auto-pilot. A filmmaker does not simply execute a script. A movie is born from the momentum of life. In this way, filmmaking is a lot like Judo. As a director, I cannot simply resist life's distractions or tangents or unforeseen elements in an attempt to tune them out. I must use their momentum in an attempt to enlighten the process and make them work for the movie's purposes. Our rules allowed us to adapt to a variety of circumstances while maintaining what we believed would be a compelling aesthetic consistency. Furthermore,

the inevitably varied results of this style of cinematography efficiently gave us many options for editing.

### **FINDING OUR MATT AND JIM**

I worked with a casting director on *Little Lions*, and I had every intention of working with one for *Lost Nights*. Casting calls put out by a professional casting director seem to draw many of the area's more serious actors than I would be able to reach on my own. Furthermore, calls put out by casting directors lend an air of professionalism to the project. I do not regard my filmmaking as a casual affair, and I do not want to work with actors who regard their craft casually.

I reached out to Toni Brock and Sally Allen at Brock Allen Casting about the project. They liked the script and agreed to cast the movie. I devised different auditions for the various roles. For the roles of Matt and Jim, we had actors audition in pairs. They first performed a scene from Sam Shepard's play *True West* and then performed a section from the opening party scene of *Lost Nights*. I thought it was important to see not only how well the actors were able to play off of each other through the more familiar material of *True West* but how they connected to the characters of *Lost Nights*. Every casting decision will have a profound effect on the story, and more than looks or charisma, I needed to believe that each of my actors really understood the role and would make it his own.

Austin Amelio was brought in to audition for Jim. His was the first audition of the day. I knew immediately that I wanted to cast him. Austin has an optimistic edge that I thought fit perfectly for Jim and Jim's circumstances.

Jeremy St. James auditioned for the role of Matt. Jeremy's version of Matt wore a sleeveless undershirt and had a loud and aggressive personality that I had not previously

considered for the character. While I was intrigued by his audition, I initially mistook Jeremy's rendition of Matt as a slight misunderstanding of the world of the script. Later, Jeremy came back to play the role of Jim against another person auditioning for Matt when the actor who was supposed to audition for Jim was a no-show. I liked Jeremy's audition as Jim. Jeremy understood Jim, so I asked that they swap roles so I could see Jeremy play Matt again. The second time around was a revelation. Jeremy understood the story and Matt deeply and showed me a side of the character I had not yet seen. I knew I had found my Matt and Jim.

#### **FINDING THE WORLD OF OUR STORY IN AUSTIN**

Because *Lost Nights* was inspired by my experiences in Omaha, Nebraska, I wanted to set the story in a place that could pass for the Midwest. We found neighborhood streets on the East Side and near Hyde Park with sodium vapor streetlights. I was adamant that we shoot under sodium vapor light. The sodium vapor streetlights of my memories are their own characters, and I wanted sodium vapor to color Matt and Jim gold when they are alone in the night.

Each location had some element that I would not compromise. The house had to feel like the house of a working-class family. The pool had to be surrounded by a tall chain-link fence. The forest had to have a dense cluster of trees, and the bar had to feel like a generic neighborhood bar. Surprisingly, the bar was the hardest location to find. Mark and I spent several nights touring bars throughout the city of Austin. Eventually we found St. Roch's Bar on the East Side. Once our locations, cast, and crew were locked down, we were ready to shoot.

## PRODUCTION

We went into production with a script that I knew was still “fat” in terms of story. As I have stated, moviemaking is a process. Each phase is completed to support the proceeding phase. The story is articulated so that expectations are made for pre-production. Then, all elements of production are thoroughly vetted and scheduled in pre-production, so that production can be spent mining those elements for post-production. In other words, the goal of production is to get as much raw material to work with in post-production as possible. This method of working was a deliberate choice on my part and found its influence in my time working with Malick.

Malick once said he did not like to “Kubrick” things. He meant that he would rather shoot 100 different moments than shoot one moment 100 times. I am of a similar ilk, but where Malick might veer completely away from the script when shooting, I only intend to follow the emotional momentum of the performances on the shoot. As previously stated, my style of directing is like Judo. We rehearse and plan and plot, but when everybody is on set and the cameras start rolling, things inevitably change. It is my job to find the emotion where it is most palpable and make it work for the movie. Needless to say the emotional arc can change drastically, and in order to properly understand what is most palpable in the moment, I have found that I cannot spend time watching the monitor while rolling. I try to stand as close to the action as possible. I have to be able to feel all that the actors are feeling in the moment—be able to see what they are seeing and reacting to—and adjust the scene and motives for each character accordingly. Then at the end of the each day, I review all of the footage to see what we have and how the story might have changed and then begin rewrites for the following day’s shoot.

## **DAY 01: BACKYARD PARTY SCENE**

We arrived on set the morning of Saturday, September 14th, 2013. Because we scheduled the shoot according to the chronological order of the story, we started with the afternoon party scene. We wanted to warm up the cast and crew for the eight day shoot, so we spent the first half of the day shooting a variety of opening elements.

It was a rather slow morning, and as I watched our morning setups play out before me, I had the distinct feeling that most of what we were shooting would be unusable. We busted take after take, which was not as disheartening it might seem. Given my process, I knew there would be moments like this, so rather than try to perfect something that was never going to work, we broke for lunch.

We scheduled a long lunch so that Caleb could roam about with a digital camcorder to capture moments that would stand in for a backyard family party. We cast extras for this scene alone, and we served lunch on the set. Given that the majority of people on set were complete strangers to one another, the mood of the family party scene was relatively subdued, but I knew this was something that we could use to play into Matt's restlessness in the scenes we were set to shoot that afternoon.

Most of what is shown in the opening party scene was shot in the afternoon. The scene was only two and a half pages, so we were able to run through it in its entirety each time we took it. I was very happy with the performances in the afternoon. I had only to watch the footage at the end of the day to account for any changes.

After reviewing the footage, I confirmed the unlikeliness that we would use most of the morning footage. The day one morning footage included moments with children who were scheduled to return for the smoke scene which was to take place later in the shoot. At this point, I was not in any rush to make changes to that scene, so I took note and prepared for the following night's shoot.

## **DAY 02: END OF THE PARTY & SAYING GOODBYE TO RACHEL**

We returned to our house location the night of Sunday, September 15th. We spent the first half of the day shooting the scene in which Matt dumps the cooler of ice water onto his uncle, and then moved onto the scene in which Jim and Rachel temporarily say goodbye.

We started with Matt's perspective of the scene, and everything went smoothly. We were scheduled to shoot Jim's perspective and then move onto the sequence of the brothers quietly walking through their neighborhood on their way to the bar. However, something was amiss when we started on Jim's side of the scene.

Whereas Matt's perspective of the scene was relatively simple because the stakes were low, Jim was being confronted by the complexity of his relationship with his girlfriend, Rachel, and Rachel's family and the script did not properly explore this. Jim was very vulnerable in this moment, so I decided to push the neighborhood scene to a later day so we could properly explore Jim's vulnerability in this moment. The tone of the movie took a more serious turn after reworking this scene, and we could all feel it while we worked on it. This was a positive turn, though. We were not only able to raise the stakes of the movie organically through the performances, but Jeremy was able to see how anxious Jim was and in turn was able to identify that desperation in Matt.

## **DAY 03: INTERIOR BAR SCENES**

We took Monday off and returned to set the morning of Tuesday, September 17th. We were scheduled to shoot out all of the interior bar scenes. By this day we had worked out a consistent shooting rhythm where we would simply run through scenes in their entirety before changing camera setup, which was important because this day was not only strained for time but involved a lot of moving parts.



Shooting the first half of the bar interiors went smoothly. We let our experiences on Sunday night inform the mood in which Jim entered the bar, which was something I knew I would have to account for later in the neighborhood walking scene that we pushed.

The second half of the day was spent shooting the fight scene. The only development worth noting from this scene was in the choreography between Matt and the Tough Dude. There were early takes in which the actor playing the Tough Dude would not bump into Matt, which was supposed to be the action that spills the drinks that sparks the bar fight. I decided to continue to roll on one of these “busted” takes, thinking we could potentially cut around the action if necessary, but I found it made more sense if the drinks were not spilled but that instead Matt intended to start a fight to get them kicked out. We shot it both ways, but I preferred it when Matt simply intended to start a fight and let that play into the energy of the fight scene. We found that once Matt decided to start a fight to get them kicked out, the energy of the fight was much louder and wilder than anticipated, which was something we had to account for in the following exterior bar scene.

#### **DAY 04: EXTERIOR BAR SCENES**

The following night we returned to our bar location to shoot the exterior bar scenes. The bar was still open when we arrived, so we scheduled the setups that did not have dialogue. These were fairly simple transitionary scenes, but they took us half of the day to shoot. After lunch we began the scene that takes place immediately after Matt and Jim have been kicked out of the bar, which is the climax of the movie.

I had arrived to set with rewrites for this scene based on the high energy of the bar fight. In the script, this scene was rather short and imbalanced. After seeing the bar fight

play out on day three, I came to realize that this scene needed to emphasize this moment as a make-or-break moment for Matt and Jim. So rather than let Rachel own the scene as she did in the script, I needed to show the night slipping away from Matt and Jim and let audiences think that this might actually be the end of the night before forcing Matt to win it back.

In the rewrite, Rachel is less assertive over the other characters and instead simply pleads with Jim. After three days of shooting it was clear that Jim cared deeply for Rachel; Austin and Lindsay had developed a great on-camera chemistry, so it made perfect sense that by having Rachel appeal to Jim on an emotional level and show him her deep concern for his happiness and well-being that Jim might seriously consider going home with her, thus ending the night. As a director, I try my best to give my actors space to improvise in the moment and follow their instincts, so naturally even the rewrites were rewritten in their performances, but generally speaking, this is how we shot it

#### **DAY 05: THE CONVENIENCE STORE SCENE**

Due to inclement weather, we did not resume shooting until the night of Friday, September 20th. It began raining the afternoon of September 19th and rained until the morning of September 21st, but the convenience store scene was all interior so the rain was not an issue. Furthermore, we had scheduled weather days, so our schedule was not greatly affected. In fact, it gave me more time to consider how the momentum of the shoot was reflected in the footage and ways we could improve upon it. That said, we shot the convenience store scene as I had envisioned it in the script.

## **DAY 06: THE SMOKE SCENE**

We arrived at Garrison Park the evening of Saturday, September 21st. I came to set with rewrites that were drastically different than what was in the script. I knew after day one that this scene had changed but had not yet known the implications. However, by the afternoon of day six I thought I understood it. In the script, children reunite Matt and Jim in the smoke and the tone is light and ultimately playful, but in the rewrite, I reduced the children to one child that I knew I could cut out if necessary and I let this scene be about the closure these characters needed. I made this scene about the moment these two brothers realize they may never see each other again.

I had emailed my actors the rewrites earlier in the day to give them time to prepare for the scene. When Austin and Jeremy arrived on set, each seemed distant to the point that I mistakenly thought they disliked the rewrites. As I do at the beginning of every day on set, I checked in with them to see if they had any questions about the day's scenes. I quickly realized they had simply come to set prepared.

The day's schedule was such that we first shot everything leading up to, but not including, their goodbye. I wanted to withhold their moment together until we were completely set up for it. Once it came time, I cleared the set of everybody that was not essential to the shot.

It was amazing to watch Jeremy and Austin act out this moment. They dug so deep I could feel the remorse of their characters in their bones. It was palpable. It was real, and to see the seed of emotion and characters I had planted within these actors develop to the point where they could truly feel what their characters felt was easily my proudest moment as a director.

## **DAY 07: NEIGHBORHOOD & POOL SCENES**

After the emotionally taxing day six, we returned to set the evening of Sunday, September 22nd. We had originally hoped to wrap shooting with the pool scene, but due to the weather, we had to schedule a full day. In the end this was a blessing. I was freed and inspired to inject more emotion into the scenes we had not yet shot because I knew it would pay off in the smoke scene.

The pool scene and neighborhood scenes we scheduled to shoot on day seven were always meant to be impressionistic, so things did not change much from the script. However, the scenes we had scheduled for day eight did change.

## **DAY 08: OUTSIDE RODNEY'S HOUSE & THE CONSTRUCTION CONE SCENE**

By day eight, we had a very good idea of what this movie was going to be, so we returned to set for our final shoot day the night of Tuesday, September 24th. I arrived to set with minor changes in terms of action. The change required only one extra set-up, but the implications of this change unlocked the movie.

Early in the development process of this story, I had reached out to a few of my friends who were veterans and have had younger brothers join the military. One of my friends informed me that he was actually more afraid to leave for basic training than he was to leave for a tour in Iraq. I thought this was interesting but could not find a way to use it in the movie without having it seem contrived, but after having spent ten days with these characters and the footage, I found our opportunity. I realized that this idea would play perfectly in Matt and Jim's first scene to themselves—as they walk through their neighborhood on their way to the bar. Furthermore, I realized that Matt's refusal to answer Jim's question about basic versus Iraq would give us more insight about the characters' and the movie's motivations than an actual answer from Matt ever could.

Beyond the addition of this moment, the remainder of day eight was spent shooting the fun, destructive, and cathartic scenes of Matt and Jim wreaking havoc on their neighborhood. Given the heavily improvisational nature of these scenes and the fluidity of production in general, I knew we would have to rediscover the story in the footage in post-production.

## POST-PRODUCTION

Within days of wrapping production, I had already transcoded, organized, and pulled selects from our footage. I enjoy editing. It is the part of the process when the movie evolves from a concept to an art piece, and so I simply assumed that as I had done with previous projects I would edit *Lost Nights*. I worked in my free time and completed an assembly cut by October and then a rough cut by November, but I hated the direction the movie had taken. I had neglected to consider the story in light of the footage and instead tried to force the footage into some version of the movie I had in my head. I had betrayed the very process the project was built upon and to which I had meticulously stayed true to that point. It was maddening. So in early December, I stepped back and decided to start over, scratching all of the work I had done—save the transcoding. Only this time I would hand over the footage to an editor so that I could track the trajectory of the progress being made and direct the movie as a whole.

### DIRECTING THE EDIT

I knew Kyle Seaquist through the work he did for Malick. Kyle is also an MFA candidate, but I did not get to know him until he started as an intern for Malick's editors in the summer of 2012. Because I had modeled my process off of what I thought were some of Malick's best practices, I thought Kyle might be a natural fit for the project, so I offered him the position in mid-December 2013.

He accepted, and we broke for the holidays with the intention to begin work in early January 2014. By the middle of February he had pulled his selects and completed an assembly cut. I was ecstatic with the results.

