EXISTENTIAL NIHILISM AND HUMAN INSIGNIFICANCE

THROUGH THE LENS OF ETERNALISM

by

Ani Arzumanyan

Presented to the

Department of English & Communications

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

American University of Armenia

Yerevan, Armenia

May 17, 2021

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 3

Introduction \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 4

Statement of Creative Intent \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 5

Literature Review \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 6

Screenplay \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 8

Methodology

Pre-production \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 10

Production \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 15

Post-Production \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 21

Conclusion \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 25

References \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 26

**Acknowledgments**

First and foremost, I want to thank my capstone supervisor, Mica Hilson, for bearing with me and supporting me and being so kind and open-minded. Without his guidance I would not be able to properly complete this paper.

I want to thank my entire cast for going through this with me and helping me realize what I had envisioned. Thank you to Armen Godjamanian for portraying such a difficult and emotionally challenging character. He truly embraces his character’s essence and brought my story to life. Thank you to Lilit Galoyan for playing Raven and willingly laying in a mud pool for the sake of art. She helped me through all my mental breakdowns throughout the shoot. Thank you to Alex Mikaelyan for being such a talented actor and a reliable friend. He understood my weirdly specific instructions on the fly and continuously went out of his way to make sure I had exactly what I wanted. Thank you to Yulia Hovsepyan for doing such a wonderful job so last-minute and bearing with my attitude on set.

Lastly, I want to thank the bakery across my house for letting me film during their working hours, and AUA for letting me film in the elevator. None of this would work if it weren’t for all these great people and resources.

**Introduction**

Everything any human has ever accomplished has no value. Everything you will ever do with your life means nothing. We have no real purpose of being here, and no real purpose of not being here. Feeling joyous and feeling suicidal are the same thing – because they both don’t matter.

To put it roughly, from the start of Modernism in the nineteenth century humans have had more and more time to simply think – to reflect – on themselves, the people around them, their immediate environment, the larger world around them, and the everlasting, still answered, question of the objective meaning of life. Before Modernism took rise in the early twentieth century, humanity had little to no time for leisure and self-reflection; therefore, self-awareness was an extremely rare trope. After the birth of social classes due to technological and scientific advances, people began questioning themselves and the world around them. The entire concept of self-actualization was a novelty. This led philosophers and other curious thinkers down a rabbit hole of questioning the essence of human existence and whether or not this existence truly matters. The more we learned about the world and space around us, the clearer it became to understand, and possibly accept, our genuine insignificance. This is the core nature of nihilism.

Speaking of studying the world and space around us, Eternalism, often justified through quantum physics, came around in the Middle Ages, stating that time is quite like space in the way that it functions – different “times” like the past, the present and the future exist just like different places exists – simultaneously. Any point in the history of the universe co-exists. It can be argued that these different times are different dimensions, but that’s not the point. According to Eternalism, all of time is happening all the time.

**Statement of Creative Intent**

Ever since my young mind discovered that there are over two hundred countries on planet Earth and about just as many different cultures, I was overwhelmed with the overbearing thought of the universe’s futility. As dramatic as that sounds, I genuinely concerned myself with seeking a tangible, real purpose to stay alive for – not just myself, but for any human to stay alive for, to keep fighting and struggling to make ends meet only to die a couple of decades later and have the world forget they ever existed. I was around nine years old when I unknowingly began a path down mild nihilism and eventually mild depression. I had too many questions and not nearly enough answers. So, this is why I’m writing my paper on this very topic. This is my reason and my driving force to thoroughly research an ideology I’m so infatuated by. I decided to do a creative project and film a short film incorporating this philosophy alongside my favorite time theory – Eternalism.

I am deeply interested in existential nihilism and the lifestyle it entails. To put it very simply, the theory preaches that the world and everything it represents is utterly meaningless, thereby whatever you “accomplish” during your short life is in turn meaningless. Even though, at first glance, it may seem like this epiphany is coming from a dark place of suffering and self-hatred, nihilists claim that the acceptance of one’s worthlessness and lack of purpose is rather liberating. Extreme nihilism encourages suicide, since the fact that you accidentally happened to exist does not mean you matter; however, like Frederick Nietzsche, many believe it is important to live a life acknowledging that human existence is futile and empty, because it is not necessarily a negative - it just is (Pratt, 2010).

Eternalism feeds into the philosophy of nihilism. It’s a theory that suggests that time is an illusion we have constructed to better fathom our surrounding world; when in reality, the past, the present and the future are all happening simultaneously. Quite literally, everything is happening all the time. “The present” is just our small underdeveloped perception of what occurs to us within a single moment (Alderson, 2019). The idea is that everything that “will happen” has already happened. These famously categorized “stages of time” coexist - one cannot occur without the other. There is no such thing as “traveling to the past” because if you decided to do that now, you already have - that is how the past became the past, it couldn’t have unraveled without you being there.

