

A PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY

- short, nonverbal screenplay

by

Willy Conley

1. INT. MEDICAL LIBRARY - DAY

On the library wall is a large art piece of the proverbial medical-illustrated man showing organs, muscles, and veins. A main artery is followed from the heart to the brain and then from the brain down the arm to the fingers.

2. INT. MEDICAL LIBRARY - DAY

A library worker's finger follows a file number on the spine of a book he's holding. It's titled PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY (or similar, possibly EIDETIC MEMORY). The finger follows the file numbers on a row of books on a shelf. The book is replaced in a gap between two books.

The camera follows the library worker's hands back to the handle of a bookcart overloaded with books. He pushes the cart down the aisle between rows of long, wooden tables with reading lamps. Doctors in white lab coats, are scattered throughout seated at the tables in deep study. Only one person at a solitary table is not in white. Past the tables the cart enters an audio-visual section where more doctors are seated. They are in corrals wearing headphones listening to audiotapes while others are watching videotapes of various operations.

3. INT. TV MONITORS - DAY

From corral to corral different types of medical videos can be seen:

Microscopy: image of cells taken through a microscope

Lecture: image of a doctor speaking behind a podium.

Heart valve replacement: image of an artificial heart valve being sewn to a heart.

4. INT. MEDICAL LIBRARY - DAY

The library worker, intrigued by the last video image, bumps the cart into a chair or a wall corner knocking down heavy textbooks.

The doctors at the tables look up. The only people that don't notice are the ones in the corrals and the one not in white who is a young, shy-looking student. He is engrossed in a clinical photography journal that shows graphic photos of patients with abnormalities.

Papers and books are all over the table as he writes notes, chewing on the edge of his laminated I.D. card. He uses the straight edge of the card to help him focus on sentences he wants to copy:

. . . .TO PHOTOGRAPH THE FULL BODY OF PATIENTS,
MEDICAL PHOTOGRAPHERS SHOULD USE FLAT LIGHTING
SET WITH TWO LIGHTS AT 45° ANGLES TO THE PATIENT. . . .

On the card is his bright-smiling mug:

D. ZAG, BIO-MED. PHOTO. INTERN
UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

A vibrating beeper on ZAG'S belt goes off. He jumps in his chair and looks around embarrassed with himself, but no one sees this. Quickly, he fumbles with getting the beeper off of his belt. He gets it off and puts it on the table. It's still on as it quivers around a little. Finally, he figures out how to shut it off.

The books and papers are collected and Zag dashes for the library exit. He passes through a book detector and is stopped cold by a turnstile. Automatically, he knows why. A buzzer has gone off. He hands a book over to the desk clerk who trips a switch to let him through.

5. INT - HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY

A dark, incandescent-lit corridor. ZAG runs to his workplace only to find the door closed with the department's nameplate staring back at him and a handwritten note affixed to the door:

MEDICAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND ILLUSTRATION

ZAG: TAKE O.R. CALL - IT'S AN OPEN HEART CASE. OTHER
PHOTOGRAPHERS TIED UP. I'M ON LUNCH BREAK NOW.
GOOD LUCK- AUDREY

6. INT. PHOTO LAB - DAY

ZAG opens the lab. All of the lights are off. He flicks them on and sees that no one is in the darkrooms, illustration desks, and studios. Nervous and hurried, he heads straight for the camera cabinet, pulls out a variety of lenses and camera bodies, and starts putting them into a camera bag. He opens a drawer and stuffs double-A batteries in his pocket, leaving out a few to put into an electronic flash unit.

Before he leaves the lab, he snatches a couple of paper towels from a dispenser on the wall to wipe the sweat off his brow. The paper is crumpled into a ball and he takes a deep breath.

In basketball form, he aims for a wastebasket. He makes it and gains a little confidence.

7. INT. ELEVATOR LOBBY - DAY

ZAG paces, waiting for the elevator. He stops to look through the large plate-glass window down at the bustling city scene. Pedestrians, patients in wheel chairs, cars, buses, traffic lights move in every direction like ants. The elevator bell goes off. ZAG sees the elevator's reflection in the window and gets in the empty car. As he goes in, there's another set of closed doors visible on the other side of the car but he doesn't face them. He turns around to face the set that just opened for him and presses a floor button.

8. INT. ELEVATOR CAR - DAY

The doors close and overhead the light on floor number fifteen goes off. A DOWN arrow lights up. The number 3 is lit on the floor button panel in front of ZAG.

He closes his eyes and rubs his face. The car stops halfway down but the doors do not open. He looks up and sees that the car has stopped on the 8th floor. He panics a little. Then an arm reaches over his shoulder pressing the floor button for LOBBY. ZAG jerks around to find that the other set of doors have opened. A group of doctors and nurses file in.

9. INT. 3RD FLOOR - ELEVATOR LOBBY - DAY

As the door opens ZAG pushes himself through the people in front of him. Running down the corridor he dodges and weaves around hospital workers and patients. He barely misses people in wheelchairs and gurneys. He gets slowed down by a large group of doctors on grand rounds blocking the hallway.