Without having to reveal to him my shortcomings as editor of *Lost Nights*, he had already accounted for them. In his assembly cut, he left several scenes, mostly those

following the climax of the movie, rather loose or formless and instead focused his efforts on establishing the overall tone and rhythm of the movie. Kyle and I share the belief that the experience of watching a movie is an emotional experience, and so the emotional impact of a piece should take precedence over smoothing out kinks in the story. That said, if a movie's story does not make sense, it can distract from the emotional impact a movie can have. Because Kyle focused his assembly cut on establishing the movie's tone, I was able to identify our storytelling priorities in such a way that we were able to continue to refine the tone while addressing the structural elements that would need to be worked out for the rough cut.

#### **REDISCOVERING THE HEART OF THE STORY**

One of the first major changes to the story I implemented was that we eliminated the scene of Matt urinating on the side of the house. This scene made sense on the page, but it simply did not fit the tone of the movie. Eliminating this scene had further implications that affected the rest of the story.

By eliminating this scene we inherently removed a lot of dialogue that explained story elements such as Rachel's temporary disappearance from the movie and her relationship to the people she leaves and later returns with. However, we found that by eliminating the tangential characters and the need to explain their presence altogether, we were able to remove any confusion and distractions that those characters might have imposed upon the movie. In doing so we attained a greater focus on the relationship between the brothers, which was ideal because it ultimately strengthened the more abstract, impressionistic moments.

The smoke scene was always one that I had trouble imagining in an edit, but as we refined our cut, its placement and purpose became apparent. Just like it made sense to

the actors as their characters' moment of goodbye, the smoke scene revealed itself as a moment of emotional catharsis, and rather than treat it as its own landed scene, we further abstracted it by introducing sounds of war to insinuate the potential finality of their last night together. We liked the direction this scene had taken, but the sounds of war proved too obvious and did not enrich the moment the way we hoped they would.

After showing cuts of the movie to various people whose feedback I trusted, I received a note that we might try using sounds of thunder in place of the sounds of war. I was interested in the idea, so we experimented with it and found that it not only truly abstracted the smoke scene in a way we always hoped for but by introducing the sounds of thunder earlier in the movie, it allowed us a smoother transition into the smoke. The exploration and use of these aural elements, especially the music, have played a critical role in recreating the world of these characters.

### **FINDING THE SOUNDTRACK**

Whenever I start a new project, I create a playlist of songs I associate with the tone of the story. The playlist for *Lost Nights* included 46 tracks from various bands and musicians that ranged in genre from heavily distorted punk to quiet bluegrass. I listened to this playlist whenever I wrote or worked on the movie. I let this music, with which I associated relevant personal experiences and emotions, enrich my work, and as the project developed I added and subtracted tracks accordingly. When it came time to choose the songs that would define the world of these characters I looked first to this playlist for inspiration.

Ironically, not a single song from the playlist made it into the movie. I found that the songs I had kept in my playlist worked to give me a general sense of the movie but were either wrong or did not properly impart a new meaning to the scene at play. For the



opening home movie montage, we found that we should use something light that would play into the palette of the score but that sounded as though it could be playing on the radio at the party. I asked Kyle to experiment with this idea, and he found a lighter track by Neil Young. We liked the way this song played in the cut, but I knew I would not be able to afford the licensing for a Neil Young track, so I searched for similar songs. I came across the song “Golden” by My Morning Jacket which plays incredibly well in the opening. Furthermore, despite the band’s popularity, I was able to attain a festival license at an affordable price.

The bar sequence was the only other moment for which we wanted to use songs and not score. We wanted to define the bar through the music it played while maximizing the emotional impact of the action within the scenes. I revisited the catalogues of bands whose members I either grew up with or knew and was lucky enough to find the song “Hitchin’ A Ride” by a group called The Yuppies. This song sounds like an early, New York-style punk song which lent the bar a contemporary feeling without making it seem too cool. Also, the tone of the song perfectly matched the clumsiness with which Matt orders drinks he cannot afford. As a bonus, because I know the people in the band, I was able to license the song at no cost.

The energy of the second half of the bar sequence is drastically different from that in the first half. We tried various rock songs but liked the implications that “Something I Learned Today” by Hüsker Dü had on the scene. The upbeat and almost militant tempo of this song helped us to sell the idea that Matt intended to start a bar fight to get Jim and him kicked out. Hüsker Dü is a band that signed with Warner Brothers Records late in their career, so my expectations were low in terms of my ability to afford a license to use their music. However, *Zen Arcade* the album that includes the track “Something I Learned Today” was published by SST Records, a small punk label based out of Taylor,

Texas. I was delighted when I learned I could afford a festival use license for this song. With the soundtrack in place, I turned my attention to the score.

### **CREATING THE SCORE**

I met Hanan Townshend when I first began working for Malick as an intern. His office was adjacent to the one I worked in, so I had the pleasure of getting to hear him develop the score for *To the Wonder*. We hit it off as friends, but it was not until months after we had met that he offered to score any of my movies. I took him up on his offer, and we collaborated on *Little Lions*. Working with him was revelatory because his only concern as composer is the emotional impact of a movie. Furthermore, he is immensely talented at understanding a story's emotion and deepening it with music. I let my experience working with him on *Little Lions* influence the process of creating *Lost Nights*.

I wanted the movie to be picture-locked before asking Hanan to begin the score. He times his music to the edit, so as not to waste his time I withheld his involvement until the edit was in place. Long before Hanan began work, Kyle and I had explored the possibilities of the score by using temporary tracks in place of what would be score. Through these temp tracks we hoped to isolate the moments where score would play well as well as develop a palette of sound that Hanan could emulate. Kyle and I developed the idea of the score based on two songs: "Drive" by R.E.M. and "Woody's Last Ride" by Ramblin' Jack Elliott.

The palette of these songs is similar. Both have an acoustic guitar picked over a distorted and repetitive bass scale, and both are serious songs that have an almost ominous tone to them. The reason Kyle and I thought this palette worked in light of the

playful scenes they played under was that the songs lent those scenes a seriousness and immediacy that was absent without them.

The challenge for Hanan was to create a score that would help audiences to feel the greater implications of Matt and Jim's last night together without ignoring the actions of their final moments together. To do this Hanan developed the idea that as the brothers leave the bar and disappear into the night, the score becomes more chaotic and formless. Then as the night settles, the chaos of the score slowly pares itself into a simple rhythm, so that by the time Matt and Jim play beer can baseball the score does not ask the audience to consider the brothers' next move but instead demands that the audience enjoy the fleeting moments playing out before them.

## MOVING FORWARD

I am very proud of this movie and excited to share it with the world. I have been humbled every time I stop to consider the immensity of talent and sheer dedication so many different people have put into bringing it to life, but perhaps the most humbling result of this collaboration is that I can see pieces of Mark, Caleb, Jeremy, Austin, Hanan, and Kyle in this movie. They agreed to help tell a story that was not their own, but they each poured themselves into it and made it their own.

*Lost Nights* is my best and most complete work yet. Not because the performances are natural or because it was shot beautifully or because it was edited well, but because for the first time in my short filmmaking career I took the time to see the process through and exhaust the possibilities of the movie. I built upon the lessons I have learned in school and from working for Malick, and further refined my process—truly making it my own.

The only way to further improve upon my process and to continue grow as an artist is through constant practice, which is why upon graduation I will approach filmmaking the way a studio artist approaches his or her craft. I came to school so that I could cultivate my ability to direct a set and performances and to gain a greater understanding of my artistic voice. For the past four years, I have worked tirelessly to do just that, and I will not let it end with graduation. As a father with a family to support, I will undoubtedly have to accept employment that will take me away from my work, but so long as I remain dedicated and disciplined the progress I have made so far will not atrophy. So it is with a heavy heart that I will graduate from a program I have been lucky to be a part of and which has blessed me with such rich opportunities, but I am excited to begin a new chapter. I cannot thank you—my mentors, colleagues, and friends—enough.

## Appendix A: Script

LOST NIGHTS

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1 EXT. SMITH HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

MONTAGE: A small family gathering. A summer party. People carrying paper plates of food outside. People eating and talking. A woman setting out the desserts playfully slaps away the hand of a man pulling the Saran wrap from one of the trays of brownies. A group of men laugh near the beer cooler. Moms socialize as they help their kids fix plates of food. Two young dads talk, holding their little ones. Kids running around with orange and purple pop-stained lips. No sounds heard in particular-- music and general party sounds: conversations, laughing, and kids yelling. An impression of salt of the earth people doing the best they can.

2 EXT. SMITH HOUSE - BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

MATT, late 20s, reaches into the cooler and retrieves a couple beers. His UNCLE, 50s, approaches from behind and wraps an arm over Matt's shoulder.

UNCLE  
You can cry on my shoulder if you  
want to. I won't judge you.

The Uncle looks at Matt with a shit-eating grin. A couple of OLD MEN sitting nearby snigger. Matt smiles and laughs and CRACKS one of the beers open but no words come out of his mouth.

3 JUMP CUT: Matt wading through people, carrying THREE beers.

A roaming group of KIDS playing wildly, tear past Matt, nearly knocking into him.

MATT  
Yo!

The kids don't stop moving, but the LEADER OF THE PACK calls back:

LEADER OF THE PACK  
Watch it, Matt!

Matt playfully starts after them.

MATT  
You watch it!

The kids run away screaming/laughing.



MATT (CONT'D)  
Greg? Rachel? Wanna do a shot?

RACHEL  
(laughs)  
I can't do shots.

MATT  
(playfully dismissive)  
Yeah. Yeah.

Matt points to Greg.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Greg. Let's do a shot.

Greg balks as he shifts his child from one arm to another.

MATT (CONT'D)  
C'mon! It's Jim's last night!

GREG  
I'm not drinking. I gotta work in  
the morning.

Matt is thoroughly annoyed.

MATT  
Oh c'mon, fuck that.

Greg's baby turns. Greg frowns and covers his daughter's ear.

GREG  
Hey! Language.

MATT  
(to the baby)  
Sorry, honey.  
(to everybody else)  
But c'mon! Let's do something! This  
party blows!

RACHEL  
It's not even sundown.

GREG  
Yeah, you have plenty of time to  
drink, Matt. Calm down.

Matt stands on the outside of the circle. He scowls at Greg.  
Jim backs him up.

JIM  
Shut up, Greg.



Jim turns to Matt.

JIM (CONT'D)  
We'll do shots in a bit.

Matt nods but is still pissed at Greg and flips him off.

MATT  
It's not even about that, pussy.  
Fuck off.

Matt starts to walk away.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Everybody has work tomorrow.

4 JUMP CUT: Matt walks to an empty table and takes a seat, facing the party.

WIDE: People are seated at the foldout tables strewn about the yard. The same Old Men are sitting near the cooler. A small group of kids are raiding the dessert table. Jim turns.

Matt smiles and holds up the beers he's now double-fisting.

WIDE: Jim smiles and shakes his head before turning back to Greg and Rachel.

Matt soaks in the scene before standing.

5 JUMP CUT: He finishes one beer and cracks the other open in Jim's ear. Jim turns, smiling.

The kids tear past in the other direction.

6 EXT. SMITH HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Matt's hand blindly searches the bottom of the cooler, sifting through the ice.

Matt frowns and shakes the water from his hand and turns to his Uncle and the Old Men who are still hanging out near the cooler.

MATT  
Welp. Party's over. Time for you to drive home.

His Uncle salutes Matt from his chair.

UNCLE

Yes, sir.

The Old Men laugh amongst themselves.

Matt picks up the cooler and dumps the water on his unsuspecting Uncle.

UNCLE (CONT'D)

Matt! Goddamnit!

They laugh. Matt starts to move to the side of the house, leaving them with one last jab.

MATT

Go home. Seriously.

7 EXT. SMITH HOUSE - SIDE YARD

Matt stands against a bush and begins to piss. He spots Jim and Rachel saying goodbye beneath a streetlight.

8 EXT. SMITH HOUSE - STREET

A DARK LEXUS pulls up, and Jim and Rachel break their hug. MEG, late 20s, gets out of the passenger side and gives Rachel a hug but not Jim. JACK, Meg's fiance, gets out of the driver's side and briefly shakes Jim's hand before greeting Rachel.

9 EXT. SMITH HOUSE - SIDE YARD

Matt excitedly calls out.

MATT

YOU'RE LEAVING??

10 EXT. SMITH HOUSE - STREET

Meg looks to Rachel, confused and annoyed. It's unclear who's calling out to them from the darkness. Jim answers Meg's confusion while Rachel calls back to Matt.

JIM

It's my brother.

RACHEL

YEAH, MATT. MY SISTER AND HER  
FIANCE ARE IN TOWN FOR THE  
NIGHT.

Jack turns to Jim, scoffs.

JACK  
(sarcastic)  
Seems like a good party.

RACHEL  
BUT I'M TAKING JIM TOMORROW,  
SO I'LL SEE YOU THEN.

Jim smiles and nods.

JIM  
He's always a party.

11 EXT. SMITH HOUSE - SIDE YARD

Matt excitedly shakes off and zips up.

MATT  
OH COOL! LUV YA GURL!

12 EXT. SMITH HOUSE - STREET

As Jack climbs into the car, Jim asks:

JIM  
You guys are more than welcome to  
come in and--

MEG  
No. We have dinner plans.

Meg shoots Rachel a look that says, "Right?"

JIM  
Well... We'll probably grab a drink  
later on if you wanna meet up?

Rachel answers before Meg can. Jack starts the car.

RACHEL  
Yeah, definitely. We'll meet you  
there after dinner.

Meg rolls her eyes and gets in the car. Rachel and Jim kiss  
before she sits and he closes the car door.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
(muffled)  
Be careful.

Jim smiles and nods.

Matt has crossed the front yard and steps into the street next to Jim, he smiles and waves as they pull away. He has no clue Jim has just made plans to meet up with Rachel later on.

MATT

Just you and me then.

Matt relishes in the possibilities. Jim nods and says.

JIM

Still want that drink?

Matt smiles and pats a hand to Jim's back as they turn.

MATT

Lez get it!

13 EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD

WIDE: Their backsides disappear and reappear as they pass through the spots of the streetlights. The night sky hangs lighter than the foreground.

MATT (PRIVATE)

Hey, are you gonna be able to do fantasy this year?

JIM (PRIVATE)

I'll miss the draft and first two weeks, but I can set it to auto.

MATT (PRIVATE)

You'll prolly do better that way anyway.

Jim pushes Matt, who playfully takes it.

JIM (PRIVATE)

Shut up.

MATT (V.O.)

(muffled)

You're really leaving tomorrow.