**Literature Review**

One of the main factors that contribute to life’s meaninglessness is the obscurity of time. One of the two time theories that does this is the alternate universe theory. In the 1950s, an esteemed mathematician and quantum theorist named Hugh Everett proposed a theory that due to quantum mechanics, the universe is ever-splitting into infinite timelines, all of which end in incalculable results (Bryne, 2008). Hence, the idea of there being so many of you devalues your current existence of millions. Everett believed that this was all simple math and physics. Energy cannot be destroyed, it can only change form. Consequently, certain elements in our environment, such as electrons and protons, do not and cannot disintegrate, we are simply not advanced enough to comprehend what happens to them. According to Everett, they travel to a different realm - one so untouchable and incomprehensible for the human mind (Bryne, 2008).

What this theory suggests is that out of the millions, possibly billions, versions of you that exist parallel to your specific timeline, you hold very little to no significance. We do not exist without time. Time is not an independent factor operating outside of the existence of life and change (Markosian, 2002). Therefore, if time is infinite, so are we. If we are infinite - absolutely nothing in our lives has any value.

The second theory is Eternalism, which proves that no matter what you decide to do, however you think you are “altering” your “future” you have already done it. Everything that could ever happen, is already happening right now. This too, encourages the idea of purposelessness and that no matter what happens to you, in the end, it was going to happen anyway, and there is absolutely nothing you or anyone can do to hinder it or to modify it (Alderson, 2019). If you take your own life today, there is no possible “future” with you in it, because the future is dependent on your lack of existence. Therefore, you had to die all along.

Nihilism told in stories and media has evolved from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* when Macbeth complains about life saying it is “... signifying nothing,” (1606) all the way to Christopher Nolan’s film *Tenet* (2020) where the Protagonist’s best friend literally says to him, “You have a future in the past.” What we believe about life, we put out into the media, especially television, and what we put out into the media affects what we think about life and how we end up viewing ourselves - yet another vicious cycle. Humans have an obsessive need to conform, hence what they consume from watching TV and/or reading content online, they soak in and imitate like a religion (Kanwal, 2012). As the cultivation theory states, the more hours people waste watching TV and mindlessly consuming content, the more likely they are to very easily adopt whatever ideology is it they are being fed (Kanwal, 2012).

With so much research done on the nature of nihilism and the belief system that comes with it, humanity is exposed to its own meaninglessness on a daily basis, which only further feeds this narrative. There is a connection between how often and how much humanity at large spends their time on their phones, computers and/or generally online and how nihilistic they have all become. Spending so many waking hours being in a reality that is not their own, people start to hang on to these ideas of what their life should look like, rather than what it actually is (Kanwal, 2012). And the majority of people are not actually determined and/or disciplined enough to change their life to the better – they just want it all to be better – to be like it is in the movies. They forget one tiny little detail – movies, commercials, any social media presence do not show the hard work it takes to get to a better place, that part is cut. But since they can’t literally cut that part out of their own lives, they get depressed and think that no matter what they do they will never reach such successes anyways – therefore they do not.

Both Eternalism and the alternate universe theory prove nihilism to make complete sense and be superior to concepts such as “hope for a peaceful afterlife” or “a willingness to change one’s destiny.” I will be using a specific discourse analysis - genre analysis - to examine how people of the 21st century speak about nihilism and the lexicon they use to define the term. The manner in which humans express a given concept deeply affects how they view it; and the way they view it, in turn, affects how they choose to express their beliefs about said concept. It is a vicious cycle.

**Screenplay**

I came up with the premise after deciding that I wanted to research something that is the complete opposite of what most people will preach to you in your life, especially if you are a young person “with a lot of potential.” After I landed on nihilism, I knew that convincing my main character of something as dark and heavy as human insignificance they would have to experience an awfully traumatic event. I brainstormed about three different, much darker, ideas before I landed on a car crash. Everything else I had in mind would make the movie rated R, so I chose the most PG-13 option that came to mind.

