

Production Slate

Peter (Jonas Fisch) endures a mental collapse in the feature *And Uneasy Lies the Mind*, which director/cinematographer Ricky Fosheim shot entirely on an iPhone 5.



Shooting a Feature on an iPhone

By Ricky Fosheim

Peter (Jonas Fisch) is a freshly minted movie star. He has it all: wealth, fame and a beautiful expecting wife (J'aime Spezzano). When the couple's two best friends join them at their new mountain mansion for Peter's birthday, envy, secrets and paranoia play out against a barren winter landscape. As the two couples grow increasingly antagonistic, they turn to alcohol and drugs to bury the past, and when an old acquaintance shows up unexpectedly, Peter must scramble to protect his new life. The harder he fights to hold it all together, though, the faster he descends into a cavernous mental abyss. As the night grows late, Peter struggles to decipher reality from a twisting rabbit hole of truth and illusion.

The two writers of *And Uneasy Lies the Mind*, Jonas Fisch and Dillon Tucker, are an abstract painter and poet, respectively. When they approached me about producing, directing and shooting the project, I knew right away it was going to be an unconventional movie. The whole story unfolds through the fragmented and traumatized memories of a man who has been robbed and violently hit over the head. The film's visuals needed to reflect this point of view, which is far from crisp and clean.

My first thought was to shoot on 16mm film. Without the budget for that, though, I set out on a quest to replicate a 16mm aesthetic with newer digital-camera technology. From the start, I welcomed grain, dirt, flares and any other techniques that would help me create a dirty, fragmented and organic look.

I was heavily influenced by Janusz Kaminski's work on *Saving*

Private Ryan [AC Aug. '98], in which he used in-camera tricks and other technological means to essentially break down the 35mm image. The disorienting images that resulted had an inherent beauty in the way they captured the feel of battle. I was also influenced by the camerawork of Harmony Korine's *Gummo*, Thomas Vinterberg's *The Celebration*, Richard Linklater's *Tape* and Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* — I've always been a big fan of the bold images in those films.

My research led me to a community of filmmakers who were shooting on iPhone cameras with 35mm lens adapters. Inspired by their work, I purchased an iPhone 5 and a Turtleback SLR Jacket lens adapter, then went to Division Camera in Hollywood to conduct comparison tests against the Red Epic MX and Canon 5D Mark III. The results blew my mind: The iPhone footage was raw, dirty, vignetted and unlike anything I'd seen before. I immediately fell in love with the look, and I decided to fully embrace these unconventional limitations as powerful storytelling tools.

The Turtleback adapter incorporates a focusing glass with a patterned texture, almost like a fingerprint. Hair, dirt and oil from my hands would always get stuck on the glass, adding further texture and imperfections that I completely welcomed. In fact, I elected not to clean or replace any of the dirty parts, and at times I even added dust or dirt.

Another interesting result of the focusing screen is a vignette around the entire image. You can control this vignette by adjusting the iris; the more you close down, the heavier the vignette gets. Even at a mid-range f-stop of 5.6, the edges become extremely dark and full of aberrations, and begin to deteriorate in beautiful and

All images courtesy of the filmmakers.



Fosheim (in white shirt) lines up a shot with Fisch and Michelle Nunes while employing a lightweight dolly rig and a Turtleback SLR Jacket lens adapter.

unpredictable ways. Additionally, the amount of vignetting is affected by the focal length of the lens. To give myself complete control over this effect, I opted to shoot with f1.4 Nikon Nikkor AI-S F-mount lenses, and I shot the majority of the movie with 35mm and 50mm lenses, which produced a medium vignette. The 18mm was extremely vignettted; I had to shoot wide open with that lens or it looked like I was shooting through a black hole.

Shooting wide open also allowed the actors to move in and out of focus. I embraced this shallow depth-of-field, placing the camera right in the middle of the action, where the actors would literally

bump into me at times. Again, this added to the atmosphere of disorientation and claustrophobia I hoped to achieve.

I recorded directly to the iPhone 5 while using the Filmic Pro app, which allowed me to control the color temperature, frame rate and bit rate; I elected to shoot at a bit rate of 50 Mbps instead of the iPhone's native 24 Mbps. Filmic Pro also allowed me to adjust the capture frame rate and output frame rate, the effect of which is akin to adjusting the shutter on a conventional camera. I shot a number of the more abstract sequences at 6 fps and played them back at 6 fps within the 24 fps video file, resulting in incredibly blurred move-

ment and a watercolor-like look. As these abstract scenes progressed, I continued to adjust the recording and output rates to further deteriorate the images.

When recording while the iPhone is plugged into a charger, an electrical pulse affects the image — every couple of seconds, you get a quick flash from a single frame that is slightly overexposed. When I discovered this bizarre and unexpected effect, I of course fell in love with it. After all, what better way to represent a dying man's fragmented memories than to have random electrical pulses uncontrollably changing the exposure of the image?