They pass familiar haunts. The streetlights hang like golden orbs overhead. Time passes.

14 EXT. BAR - FRONT

Matt and Jim play their way through the front door.

15 INT. BAR

They walk into their neighborhood bar. It's a familiar place. Nothing unique to love or hate. It's a place people come to drink. Bartender BILL sits behind the bar and watches a silent television. A MAN is sidled up to the bar, also watching TV. A few PEOPLE drink quietly at a table. A couple of well-dressed DUDES, one TOUGH and the other COOL, monopolize the pool table near the door.

The Tough Dude is lining up his shot as the brothers enter. He silently dismisses the brothers before taking his shot.

Matt looks from the unfamiliar faces and frowns to Bill. Jim eases Matt's tension by slapping the backs of his shoulders, and they stumble up to the bar.

Bill turns to Matt. He doesn't smile. He doesn't point. His eyes betray the familiar indifference that reminds us he is on the clock.

Matt leans against the bar and holds up two fingers. Jim lingers nearby.

MATT  
Two whiskeys.

BILL  
Rocks?

Matt nods. Bill quietly pours the drinks.

Matt looks around to Jim, who smiles.

Bill sets the drinks on the bar and holds up his hand to say "five dollars".

Matt knocks the bar top.

MATT  
Okay, so here's the thing..

Bill immediately, frustratedly pulls the drinks from the bar.

BILL  
What the fuck Matt.

Matt leans over the bar to plea and prevent Bill from pouring out the drinks. The Man watches.

MATT  
NoNoNo! Don't pour em out!

Bill pauses.

MATT (CONT'D)

You know I'm good for it. Lemme take out the trash tonight, and I'll pay you tomorrow. It's Jim's last night.

Bill looks at Jim, who smiles and nods.

Bill shakes his head. He's not giving in.

The Man chimes in.

MAN

It's his brother's last night.

Bill reluctantly gives up.

BILL

God you're an asshole.

Matt beams.

MATT

Thanks, man. I appreciate it.

Matt swiftly walks around the bar. Bill points at the different trash bins behind the bar. Matt playfully adds:

MATT (CONT'D)

What about givin Jim money to play some songs on the Juke box.

Bill irately turns back to the silent TV as the Man sniggers.

MAN

You don't know when to stop.

Matt smiles at Jim as he ties the trash bag.

Jim smiles at Matt before turning to check out the bar. The Tough Dude catches Jim looking.

16 EXT. BAR - ALLEY

Matt tosses the trash bags into the dumpster. They clink and crash. He stays in the anonymous darkness and retrieves a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and puts one to his lip when he sees:

The DARK LEXUS pulls up and parks in the street. Rachel, Meg, and Jack, get out of the car and make for the bar.

Matt shakes his head disappointedly before lighting up.

17 INT. BAR

Matt walks straight to the bar. Jim is hanging with Rachel, Meg, Jack, and the Dudes, who are slapping Jack's shoulders and having their own reunion. Rachel and Jim are standing near Meg, apart from the others. Matt knocks the bar and turns to check on Jim and company. Bill turns and points toward the drinks behind the bar.

Matt reaches over the bar to grab them and makes for Jim.

Matt is once again weaving through people, drinks in hand, trying to get to Jim. The Tough Dude steps between Matt and Jim to line up his next shot, without seeing Matt, nearly knocking the drinks from Matt's hands.

MATT

Whoa! Whoa!

The Tough Dude turns to Matt, this time accidentally/successfully knocking the drinks, spilling them over Matt's hands and arms.

MATT (CONT'D)

God! Fuck!

Everybody stops to watch.

TOUGH DUDE

Whoa. Watch where you're going.

Matt sets down the glasses and shakes his hands and wipes them on his pants.

MATT

Fuckin hell.

He steps up to the Tough Dude.

MATT (CONT'D)

You watch it, asshole.

Jim steps in, gently holding Matt back. He's been here before and isn't exactly excited to be here again.

COOL DUDE

Whoa! Take it easy.

JACK

Settle down.

Matt ignores the others.

MATT

You're buying a new round.

JIM

It's alright, Matt.

TOUGH DUDE  
Like hell spaz.

Matt can't believe his ears.

MATT  
Like hell!?

Matt frantically leans past Jim to the pool table and swats the balls with his forearm, effectively ruining their game. Jim laughs.

COOL DUDE  
Fuck, man!

The Tough Dude reaches past Jim and grabs Matt by the collar. Jim immediately throws the Tough Dude back. The girls, Jack, and the Cool Dude yell at Matt as he tries to get past Jim to attack the Tough Dude, who is coolly waiting for Matt to get to him. The Man gets involved, trying to settle Matt as well, when Bill's voice booms out over the chaos.

BILL  
Matt! Jim! Get out!

Matt and Jim don't immediately react to Bill. Bill's voice whines as it strains to project.

BILL (CONT'D)  
GET OUT!

Jim turns, scowling at Bill. Matt still hasn't turned from the Tough Dude, who lowers the cue.

BILL (CONT'D)  
Matt! Get the fuck out!

Matt turns, seething.

JIM  
Fuck! Bill!

Matt shakes a table, spilling all the drinks on top of it.

BILL  
That's going on your tab too!

Matt and Jim storm out.

MATT  
I'm not paying shit! I'm never coming back to this shithole!

JIM  
Fuck you, Bill! You just lost two regulars!



18 EXT. BAR - PARKING LOT

Matt and Jim scream at the Bar, fueling each other's adrenaline. Rachel exits the bar, keys in hand, and attempts to get their attention.

RACHEL

Jim! Matt! Jim! C'mon. I'm taking you home.

JIM

I don't wanna go yet!

Jim yells and kicks over a trash can. Matt cheers next to the LEXUS.

RACHEL

You have to be up early, Jim. It's late. You have to go home.

Jim pauses and looks at Matt. He's stuck. Matt reads this and feels the night slipping through his hands. Matt stands in protest.

MATT

NO!

Rachel turns to Matt. He's three storeys tall as he proclaims:

MATT (CONT'D)

THIS NIGHT IS *NOT* OVER!

He winds up and smashes the sideview mirror with his fist. The CAR ALARM wails.

A Hyde-like, wide-eyed Matt turns to Jim and Rachel.

Rachel is mortified. Jim is supremely impressed.

RACHEL

What the hell Matt??

She steps closer to inspect the damage, pushing past Jim, who is in awe of Matt's newest feat. She looks back toward the bar trying to stop the alarm with the keyless entry remote.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Why did you do that!

The car alarm continues to wail. Rachel grows concerned.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

You guys have to get out of here!  
Go!

Jim turns and kisses Rachel on the cheek, and the two brothers cavort and romp away, knocking over another set of trash cans and when Matt jumps to slap a Stop sign:

19.1 BAM! The sign rattles violently, and we're in it. They're wild and given over to the night.

19.2 They laugh as they run past a construction site. Jim kicks over a traffic cone before grabbing another.

JIM

Fix this fucking street!

He tosses the cone into a hole in the ground.

MATT

Fuck your cones!

Matt throws his cone into the air. Jim throws another at a large piece of equipment. They continue running.

19.3 Matt stops at a pick up truck and jumps in the truck bed. He starts tossing the contents out in all directions. Wood scraps, drywall chunks, and bits of carpet.

Jim hops on the bumper and starts to bounce the back end. Matt pauses, holding a chunk of drywall.

MATT (CONT'D)

Let's get that beer.

Jim keeps bouncing.

JIM

It's too late now.

Matt shakes his head with Dionysian bewilderment that Jim would let such a thing as time stop them, but is interrupted by a pair of 30-something ROUGHNECKS who come running out of their house, holding beer bottles like weapons.

TALL ROUGHNECK

WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU THINK  
YOU'RE DOING MOTHERFUCKERS!!

SHORT ROUGHNECK

GET THE FUCK OUTTA MY SHIT!!

Matt drops the drywall as the brothers immediately jump from the truck.

MATT  
NICE TRUCK!

They laugh hysterically and book it down the street.

The Roughnecks chase only momentarily before throwing their beer bottles at them. The bottles smash behind the brothers as they continue to laugh their asses off.

SHORT ROUGHNECK  
I'M GETTING MY GUN YOU FAGGOTS!!

Jim turns and hops along shaking his head, yelling back.

JIM MATT  
MY DAD'S A COP! DO IT PUSSY!

The roughnecks watch the brothers disappear around the corner.

20 INT. GAS STATION

They move down separate aisles.

Jim opens the door of the beer freezer.

Matt begins filling a fountain soda.

WHIP PAN: Matt throws the fountain soda at the NIGHT CLERK's chest. The pop explodes. As Jim runs past, case in tow.

Matt and Jim laugh as they exit with the beer.

21 EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD

The night is electric blue as their silhouettes roughhouse and carouse with abandonment.

22 EXT. PARK - ENTRY

The brothers finish shotgunning beers when Matt turns to Jim:

MATT  
Wanna go swimming??

JIM  
Fuck yeah!!

Jim swings and throws the remainder of the case into the air, letting it crash to the ground behind him as he skips away into the park.

Matt pauses to watch the beer hiss and fizzle in the street.

He looks from the beer to Jim as Jim calls Matt into the park. When he looks back to the beer, wisps of smoke drift into frame park-side. Matt turns exits frame.

23 EXT. PARK

He is in the middle of the park. The night now reveals itself as mystical. Plumes of white smoke rise from the ground amidst a density of leafless tree trunks. Matt has trouble seeing past the smoke.

MATT

Jim!

A small silhouette of a child brushes past an unsuspecting Matt. He frowns as another small silhouette passes.

MATT (CONT'D)

JIM!!

Matt continues through the smoke and the trees. In the distance he sees a thin beam of a flashlight pierce through the smoke, searching. He pauses as three more silhouettes pass nearby. The flashlight approaches.

The beam hits Matt in the chest, and from behind the flashlight, Jim appears through the smoke.

He smiles and hands Matt the flashlight. He speaks but no sound comes from his mouth.

Matt doesn't quite comprehend. Jim holds out the flashlight.

JIM

Take it.

Matt takes it. Then Jim laughs and pushes Matt before disappearing into the smoke. Matt notices the silhouettes standing near him. They laugh and run as soon as he sees them, and he makes chase with the flashlight. Running and laughing in the smoke.

24 EXT. POOL

The brother's approach a tall, chain-link fence. The pool in the background is obscured. They scan their surroundings. The chain-link fence CLINKS as they climb it.

As they start to undress, it becomes clear this is the pool.

They jump in the pool simultaneously. Matt flops. Jim does a cannonball.

Matt's blue body swims to the surfaces from the dark depths. Shots of their bodies underwater. Floating alone. Swimming together.

**SUPER WIDE:** High-angle shot of the brothers in the pool set against the backdrop of their sleepy neighborhood.

## Appendix B: Rewrites

EXT. BAR - PARKING LOT

Matt and Jim scream at the bar, fueling each other's adrenaline.

MATT  
FUCK BILL! YOU STUPID FUCK!

JIM  
FUCKIN YUPPIE FUCKS!

YELLING.

Rachel exits the bar on a mission, keys in hand, and attempts to get their attention.

RACHEL  
Jim! Matt! Jim! C'mon. I'm taking you home.

JIM  
I don't wanna go yet!

Jim kicks over a trash can. Matt cheers next to the LEXUS.

RACHEL  
It's late. You have to be up early.

Jim sees that she's being serious.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
(pleading)  
C'mon. Let's go home.

Jim pauses and looks at Matt. He's stuck. Matt reads this and feels the night slipping through his hands. Matt stands in protest.

MATT  
NO!

Rachel turns to Matt. He's three storeys tall as he proclaims:

MATT (CONT'D)  
THIS NIGHT IS NOT OVER!

He winds up and smashes the sideview mirror with his fist. The CAR ALARM wails.

MATT (CONT'D)  
FUUUUCK!

*Day 04 Rewrite (Page 1 of 2)*



EXT. PARK - SMOKE

Matt is in the middle of the park. The night now reveals itself as mystical. Rolling plumes of smoke waft across the ground and past the leafless tree trunks. Matt has trouble seeing through the smoke.

MATT  
JIM! JIM WAIT UP!

Matt searches for Jim in the dark. Tiny silhouettes pass from behind like fish through murky water.

As Matt continues to search, a flashlight pierces through the smoke from behind. He turns to see the silhouette of a CHILD run ahead of him.

CHILD  
C'mon!

The Child runs ahead with the flashlight, and Matt follows.

Meanwhile, Jim has run ahead. He's reached the precipice of the night-- at the end of the night. And for a second, he finds himself alone.

He turns to search for Matt.

JIM  
Matt!

A flashlight approaches Jim from the distance. He takes a few steps back as the flashlight searches and probes through the darkness, until at last the beam finds him.

The Child turns to Matt before continuing on. Matt calls out.

MATT  
Jim!

Jim steps toward his brother. They smile and laugh in awe of the smoke-- of the night before disappearing further into it.

*Day 06 Rewrite (Page 1 of 1)*



EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - ALLEY

WIDE: They roughhouse their way down the street.

MATT

Hey, are you gonna be able to do  
fantasy this year?

JIM

I'll miss the draft and the first  
two weeks too probably, but I can  
set it to auto.

MATT

You'll prolly do better that way  
anyway.

Jim pushes Matt, who playfully takes it.

JIM

Shut up.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - HOUSES

Their backsides disappear and reappear as they pass through  
the spots of the streetlights. This is the neighborhood they  
grew up in. Their history hangs in the tree branches  
overhead.

JIM

I can't believe I'm leaving  
tomorrow.

Matt shrugs. This isn't a subject he wants to discuss. What  
good will it do? Leave it for tomorrow. Tonight is now.

MATT

Yeah, I know. It's crazy.

JIM

Can a bum a cig?

Matt is surprised, but happily so, and gives Jim a cigarette  
and the lighter.

They walk in silence for a moment before Matt pushes Jim  
playfully, but Jim is in a serious mood and continues to  
think.

JIM (CONT'D)

Were you seriously more afraid for  
basic than Iraq?

*Day 08 Rewrite (Page 1 of 2)*

Matt dismissively shrugs.

MATT  
I dunno man.

And points to a nearby house.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Remember Rodney fucking Baines?

He begins shouting.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Hey Rodney! ROD-NEY! I FUCKED YOUR  
MOM!

Jim isn't impressed.

JIM  
Hey. C'mon.

Matt turns, incredulous Jim isn't into it.

MATT  
What??

JIM  
It's late. You're gonna wake  
everyone up.

Matt can't believe his ears.

MATT  
So?!

Jim shrugs.

MATT (CONT'D)  
It's our last night! Fuck everybody  
else!