10. INT. SURGICAL WING - LOCKER ROOM

ZAG barges in the O.R. staff locker room to a shelf of clean surgical garments and grabs a pair of pants with drawstrings and a scrub shirt, both labeled SMALL. On another shelf he pulls out a disposable hood, face mask, and shoe covers. In record time he tears off his clothes and throws them into an empty locker.

Scrub shirt comes on first. Next, the pants and as they are pulled up sweat drips onto the pants legs looking like dark drops of blood. The surgical hood slides over his head. The shoe covers are slipped over his

street shoes. The face mask covers his nose and mouth and the strings are tied together behind his head.

He takes out a NIKON camera and screws on a lens. A roll of KODACHROME color slide film is loaded into the camera. He presses the shutter to advance the film to the first frame. The motor drive whirrs with each advance. The flash unit is wired up to the camera and tested to see if it flashes. The flash makes a pop sound with each test.

He picks up his camera and bag, and goes over to a mirror. He tucks his shirt in and pulls the drawstrings of his pants tighter.

11. INT. SURGICAL WING - LOCKER ROOM - ZAG'S P.O.V.

He sees himself as an alien-being with a camera around his neck and fluorescent lights protruding from his head. Dark rings of perspiration form around his armpits. His stomach growls. Without warning, the flash misfires at the mirror and momentarily blinds Zag. When he blinks, ghost-like negative images float in circles in the air: lockers, wooden benches, soiled towels, fluorescent light tubes. A positive image slowly zooms up the middle - a dry, beating heart with no protective sac around it. It ceases pumping and begins to harden, peel, and crack. It breaks apart like an egg and spews forth an oil-black ooze. ZAG shuts his eyes and looks at his feet on the floor to steady his vision.

12. INT. SURGICAL WING - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

He smacks his flash unit as if reprimanding it. He takes a deep breath and zips out into the bright, fluorescent-lit corridor.

13. INT. SURGICAL CORRIDOR - CENTRAL NURSE STATION WINDOW - DAY

ZAG rushes to the window and holds up his camera equipment for the desk clerk to see.

Recognizing him, she flips through a log, finds her place and holds up a number five handshape. She mouths the word FIVE. He gestures OKAY and dashes off to operating room number five.

14. INT. ENTRANCE TO INNER SURGICAL CORE - ZAG'S P.O.V.

A faded sign on double-doors reads: SURGICAL ATTIRE MUST BE WORN BEYOND THIS POINT! ZAG blocks an electric eye's vision and with a hum, the doors swing open revealing a long, glistening-white corridor of operating rooms. As he enters, several people hurry in and out

of rooms with surgical supplies and sheets. One person pushes something by that looks horrific and mechanical - a portable X-Ray machine. Another pushes open the door to a patient holding room lined with beds and life-support machines attached to wax-like figures.

15. INT. ENTRANCE TO INNER SURGICAL CORE - DAY

Someone from behind ZAG pushes him out of the way signaling him to move. A motionless figure on a gurney covered up to his head in a white sheet is being pushed to an operating room by a nurse.

ZAG stands for a few seconds with his back against the wall recovering from the surprise. After his wits are gathered, he continues.

16. INT. INNER SURGICAL CORRIDOR - DAY

Room numbers and names of the operations going on can be seen. Each name is scribbled on white surgical tape and stuck to the doors:

O.R. 1 APPENDECTOMY

Door opens with a nurse giving him a look. He drops a bundle of green sheets splotted with rust color out in the hall.

O.R. 2 PEDIATRIC EXPLORATORY LAPAROTOMY

ZAG peaks through the door window to check out the set up.

17. INT. OPERATING ROOM #2 - DAY

A surgical team works on an infant. ZAG looks in with his nose up to the glass.

18. INT. INNER SURGICAL CORRIDOR - DAY

The camera slips out from under his arm and swings on its strap, banging hard against the door.

The surgical team stops and looks at the door just to see a head duck.

In a crouched position, ZAG continues down the hall passing a surgeon at a wash station scrubbing up. Brown bacterial soap and lather are all over the floor around his feet. ZAG and the surgeon exchange glances.

O.R. 5 CORONARY BY-PASS

ZAG takes another peak at an entirely different set up - more complicated looking.

19. INT. OPERATING ROOM #5 - DAY

A team of 3 cardiac surgeons, an anesthesiologist, a scrub nurse, and a circulating nurse surround a heart patient like a football huddle. An audible beep is heard throughout this scene.

Another person is set apart from the rest adjusting a contraption of dials, switches, wires, and plastic tubing - the heart/lung machine.

ZAG enters and looks up at the clock: 12:15.

20. INT. OPERATING ROOM #5 - ZAG'S P.O.V.

A few heads turn his way and, seeing he's the photographer, turn back to work.

Two cardiac surgeons, voices unintelligible, look like praying mantises chewing on prey. Their bushy eyebrows jump up and down looking like spastic caterpillars.

Both have blood splatters on their sterile green frocks. More looks of chewing and caterpillars jumping.

ZAG looks at his sweaty hands and wipes them on his pants. The muscles in his fingers twitch involuntarily.