The small iPhone camera rig allowed me to place the camera anywhere I wanted. We mounted it on sleds going down ski slopes, in small cubbies on set, in the kitchen sink and even directly on the actors' bodies. The iPhone is so unobtrusive and simple to use, it freed me to move and react to the actors, who in turn appreciated the camera because it allowed them to stay in character for longer periods of time.

Principal photography took place over four weeks of extreme winter weather in Mammoth Lakes, Calif., where we shot in the beautiful cabin home of a family friend. Inside the house, I rigged 6' covered wagons fitted with six 250-watt incandescent globes and draped in muslin; we attached hooks to the 15'-high ceiling so we could hoist the covered wagons up or



Top: Jack (Dillon Tucker) witnesses Peter's mental collapse. Middle and bottom: The crew gets a shot of Fisch on location in Mammoth Lakes, Calif.

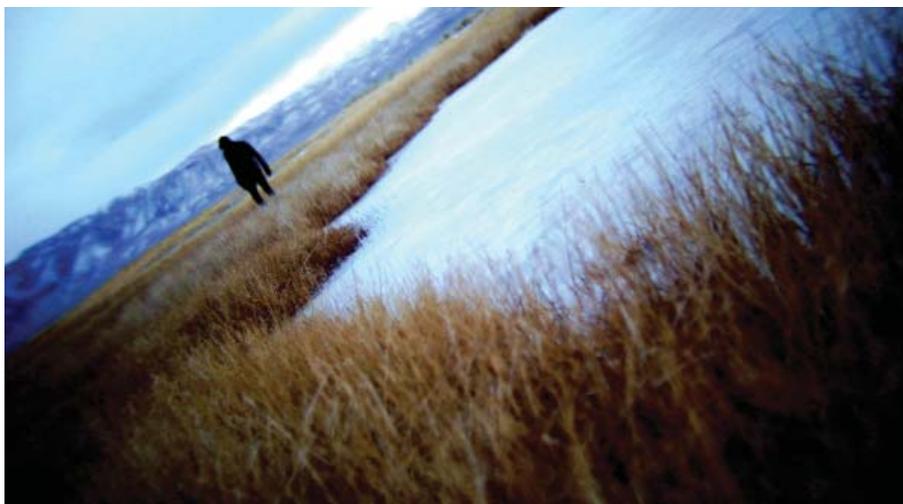


down depending on the shot.

To dig into the actors' eyes and make them pop, I floated a couple of China balls. I didn't add eye lights for beauty, or to better see reactions; instead, I considered the eye lights to be portals into the characters' dark and twisted psyches. At the climax of the movie, one of the characters gets sucked into a television, which acts as a portal between the real world and his memories. Here, the eyelight served as a way to show this connection to the outside world.

Extremely cold weather — with temperatures as low as 5° Fahrenheit — proved to be one of the most difficult hurdles on the shoot. A fully charged iPhone 5 will die in less than two minutes when exposed to such frigid temperatures. Between takes, I would tuck the camera beneath my armpit to keep it warm. Even so, we lost numerous takes when the camera died in mid-shot. We rotated between three 64GB iPhones, and even under normal shooting conditions we would run out of battery before we'd run out of memory.

For the film's opening and closing title sequences, I took two of the story's major elements — ice and oil — and shot them in ways that would suggest the dark and fragmented tone of the movie. The opening credits involved dying and freezing water in homemade alphabet ice-cube trays; I pulled the letters out of the freezer



The Turtleback adapter created a vignette that Fosheim could control by adjusting the iris and changing focal lengths.

and shot them at 1 fps as they melted onto a large tray of ice. The end credits involved printing out the title cards on paper I would tape to the back of a greasy glass casserole dish; I then added different layers of clear and black liquids that I moved with a hair dryer, shooting mostly at 2 fps with a magnetic clip-on macro lens. In both cases, the result is reminiscent of a Stan Brakhage film or a Jackson Pollock painting.

We transcoded the native H.264 footage into ProRes 4:2:2 and edited with Final Cut Pro 7. I worked with colorist Brent Greer for the final color correction, using Blackmagic Design's DaVinci Resolve. We primarily focused on balancing and matching shots, since the footage was so textured and vignettted to begin with. The iPhone 5 camera performed extremely well under bright daylight conditions, but its latitude fell off tremendously when we worked under lower tungsten light levels. I also have to give a lot of credit to our editor, Peggy Davis, who managed to construct a coherent narrative out of such unconventional images.

Every image in *And Uneasy Lies the Mind* was shot with the iPhone 5 — no animations or visual effects were added in post. I truly fell in love with the look of this movie, and I thoroughly enjoyed pushing the limits of this filmmaking technology, even (and especially) when it meant breaking things down and experimenting. The most important question filmmakers need to ask themselves when shooting with an alternative camera system isn't "How do I do this?" but rather "Why am I doing this?" I encourage other filmmakers to use these cameras to explore and push the ways we tell stories. I can't wait to see what they do.

Ed. note: And Uneasy Lies the Mind will be released via video-on-demand in September.

◀ TECHNICAL SPECS ▶

1.78:1
 Digital Capture
 iPhone 5
 Nikon Nikkor AI-S ●