Jim doesn't get it, but goes along with it anyway.

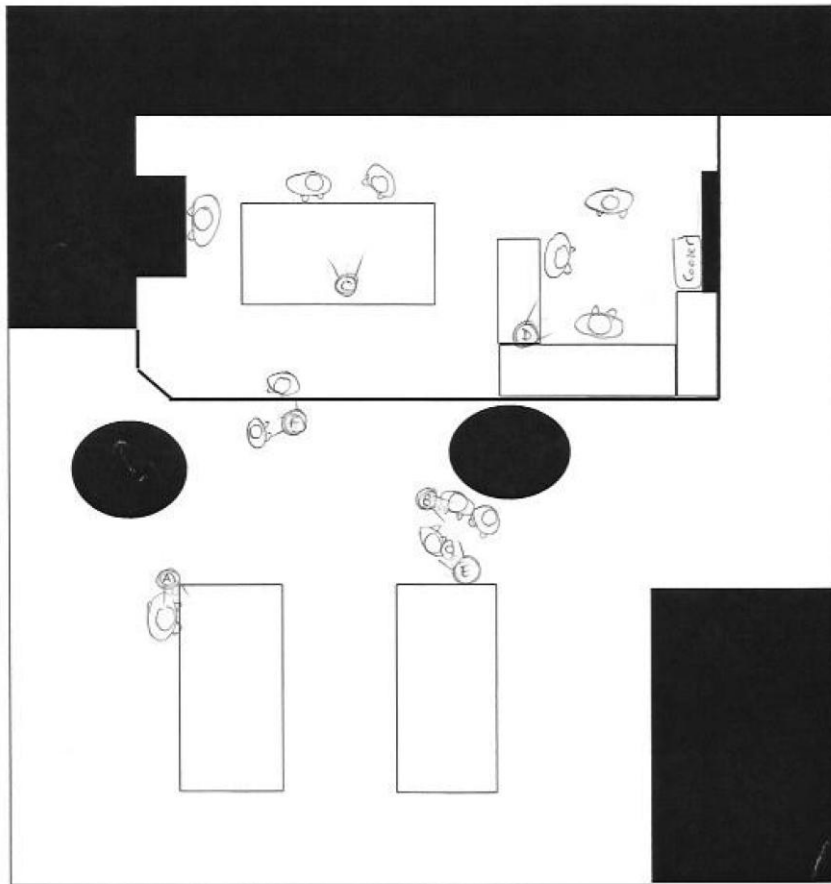
## Appendix C: Overhead Camera Diagrams

LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM

LOCATION: SMITH HOUSE - BACKYARD

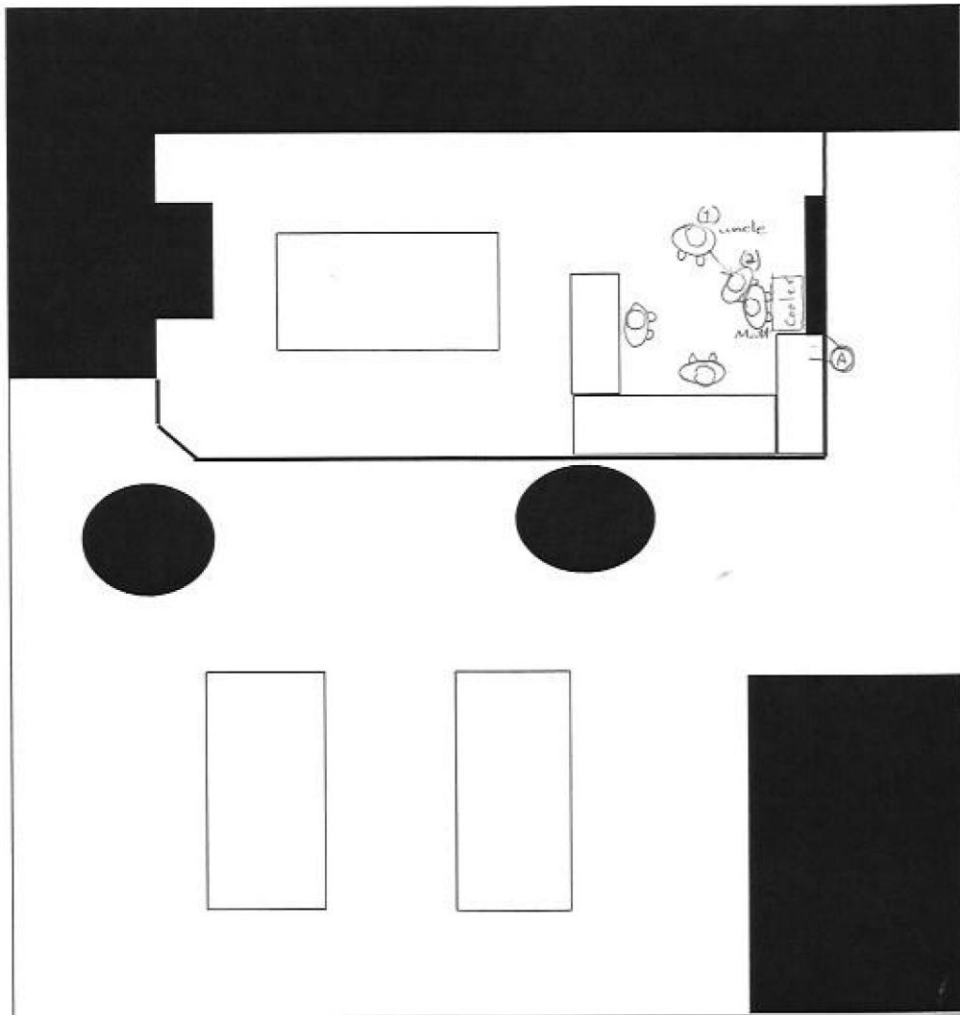
SCENE # 1 - OPENING MONTAGE

- A - Person carrying a paper plate of food (past people)
- B - People eating and talking
- C - A woman sitting out dessert
- D - Men laugh near beer cooler
- E - Little one
- F - Kids with pop-stained lips



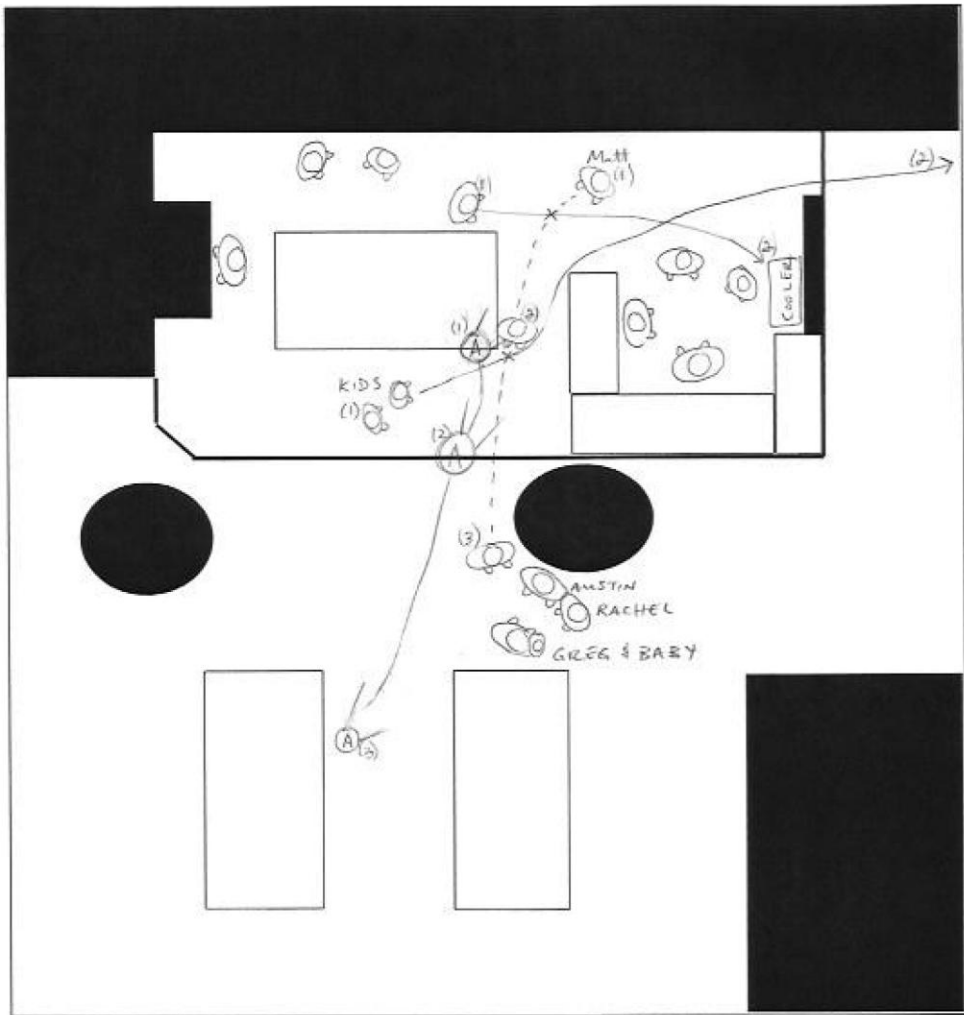
A - High to low angle on Matt

LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: SMITH HOUSE - BACKYARD  
SCENE # 2



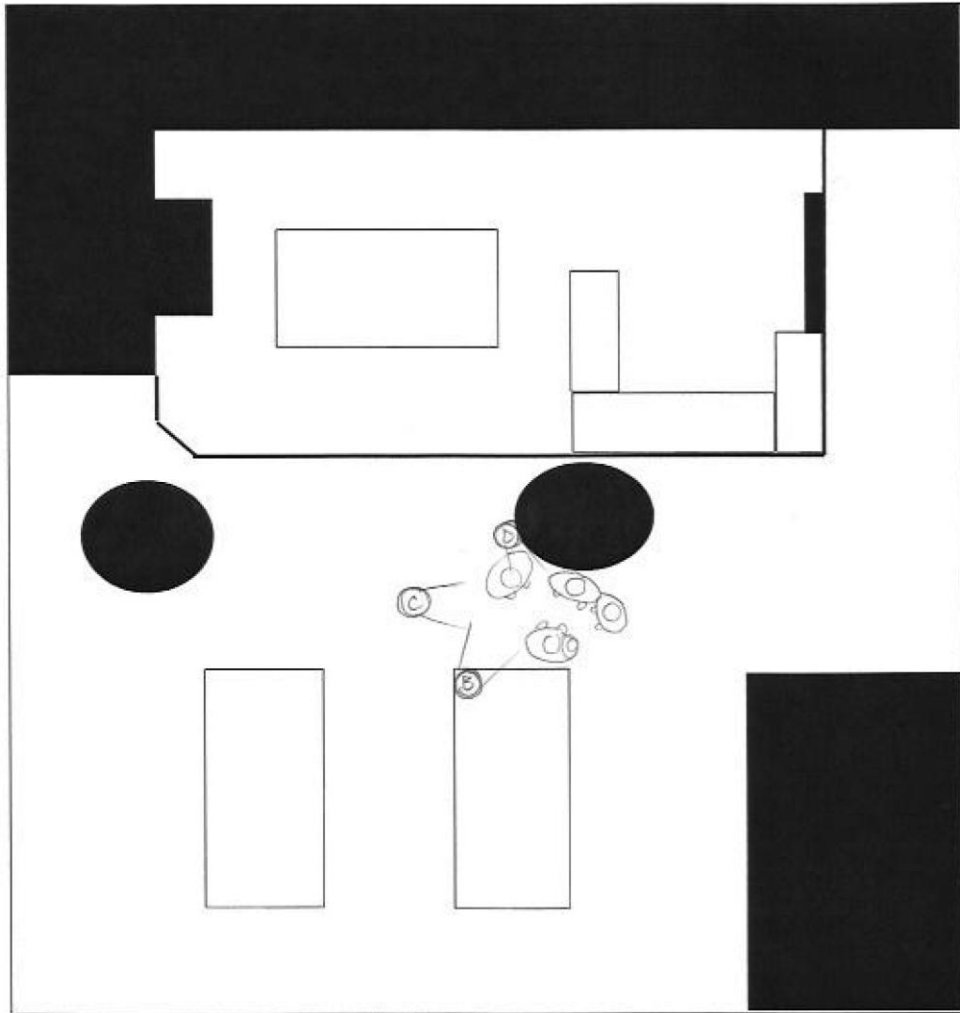
LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: SMITH HOUSE - BACKYARD  
SCENE # 3 - MASTER HINCHETT

A - Med of Matt tracking backwards into  
a Med/CU with kids (Matt turns away  
from camera; landing in a WIDE  
to MASTER scene



LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: SMITH HOUSE - BACKYARD  
SCENE # 3 - COVERAGE

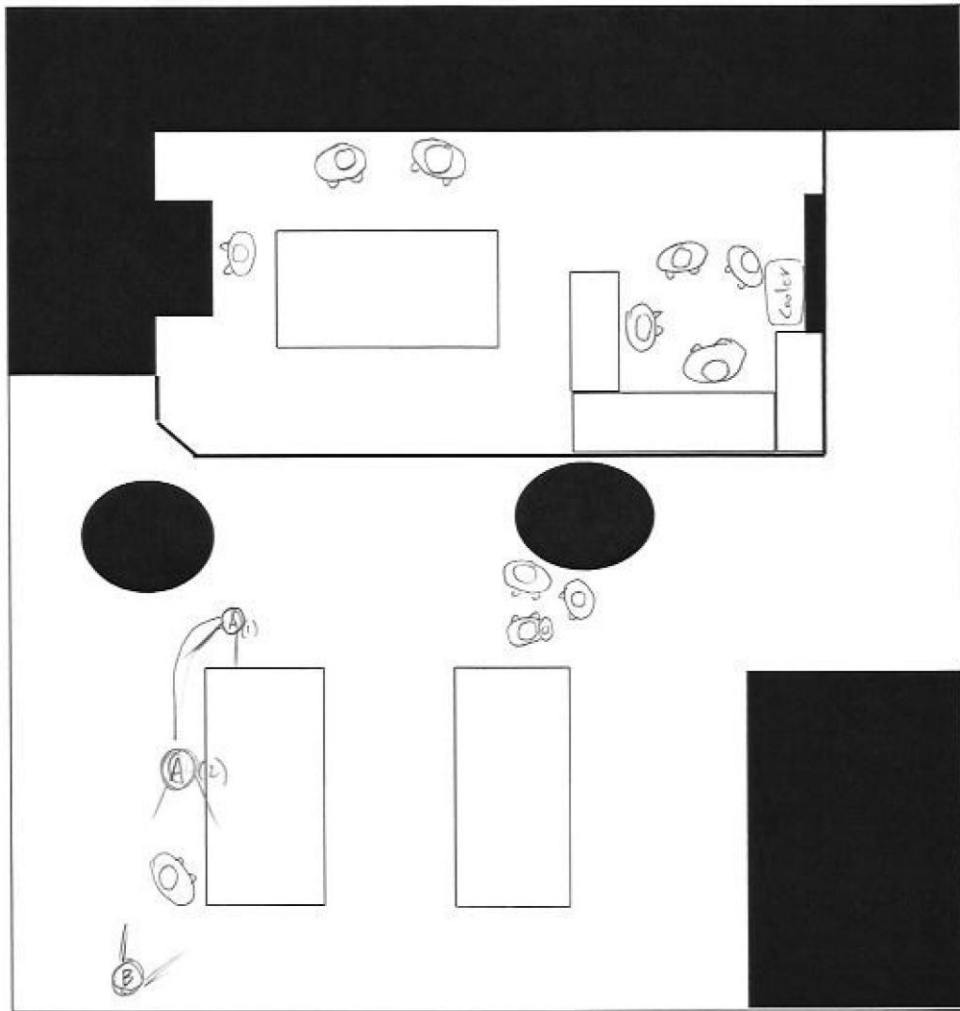
B- 2 SHOT of Matt & Jim  
C- MED 2SHOT of Jim & Rachel with  
Matt dirty left & Greg dirty right  
D- OTS on Greg