The story starts off with a couple and their dog at a local farmer’s market. They are doing what looks like their weekly shopping for groceries. They head to the bakery they always go to, where we meet Sally. She works at the bakery and knows Dryston, Raven and Archie really well. As Dryston and her finish up their conversation about Archie, she tells him to say “hi to the wife” referring to Raven, and this pushes Dryston to think about how others view his relationship. On their way home, him and Raven see their former physics professor, Dr. Wright, who reveals to them that he has invented a time machine. As the two of them try to process this information in shock, Dr. Wright leaves dismissively. Back home, Dryston thinks over Sally’s comment and brings up marriage to Raven. Confused, she speaks to him from the bathroom, only to get out and find him on one knee, proposing. Overcome with joy, she says yes, and he pulls out his ring necklace that he had been wearing since the day they met. After putting the ring on her finger, both of them go to bed. Next morning, Raven leaves to run a few errands, when she tragically gets hit by a speeding car. Devastated, Dryston convinces Dr. Wright to help him travel back in time in order to prevent the accident. Initially hesitant, Dr. Wright agrees. As Dryston find himself on that road, he screams Raven’s name, so she looks distractedly across the street to see who it was. As she slows down, the car behind her runs into her and she plummets to the ground. Having witnessed all this in person, Dryston reappears back to the present more confused than ever. Dr. Wright explains to him that the past isn’t changeable, because “the past” is not something that has already happened, but rather something that is happening right now. Everything in the world that has ever taken place or will ever take place is taking place all at the same time. Trying to wrap his head around this absurd information, Dryston realizes that if that were the case, then nothing can ever be changed, because it’s all already happened. This causes him to fall into a deeply nihilistic viewpoint on human life, which helps him deal with his grief in a rather unhealthy way. The film ends with him having accepted his true meaninglessness.

**Methodology**

Pre-Production

I spent most of March in pre-production. It was a nightmare. I faced more challenges than I had anticipated, naturally. I didn’t really comprehend what I was getting myself into before I was actually in it. For a few weeks there, it seemed as though all the work that I had to take care of pre-production was three times more time consuming than having to actually film it all.

My first concern was making sure I have a concrete plan for the entirety of the plot, because, obviously, literally everything else was dependent on that – on my story. First thing I did was brainstorm each scene. I made a rough outline of all the scenes in more or less consecutive order; described what had to happen during each scene – where the characters were standing, what they were talking about and how they were feeling. This allowed me to visualize the shots in my head, and if I had a clear idea of how I wanted to frame a specific moment, I noted that down as well. Basically, any and everything that would come to mind, I put on paper, because I knew better than to rely on my memory.

To be fair, many things (minor details as well as major plot lines) changed as I progressed into the final stages of pre-production. After I had a complete outline, I began to write the script. It varied greatly from what I thought I would accomplish – not necessarily worse, but simply different. The script is less than 20 pages. When I composed the outline, the “device” used by Dryston to “go back in time” was a pill that he bought from the pharmacy downstairs. I wanted to build a reality where time travel pills were a norm, and in order to show that, I was going to pan over their computer screen at home showing an article titled something like “*Best Invention of the 21st Century: The Time Travel Pill*” or “*Time Travel Pill – Available Now to the Average Consumer*.” But after giving it a lot of thought, I came to the conclusion that walking into a physical time machine would, not only make more sense, but would be easier to film around because Dryston could literally walk into and out to personal memories/experiences. Since I don’t exactly know anyone who has a built and ready time machine I could borrow, I had to make do with a cool looking elevator.

My biggest concern in all of March was finding the proper locations. Many of the changes I made later on, were because of certain issues with location. In reality I filmed in fourteen different locations. But according to story, the characters were only in seven of them. The most problematic place to make happen was the inside of the bakery.

I had a very different plan at first about where the main characters would be shopping – it was supposed to be at their local supermarket instead of a tiny private bakery. The point of this scene was to converse with a cashier/worker in order to establish a relationship between them and the locals of the neighborhood. I wanted to show that this is their town, and they are well acquainted with the people who work in that town and are even friends with some of them. Plus, I needed someone to push Dryston into the thought process of marriage and viewing his relationship from a third person’s perspective. The cashier, whoever they would be, wherever I would end up filming (i.e., supermarket, bakery, drug store, hardware store) knows this couple really well. They are informed about Archie and his eating habits because Dris and Raven come here a lot. Initially, I wanted to film in a supermarket, and they were supposed to buy juice. However, I hadn’t considered the pain of making that happen.

My first choice was a Parma around my house. I used to shop from there nearly every day, so I figured it was the obvious choice. When I walked in, I couldn’t spot a manager or someone in charge, so I approached one of the cashiers, and explained my situation. He called the manager over, and I told her the same thing. In turn, she called the owner and asked me to explain what I want, for the third time. Then the owner contacted their “media team” to understand if this is doable. I’m not exactly sure what was discussed in that conversation, but the owner called back twenty minutes later and spoke to the manager, who later told me “I’m sorry, but we don’t do that here.” I suggested promoting the supermarket if that’s the problem, or on the contrary hide all the logos if that’s what they prefer; yet their answer remained the same. So, I left, a little discouraged.