A circulating nurse steps back from the huddle and looks over at ZAG. Her voice is unintelligible and she appears to be chewing on something also. Not knowing what to do, ZAG doesn't respond. The nurse shrugs her shoulders and returns to the huddle.

The heart/lung specialist eyeballs ZAG but doesn't say anything.

ZAG walks around to get a glimpse at the operation site and the patient. Hands and tools are busy at work going in and out of the chest cavity. The anesthesiologist watches the procedure over a sterile cloth barricade. Blood and fluids make gurgling sounds as they are siphoned from the cavity and suctioned through a tube into a disposable jar on the floor.

A look under the table reveals trash, blood drops, and feet in a variety of shoes (clogs, high-top sneakers, loafers) and positions.

ZAG moves around to the anesthesiologist's station and watches the rhythmic LED readout of the EKG. The anesthesiologist takes a blood pressure reading from the patient's arm. With a syringe he injects a drug into the I.V. line. The flow from a pint of donated blood is increased on the I.V. The patient's eyes are checked for proper dilation with a penlight.

21. INT. OPERATING ROOM #5 - DAY

ZAG comes back around to where he came from and finds a stool. He sits and waits, idly looking at the clock: 12:35. Getting bored, he starts toying with the drawstrings on his pants, and then his camera. He tries to pick his nose. The flash accidentally goes off.

All heads turn toward him. Right away ZAG pretends to work on the camera as if something were wrong with it.

22. INT. OPERATING ROOM #5 - ZAG'S P.O.V.

He looks up and sees the team has resumed their work. He looks at the time and corrects it on his watch: 12:45.

The huddle breaks. Excess fluid is siphoned out of the chest cavity. The area around the cavity is wiped up, and the bloodied towels are replaced with fresh sterile ones. A stool is placed beside the table.

23. INT. OPERATING ROOM #5 - DAY

Knowing his cue, ZAG double-checks his equipment. He tucks his shirt in tight and checks to be sure the drawstrings are tight.

The surgical team watches with laser-like stares at his every move. He puts the stool where he needs it and stands up on it. It feels unsteady. He climbs back down and swivels the seat, making a terrible squeaking sound, all the way down until it locks at its lowest point. He is oblivious to the irritating effect it has on the surgical team.

24. INT. OPERATING ROOM #5 - ZAG'S P.O.V.

Being very careful, ZAG looks around to make sure he's not in contact with anything sterile. He looks up and sees he's very close to the hot, sinister-looking O.R. lamp. He looks down and sees into the cavity. In its middle is the pulsing heart.

The heart is uncovered, glistening and beating.
He looks at all of the faces that are looking up at him.

One of the surgeons is chewing in big chomps, his eyebrows raised and voice loud and unintelligible.

ZAG looks down again - the heart with its red arteries and blue veins squeezing and letting go. We hear ZAG'S heart beat irregularly between or overlapping the audible beeps.

25. INT. OPERATING ROOM #5 - DAY

He slowly sets up for his shot. Beads of sweat are seen on his forehead. His finger hovers over the shutter release button. His eyes stray from the camera's viewfinder to his audience.

ZAG
(signing or gesturing)

Doctor! I'm deaf. I must lipread you
and your mask is in the way. What
kinds of shots do you need? All
close-ups?

26. INT. OPERATING ROOM #5 - ZAG'S P.O.V.

The surgeon jerks his head angrily from side to side. More loud chomping; he points to the heart.

The heart is still beating but drying up a little.

ZAG looks at the exasperated team.

The anesthesiologist leaves his station and comes around to ZAG'S side with a legal pad and pen and motions to ZAG to step down.

A message interpreting the doctor's commands is scribbled out:

HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY HANDLE THIS JOB? GIVE ME A
SHOT OF THE ENTIRE HEART AND A CLOSE-UP OF THE
CORONARY ARTERY. TWO COLOR SLIDES OF EACH VIEW.

27. INT. OPERATING ROOM #5 - DAY

ZAG nods and climbs back on the stool. He focuses the camera.

28. INT. OPERATING ROOM #5 - ZAG'S P.O.V.

The viewfinder shows the chest cavity coming in and out of focus, and then back in final focus. He presses the shutter and the flash goes off. A series of photographs are taken at various distances from the heart.

ZAG steps down and rewinds the film. The anesthesiologist shows him another message:

NO NEED TO WAIT FOR FURTHER SHOOTING. THAT'LL BE ALL. SEND SLIDES TO DOCTOR.

ZAG gladly shakes his hand and leaves.

The stares from the surgical team follow ZAG out the door. The clock shows it's 1:05.

29. INT. SURGICAL WING - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

ZAG puts on his street clothes. After tying his shoes, he straightens up and is face to face with a smiling, heart-shaped sticker stuck on a locker door. It's a sticker that the blood bank gives out to its donors:

SMILE! I GAVE BLOOD TODAY.

ZAG picks up his camera bag and grabs his soiled scrub clothing. Before he exits he puts down the bag and crumples his dirty scrubs into a ball. He aims for the corner laundry basket. Before he shoots the sticker's meaning dawns on him. He slowly looks over at it, and smiles. Then he makes the basket and exits.

THE END