A - follows Matt to chair & ends in MED/cu

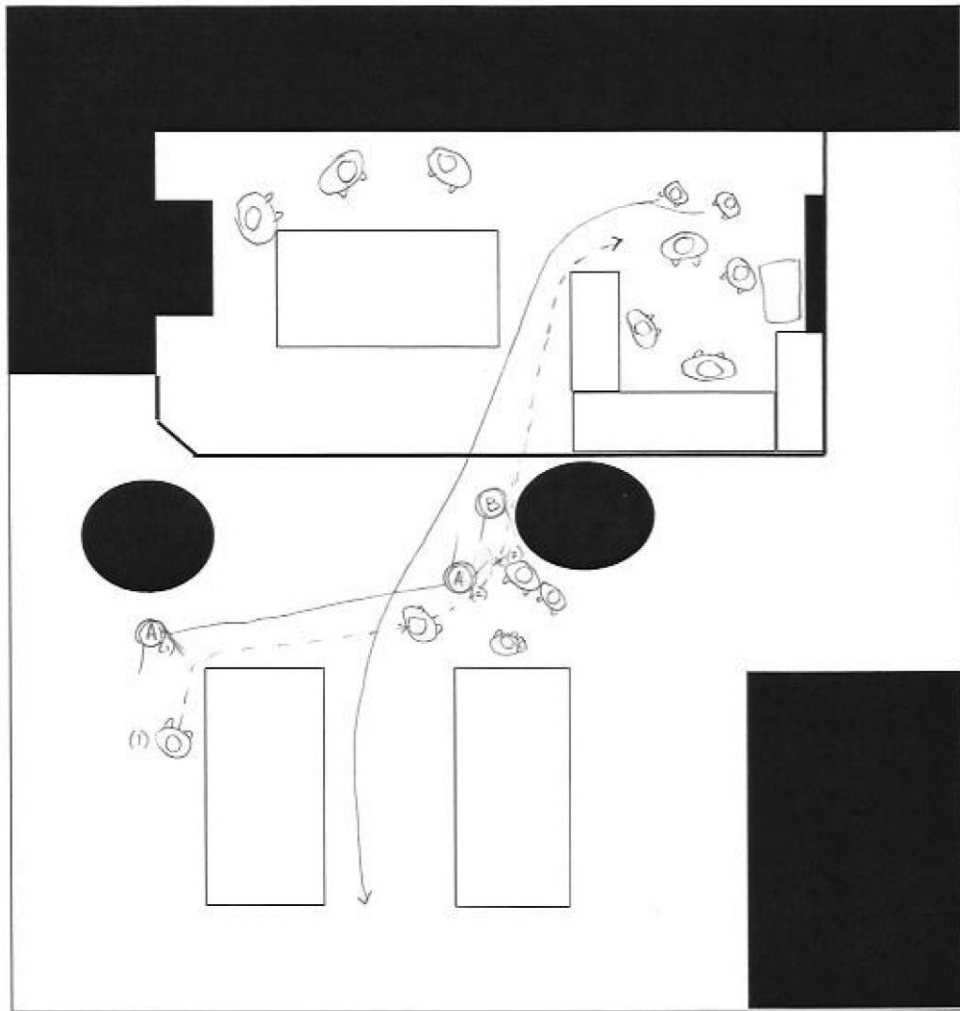
B - WIDE of party from Matt's perspective

LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: SMITH HOUSE - BACKYARD  
SCENE # 54



LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: SMITH HOUSE - BACKYARD  
SCENE # 5

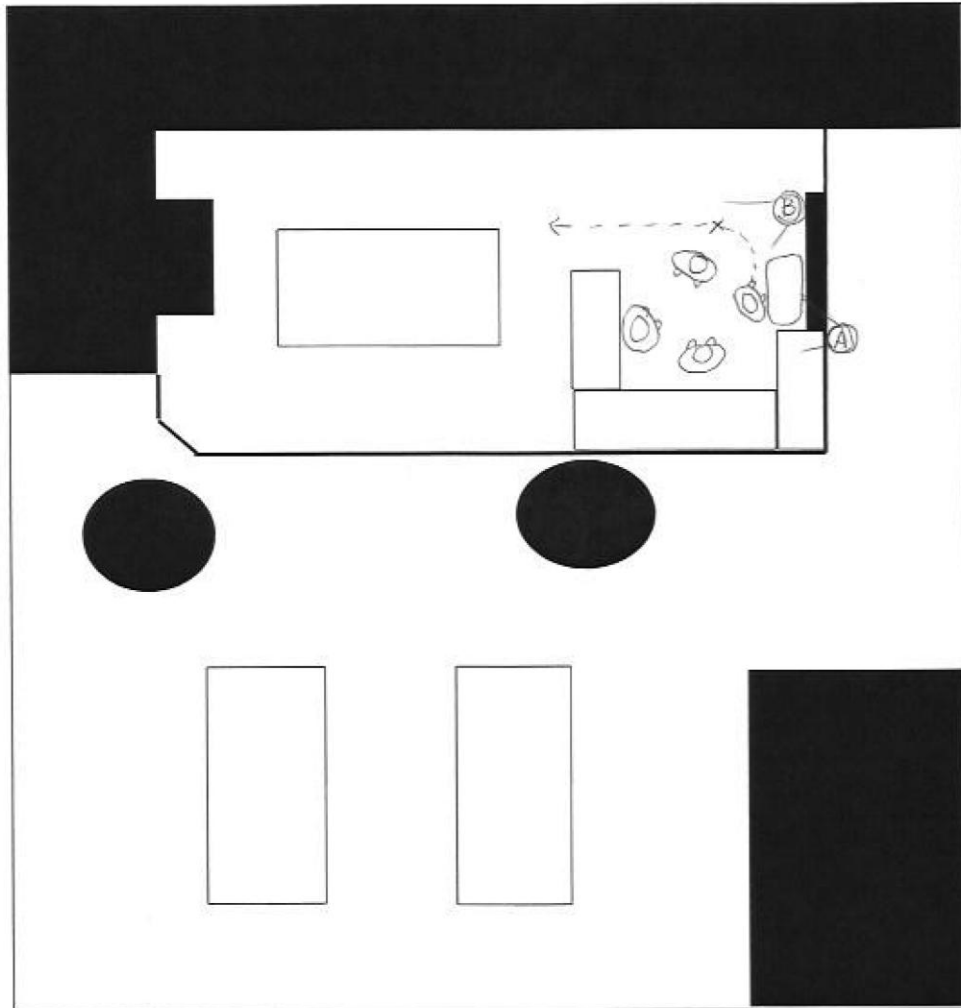
A - Starts on Matt & tracks backward until  
turns Greg-side to catch Matt open beer in  
Austin's ear, then watches Matt off & ends  
by turning with playing kids  
B - Catches Jim's reaction





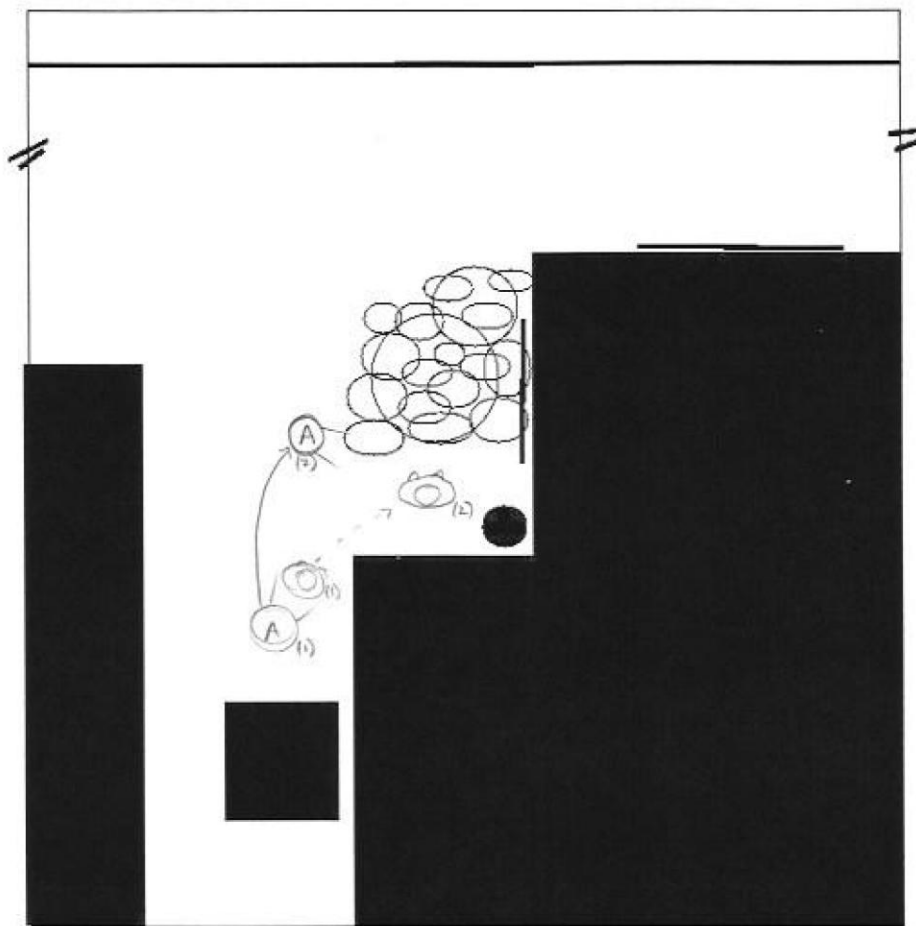
A - Same low-angle MED as scene 2 with  
move to high-angle on uncle  
B - Follows Matt dump cooler on Uncle  
in profile

LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: SMITH HOUSE - BACKYARD (NIGHT)  
SCENE # 6



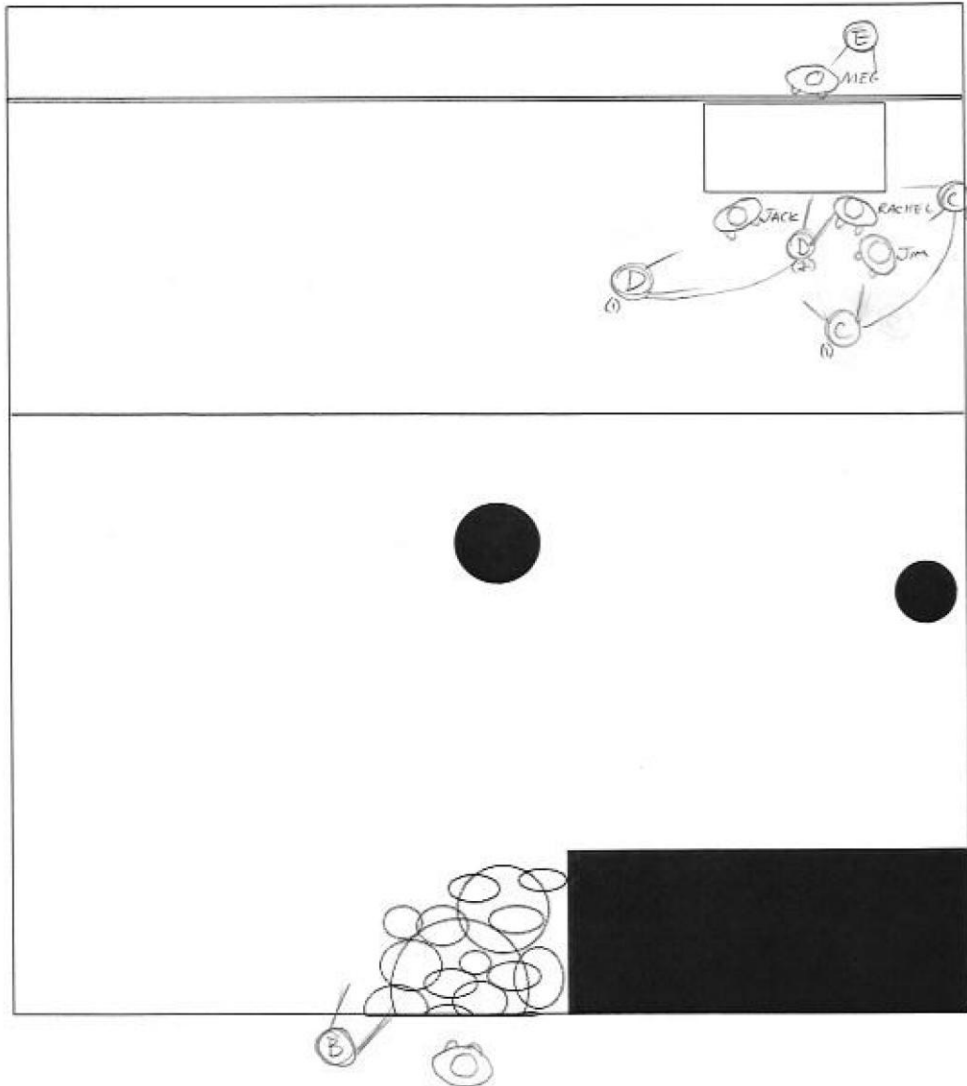
A - Follows Matt to side of house & lands  
in Med/cu of Matt while pissing

LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: SMITH HOUSE - SIDE YARD  
SCENE # 7, 9, 11



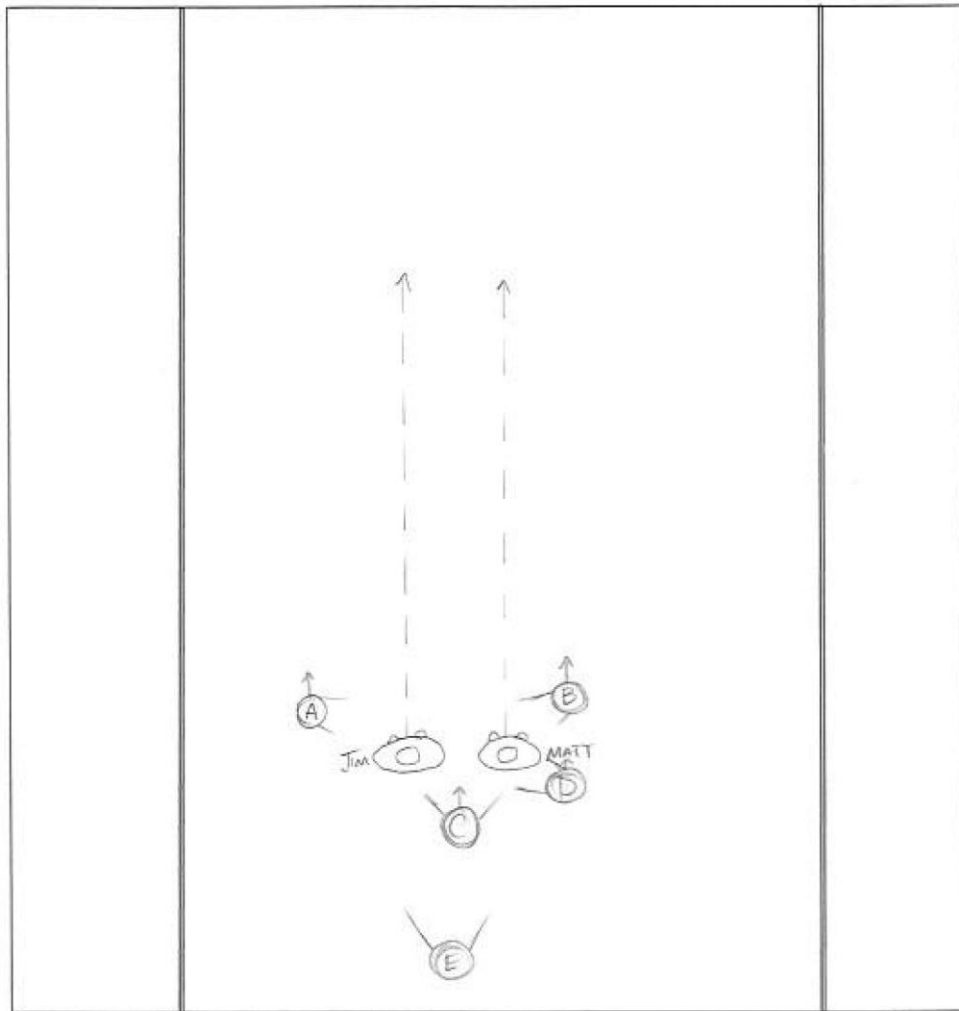
LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: SMITH HOUSE - STREET  
SCENE # 8, 10, 12

- B - WIDE of street scene from Matt's perspective
- C - MED 4 shot; lands in Cfr of Jim once R in car
- D - 2 SHOT OF RACHEL & Jim with Jack dirty frame left; lands in Cfr of R in car
- E - WIDE that eventually follows brothers into street



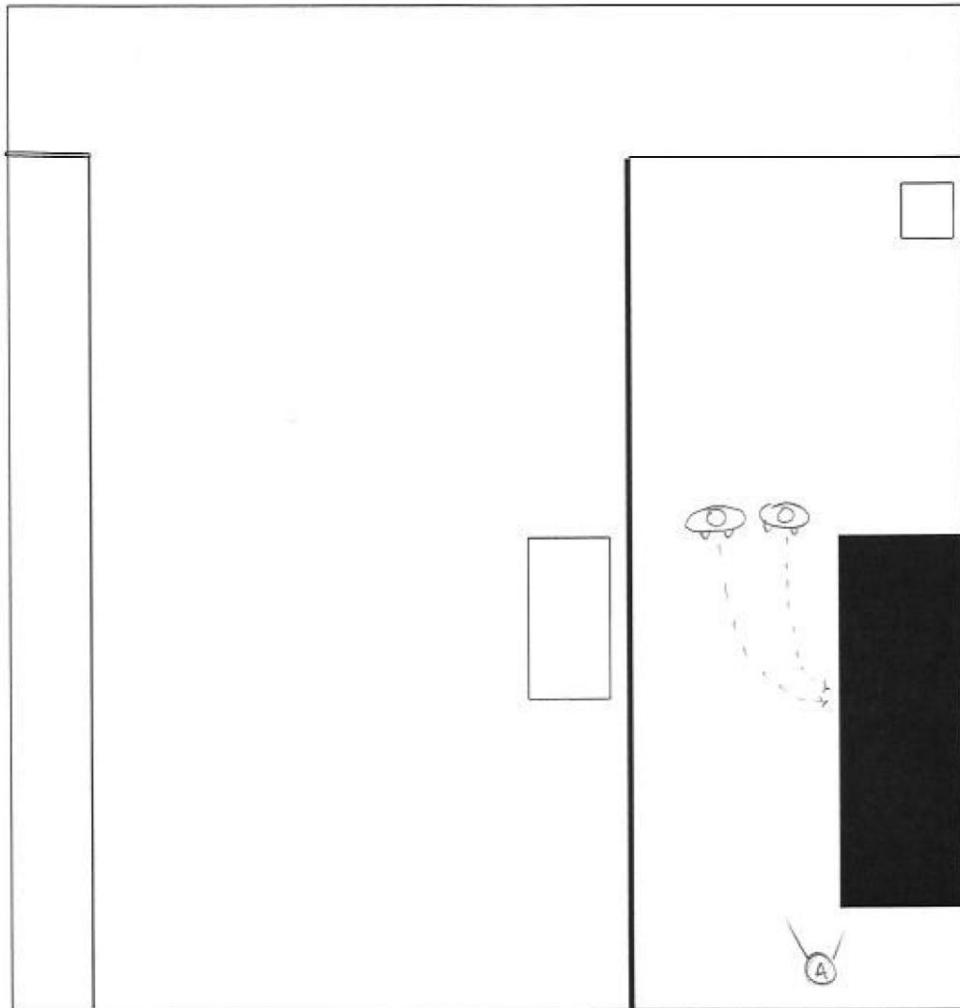
LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: NEIGHBORHOOD  
SCENE # 1?

- A- Tracking 3/4 with Jim frame right
- B- Tracking 3/4 with Matt frame left
- C- Following Matt & Jim, step for step
- D- Following 3/4 with slight glimpses of their face
- E- Stationary wide



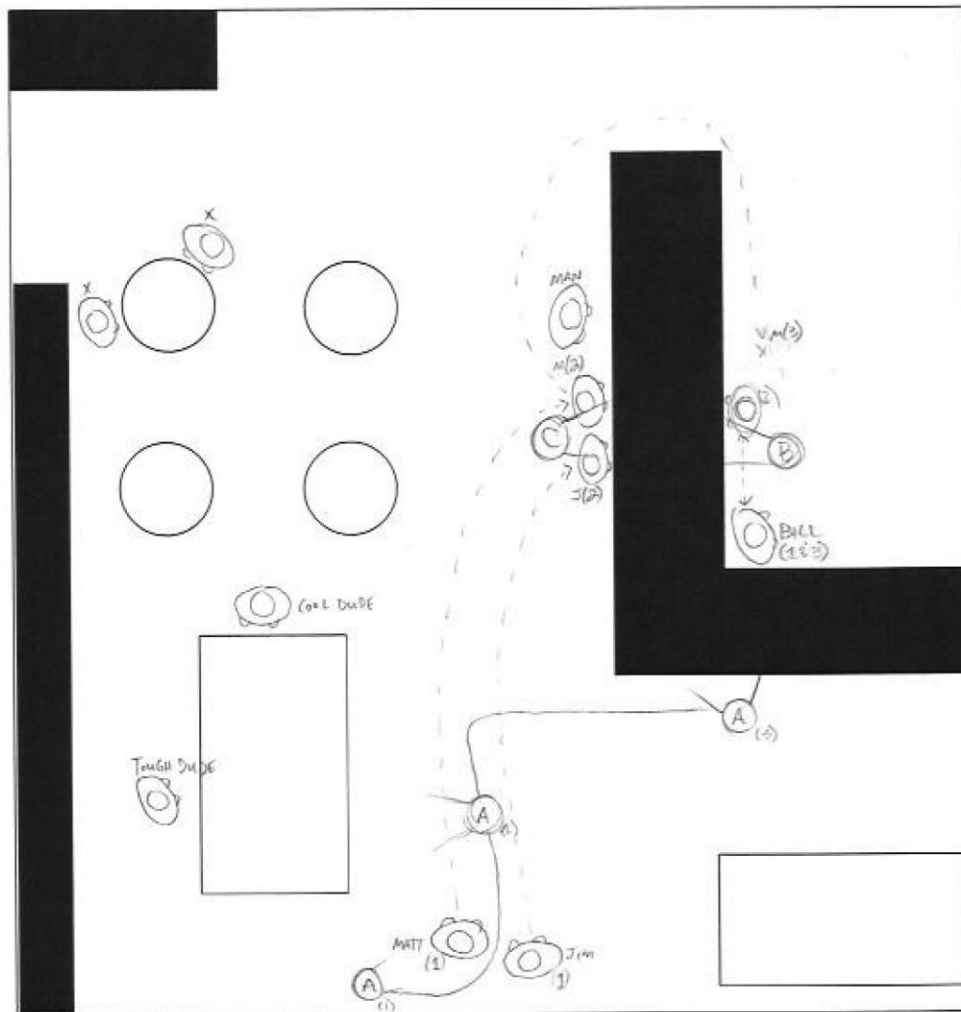
A - Wide of brothers entering bar with bar front  
in profile

LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: BAR EXTERIOR  
SCENE # 14



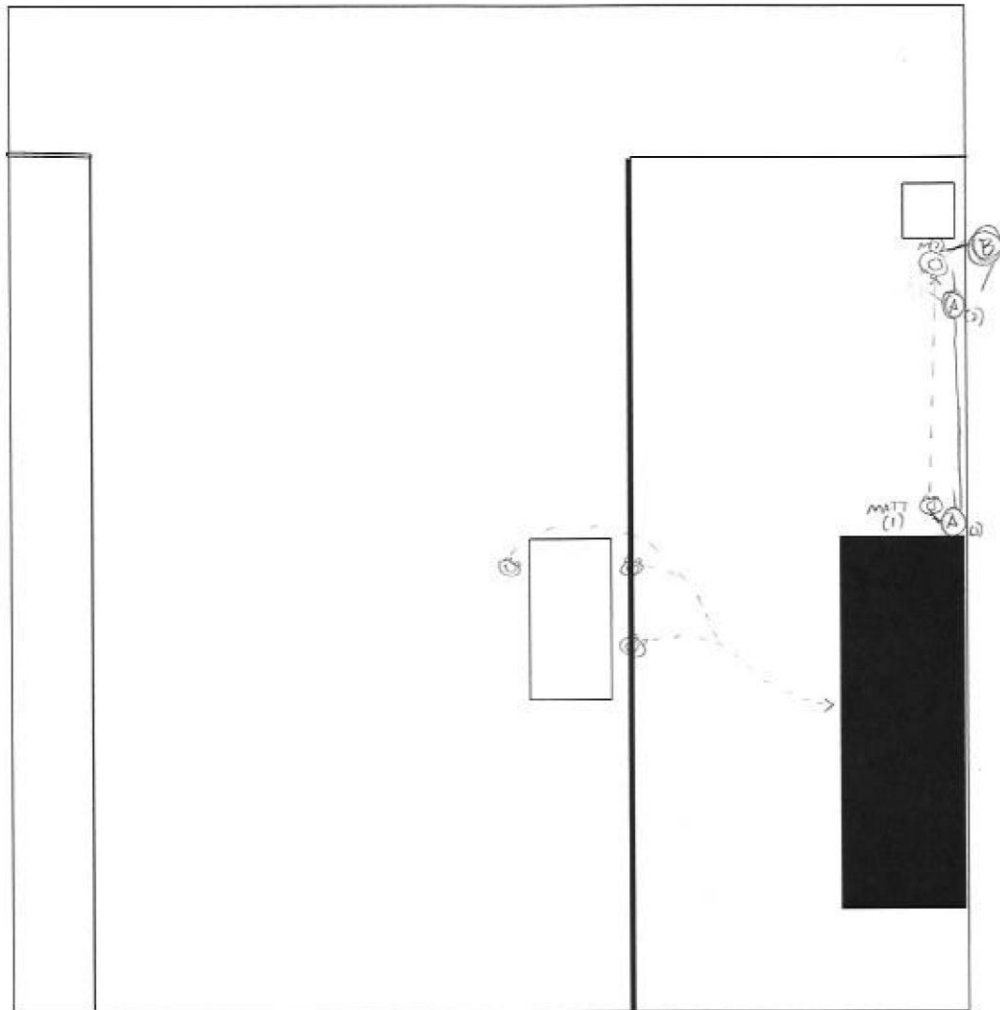
LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: BAR INTERIOR  
SCENE # 15

A- Follows Matt & Jim into bar, briefly pan over to  
Dudes before landing on Med/Wide MASTER of  
bar exchange  
B- OTS of Matt with Jim clipped frame left  
C- OTS of Bill