I asked two other supermarkets the next day: SAS and YerevanCity, but still no luck. I thought maybe collaborating with smaller businesses would be easier, so I walked into a bakery I would pass by almost every day and declared my bright idea. The woman working there told me to leave my phone number so that she could ask and let me know if this is something we can do, so that’s exactly what I did. I waited for her call for two days, then decided to make another visit. She was surprised to see me. She creased her eyebrows and gave me the saddest smile and said, “I’m really sorry, but they don’t allow for such a thing.” I smiled back and left. I considered taking out that scene altogether. But I quickly changed my mind, because I refuse to change my movie just because it’s a hassle bringing it to life. Three days later, at three in the morning, I had the bright idea to ask the bakery right across my house. At first, they thought I wanted to film a commercial about their bakery specifically, but after about four more times of explaining, in Armenian, what it is that I wanted to accomplish, they said yes – as long as none of their faces are seen, because they “don’t want to be on camera as long as it’s a promotion.” Fair enough. We decided on a day and time and that was that. Getting the other locations was relatively easier. My capstone supervisor helped me out with getting permission to film on school grounds for the time machine scene, since I needed one of the elevators.

Another overbearing obstacle was finding the right place for the house. It couldn’t be a new place; it couldn’t be too big and spacious; it couldn’t expensive; it had to be believable that two graduate students or newly graduated students could afford it; it had to look used and “lived-in;” it had to be tiny and cozy; it had to look nice, like the people who live there care about good design and had compatible taste. Basically, it was difficult to find exactly what I was looking for. But after a few days of searching, I managed to find a tiny apartment that couldn’t have been more perfect. About a year ago, I was looking for a place for a friend and I accumulated many phone numbers of local brokers. I had contacted a few of them, but it was a dead-end, so I started searching for Airbnb’s myself. That’s how I found the house we ended up filming in. I had to make sure the hosts were also okay with my dog being there (which was additional stress), and thankfully they were.

I began my search for all the necessary locations before I recruited actors - not for any particular reason, that’s just how it turned out. Again, I had to change a few things due to how comfortable my actors were playing certain scenes. Originally, after the proposal, I had the characters share a kiss – which makes perfect sense, since they are literally about to get married. But the woman who I ended up casting to play Raven wasn’t comfortable doing that, so we worked around it.

I had no idea who it was that I wanted to play the two main roles, so I contacted literally every actor friend I thought would do a good job. Most of them were either busy or in relationships (therefore unable to play in any love scenes, apparently) or simply uninterested. After feeling hopeless, I thought of Armen Godjamanian, who I had met earlier that year and learned that he had once been a film student with a background in acting. I texted him and about an hour later he responded with the utmost enthusiasm, which reminded me why I started this project in the first place. It was very refreshing. I had my protagonist.

Finding someone to play Raven was a lot more difficult. I realized there is a great lack of female Armenian actors who are actually talented. Luckily, my best friend, Lilit Galoyan, had all the talent I needed, I just had to cut out the kissing scene. Casting the professor was a whole nightmare of its own. I had someone else in mind at first, but that plan crumbled to pieces, so I had to recast Dr. Wright. Fortunately, I ended up with a much more talented actor. I thought of Alex Mikaelyan, because I knew him from the AUA Drama Club. We were both members during my freshman year, and I remembered his remarkable acting. The last person I cast, was the cashier in the bakery. I imagined the cashier as a young woman with a beaming personality and an almost naïve outlook on life. As shallow as this may sound, I wanted this character to be conventionally attractive, an almost girl-next-door architype. This made me think of Yulia Hovsepyan, and she was perfect for the role. Any other minor details that I had to take care of before starting to shoot the movie were much less stressful to handle.

Picking the character names was really fun. I made sure they were all named that for a reason. Starting with Dryston, who is often called Dris by his girlfriend, his name comes from the French word “triste” or “tristesse” meaning “sad” or “sadness.” It is also the name of someone who heavily relies on their sense of intuition to make any decision. Dryston is impulsive. Raven literally means raven. I chose this name for Lilit’s character based on her appearance and personality; her character is rather similar to her. Raven is a pale, black haired woman with a strong presence. Dr. Wright (who doesn’t have a first name) I named Wright because it means worker and/or inventor. Dr. literally created a time machine, so I figured it was only appropriate for his name to represent his genius and his skillset. And finally, Sally, I named Sally because I wanted this character to be your typical girl next door. Sally isn’t special, she isn’t someone you remember after having met her, she’s a young product of conformity. Hence the generic name.

Production

I spent nearly all of April filming. We wrapped on April 20th. Everything was just as overwhelming as I had anticipated. First day of shooting was on April 3rd, a Saturday. The day before I had invited the “main cast” which consisted of Armen and Lilit, to a café, because I wanted them to meet each other for the first time outside the set, in a normal relaxed environment. They got along almost immediately, which was very lucky for me. We spent about five hours together and they really got to know each other. The first thing I thought of when I got home is how much chemistry their characters will have on screen.