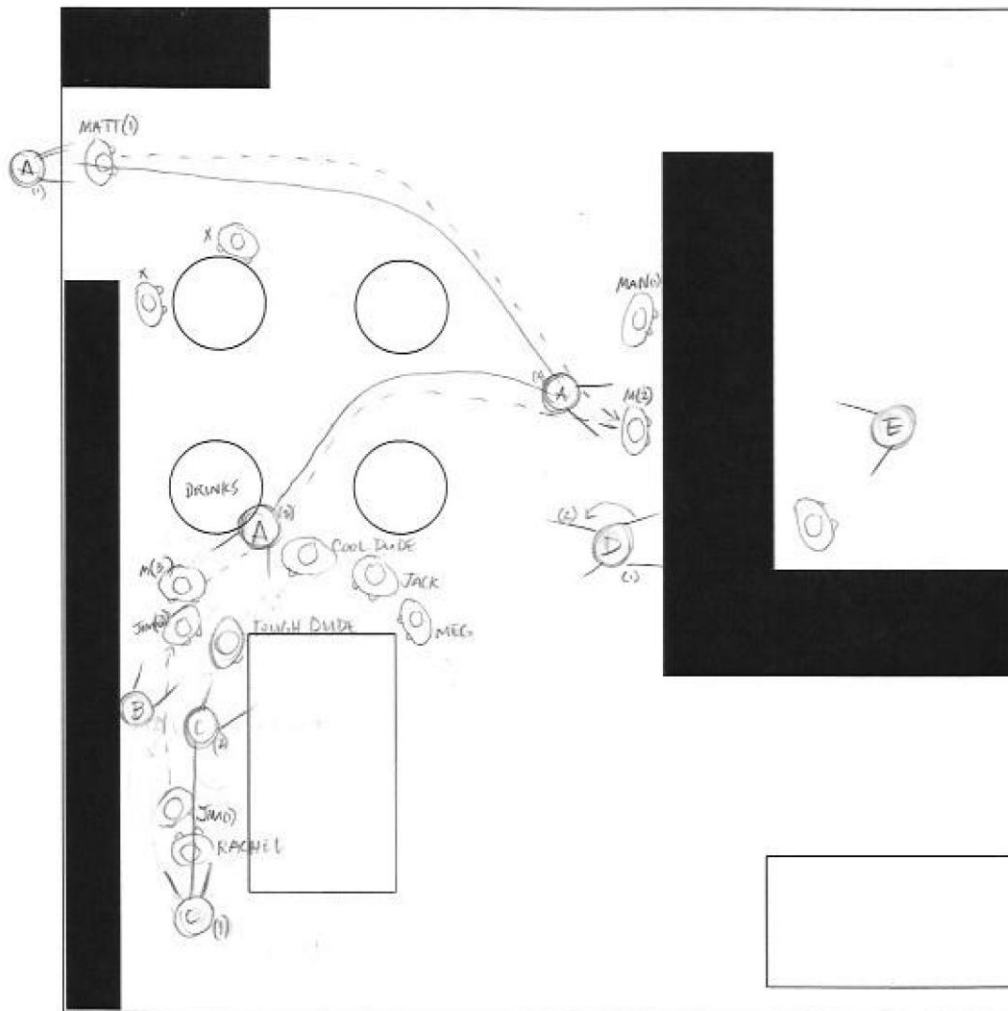
LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: BAR EXTERIOR  
SCENE # 16

A - tracks after Matt before landing in 3/4 Med/cu  
B - Wide OTS - of Jack, Meg, & Rachel going into  
the bar



LOST NIGHTS  
 OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
 LOCATION: BAR INTERIOR  
 SCENE # 17 MASTER - LIST

A - tracks after Matt & lands on tough dude through fight  
 B - catches Matt's reaction & follows Matt/Jim through fight  
 C - follows Jim into fight & then breaks off to get reactions of others  
 D - pill into brothers reaction to getting kicked out  
 E - watches brothers reaction to getting kicked out









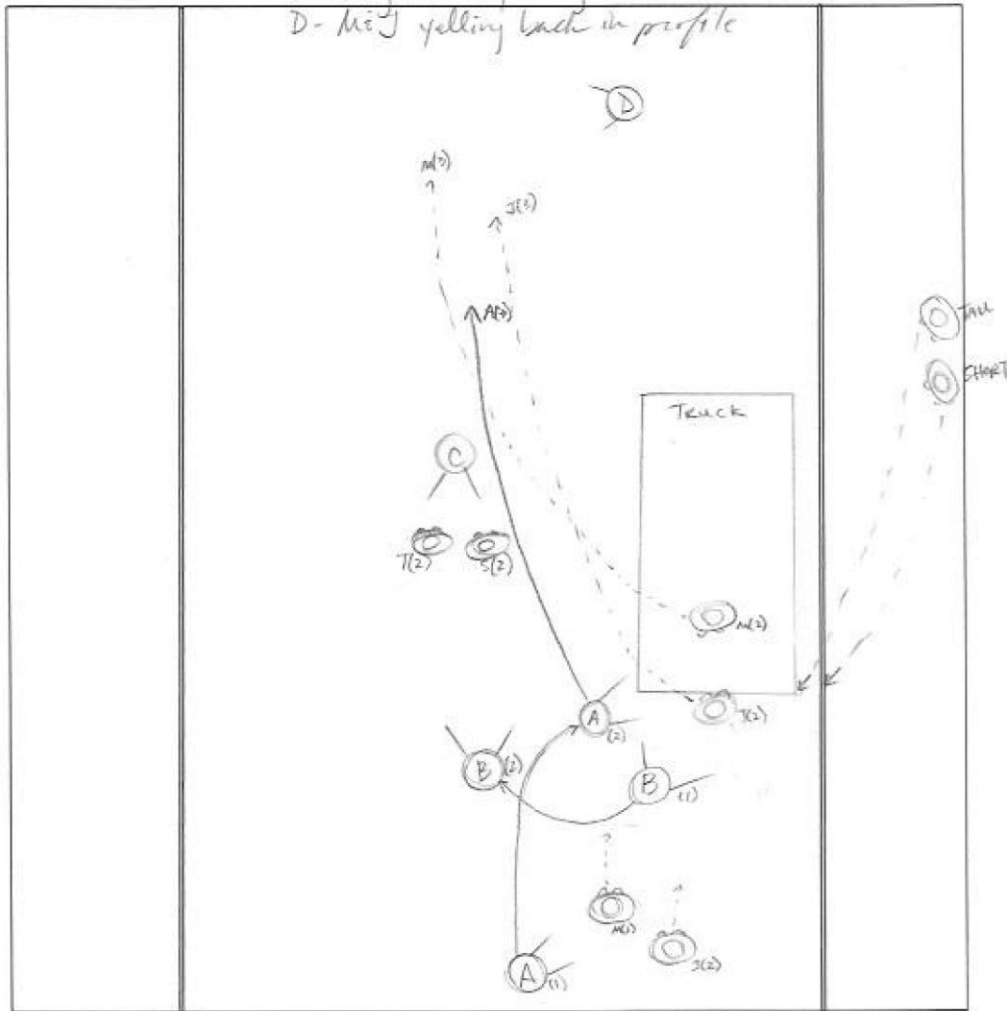
LOST NIGHTS  
 OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
 LOCATION: NEIGHBORHOOD  
 SCENE # 19.3

A - Watches Matt to truck, then lingers in Jim's profile until landing in low-angle 2-shot (2) before tracking with them as they run

B - Watches roughnecks emerge from darkness, then turns truckside & catches part of chase before landing in wide

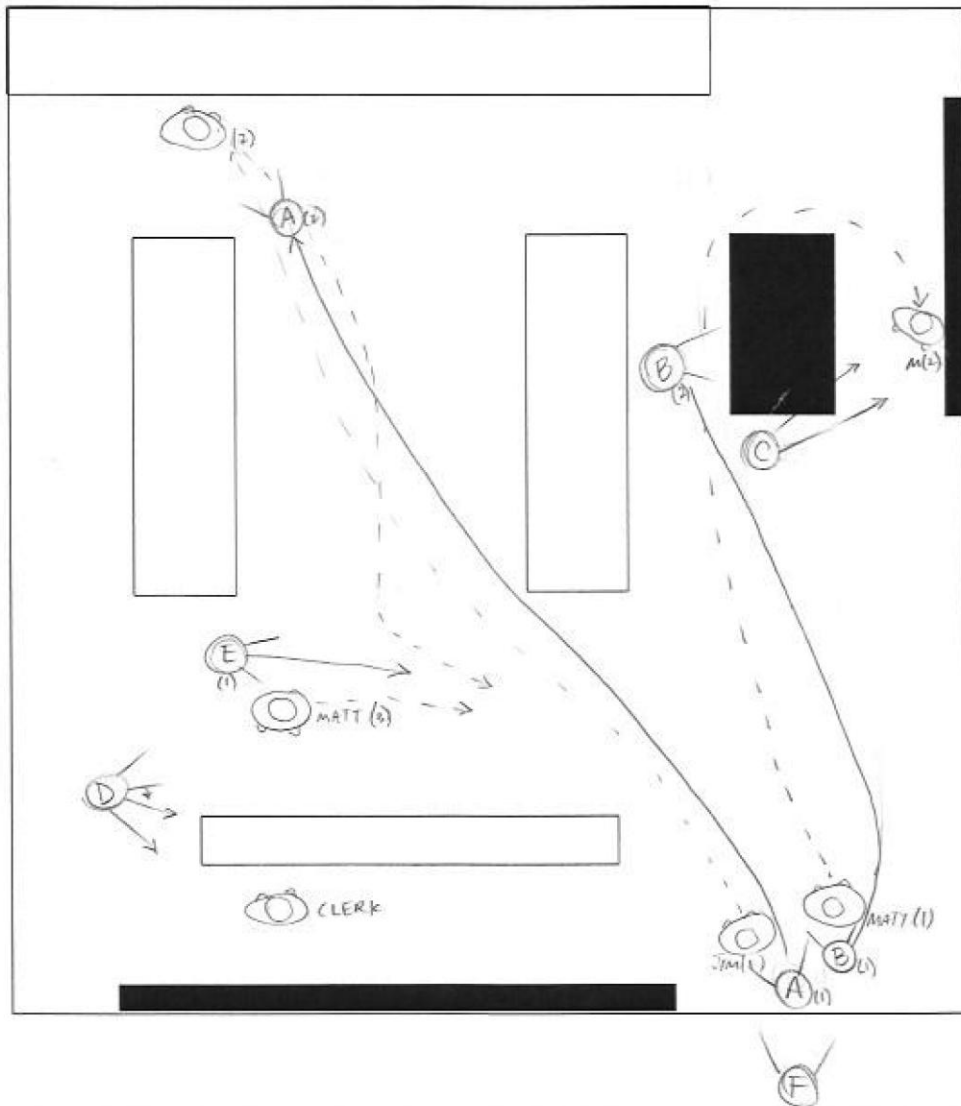
C - Roughnecks yelling

D - MiJ yelling back in profile



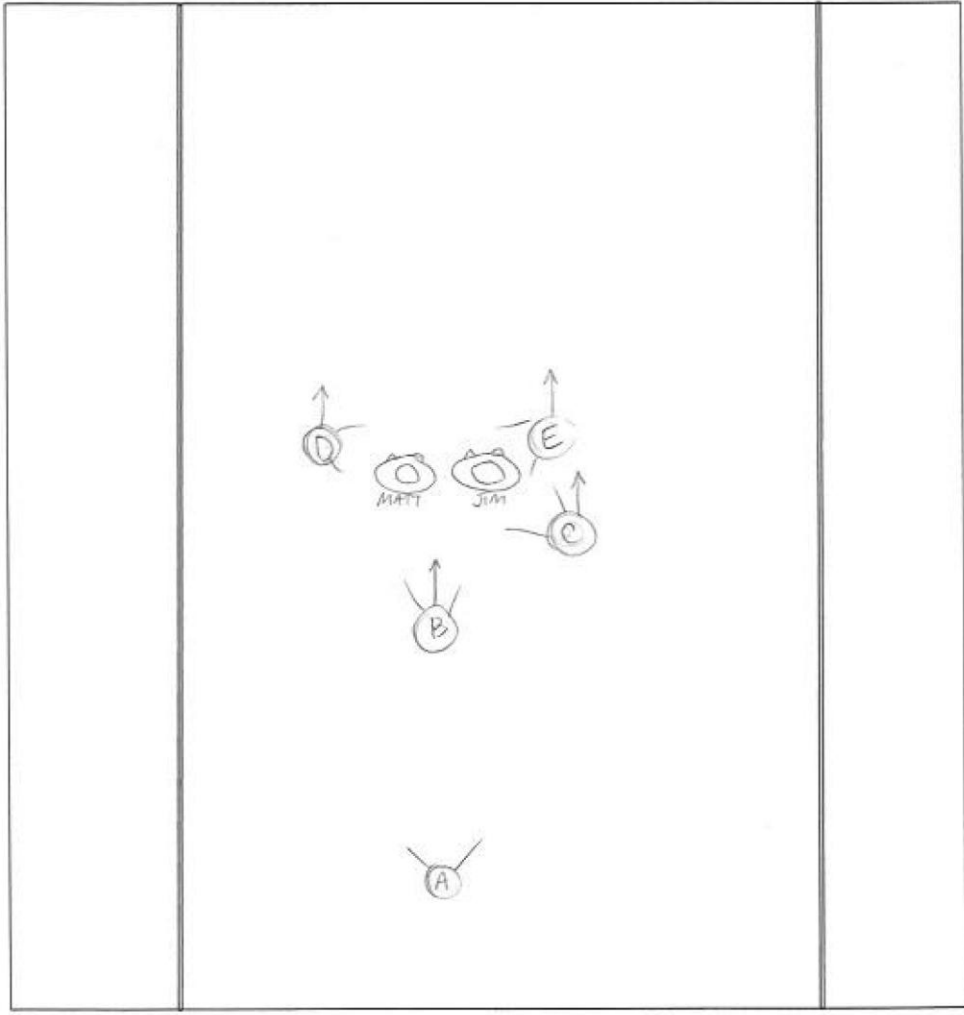
LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: CONVENIENCE STORE  
SCENE # 20

- A - follows Jim to beer cooler
- B - follows Matt to soda fountain
- C - Zoom on soda
- D - Whip & Zoom on Matt throwing soda at Clerk
- E - follows Brothers running toward door (slow mo?)
- F - Brothers faces as they exit