So, on day one of filming, we didn’t accomplish too much. I thought I should take it easy. We shot the two memories - on the grass patch and the hug on the street. I had sent both of them their entire wardrobe plan for the whole movie, so they always knew what to bring in for each scene. Some of the clothing items that they didn’t have, I would bring myself, either from my own closet (for Lilit) or my dad’s (for Armen and Alex). The next day, we shot the farmer’s market scene.

Filming in the market was yet another challenge. I had to come up with a brand-new plan on the spot, because none of the vendors agreed to have their products filmed. I was very clear about the fact that they will not be on camera, I won’t be filming their face, but that didn’t make much of a difference. In the original scene, Raven was supposed to have small banter with this random vendor and unintentionally make them laugh – thereby showing her warm and sarcastic personality. Obviously, that meant there had to be close ups. But that quickly went out the window. I decided to film from afar – just a single long shot. It wasn’t how I had envisioned this scene in my head, but it would do.

On April 8th, we filmed inside the bakery. Armen, Lilit and Yulia had all come to set at around noonish, because that is when the owner said I could come film. I had suggested to come super early in the morning before they even open, but they said there’s no need for that inconvenience. We had time from noon until 2pm (max) since that was their least busy time, apparently. I had to skip classes that day. Everything went smoothly, except for the fact that I shot about 30 useless takes because Armen couldn’t stop making Yulia laugh. Three days later, I realized that I never filmed Armen walking up to the door, he is just immediately inside, and that makes no sense, so on the day we filmed the car accident, my two main actors had to bring in about three different outfits in literal duffel bags – one of the outfits being the one from when they went to buy “cupcakes.” Now, that bakery didn’t sell any cupcakes, or even cookies for that matter. They had Armenian khachapuris and *gata* and “grandma’s éclairs.” So, we got the éclairs. In the script it says they buy carrot cupcakes, but in the script, it also said that at the end Dris was on the edge of a bridge contemplating suicide, so. I was just kind of dealing with what each situation was throwing at me on the spot. As you watch the cashier hand him the plastic bag, you can’t really tell what’s inside, because I tried my best to not focus on the food, but rather film their hands, their exchange.

On the day of the accident, or rather, filming the car crash scene, we all had to wake up at 6am, because I made sure to minimize the number of cars on the road as much as possible. I also kept track of the weather and made sure we filmed on a rainy day. I wanted everything about that scene to be gloomy and dramatic. The person I cast to play the driver, Zara Kevorkova, had just recently gotten her license, so her dad came to set with her. I explained in further detail what I want to achieve, and her dad said, “yeah there’s no way I’m letting her do that, she might actually run Lilit over.” So, change of plans, naturally, I recast the driver. So, Vahe Kevorkov sat in the car with Zara in the passenger’s seat and we began rehearsing. Everyone was a little late, and the practice runs took quite a while, so by the time we started shooting, it was around 8:30am. Not ideal, but again, doable. We did around 15 takes of the car driving into me while I hold the camera, and about 20 takes of Raven’s reaction to the car approaching. I had to get inside the car, in the passenger’s seat and hang out the window, doing my best to keep a steady hand. I had put the window down completely and was sitting on the edge of the window frame, holding on for dear life. At first, every time we would drive towards her, Lilit would break into laughter because of how ridiculous I looked. But eventually, we got the hang of it, and I ended up with a few good takes. I had made sure to have Armen standing in the very background screaming inaudibly, because when he enters the time machine and comes to this moment in time, he is there trying to warn her. The continuity worked pretty well.

Lilit was wearing my coat, because I didn’t want to have to ask her to consciously ruin any of her clothing when she was laying in the middle of the muddy road. She was hesitant to get on the ground at first, but for the sake of art, we’d do anything. I had also prepared the “fake blood” with whatever paint I had left in my room, which wasn’t a lot. I had run out of black paint so the shade I got was weirdly purple. It didn’t look like blood at all, but I kept consoling myself with the thought that I can fix that in editing. I poured some of it near Lilit’s head, but it looked too separate from her, so I got some in here hair. She stopped freaking out after she realized she is drenched in mud water and there’s no going back now. I was freaking out because I thought this doesn’t look believable. Zara was freaking out because we were freaking out. The energy on set was chaotic to say the least.

After I wrapped with Lilit, I crossed the street to film Armen’s reaction to seeing her die. He’s incredible actor. He really gave it his all, and he takes criticism really well – that is exactly the one thing you need in an actor as a director. We finished at around 11am, and the girls came home with me so Lilit could take a shower. The last thing I wanted was for her to get sick because of this.

The 17th was yet another stressful day. We all arrived at the Airbnb I had booked for three nights at 10 in the morning. We didn’t need three nights, we finished all the house scenes in two days, but I thought better safe than sorry. We spent longer hours rehearsing than actually filming. This time, I actually filmed everything in chronological order, because it made more sense that way. We started with and Dris walking seeing Dr. Wright outside. In the movie it doesn’t really matter if it was near their house on their way to their house, but for the sake of keeping myself and my cast sane, we filmed right outside the Airbnb. Alex hadn’t learned his lines, so it took us about three to four hours to film that single minute of conversation. We all kept laughing and simultaneously getting more anxious because the sun was setting, and we were growing more and more tired. I wanted to get three different angles, and since I only had one camera to work with, like for every other scene in the entire movie, we had to shoot everything a few times from different angles so when I edit it all together it’s not one boring shot. But this scene in particular was apparently so amusing that the actors could barely get through it twice. I ended up with a two-shot and a medium close-up on the professor; however, I also wanted a group-shot from a little further away. But I had to compromise – they couldn’t get it together and we were running out of time.

The scene was Dryston, holding Archie and Raven walking into their house and wrapping up their conversation about whether their former professor is okay or not. That’s what you are supposed to believe when you watch this part, but in reality, Archie was already inside sitting on the bed, because he was a nightmare to work with. He wouldn’t cooperate, so I decided to change the shot from a medium long to medium and cut him out. After we wrapped on the kitchen and proposal scene it got significantly darker, which, naturally pissed me off, but what can you do. Getting through the proposal scene was a whole another circus of its own – Lilit couldn’t stop laughing at the thought of Armen proposing to her, so it took us a while. I realized I made a mistake when I didn’t start with the morning scene. I asked them to quickly change and get into bed. My initial plan was to have them wake up together and smile at each other because their fiancés now and maybe have small banter about how they feel, but we didn’t have time for that. So instead, Raven was already in the bathroom (we assume she just brush her teeth or something) and she starts a conversation about the small wedding ceremony they want to have; and Dryston’s still in bed, reading a book with Archie by his side.

When I needed scenes out on the street, we’d film around my house. We did this on the 5th, the 8th and the 17th. I ended up shooting none of it in order, which is fine, it just made it that much more difficult to follow along and keep track of what I already have and what I still need to film. The most infuriating part about filming in public was Archie, my dog. He was the worst actor by far, constantly distracted by the people walking by, and of course they would give him attention, and as a result he was incapable of walk in a straight line for longer than two seconds. For a good minute there, I seriously considered just cutting him out of the movie because I felt myself being mentally drained from having to baby him and controlling his every move. But thankfully, it was a very short minute.

On the last day of shooting all the street scenes, one of the stores the characters had to walk by was a wedding dress store called “Lilit” – this worked on two levels. First of all, it’s a foreshadowing of Dryston proposing in the following scene. Second of all, it’s a tiny Easter egg for anyone who knows the actors personally, since Raven was played by Lilit Galoyan.

The following day, on April 18th, we filmed inside the university, after getting permission to film on the premises with the help of my professor. Frankly, it was a little annoying, but rewarding in the end. Much thanks to the Covid-19 restrictions, security was very strict. One of my actors had forgotten his student ID card, so they refused to let him in, even though they have seen his face every day for four years and know full well who he is. Anyway, when I decided to use a “time machine” in the movie, I knew I had to find a suitable elevator with no mirrors in it in order to be able to film inside. Although the walls inside the elevator were all metallic and we had to reshoot countless scenes because I noticed later that my reflection was clearly visible. I also had to make sure none of the elevator buttons were seen, because that would make no sense inside a time machine. So basically, I had a very narrow window of framing.

It was strangely difficult for me to figure out how to show my character “entering” a new memory each time he “leaves” the time machine. I thought literally stepping into the environment of the memory would make sense, but I forgot to film Armen’s feet walking on the sidewalk that rainy day. I forgot to film countless little/significant scenes here and there. Other examples include Raven walking around shopping before she gets hit by the car so the audience isn’t thrown into it so suddenly, and an insert shot of Raven’s phone that says “Mom” when her mother calls her that morning. I literally made sure to give Lilit Alex’s phone number so I could call her from his phone, and I named his contact “Mom.” All that effort is completely dismissed, because I forgot to show it. I need to learn how to be a better planner.

Post-Production

Post-production was an absolute nightmare. I kept delaying editing because I knew it would take me longer than the entirety of production. I love editing, but only the video. Sound editing is the most excruciatingly painful process for me. Not to be dramatic, but it is absolute mental torture. I loathe editing sound effects, voice, music with my entire heart and soul. None of it actually comes out in the way I imagined it, and the tediousness of it all makes it that much more unrewarding. Of course, it’s my fault that I’m never satisfied with the outcome, but I truly, honestly try my best. That being said, editing the actual video clips together is the most fun I have in the general process of filmmaking. I’ve been video editing since the age of 11 – started off on iMovie. The easiest part of editing my film was putting the already organized footage in the right order as the story develops. Organizing all that footage however took me three days.