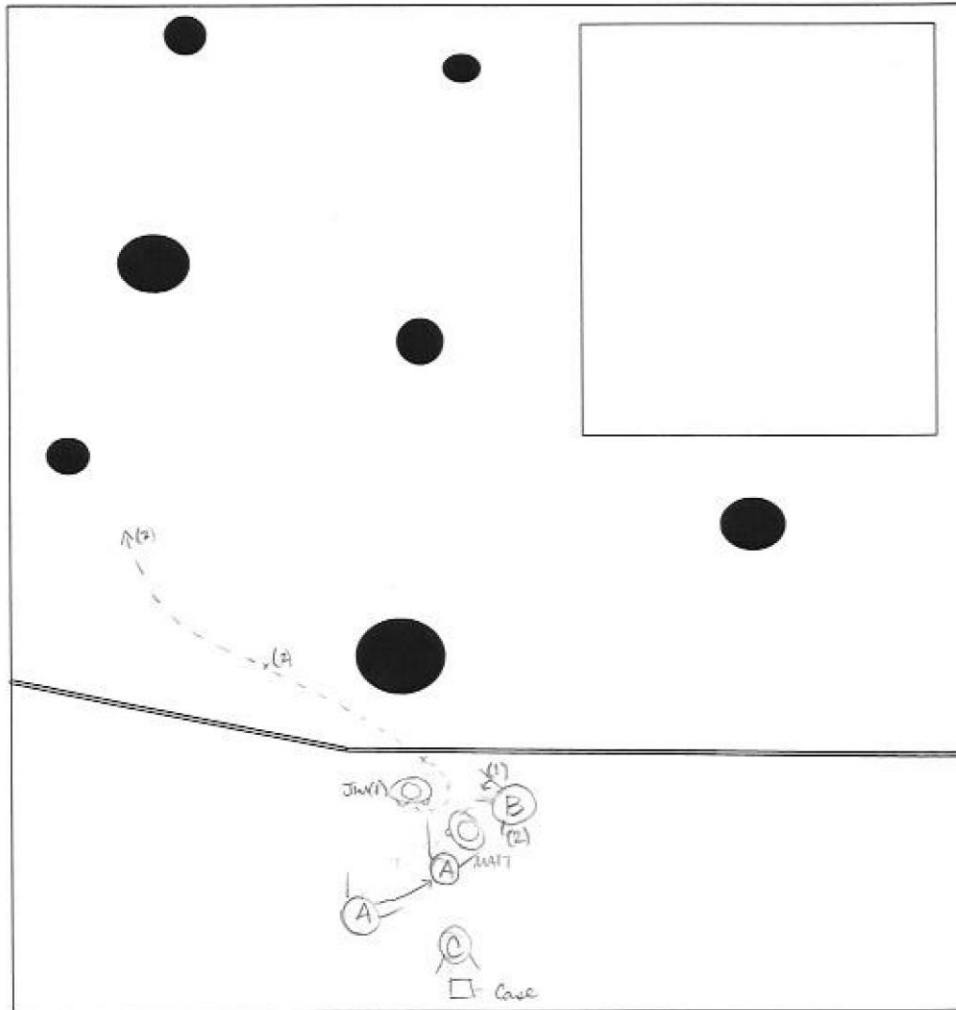
LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: NEIGHBORHOOD  
SCENE # 21

- A - WIDE of Brothers
- B - Following step for step
- C - 3/4 Behind, following
- D - Tracking 3/4 with Jim frame right
- E - Tracking 3/4 with Matt frame left



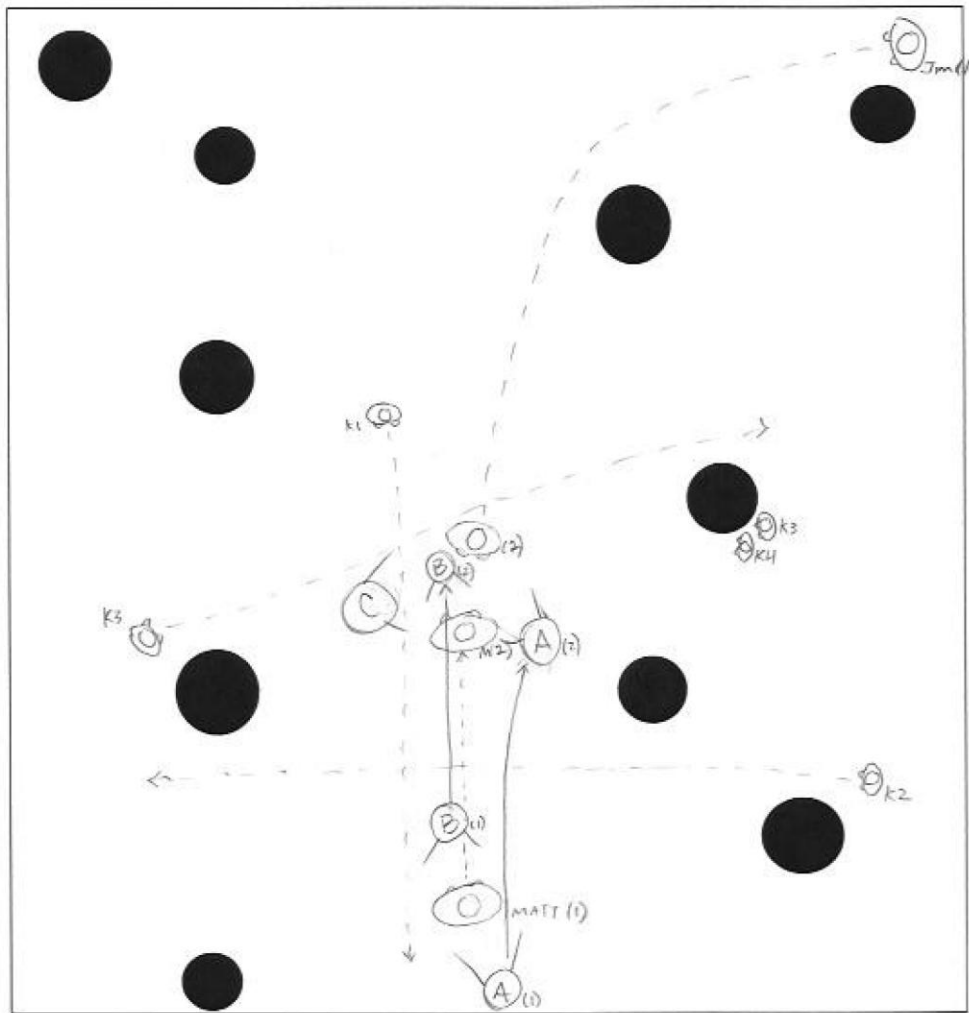
LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: PARK (ENTRY)  
SCENE # 22

- A - Cowboy 2 SHOT of M&J shotgunning beers into CU on Matt
- B - Pan from WIDE of Jim in park to 3/4 c/u of Matt from behind
- C - INSERT of case on ground



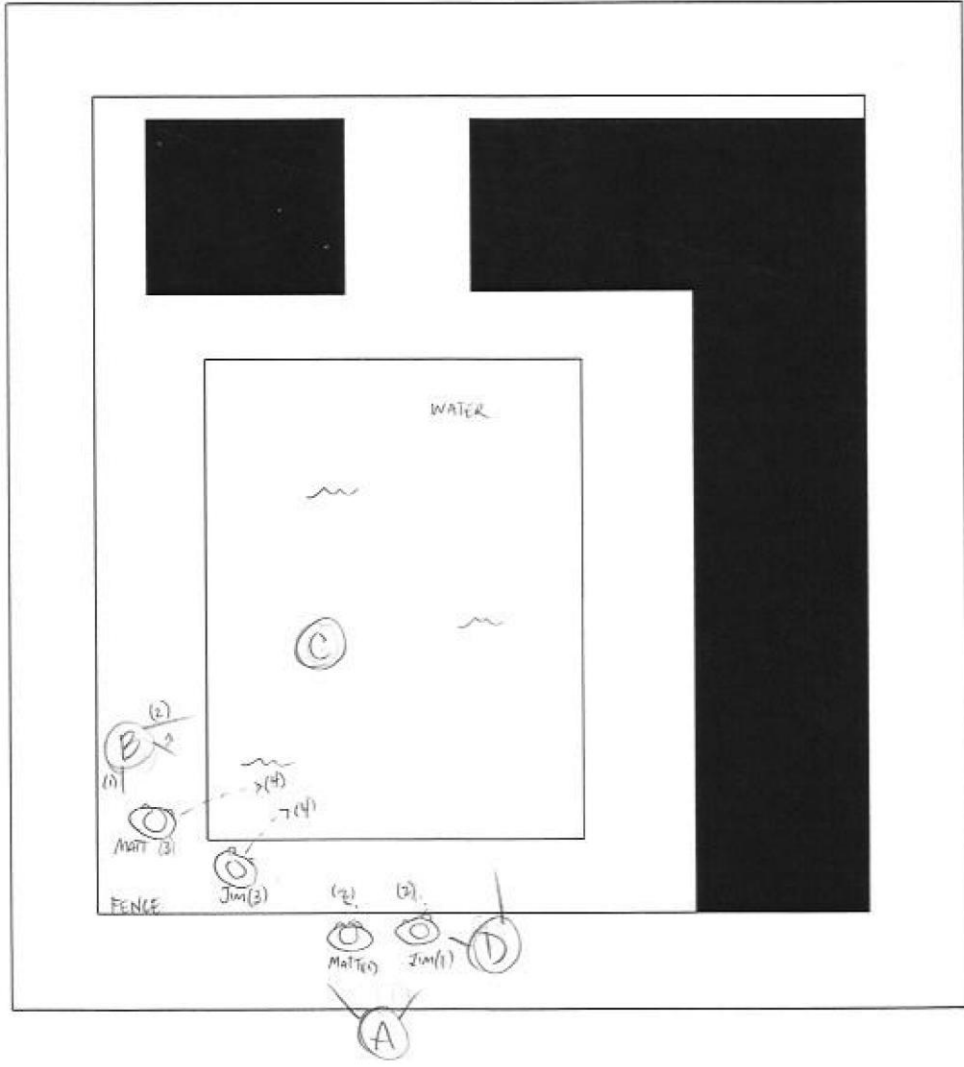
LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: PARK (SMOKE)  
SCENE # 23

- A - following Matt into 2 shot of M & J w/ M in profile & J in 3/4
- B - facing Matt's reactions
- C - Roaming. Spinning. Playing in smoke



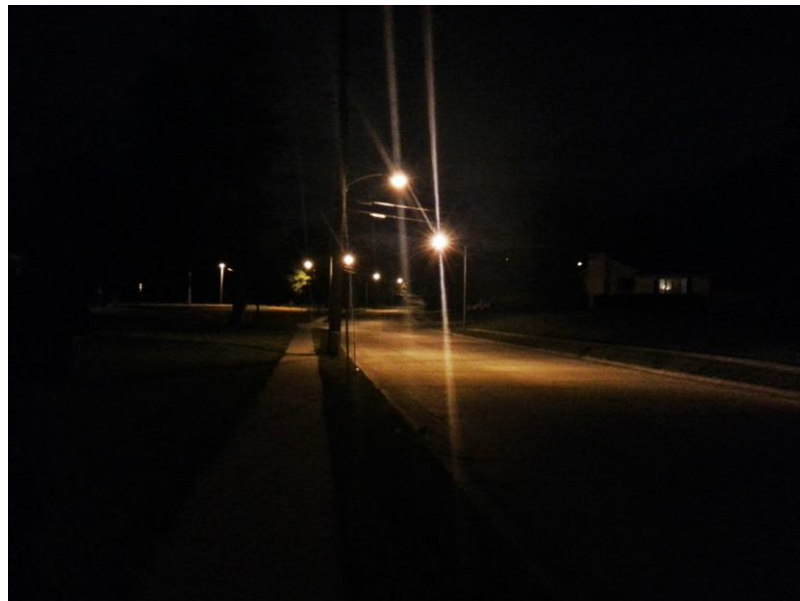
LOST NIGHTS  
OVERHEAD DIAGRAM  
LOCATION: POOL  
SCENE #24

- A - Following Med of M&J climbing fence
- B - MED of M&J jumping into the pool
- C - UNDERWATER
- D - WIDE of M&J in quiet pool together

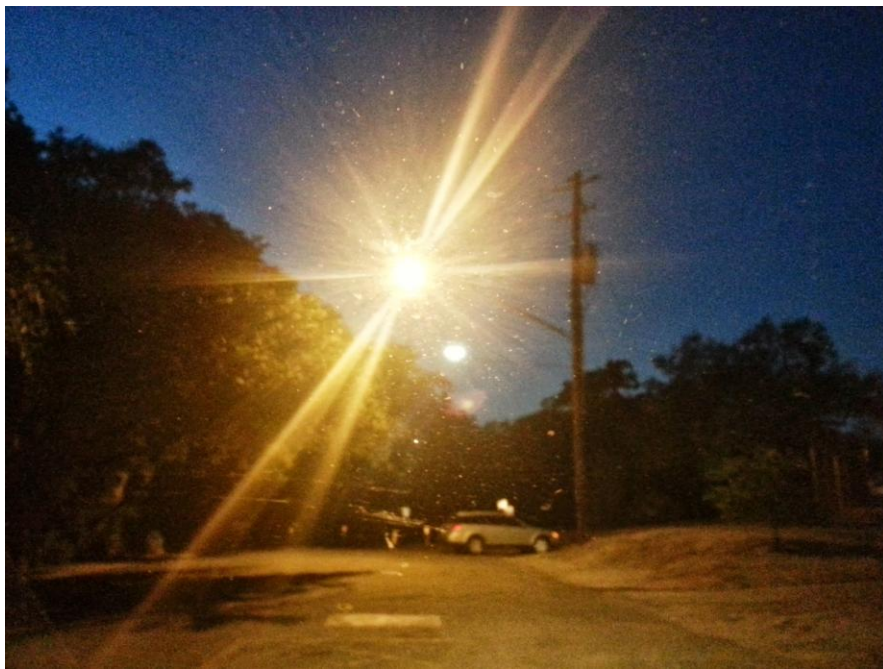




## Appendix D: Visual References



*The Chiaroscuro effect that streetlights have on neighborhood streets in Omaha, NE, was something I wanted to recreate in the neighborhoods of Lost Nights.*



*I also liked the way sodium vapor streetlights seem to paint the blacktop gold.*



*The cinematography of Oslo, August 31st inspired us to use naturalistic light to dramatic effect. I liked the way made characters a part of the fabric of the space they occupied. In doing so, it also encourages audiences to explore the frame and the world of the story.*



*By reimagining traditional ways in which dialogue scenes are covered, I liked the evocative way Joachim Trier's characters in Oslo, August 31st are isolated within dialogue scenes.*





*Lalage Snow's We Are The Not Dead provided a lot of inspiration in terms of how I wanted to depict soldiers before and after war.*



*These images helped me to understand why Matt, who had been to war, might not want to see his younger brother join the military.*

## **Vita**

Tony Costello was born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska. He attended the University of Nebraska at Omaha where he was introduced to the questions of aesthetics, ethics, and ontology. Upon earning degrees in Philosophy and Political Science, he took a job at a used book store. After spending a couple of years finding inspiration in the work of others, Tony set out to begin his own career as an artist. He entered a post-baccalaureate program at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago where he studied experimental film and later matriculated in the graduate film production program at the University of Texas at Austin.

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