Since, I didn’t have a boom mic, all the audio from the footage was completely unusable. The dialogue was inaudible, and the sound effects weren’t as sharp as I would want. It was simply horrible. So, after I finished filming everything, I called in a few meetings with my entire cast in order to dub over all the dialogue. There is not one single original audio clip in the entire film. All the conversations between the characters were voiced over and every sound effect was manually inserted by me in editing. It was a complete nightmare to align the characters speech with their lips on the screen. Every single word had to match. That being said, I’m pretty sure if you look closely it will be very easy to tell that it doesn’t.

In the first half of the movie, the visuals, like colors (which includes the characters’ outfits as well as the colors in the overall set) shot size and framing were all intentionally much more pleasing and comfortable and “happy.” When the audience sees a bright blue clear sky, subconsciously they link that visual to a positive mood or event, or even a personal memory. I made sure the outside shots all took place during daytime, because it is much more difficult to convey joy in a scene that occurs in the dark. It’s very possible, but it’s a lot more challenging in a way that the conversation and/or the acting has to be so layered that the audience looks past the physical environment.

I color corrected every single shot in the film; either to give it a more “natural” look or to change the mood. By “natural” look I mean, for instance, when we filmed the morning scenes, it was around 4pm. There were too many indicating shadows inside the house that didn’t help to make it look like the morning. I told myself it’s okay that I filmed it so late, because I could always “fix it in post.” I’ve said that to myself more times that I’d like to admit. Editing became so much more tedious due to my inability to retake a shot, because “it’s no problem, I’ll fix it in post.”

The length of the shots is also a lot longer in the first half, because the life of the characters is calm and very routine – and the key thing here is that they love their routine. Building a life together is exactly what they both want, and that moment is all compressed in the proposal scene when Dryston, completely out of the blue, decides to do a romantic gesture. He is *that* sure in his love for her and her love for him. The back and forth between them when Raven jokes about how he “really outdid [himself] on the romance” was a line to show that even through all that sarcasm and making fun of her boyfriend, at the end of the day, Raven is really just in love with him. We see her façade almost disappear when he surprised her on one knee. Even her voice sounds higher and less condescending. They’re not perfect. But they’re perfect for each other.

My favorite thing is jump cuts. I used them multiple times in the movie, and all for different effects. The colors dim and shot lengths shorten starting from the car crash. This is the first intense scene in the movie, and the cutting back and forth between Raven and the car is the first set of jump cuts I chose to do. At first, when I initially put the footage together, it did not look as dramatic as I had pictured it. However, with the correct color editing and sound effects, I think I managed to up the intensity. She died very suddenly, and it all happened very quickly. Hence the short jump cuts. The next time I used jump cuts was in the proceeding scene which shows Dryston, already having found out, going a little insane. He doesn’t know what to do with himself, so he paces around the apartment like a madman and eventually falls asleep. I thought about having one single continuous shot of him sobbing on the floor then getting up to go to bed, but I figured that isn’t dramatic enough. I also thought of making a depressive montage, but the way I would end up editing it together would look almost comical, like I’m making fun of his sadness, which was not my intention at all. Another I time I used a few jump cuts, was when Dris entered the elevator and was looking around trying to understand what is about to happen. Often, when we’re confused and overwhelmed this is exactly how we feel – as thought the world around us is skipping a few frames at a time in a frantic manner. He wants to go through with his under-researched plan, because according to him he has no better option, but he’s simultaneously scared. The pressure of righting a wrong that he doesn’t even know he wronged dawns on him as he enters that last memory on that doomed rainy day. Not only did he watch his fiancé get killed right in front of his eyes, but he also had to sit through an explanation of how it was all his fault. After he appears back in the machine, Dr. Wright and he begin to converse, but the camera lingers on his face. We are Dryston in the moment. The audience is just as confused, and in that moment, it doesn’t matter where Dr. Wright is or what he’s doing, it’s not about him. All we need is his voice and his explanation. His face doesn’t matter, because it could be a different person explaining to Dryston how time works. Dr. Wright as an individual doesn’t matter. What’s important about his character is that he is a scientist – he is the bridge between Dryston and his answers. He’s a means to an end. I cut back to his face a few times, but the emphasis here is on how Dris reacts to all this information and how much of it he truly understands.

After they exist the machine, there’s a shaky cam on both of them, because not only do I not have the equipment to have a steady moving camera, but also because Dris’ world is coming crashing down. Nothing about this is steady. He is walking away from Dr. Wright just as he wants to walk away from this nightmare of a realization – that he is nothing, that he, as a human being, is the most insignificant dust spec in this universe, and there is absolutely nothing he will ever be able to do to change that. We linger on his face as we too accept this truth, then it cuts to black.

The last scene in the movie is him waking up in bed (assumingly) the next morning, with a strange calmness to him. He chose to find peace in the fact that his entire existence is meaningless. All he has left to do now is wait for death. He doesn’t find that depressing, he will continue living, maintaining his routine, walking Archie. But there is not more purpose, no more reason to be anything better than what he already is. I chose to show this blank expression on his face from a bird’s eye angle because it looked like he was looking up at God and God was looking down on him. I’m not a religious person per say, but I liked the idea of implying that “a higher being” (outside of the philosophy being discussed in the film), is somehow present. Something to clash the very idea of nihilism, because religion, specifically Christianity, is built around the idea of self-improvement and the significance of cleansing your soul in your physical body on Earth in order to have a meaningful afterlife as a free spirit. If this isn’t the exact opposite of nihilism, I don’t know what is. As soon as Dryston exits the frame, everything fades to black. I thought of simply cutting to black, no transition, but it didn’t match the tone of the music and overall, what I was trying to bring across. When it fades to black slowly, it allows the audience to take a breath and let it (whatever “it” meant for them by the end of the movie) sink in.

**Conclusion**

This film is the longest one I’ve done so far in my life. It was my utmost pleasure to watch it as a whole piece in the end. The filming and editing process was a pain, but it’s a pain I love experiencing. As much as I hate editing sound, it came out pretty okay in the end. This is exactly how I want to express myself for the rest of my life. Film is my purpose in life. Ironically, this whole paper argues that life has no purpose.

Diving so deep into a philosophy I don’t necessarily align with caused enormous amounts of self-reflection, along with a little bit of self-doubt, but mostly reflection. I’ve always been interested in studying views I disagree with or simply don’t practice myself. That being said, most people, including myself, have nihilistic thoughts and/or outlooks about certain things in their life. But that’s only natural. Doubting whether or not your life means something is part of being a person. Obsessing over the innerworkings of time and space and how together they compose your “current” reality is normal, if not necessary. At this point in my life, I would believe anything about the universe. If I read someone else’s academic research paper, stating that the entire universe is a simulation programmed by an alien species for experimentation, I would believe it. But then again, it doesn’t matter.

**References**

Kopnina, H., Washington, H., Taylor B., Piccolo J. J. (18 January 2018).

*Anthropocentrism: More than Just a Misunderstood Problem*. Springer Link. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-018-9711-1>.

Hanna R. (23 October 2017). *Kant’s Theory of Judgment*. The Stanford Encyclopedia of

Philosophy Archive. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/kant-judgment>.

Miller, D., Costa, E., Haynes, N., McDonald, T. (2016). *Chapter 12 Individualism*. How

the World Changed Social Media, 181-192. JSTOR. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1g69z35.19?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents>.

The Happy Philosopher. (5 April 2016). *How Embracing Insignificance Can Improve*

*Your Life*. A Guide to Freedom and Happiness. https://thehappyphilosopher.com/how-

embracing-insignificance-can-improve-your-life/.

Syfret, W. (17 December 2019). *Sunny nihilism: 'Since discovering I’m worthless my life*

*has felt precious.'* The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/dec/18/sunny-nihilism-since-discovering-im-worthless-my-life-has-felt-precious>.

Danaher, J. (3 September 2019). *Does Technology Induce Nihilism?*. Philosophical

Disquisitions. <https://philosophicaldisquisitions.blogspot.com/2019/09/does-technology-induce-nihilism.html>.

Lovink, G. (7 April 2020). *On Digital Nihilism and Techno-Sadness, Interview with*

*Geert Lovink (for Cyberzone)*. Institute of Network Cultures. Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. <https://networkcultures.org/geert/2020/04/07/on-digital-nihilism-and-techno-sadness-interview-with-geert-lovink-for-cyberzone/>.

Pratt, A. (9 March 2010). *Nihilism*. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

<https://iep.utm.edu/nihilism/#:~:text=It%20only%20became%20popularized,%20however,a%20creed%20of%20total%20negation>.

Byrne, P. (21 October 2008). *The Many Worlds of Hugh Everett*. Berlin, Germany: Scientific

American. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/hugh-everett-biography/#:~:text=Fifty%20years%20ago%20Hugh%20Everett,different%20events%20occurring%20in%20each>.

Markosian, N. (25 November 2002). *Time*. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/time/>.   
Alderson, E. (4 April 2019). *Everything Exists at Once: Past, Present, Future*. Medium.

<https://medium.com/futuresin/everything-exists-at-once-past-present-and-future-264b252e0748>.

Tomasik, B. (22 September 2014). *Eternalism and Its Ethical Implications*. Reducing

Suffering. <https://reducing-suffering.org/eternalism-and-its-ethical-implications/>.

Kanwal, K. (28 January, 2012). *Cultivation Theory*. Communication Theory.

https://www.communicationtheory.org/cultivation-theory/.